



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of
BALLARAT



OUR DIOCESAN COMMUNITY

News around the Diocese

No. 79 August 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Bishop
School News
Important Opportunities
Catholic Education Week
Ballarat Regional Vinnies Festival
Mass
Building a Synodal Future
In the Parishes
Formation in Synodality
Celebrating 70 years of Education
Archive News
World Day for Grandparents and
the Elderly
St John of God - Tongan Twinning
Program
Fr John's Retirement
Vital Contribution - Women
Farmers
Uplifting Day of Discernment and
Collaboration
A Visit from India
National Volunteers Week
CatholicCare Victoria news
Social Justice Statement
Every Family, Everywhere
Retirements and Anniversaries
Laudato Si' Week
A year of Pastoral Formation
Magnifica Humanitas
OUR DIOCESAN COMMUNITY (ODC)
A joint publication of the
Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and
Catholic Education Ballarat.



The Editorial Committee of ODC wishes to thank the many people who have contributed to this issue. We also acknowledge the support through sponsorship of the Catholic Development Fund and Australian Catholic University - Aquinas Campus.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Sr Geraldine Mugavin, Mrs Julie Boyd, Ms Kate Lawry, Ms Fiona Tonkin, Dr Susan Crowe, Mrs Bernadette Lynch, Fr Adrian McInerney, Mrs Jane Collins.

The next ODC will be in October 2026.
All contributions to ODC may be forwarded to:
OUR DIOCESAN COMMUNITY,
PO Box 576, Ballarat 3353.
Phone: (03) 5337 7179
Email: odc@ballarat.catholic.org.au
Web: www.ballarat.catholic.org.au



Filled with Gratitude

Dear friends,

Sunday, July 19 marked four months since I was ordained and installed as the Bishop of Ballarat. In reflecting on the experience of this short time as your bishop, I find myself filled with gratitude for the generosity of your welcome and encouragement. It has been my great privilege to witness the depth and practicality of your faith. You inspire me and challenge me to live fully this new reality in the journey of my vocation.

During the days that followed July 19, our diocesan community marked a rare and significant anniversary for two of our priests. Fr Dan Arundell and Fr Damien Heath celebrated the 70th anniversary of their Ordination to the Priesthood on July 22. This day is also the Feast of St Mary Magdalene, the one chosen by Christ as the first witness to the Resurrection. As the Opening Prayer of the Mass that day states: Christ "entrusted Mary Magdalene before all others with announcing the great joy of the Resurrection."

Concelebrating Mass with Fr Dan at Nazareth House on the day of his anniversary, I admitted in the homily that I was only just getting to know him, so I did a little research into his journey as a priest for and within the Diocese of Ballarat. "Gratitude" was a word that cropped up time and again as I flicked through the pages of Fr Dan's priestly life: Gratitude from God's People for Fr Dan's interest and encouragement, for his opening up the Scriptures and for "breaking the bread" of the Eucharist for communities, large and small, throughout this extensive diocese. There was also gratitude from Fr Dan for the goodness and deep faith of all the different people he has encountered over the years.

Similar themes filled the words spoken during the Mass and at the celebrations that followed in Casterton on Sunday, July 26. Fr Damien Heath marked his 70th anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood

in the Church where he had been baptised. Fr Damien preached the homily, exhorting the gathered assembly to look to the future to discover what God is asking of the Church. Inspired by Pope Leo's recent encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, "the grandeur of humanity", Fr Damien challenged those present to step out on the journey forward, embracing the good and seeking to proclaim the Gospel in all things.

The first reading for the Feast of St Mary Magdalene comes from the Song of Songs in the Old Testament. The short passage finishes with the words: "scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves (Song of Songs 3:4)". Many years have passed since Fr Dan and Fr Damien entrusted their lives to the one their hearts love. Over all these years they have enabled us and countless others to find the one our hearts love. Their whole lives have pointed us to Christ and Christ's love for each and every person.

The Gospel Acclamation for July 22 is taken from the ancient Easter Sequence: "Tell us Mary, what did you

see on the way? I saw the glory of the Risen Christ. I saw his empty tomb". There is no need to ask either of our platinum jubilarians what they have seen along the way. It is obvious what they have seen. We know they have seen and experienced the glory of the Risen Christ because we have experienced the glory, the joy, the love of the same Risen Christ in and through their faithful living of priesthood these past 70 years.

Now part of the journey into the future for our diocesan community, I cannot help but be grateful. May gratitude be the hallmark of our living as disciples of the Risen Christ in faith and hope and love.

+ Mark Freeman

+ MWFreeman

Bishop of Ballarat

MARIAN COLLEGE OPENS NEW OAK LEARNING CENTRE

Marian College has officially opened and blessed its new Oak Learning Centre, marking a significant milestone for the school community. The opening ceremony on May 15 welcomed Bishop Mark Freeman, representatives from Kildare Ministries, Catholic education leaders, local government representatives, builders, project partners and members of the wider Marian College community. The celebration began with a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country led by local Kirrae Whurrong custodian Brett Clarke, recognising the rich cultural heritage of the land and reinforcing the College's commitment to respect, inclusion and reconciliation.



Named in honour of the oak tree's significance in the Brigidine tradition, the Oak Learning Centre reflects the College's heritage and values of learning, hospitality and community. The modern facility includes a Learning Resource Centre featuring traditional library collections, collaborative learning spaces, study pods, tutorial rooms and technology support services.

Developed with input from students and staff, the new centre is already supporting a range of initiatives, including after-school study sessions, a student book club, a chess club and environmental projects inspired by Catholic Social Teaching. Religious Education students have also established garden beds around the building, demonstrating a commitment to caring for the environment.



A Brigidine Cross now adorns the building, made possible through community partnerships with local businesses Manhari Metals and Gason Ararat, crafted with the involvement of Year 12 student Sophie Cooper through her school-based apprenticeship, making it a lasting symbol of community partnership and faith. The opening celebrations also provided the opportunity to launch the inaugural Leanne and Julie Arnold Award of Excellence in STEM. Established by Anne and Terry Arnold in memory of their daughters, both former Marian College students who achieved distinguished careers in science and medical research, the scholarship will support students pursuing careers in medical sciences. The first recipient is 2025 College Dux Bradley Carter. Principal Catherine Howison described the occasion as a meaningful and joyful celebration, noting that the Oak Learning Centre is more than a building - it is a place where students can grow, learn, collaborate and flourish as future leaders grounded in the values of compassion, justice and community.

Catherine Howison - Principal

Seaside Community Kitchen

It has been twelve months since the Seaside Community Kitchen opened in Warrnambool, and during this time we have proudly served 1423 nutritious three-course meals to members of our community in need. These meals have been provided through both dine-in and takeaway services, ensuring support is accessible to those who need it most.

Our success is made possible by the dedication of our volunteer committee and the many wonderful volunteers who generously give their time and energy. We are also incredibly grateful to our sponsors and donors. Their ongoing support enables us to continue operating and serving our community, and without them our work would not be possible. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to making the past year such a positive and impactful one.



Seaside Community Kitchen Committee

IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES

National Reconciliation Week (27 May–3 June), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday (5 July 2026), and NAIDOC Week (5–12 July 2026) provide important opportunities for all Australians to reflect on our shared history, celebrate the rich cultures, achievements and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and commit to building a more reconciled nation. The 2026 National Reconciliation Week theme, **All In**, calls on every Australian to actively participate in reconciliation, recognising that meaningful change cannot be achieved by First Nations peoples alone and that reconciliation requires collective responsibility, commitment and action every day. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, promoted by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), carries the theme **Walking Together in Christ – 40 Years On!**, commemorating 40 years since St Pope John Paul II's historic address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Alice Springs and celebrating the 50th anniversary of NAIDOC Week. The theme invites Australians to reflect on the journey travelled, acknowledge the faith, resilience and strength that have sustained communities, and continue moving forward together with humility, hope and mutual respect, while recognising the profound ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, spirituality, connection to Country and sense of community enrich the life of the Church and the nation. NAIDOC Week 2026 marks a significant milestone with the theme **Fifty Years of Deadly**, celebrating five decades of honouring First Nations voices, cultures and achievements. It recognises the Elders, leaders, activists, artists and communities whose determination, courage and cultural pride have driven progress and kept traditions strong despite ongoing challenges. More than a celebration, NAIDOC Week acknowledges a powerful history of advocacy, survival and self-determination while highlighting the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across health, education, business, media, the arts and many other fields. The theme also looks forward with optimism, focusing on future generations, the revival of language and culture, connection to Country and the continuing pursuit of justice and equality. Together, these observances encourage all Australians to honour the oldest continuing cultures in the world, learn from the past, celebrate the present and work collaboratively towards a future shaped by respect, reconciliation, cultural strength and shared understanding.



Image: 'The Time for Rebirth is Now!' created by Youth Delegates at the 2003 NATSICC Assembly – Adelaide. Drawn from St Pope John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Alice Springs (1986).

CELEBRATING DR DEANNE GILSON

Dr Deanne Gilson is a Proud Wadawurrung woman living on her ancestral Country of Ballarat which is located in Australia. Her award-winning multi-disciplinary art has spanned forty years of full-time creative practice through painting, clay (sculptural installation), fashion & textile design, photography and drawing. She has recently been included as an upcoming Blak Jewellery Designer.



Deanne celebrates her continued living culture through art and design that revives traditional marks used by Wadawurrung family, contemporary ceremonial business and includes oral stories like her Creation Story. She depicts many indigenous plants, trees, birds, often painting endangered species to highlight the importance of taking care of the land and all living things. She works with the notion that time is traversed and all is connected through layers of Dja (Country) - from the Cosmos, to Sky to Under Country. She also depicts issues faced by Aboriginal women stemming from the white male and female colonial gaze.

Deanne highlights the beauty of Dja through use of natural ochres sourced by herself on Wadawurrung Dja, while at the same time challenging colonial patriarchal views, including those expressed in the arts and crafts of early Australia. Her contemporary art practice is an attempt to revive and regain the presence of cultural identity, and also to play a deeper role in preserving and highlighting cultural practices and symbology, thereby awakening culture once again.

She states that “my practice aims to demonstrate the way in which contemporary Aboriginal women’s art and business, including sacred and spiritual aspects, is evolving in response to the current social and political environment. We are reclaiming, reinvigorating, teaching our children, and unravelling the trauma caused by the invasion of our Country.”

Her artwork has recently been collected by the Koorie Heritage Trust and the National Gallery of Victoria and held in many other public and private collections throughout the world.

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat had the honour of Deanne delivering the Welcome to Country at Bishop Mark Freeman’s Episcopal Ordination and Installation, respectfully acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land and paying tribute to their enduring cultural and spiritual connection to Country, setting a meaningful and inclusive tone for the significant occasion.

<https://www.deannegilson.com/>

Catholic Education Week 2026

Catholic Education Week offers an opportunity to celebrate Catholic Education throughout the Diocese of Ballarat and to recognise the profound and ongoing contribution Catholic education makes to students, families and communities.



Held from May 25–29 under the theme “Peace be with you all” (Romans 15:33), schools marked the occasion in ways that reflected their local communities - from liturgies and student-led activities to gatherings that brought families together. The week culminated with the Catholic Education Week Mass and Awards Dinner at Damascus College, where Bishop Mark Freeman led the Catholic Education Week Mass for the first time as Bishop of Ballarat. The evening recognised the incredible milestone of 30 years of service for 28 employees and celebrated nominees and recipients of the Bishop Paul Bird CSsR Spirit of Catholic Education Awards. It is inspiring to witness the depth of

Our Diocesan Community - August 2026

commitment, care and faith that exists across our diocese. Winners of the awards included: Dympna Turner, St Thomas More Primary School Alfredton - Catholic Identity; Cara Chisholm, St Joseph’s Primary School Warrnambool & Stacey Atkins, St Pius X Warrnambool West - Catholic Identity; Rachel Brown, Clare Green & Kate Sewell, St Pius X Primary School Junior Team Warrnambool - Rich Pedagogical Practices for Deeper Learning and Wellbeing; and Belinda Dwyer, Damascus College Ballarat - Engagement and Belonging.

Celebrating 30 years of service to Catholic Education were: Joe Ewing; Andrew Watson; Narelle Dixon; Anne Griffin; Simone Jans; Yoshie Burrows; John Coghlan; Mary Avery; Ben van de Camp; Wendy Collins; Mark Gibson; Katrina McGuane; Rosemary Johnson; Kathryn Davis; Michelle Haeusler; Christopher Joyce; Bambi Afford; Leah Brooks; Andy Higgins; Bronwyn Burt; Leanne O’Brien; Leo McMahon; Kathryn McMeel; Inez French; Jamie Walsh; Janette Mottram; Joel Saywell; Kenneth Turnbull. Congratulations to all!

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications



A TRADITION RETURNED



Among Catholic Education Week's special gatherings was a Mass at Sovereign Hill on Tuesday, May 26, which brought Catholic school communities from across Ballarat together in a meaningful return to a tradition not held at the venue since before COVID.

Held in the recreated St Alipius Tent Church, the Mass offered students, staff and guests the opportunity to gather in a setting deeply connected to the earliest days of Catholic worship on the Ballarat goldfields.

Damascus College Religious Education Leader and Director of Faith, Stephen East, was instrumental in renewing the Mass and acted as the catalyst for its return, working with other schools to help re-establish this special tradition. Students participated reverently throughout the liturgy, leading the group in prayer and scripture readings, while students from St Alipius Parish Primary School led the choir, alongside music teacher Adam Cameron.

The Catholic Education Week 2026 theme, 'Peace be with you all' (Romans 15:33), invited school communities to reflect on peace as both a gift from God and a shared responsibility. Across the diocese, schools brought

this theme to life through prayer, liturgy, learning and community celebration. The theme also echoed the first words spoken by Pope Leo XIV when he greeted the world from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica: "Peace be with you all." In that message, he spoke of the peace of the Risen Christ as humble, persevering and grounded in God's unconditional love, calling the Church to walk together, build bridges and remain close to those in need of compassion and care.

Schools in attendance included St Alipius Parish Primary School, St Aloysius Primary School, St Thomas More Primary School, St Francis Xavier Primary School, Emmaus Primary School, Siena Primary School, Damascus College, Loreto College and St Patrick's College.

Celebrant Fr Justin Driscoll drew on this year's theme in his homily, encouraging students to pause and recognise the rich history of Catholic education in Ballarat and the courage of those who helped establish and sustain it. As one of many celebrations that took place across the diocese during this week, the Sovereign Hill Mass once again brought history, faith and education together in a powerful way.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications



Schools unite for CEW

Students from St Joseph's Coleraine, St Malachy's Edenhope, Sacred Heart Casterton and St Joseph's Penshurst came together at St Joseph's Coleraine to celebrate Catholic Education Week. The day began with Mass celebrated by Fr John Corrigan and Fr Cay Trinh, focusing on this year's theme, "Peace Be With You."

A special feature of the day was the involvement of Monivae College Hamilton students who had previously attended the participating primary schools. They returned to help lead activities and reconnect with younger students. Throughout the day, students enjoyed dancing, games and team-building activities while building friendships across the four school communities. A highlight was the creation of a peace mural, with each student contributing a handprint to symbolise unity, belonging and peace.

The celebration provided students with a valuable opportunity to strengthen their faith, make new connections and experience the spirit of Catholic education in action.

First published in CEB Communications with photos and content shared by Danny Franc, Principal of St Joseph's Primary School Coleraine

Ballarat Regional Festival Mass

On Thursday, May 21, the Ballarat Region of the St Vincent de Paul Society held their Festival Mass at Ss Peter and Paul's Church Buninyong. What a beautiful venue for this Mass. The amazing stained-glass windows of the church really create an environment where you immediately feel in the presence of something special. The day was hosted by the Ballarat East Conference.

Festival Masses are held annually in different regions, not only to bring the members together on a social level, but to also commission new presidents and acknowledge the members themselves and their years of service.



Bishop Mark Freeman and Fr Justin Driscoll concelebrated the Mass and Michael Ryan, North West Central Council (NWCC) President, was the Master of Ceremonies. It proved a great opportunity for our new bishop to meet members of our society in this region.

Brian Hall (Ballarat East Conference) was presented with his Emeritus Award and at the commencement of Mass, Peter Rix, President of the Wendouree Conference, spoke of Jim McNulty, a former member of Wendouree for over 50 years. Jim had recently received an Emeritus Award and sadly passed away a few days prior to our Mass.

State President Brendan Podbury attended, together with Margaret Gearon, Chair of Social Justice and Advocacy and Susan Dornom, State Vice President, Special Works and Projects. The day was completed with a delicious lunch which was served in the church hall.

Thank you to the Ballarat East Conference organisers for hosting such a wonderful day. It provided an enjoyable opportunity for members to connect, share experiences and strengthen relationships. Events like this are a great source of encouragement and support for members in their day-to-day work, serving those in need.

Helen Meade - Ballarat Regional President: St Vincent de Paul Society

With Gratitude



WITH GRATITUDE: A TRIBUTE FROM OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS TO BISHOP PAUL BIRD CSSR.

Recently, current and former members of the DOBCEL Board and Catholic Education Ballarat staff gathered to celebrate and thank Bishop Paul Bird CSSR for his years of service as Bishop of Ballarat and his longstanding support of Catholic education across our diocese.

As part of the evening, Bishop Paul was presented with a commemorative book featuring student artwork,

photographs and written messages contributed by schools from across the Diocese. The collection reflected the deep appreciation held by our communities and captured the many connections Bishop Paul has built through his visits to schools over the past fourteen years. Thoughtful messages, creative artwork and reflections helped create a meaningful gift that honoured Bishop Paul's commitment to students, staff and families across Catholic education.

Bishop Paul has shared a message of thanks for our school communities: "Thank you so much for your greetings on my retirement as Bishop of Ballarat. I was delighted to read your messages and see the photos and artwork that you put together. I am glad that I was able to visit so many schools over the past fourteen years. I am very grateful for your words of appreciation for my service as bishop and for your kind wishes for me in my retirement."

I am planning to stay in the Ballarat Diocese and give whatever help I can with Masses in our various parishes. This will mean that I will have some continuing ministry, though at an easier pace and with more days to relax. Thank you for your prayers for me. I pray likewise for you as staff and students and for all the families of your school community. Peace be with you. God bless you always."

The book can be viewed at this link - <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/403576ff2b.html>

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications

Building a Synodal Future

The Diocese of Ballarat has released a report highlighting a significant year of pastoral, leadership and strategic development throughout 2025, following the Diocesan Assembly held in late 2024. The report captures a period marked by reflection, discernment and renewed commitment to the mission of the Church across the region. At the heart of 2025 there was a strong focus on receiving and integrating the fruits of the Assembly. Rather than moving quickly to implementation, the Diocese is embracing a more reflective approach - listening deeply, discerning carefully and beginning to embed synodal ways of working that emphasise shared responsibility, dialogue and mission-focused leadership.



A key focus throughout the year was strengthening relationships with clergy and fostering a shared understanding of leadership and mission. Through parish visits, zone meetings and structured conversations, clergy and lay leaders were invited into ongoing dialogue about what collaborative leadership looks like in practice and how parishes can more fully embrace their identity as missionary communities.

The Diocese also made progress in reviewing and strengthening leadership and governance structures. Initiatives such as the establishment of a Leadership and Governance Working Group and formation sessions for diocesan bodies, reflect a commitment to ensuring that structures effectively support pastoral mission. At the same time, there was a clear awareness of the importance of clergy wellbeing and succession planning. Through consultation with priests and engagement with the Personnel Board, the Diocese began building a more sustainable approach to leadership, acknowledging both current realities and future needs.

Another highlight of 2025 was the growing use of synodal practices across parish and agency life. From trial conversations in healthcare settings to spiritual conversations within parishes, these initiatives provided practical opportunities for listening, shared discernment and collaborative decision-making. Feedback from these experiences has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating a growing confidence in synodal processes. Underlying all of this work is a recognition that the Diocese is living through a time of transition, with a new bishop beginning his ministry. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the insights and momentum of the Diocesan Assembly are not only preserved, but thoughtfully integrated into the life of the Diocese moving forward.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Diocese has outlined several key priorities. These include deepening parish engagement through a structured Parish Engagement Plan, continuing zone-based consultation and formation and progressing the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council grounded in parish life and leadership. Additional areas of focus include reimagining diocesan zones, continuing clergy succession planning and supporting parishes in future planning, including mergers and mission-focused renewal. There is also a strong emphasis on strengthening the relationship between parish, priest and school, recognising the vital role these relationships play in nurturing faith, building community and connecting families more deeply with the life of the Church.

As the Diocese moves forward, the report highlights a clear and hopeful direction: a Church that listens, collaborates and grows together. With strong foundations laid in 2025, the Diocese of Ballarat looks to 2026 as a year of continued growth - guided by shared mission, synodal practice and a deep commitment to the Gospel.

The report can be read at this link - <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/building-a-synodal-future/>

IDAHOBIT

The international day against LGBT discrimination, IDAHOBIT, is celebrated annually on May 17 and because this year the date fell on a Sunday, St Joseph's College Mildura celebrated on Monday, May 18. At lunchtime, the student Rainbow Alliance painted faces with free 'glitter glow-ups'. Students could also purchase delicious rainbow

cupcakes. Rainbow Alliance members also enlisted their classmates to help create an awesome rainbow mural. IDAHOBIT is a celebration of inclusion, acceptance, and a future that is better for everyone. More information can be found at <https://www.idahobit.org.au/>

Tracy Aston - Communications and Events Manager



WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS RESEARCH-INFORMED APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHING



More than 100 language teachers from across Victoria came together in Ballarat on May 15, 2026 for a major professional learning workshop led by internationally recognised language educator Dr Gianfranco Conti, in an event that highlighted the growing impact of research-informed language teaching in schools. Hosted by Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) at the Vickers St Community Hub in Sebastopol, the one-day workshop focused on Dr Conti's Extensive Processing Instruction (EPI) approach, a model that draws on cognitive science and instructional design to strengthen how students learn languages. Teachers attended from Catholic, government and independent schools across metropolitan and regional Victoria, including Swan Hill, Warrnambool, Camperdown and Melbourne.

Dr Conti is an educator, researcher, author and presenter with almost 30 years' experience across primary, secondary and university settings. He is also founder and CEO of **The Language Gym**, a widely used language-learning platform and professional learning resource for teachers internationally. His work is known for helping teachers build student fluency and confidence through structured, input-rich and retrieval-based classroom practice.

Reflecting on the purpose of the workshop, Dr Conti said the day was designed to help teachers hear the core principles of the approach clearly and directly, while also challenging common misconceptions about language learning. He said the aim was to take participants through the main ideas as concisely as possible, dispel stereotypes and show that many of the principles they were exploring could also be applied in other subject areas. That broader relevance was a key theme throughout the day. Dr Conti said the work extends well beyond languages because "some principles of human learning are universal". While some aspects of language acquisition are specific to sound, grammar and repeated rehearsal, he said the underlying insights from cognitive science are increasingly informing teaching across the curriculum, from science to the humanities. He also noted that many of these ideas are now becoming more visible in schools as curriculum expectations evolve. Drawing on his experience in the United Kingdom and internationally, Dr Conti said the principles underpinning EPI have been used in practice for years and are now gaining wider recognition because of their strong alignment with a contemporary understanding of how students learn best.

Teachers from Siena Catholic Primary School and St James' School took part through their Teachers as Co-Learners (TCL) professional learning programs, with the workshop providing an opportunity to deepen classroom practice and connect that learning to student outcomes. Throughout the day, participants engaged with practical strategies designed to support stronger comprehension, retention and language production.

Dr Conti said one of the most encouraging aspects of the workshop was the response from participants. After speaking with teachers across the room, he said many were enthusiastic about the TCL method, even when they found aspects of the learning challenging because they were working in a new language. He also said feedback about student response had been very positive, reinforcing the conclusion that the approach is translating into meaningful classroom engagement.

Evidence from schools in the UK and Australia suggests that approaches such as EPI can improve student engagement, academic outcomes and retention in school language programs. For schools and systems looking to strengthen language education, the Ballarat workshop demonstrated both the appetite for this work and the value of bringing educators together around practical, research-informed teaching.



Formation in Synodality: A Milestone for the Diocese of Ballarat

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat marked an important step forward in 2026 with the introduction of a new Formation in Leadership for Synodality program, delivered in partnership with Catholic Theological College and supported by a bursary funded through the Therese D'Orsa Mission Fund.

This initiative grew out of the Ballarat Diocesan Assembly held at the end of 2024. The Assembly Report reflected a strong desire to build a more synodal Church—one grounded in listening, discernment and shared mission—and identified the need for intentional formation to support synodal leadership across the Diocese.

In response, the Diocese developed a Formation in Synodality Pilot Program, with its first module, **Together On the Way with the Spirit**, commencing in February 2026.

A Pilot Program Takes Shape: The inaugural module brought together a cohort of twenty participants from across the Diocese. Functioning as both an introduction and a pilot experience, it focused on the spirituality and biblical foundations of synodality and explored what it means to become a more synodal Church in contemporary times.

Delivered collaboratively by Catholic Theological College (CTC) and the Diocese of Ballarat, Dr Rosemary Canavan and Fr Justin Driscoll, the module combined theological reflection, spiritual discernment and practical application. Through a reflective praxis format of two in-person gatherings at Ss Peter and Paul's Church, Buninyong, plus two online sessions during the semester, participants were invited to engage deeply with Scripture, one another and the call of the Holy Spirit. Four members of this group undertook this formation for credit through a Supervised Reading unit with CTC, which involved fortnightly meetings with the supervisor Rosemary Canavan and the completion of assessments.

Learning for Synodal Leadership: A key focus of the formation was developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to foster synodality in parish and diocesan life. Participants explored the experience of synodality in the early Church and its renewed expression in contemporary theological reflection and Church teaching.

The learning outcomes challenged participants to:

- Articulate and demonstrate the process of becoming a synodal Church in light of the experience of the early Church and contemporary Church teaching.
- Engage with, implement, and lead synodal processes, including Conversation in the Spirit, in support of diocesan and parish goals.
- Evaluate the implications of synodality for the life and mission of both parish communities and the Diocese as a whole.

Learning Through Practice: A defining feature of the program was its project-based approach. Each participant developed and implemented a synodal project within their own ministry context, be it parish, school, faith community or organisation.

Many projects aligned with the priorities identified through the Diocesan Assembly and sought to foster greater participation, listening, collaboration and discernment. The projects allowed participants to put their learning into practice and to explore how synodality can be lived in practical and meaningful ways.

Throughout the semester, participants were supported by a dedicated mentor and administrator, Martin Ryan, who accompanied them in their formation journey, offering guidance, encouragement and practical support.

Evaluating the Pilot: The concluding gathering held at Buninyong on May 30, 2026 provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experience and evaluate the pilot program.

One of the significant outcomes of the day was the emergence of what participants described as the “Five S’s of Synodality”: 1. Slow; 2. Small; 3. Sustainable; 4. Spiritual; 5. Scriptural.

These themes captured the group’s growing understanding that genuine synodal renewal requires patience, attentiveness to relationships, deep spiritual grounding and a willingness to allow change to unfold over time.

Participants also highlighted the importance of embedding synodality as an ongoing dimension of parish and diocesan life, rather than viewing it as a one-off initiative. Many recognised the need for continued formation and support if the momentum generated through the program was to be sustained.

The Importance of Walking Together: A particularly encouraging aspect of the final gathering was the presence of Bishop Mark throughout the day. This brought much encouragement to and affirmation of participants in their synodal projects as Bishop Mark listened and observed, joining in the spiritual conversations and in the final feedback.

A number of important themes emerged from the final discussions:

- The need to continue embedding synodality across parish and diocesan life.
- The importance of engaging clergy in the synodal journey and supporting shared leadership.
- Opportunities for synodal parish visits and local initiatives that promote listening and discernment.
- The importance of communicating synodal stories and learnings through diocesan channels.
- Encouraging participants to share their experiences and learn with parish leadership teams.
- The desire for participants to remain connected and continue supporting one another beyond the pilot program.
- The need for ongoing formation opportunities in synodality and stronger links with other diocesan priorities, including mission, evangelisation, Christian initiation and pastoral care.

Looking Ahead: Perhaps the strongest message to emerge from the pilot program was the desire expressed by participants to continue the journey. Having experienced the richness of spiritual conversation, communal discernment and practical collaboration, many spoke of the importance of remaining connected and supported as they seek to foster synodal practices in their local communities.

The successful completion of **Together On the Way with the Spirit** marked a significant milestone in the Diocese of Ballarat’s ongoing response to the call of synodality. Through Scripture, reflection, accompaniment and practical action, participants not only deepened their understanding of synodality but also contributed to building a culture of listening, discernment and shared mission that will continue to shape the future life of the Diocese.

Celebrating 70 Years of Catholic Education

This year, St James’ Primary School Sebastopol proudly celebrates 70 years of Catholic education, reflecting on a rich history of faith, learning, service, and community.

For seven decades, our school has been a place where generations of students have been nurtured academically, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Guided by Gospel values, we have remained committed to providing an education that develops the whole child and encourages each student to grow into the person God created them to be.

As we celebrate this significant milestone, we acknowledge the vision, dedication, and contributions of the many students, families, staff, parishioners, and religious communities who have shaped our school over the years. Their commitment has helped create a strong and welcoming community built on faith, relationships, and a shared belief in the value of Catholic education.

While we honour our past, we also look forward with hope and excitement. We continue to build on the foundations laid before us, ensuring that future generations experience a learning environment where they are known, valued, challenged, and supported to flourish.

This anniversary provides an opportunity to celebrate our history, reconnect with past members of our community, and give thanks for the countless people who have contributed to the story of our school.





32nd Principal of Loreto College Ballarat commissioned

Loreto College Ballarat officially commissioned and blessed Christine Shaw as its 32nd Principal during a special ceremony held on Friday, May 22, 2026.

At Loreto College Ballarat, leadership is guided by the values of Freedom, Justice, Verity, Sincerity and Felicity. These principles shape the way the community leads, learns and grows together. The College describes its approach to leadership as one that draws on the strengths and talents of all those around it and empowers individuals to be the best they can be.

Christine Shaw has long embodied these values throughout her time at Loreto College Ballarat. Her commissioning as Principal was warmly received by the community, who formally welcomed her into the role.

The College extended its thanks to the Loreto Sisters, Loreto College Board, Loreto Ministries, Bishop Mark Freeman, Fr Justin Driscoll, special guests, students and staff who attended and contributed to the celebration.

We look forward to this exciting new chapter in the life of Loreto College Ballarat.

Jayde Harrington - Development Officer

SOCIAL JUSTICE VISITS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Social Justice Visits at St Mary's Primary School Swan Hill are a wonderful success, giving students the opportunity to connect with members of our local community while putting our Gospel values into action.

Students have embraced these visits with kindness, respect and compassion, bringing joy to others through conversation and companionship. These experiences not only strengthen the important connections between our school and the wider community but also help students recognise the difference they can make through simple acts of service, following the example of Jesus.

These visits have a positive impact on the lives of those the students meet, and we look forward to their continuation.

Belinda Davies - Religious Education Leader

Where Creativity and Community Come Alive

*Sharing our church with the wider community is an important way of showing hospitality, building relationships and supporting good causes. When the local Spa Quilters Guild of Daylesford held its biennial Quilt Show at **St Peter's Catholic Church** in June, it not only opened our doors to others but also created a welcoming space where people could come together, appreciate one another's talents and contribute to something meaningful. Opportunities like this help the church remain a place of connection, generosity and service within the community.*

Visitors came not only to admire the intricate craftsmanship of the quilts, but also to appreciate the architectural beauty of St Peter's itself.

The exhibition served as a fundraiser, with all proceeds supporting the Guild's ongoing work of making quilts for children in foster care and residents in aged care homes. Many recipients arrive in care with few personal belongings, and these handmade quilts offer warmth, comfort, and something of their own to keep.

The Spa Quilters Guild has been part of the Daylesford community for 41 years and meets each Thursday at St Peter's Parish Centre, continuing a long tradition of creativity, care and service.



Leonie Keynes - Parish Administration Officer: Creswick & Daylesford Parishes

FORMATION OF CO-OPERATIVE FARMING GROUPS 15 MAY 1943

A typewritten draft letter and proposed agreement, signed by H.A. Henry (Regional Organiser), sheds light on agricultural activities during the war and post-war period. The letter highlights the achievements of the District War Agricultural Committee (North-East Region Benalla). Henry considered the project a success and wrote, "In considering these proposals, it should be encouraging to note the possibilities of co-operative effort among farmers... in the Boorhaman District ... 40 producers farming over 40,000 acres have maintained full production since last October by co-operative organisation..."¹ The organisation of the labour and machinery available was sustained and heavily supported by the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), which was formed as a national body in 1942 and modelled on the British example. Recruitment was on a full-time and auxiliary basis. Women were given a badge, clothes, and essential equipment on loan.² Enrolment peaked in December 1943, with 2,382 permanent members and 1,039 auxiliary members. The average working week for an AWLA member was 48 hours and pay started at the AWLA minimum wage of 30 shillings a week. Permanent members were also entitled to sick pay. Women were paid much less than their male counterparts for the same work, covering vegetable and fruit growing, pig and

poultry raising, and sheep and wool work.³ The Ballarat and District Genealogical Society recorded the efforts of these "invisible women" who supported both WWI and WWII.⁴

Dr Malcolm Borg - Diocesan Archivist



Image: Members (land army trainees) of the Australian Women's Land Army loading wooden posts onto a horse-drawn cart by hand at Longerenong Agricultural College, Horsham, in or before August 1941. State Library of Victoria

1 Henry H.A. (15/05/1943). Draft Letter and agreement proposal "Formation of Co-operative Farming Groups North-East Region Benalla." Ballarat Diocesan Archive and Gallery, 84/2/58, Ballarat.

2 Australian War Memorial. (2020, December 7). Australian Women's Land Army | The Australian War Memorial. Awm.Gov.Au; AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/homefront/land_army

Our Diocesan Community - August 2026

3 WW2 - Australian Women's Land Army - Hat Badge. (2026). Welcome to Australian Militaria Sales. <https://www.militaria-sales.com.au/shop/australia/army/badges-australia/badges-civilian-ww2/australian-women-s-land-army-hat-badge-world-war-2/>

4 <https://www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/index.php/about/news/researching-ballarats-ww1-women>.

World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

In 2026, the Sixth World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly was observed on Sunday, July 26. This date coincides with the liturgical Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus.

The theme chosen by Pope Leo XIV for the 6th World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly – “I will never forget you” (Is 49:15) – reminds us that God’s unwavering love is the ultimate answer to the isolation and neglect so often experienced by the elderly. It brings comfort and hope, assuring us that the Lord knows each of us personally, forgets no one, and loves us unconditionally, even through the frailties of old age. This day is an invitation to draw close to the elderly, to celebrate their role in our families and communities, and to reach out to those who may be lonely.

Since its creation in 2021, the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly has grown into a cherished tradition that teaches our communities to truly value the elderly, not through occasional gestures, but as a permanent, central part of our lives. This celebration helps us appreciate older generations as vital keepers of our history, witnesses to our faith, and teachers for our lives.

BEING A GRANDPARENT



After raising a family of four, we had the pleasure of becoming grandparents to eleven children, ages currently ranging from 24 to 6. At the time of the arrival of our first two granddaughters – 3 weeks apart – I was working full time, still heavily involved in sport and had a busy social life. After discussions with Jim, I asked my work if I could go part time (3 days a week) so that I had time to spend with the grandchildren. Luckily, the Director of the Catholic Education Office at the time agreed to my request for which I was forever grateful.



Whilst probably not the best financial decision, it was certainly the best family decision which has enabled us to have a life long relationship with this next generation of our family. Those days were filled with great experiences for us all – playgrounds, movies, parks, cooking, arts and crafts, walks and generally just sharing time together with no outside distractions. They were all the things we struggled to fit into our busy lives when our children were young. When Jim and I both retired from work it enabled us to attend more school occasions – school Masses, grandparents days, sports days, concerts, art shows. The smile on the grandchildren’s faces when they saw us made it all worthwhile.

As the children grew, we shared many special occasions as a family – birthdays, Christmases, school graduations, sporting achievements, beach holidays and Deb balls. Such a pleasure and honour to see these children growing into beautiful adults. We were lucky that eight out of our eleven grandchildren lived locally – our youngest grandchild, from Melbourne, just had his first “Bungaree holiday” without his parents – a great cousin catch up.

The love and care all the grandchildren showered on Jim in the last two years of his life was so lovely – he was loved dearly by them all. Since his passing, we have initiated “dinner at Nana’s” on a Monday night for whoever is available. It’s a lovely gathering time, and especially nice that the partners of the grandchildren also come whenever they can – such a precious family time. When we look back over the past 24 years, we reflect on millions of memories and I give thanks every day for being blessed with such a loving, caring family that has been happy to share their lives with Nana and Pop.

Sue O’Keefe

The celebration of the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly is an opportunity to rediscover that the Church is called to be a mother to all and that at any age it is always possible to recognize ourselves as sons and daughters of God. May this day, therefore, be an inspiration for everyone, especially the young, to revive the beautiful custom of visiting their grandparents, the elderly members of the family and even those who have no one to visit them.

Taken from the Message from His Holiness Leo XIV for the Sixth World Day For Grandparents And The Elderly

'Hearts and Hands Mass'

On June 24, St Mary MacKillop College Swan Hill celebrated their annual 'Hearts and Hands Mass.' The Mass brings together the community in prayer, reflection and generosity to support the St Vincent de Paul Society in Swan Hill.

Each year, the school community generously donates non-perishable food items, pantry staples and toiletries to assist individuals and families in the local area who may be experiencing hardship during the colder months. Every contribution, no matter how small, is a powerful expression of solidarity and compassion. Through these acts of kindness we help bring warmth, hope and dignity to those in need.



The Hearts & Hands Mass is a meaningful reminder that we are more than a school, we are a community united by a shared commitment to caring for others. The Mass is a wonderful reflection of our school values in action and of our 2026 theme, Conscious Compassion. Thank you to all students, staff and families who contributed so generously to this year's appeal.

Michelle Haeusler - Principal



WINTER SLEEPOUT

On Thursday, June 25, 2026, thirty students from Mercy Regional College Camperdown braved the winter cold to take part in the Winter Sleepout, an experience that challenged them to step outside their comfort zones while raising awareness of homelessness in Australia.

Guided by the 2026 College theme, **Walking Together in Hope**, the Winter Sleepout gave students a meaningful opportunity to put this theme into action. By spending a night in simple conditions, students stood in solidarity with those who experience homelessness every day. The experience encouraged them to think about the challenges faced by vulnerable members of our community and helped build greater empathy, gratitude and compassion.



The evening also highlighted the important work of the St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies), whose programs provide practical support and hope to people experiencing homelessness and hardship across Australia.

Thanks to the generosity of our school community, the event raised an incredible \$1,500 with all funds donated to the St Vincent de Paul Society to support their ongoing work with people experiencing homelessness.

A sincere thank you to staff members, Berni Sinnott, Tom Kelly and Melanie Kavanagh, for generously giving their time to attend and support our students throughout the evening.

Sharon Gillett - Principal



St John of God Ballarat and Ministry of Health Tongan Twinning Program

The St John of God Ballarat Hospital team travelled to Tonga on May 23, 2026, auspiced by the Tongan Twinning Program, which continues to have excellent health outcomes, providing a mutually rewarding relationship. This visit included the outer islands of 'Eua and the Niu'eiki Hospital as well as Vaiola Hospital, Tongatapu.

Carolyn Mornane, Clinical Nurse Consultant, was invited by the Tongan Ministry of Health to provide wound care education which will extend to the outer islands in October. Carolyn has educated the Tongan Nurses in best practice and evidence based wound management. Since 2006, Carolyn initiated and continues to support the utilisation of the antimicrobial dressing, Inadine. The introduction of this practice has seen a significant improvement in wound care management, resulting in the preservation of limbs that may otherwise have required amputation.

Stacey Dubberley, Clinical Nurse Specialist, supported the very first Paediatric patient in Tonga in Intermittent Self Catheterisation (ISC) which enables the child to go to school and live a typical life in her community as opposed to being confined to home. SJGBH will continue to provide more ongoing paediatric support.

David Lenehan, Associate Nurse Unit Manager, provided Infection Control education for the surgical ward as essential practice. An Orthopaedic Team is visiting in September 2026 and will be performing the very first Joint replacements in Tonga. Palliative Care is also of interest to the Ministry of Health and David's experience in this area was welcomed.

In addition, with a commitment to environmental stewardship, and in the spirit of Laudato Si', we provided two 40ft shipping containers of excellent quality medical equipment, along with thousands of dollars of reusable items from St John of God Ballarat Hospital and surrounding Ballarat services, in alignment with the Ministry of Health requirements.

Maureen Waddington - Director of Mission Integration, St John of God Ballarat Hospital

Building Paths of Peace, Planting Seeds of Hope

St Michael's Primary School Daylesford staff recently participated in a retreat held in Halls Gap. The focus over the two days was: *Building Paths of Peace, Planting Seeds of Hope*. Inspired by the *Laudato Si'* action goals, we were extremely fortunate to be led by Sarah Page (DOBCEL: Social Justice Education Officer) who shared her knowledge of and passion for God's creation with us.

The retreat reaffirmed the interconnectedness of all life and our responsibility to care for our common home. It was a unique opportunity to grow together in knowledge and wisdom, having our hearts opened, our spirits refreshed and our feet ready for the path ahead!

Tim Hogan - Principal



Winter Appeal "Can Raiser"

On Thursday, June 25, students and staff at Sacred Heart Primary School Casterton swapped their uniforms for pyjamas as part of their annual Winter Appeal. Rather than bringing a gold coin donation, families were encouraged to donate a can or two of food to support local families doing it tough this winter. We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of our school community. Over the past few weeks, students and families have contributed an incredible collection of non-perishable food items and warm blankets, helping to make a real difference to those in need.

Working alongside the United Way Glenelg "Can Raiser", our team was proud to present the donated items to Frank, a representative from St Vincent de Paul Society, who will add them to local winter hampers for families within our community.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and helped to make this appeal such a success. We are incredibly proud of the way our students embrace opportunities to help others and develop an understanding of the importance of kindness, compassion and service. Initiatives like this create a wonderful sense of community spirit, both within Sacred Heart and throughout our beautiful town of Casterton. Together, we have shown that even small acts of generosity can make a big difference in the lives of others.

Mel Willis - Acting Principal



Fr John Fitzgerald's Retirement

Fr John was born July 4, 1951 and grew up in Killarney and Koroit. He spent much of his youth working on the family farm alongside his siblings. He attended primary school at St Brigid's Crossley and St Patrick's Koroit before attending St Patrick's College in Ballarat for secondary school. Fr John entered Corpus Christi College Seminary at Werribee in 1970. When that closed, he completed his studies at the new seminary in Clayton. He completed his theological studies in 1978. Fr John

was ordained in Koroit on November 24, 1978 and has faithfully served the Catholic Church for nearly 48 years. After Ordination, Fr John's first appointment was to the Parish of Horsham. He then spent three and half years at the Ballarat Cathedral Parish, which included serving as Chaplin at St Patrick's College. He spent a year in Terang, after which the Bishop invited him to undertake further studies prior to taking up the appointment as Director of Religious Education for the Ballarat Diocese from 1988 - 1993.

In 1994, Fr John was appointed Parish Priest of Daylesford with the Parish of Creswick later included in his ministry. In January 2004, he was appointed Parish Priest of St Joseph's, Warrnambool. In October 2021, he became Parish Priest of the Star of the Sea Parish, South West Coast when the parishes of Warrnambool, Koroit, Port Fairy and West Warrnambool merged. East Warrnambool Parish later joined.



In 2024 Fr John was elected as a Director of Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL), where he continues to support and nurture Catholic Education for students in the schools across the diocese. He has demonstrated a truly selfless lifelong commitment to God and the Church, extending into the everyday lives of parishioners. His compassion, generosity and dedication to the Parish will be greatly missed.

Fr John Fitzgerald celebrated his final Mass as Parish Priest of the Star of the Sea Parish on Sunday, July 26 at 10:30am. Each church community held a special celebration event: Sunday, June 14 - St Anne's, Purnim; Sunday, June 28 - St Patrick's, Port

Fairy; Sunday, July 5 - Infant Jesus, Koroit; Sunday, July 12 - St Pius X, Warrnambool West; Saturday, July 18 - Our Lady Help of Christians, Warrnambool East; Sunday, July 19 - St Joseph's, Warrnambool; We wish Fr John all the best in his retirement and thank him for his priestly ministry.

First published on <https://www.catholicparish.app/southwestcoast>

Bottom image: Gathering at St Pius

Vital Contribution

The International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026, declared by the United Nations, recognises the vital contribution women make to agriculture, food production, rural communities and global food security. The year highlights both the significant role women play across agrifood systems and the ongoing challenges they face, including access to land, finance, technology, education, and decision-making opportunities. It encourages governments, organisations, and communities to support and empower women farmers, whose leadership and expertise are essential for building sustainable, resilient, and equitable food systems for the future.

Jo Brady writes about a life in farming: I was born on July 2, 1955 at Sea Lake and District Hospital to Leo and Jean (Stacey) McInerney. 1956 was a year of flooding in the Mallee and I think the roads in those days would have been a bit difficult to navigate, especially with lots of rain. I grew up on a farm at Nyarrin with my parents, and four siblings – three sisters and one brother.

I attended primary school at St Mary's Sea Lake and then onto secondary school, to what is now known as Tyrrell College. Growing up on the farm was a great time in my life as I enjoyed riding horses and camping with my friends, who were our neighbour's children. These friends are still friends to this day. Even though we might not see each other often, when we do catch up it is just like we have never been apart. We had wonderful neighbours where everyone was there for each other and would help you out with finishing harvest or cropping, where favours were never paid with money but with time. Christmas time was also special when the neighbours would call in and have a drink and offer their best wishes.

My Dad was a bit of a character, and there are so many stories I could tell, one that was well known was this: Mum had gone somewhere for a few hours, and Dad was in charge of the kids. He wasn't any good at changing nappies, so off he went to our nearest neighbour so she changed the nappy for Dad. He wouldn't last long in today's world.

As I loved riding my horse, I would often wag school and go droving cattle with my now husband, Sam, who had a property a few miles past our farm. We would spend quite a few hours on our horses. We were friends for many years attending St Mary's and high school together. Our parents were friends for many years, so when people ask where did we meet, I often joke 'side by side in a cradle', as there is only three months between us. We both left school at 16 years old and I had a few jobs in Sea Lake before I was married. I started working in a shop that sold material, and offered sewing alterations and seamstress work. My employer moved away and closed her shop. I really enjoyed my time there and learnt how to sew properly which came in handy when I had my own children. My next employment was at Denney's, another haberdashery shop where I stayed until they shut their doors. Moving from there I started at the Sea Lake Newsagency until I was married in 1976.

After we married, we moved into the house on the farm in which Sam's uncle Jim Brady lived until his death in a car accident. This was the home in which my husband Sam lived until his mother's death in 1964. Several working employees lived in this house until we married, and it continues to be our home until this day, being renovated in 2003. The children arrived thick and fast after marriage, with six kids and one stillborn in ten years. My life on the farm was busy with kids and not much else. Apart from chasing preschoolers and school kids, going to football and church took up the weekends. As the kids got older, I became involved in coaching the junior netball and starting up a junior tennis competition in Nandaly. I was also involved in the Parent's Club at St Mary's Sea Lake, ironically as a catering conveyor for three years. When I got married my father's quote was 'she can't even boil water' which was quite a fair comment as I spent so much time outside, I was no help to my poor mother, but with a husband that opened our home to so many people, I had to get over my embarrassment and learn to cook. I am pleased to say that I now love cooking and love entertaining family and friends, and everyone is welcome from stock agents to hip campers, and anyone else who knocks on our door.



I love being a farmer's wife, although it has certainly had its challenges over the years. Bringing up the kids was challenging enough without the added burdens of droughts, low commodity prices and wondering how we were ever going to get through. I remember when I had my fifth child, we had just bought a new header before harvest. It was a very lean harvest so Sam decided he would go to Queensland to do contract harvesting so that we could make the

payments on our header. This was a very hard time for me as I had a five-week-old baby and four others to contend with. I was truly blessed to have my parents ten kilometres down the road to call on. I know how hard it was on me, but I can only imagine how hard it was on Sam to be away from his family for weeks.

Many more droughts came, so in 1993 I returned to work off farm as a domestic at the Sea Lake Hospital. This tore my heart leaving my kids, but one good thing came out of this, my kids became more independent, and they all had chores to do, even Sam, as he had to pick up jobs that I would normally do. My father was in the nursing home at this time, and I felt that I could give back to my parents a bit of the help which they had given to me for many years. It was a special time with my Dad as I could stay behind after work and feed him his dinner, allowing Mum to have a bit of time to herself. I ceased work three years later, returning home to the farm which I missed so much.

I am not a farmer's wife who drives tractors. I am what you call a gopher. Sam tells me I am more important to him doing this, especially now, as Sam hasn't got a licence due to poor eyesight. I am and have been running around for many years for parts, piloting vehicles, feeding all the workers and most importantly being there for my husband and boys when they need an ear on a bad day. I enjoy my time with all of them around our kitchen table.

Our health has been another challenge with Sam and I both being diagnosed with cancer in 2008 and Sam again in 2014. Our family and again the small farming communities surrounding where we live, came to the fore with food and support, and Speed Lions Club donated money for our travelling expenses. This is what makes where we live so special. I would not wish to live anywhere else but in the Mallee.

Over the 50 years that Sam and I have been farming, we have seen many changes come and go. When we were first married, we had dam fills and now we have our water supplied by a pipeline. Gone is the yabbing, swimming in dams, throwing things in the channel and watching them float and just the joy and pleasure of seeing our house dams fill after months of being empty. The best thing about the pipeline is the security of water and not running out of water for your stock and garden. We would have to sell our stock if we didn't have water and our garden would die in the scorching heat.

Machinery has certainly increased in size as well as price and a farmer needs to be multi-skilled in many different areas, it isn't all about sitting on a tractor. Bookkeeping, marketing grain, stock work, mechanical repairs, just to name a few skills. Long hours are required and family time certainly suffers at times. Farming is in our blood and is very hard to get out of. We do enjoy the hard work and challenges that life throws at us. We have sixteen grandchildren and they have given us much joy and contentment in our lives. We hope that our farm will be here for them to enjoy for many more years to come.



Volunteering has also taken up a lot of my time but has given me a lot of enjoyment. Both Sam and I have great pleasure in giving back to our community what has been given to us, and it isn't hard when you love your community.

Four years ago, I decided I wanted to share the farm experience with others, so we started a hip-camping business and opened our farm up to strangers to come and camp and enjoy our beautiful Mallee, night skies and peaceful surrounds. It has been a great success, and it gives me so much joy to be able to share our farm with them and their families.

As I write this, I do ponder and wonder where I will be in a few years from now as we enter our twilight years. Where we go next, who knows? All I know is farming has been our life and it will be a sad day when we have to hang up our boots. Thank you for the opportunity to put pen to paper and I hope that your readers enjoy a bit of hindsight into my life on the farm.





A Special Visit

The Ministry District of Ballarat East, Bungaree and Gordon welcomed Bishop Mark Freeman for his visit to our three parishes over the weekend of June 27–28, 2026. This visit marked our first opportunity to formally welcome Bishop Mark to the district since his Ordination and Installation as Ninth Bishop of Ballarat on March 19, 2026.

Bishop Mark celebrated the 5.00pm Vigil Mass at Ballarat East with Fr Justin Driscoll, the 9.00am Sunday Mass at Gordon and the 10.30am Sunday Mass at Ballan with Fr Shaiju Mathew. Each celebration provided a meaningful occasion for parishioners to gather in faith and share in the presence of our new Bishop.

Following Mass at Ballan, parishioners and friends from across the Ministry District were invited to gather for Sunday lunch at the Wallace Hotel. This provided a wonderful opportunity for those in attendance to meet Bishop Mark personally, connect with fellow parishioners and strengthen the sense of community across our parishes.

We sincerely thank Bishop Mark for joining us over this weekend and look forward to many future visits and celebrations together within our Ministry District. Thanks also to Parish Staff, Cathy Prunty, Natalie Gleeson and the staff of the Wallace Hotel.

Julie Boyd

SUSTAINABILITY

Trinity College Colac have been incredibly busy in the Sustainability space recently and thanks to some passionate students have achieved a great deal.

On Thursday, June 4, eighteen students attended a Student Environmental Leadership Summit, working with professional facilitators and joining forces with Colac Secondary College to develop their leadership skills in this space, dive deep into sustainability issues, and begin action planning for our school's sustainability priorities. These students represented the College incredibly well, contributing to group conversations, immersing themselves in the opportunities, and developing specific, meaningful actions for the College community. A group of Year 9 students also delivered a presentation on the Waste Reduction Plan, which provides multiple recycling opportunities at Trinity to reduce landfill. They communicated the data that has been collected around this plan and outlined how we can further encourage the proper use of these bins.

On World Environment Day, Friday, June 5, the VCE VM students hosted another Waste-Free Morning Tea, which was thoroughly enjoyed by staff and provided a fantastic way for the College to celebrate our students' sustainability achievements. The event saw students plan and prepare a morning tea full of edible goodies made without single-use plastic, using ingredients purchased in recyclable packaging or fresh produce without packaging.

Wrapping up our World Environment Day events, congratulations to Homerooms 7C and 7E, which tied in the Homeroom vs Homeroom Nude Food Competition. These students earned the most points across the school during the competition week by bringing lunch items free of single-use plastic and promoting awareness of the impact of single-use plastics and littering. In recognition of their efforts, a pizza party will be provided.

Sarah Glennen - Sustainability Coordinator



Diversity Month

Emmanuel College Warrnambool recently celebrated diversity. To begin Diversity Month, they celebrated Neurodiversity and All Abilities Week from May 4 - 8. During this week there were posters around the school, music shared from neurodiverse artists and a collaborative mural created. This week was a great opportunity to 'celebrate minds of all kinds'.

From May 18 - 22 the College celebrated Cultural Diversity Week. Students and staff enjoyed activities such as cultural trivia, sharing personal stories and contributing family recipes to our school multicultural eCookbook. The week provided a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the diverse cultures within our community and strengthen our sense of belonging.

During Week 2 of Diversity Month the focus was on Sexuality and Gender Diversity. Activities across the week included the raising of the LGBTQIA+ flag each morning, playing songs created by LGBTQIA+ artists over the PA system at lunchtimes and inviting Headspace to visit to run a badge/jewellery making stall for IDAHOBIT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination and Transphobia).

All activities were a huge success, with over 50 badges made at the lunchtime stall.

Wellbeing Team - Emmanuel College Warrnambool



Uplifting Day of Discernment and Collaboration



More than fifty people joined our generous East Wimmera Parish hosts for an inspiring day of reflection, with members and friends of the Catholic Women's League Ballarat Diocese, celebrating the great Australian Solemnity of Our Lady Help of Christians.

The Reflection Day began with Mass in the 19th century red brick gem of St Mary's Church Donald, celebrated by Fr Gerry Prunty of the East Wimmera Parish and Fr James Kerr of the Holy Family Northeast Mallee Parish.

The women and a few of the men who attended were delighted to have the entire school of St Mary's Primary School Donald making up a bubbly choir of children who accompanied our prayer. Special thanks to Principal Melissa Drum and the school community for their support.

Fr James gave a presentation about his recent sabbatical stay in Rome and beyond - tying together his experience on a vocational and spiritual pilgrimage to certain holy places in Italy and beyond. Both humorous and touching was his encounter with the restored icon of the Madonna of San Sisto, which is thought to be one of the earliest surviving depictions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fr James focused on the image for a moving reflection about vocational discernment.

We were treated to a warm and delicious lunch organised by East Wimmera Parish Manager and CWL member Noeline Hogan. Carefully curated tables encouraged lively discussion and reunions around the room. Attending the day were women from current and former CWL Branches: Dunkeld, Timboon, Ouyen, Swan Hill, Ballarat, Birchip, Donald and beyond.

This was followed with prayer, spiritual discernment and an invitation to listen and discuss, which was especially encouraging and rich. Donald is a small pastoral area with an enormous heart thanks to the work and vision of Fr Gerry and Noeline.



Anna Krohn OAM – Ballarat Cathedral CWL

A VISIT FROM INDIA

Mary Glowrey was born in 1887 in Birregurra. Her family owned the Birregurra General Store from 1884 - 1888 and then moved to Garvoc when Mary was six months old. Mary studied Medicine at the University of Melbourne and graduated in 1910. She became the first General President of the Catholic Women's Social Guild in 1916 (now the Catholic Women's League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga.)

In 1920, Mary left her career in Australia to serve as a medical missionary to vulnerable women and children in India. She joined the Society of Jesus Mary Joseph, becoming known as Dr Sr Mary of the Sacred Heart, and worked as the world's first "Sister Doctor" in Guntur. In 1943, Mary founded what is now known as the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI), which today serves over 21 million people annually. Mary's work and prayerful service provided hope to countless men, women and children in need. Mary passed away in Bengaluru in 1957.

On November 21, 2025, Dr Sr Mary Glowrey's cause for Sainthood was advanced, after Pope Leo XIV recognised her 'heroic virtues' and she is now titled as Venerable Mary of the Sacred Heart Glowrey and is only the second Australian to be accorded this status.

Recently, we had a visit from Sr Showry Tresa JMJ and her sister, both from Guntur, along with her sister's son-in-law and grand-daughters, as well as Mary Glowrey's great nieces Pauline Adams and Louise McGrath. Many people also attended a Mass at St Peter's Church, Birregurra. Sr Showry Tresa's one wish whilst visiting her family in Australia was to visit places significant to Venerable Mary Glowrey of the Sacred Heart, especially her birthplace. Sr Showry wrote "The visit to Birregurra was a great, memorable moment. It was a unique and spiritual journey. The Holy Mass added to the day's inspiration. Fr Andrew was so kind and considerate towards us. The meeting we had with everyone at the Historical Centre was great as everyone talked and lived the memories of Dr Sr Mary Glowrey. Thank you to all for the warm welcome our little group received on our recent visit."

Recently, a former Murroon resident Margaret Riordan (Gannon) told me of letters her mother had from India and that she was named after Margaret Barrett, who later became a religious sister. Margaret and Nell Barrett attended the Barwon Downs school between 1907 - 1918, then they went to a Convent in Melbourne. Their father Michael was a ganger on the railways. Marg has written,



"Thanks to the Birregurra Historical group, I had a most enjoyable, perhaps spiritual day. Without the work of this group, many things would be lost to future generations. This all began for me when I shifted for the fourth time following my mother Mary Gannon's (nee Hayden) death 34 years ago. I thought it was time to go through her tin of bits and pieces, and I took the time to read through the old letters. I had always known I was named after her Barwon Downs friend Margaret Barrett, who later became a chemist and then at the time of my birth, she gave up life in Melbourne and went to India and became a religious sister in the religious congregation, the Society of Jesus Mary Joseph, the Order that Mary Glowrey had joined, taking the name Sister Peter Julian. On reading these few letters there was the name Mary Glowrey: I hasten to add, this would have meant nothing to me 34 years ago and the letters may well have ended up in the bin. I mentioned the letters to Janet, who invited me to share lunch with Mary's nieces and Sr Showry, who was most interested to hear my story as she personally knew Sr Peter Julian and she was delighted to tell us a story about her much respected friend. When she was in training in the hospital pharmacy under Sr Peter Julian, she was at some stage given the task of cutting the pills. To her horror, she broke the pill cutting apparatus and was so scared to tell Sr Peter Julian. When she finally gained the courage, the news was received with much kindness. We all enjoyed the chat, leaving me in awe of what Mary Glowrey had achieved, made even more admirable when you consider the constraints against women at that time and of my renewed admiration for Sr Peter Julian. I couldn't help but feel enormously proud of Sr Peter Julian, who lived in the railway house on the track of the Birregurra Forest rail line at Barwon Downs.

Margaret has donated the letters to the Mary Glowrey Museum at the Australian Catholic University Fitzroy Campus. For more information and details on visiting the museum, go to <https://www.maryglowreymuseum.info/>

Emmaus Parish: Colac, Lakes to Coast



What a wonderful day of celebration at St Joseph's!

On July 24, we at St Joseph's Primary School Red Cliffs were blessed to celebrate the Feast of Saints Anne and Joachim and Grandparents' Day, with the special people who mean so much to our students and school community. Thank you to all the grandparents and special friends who joined us for this beautiful occasion. Your love, guidance and support enrich the lives of our children each and every day. We extend our sincere thanks to Fr Bill for celebrating a beautiful Mass and to our talented Marimba Band and School Choir for filling the morning with music and joy. It was wonderful to see generations coming together in faith, friendship and celebration. Thank you for helping make the day so memorable.

Naomi Kennedy - Principal

Our Diocesan Community - August 2026



BASKETBALL SHED MURAL

The Year 11 Art Class at St Joseph's College Mildura recently had the exciting opportunity to design and paint a brand-new mural on the basketball shed - an area seen not only by students but also by anyone passing along Eleventh Street. The small but dedicated class (with proven ability to handle spray paint responsibly) were thrilled to take on the challenge.

The project began last year when the College Executive introduced the idea of transforming the 'big,

ugly shed' into something bold, bright, and visually engaging. Given the shed's prominent location, the design needed to make a strong impact. Our first step was to head out to the courts, measure the shed, and consider the surrounding environment. We then researched large-scale murals for inspiration before beginning our own design process. Each student created several concept drawings using pencil and markers, exploring themes such as sport, sea life, the night sky, geometric shapes, and the environment. Over two weeks, our ideas grew into a diverse collection of creative possibilities. We then combined elements from all our designs to create one cohesive mural. This is truly a collaborative artwork and represents the creativity of the entire class.

One weekend, we projected the final design onto the shed after dark to allow the outlines to be traced accurately. The following Monday, we began spray painting. We started by blocking in large areas of colour before moving on to the finer details. Completing the long side of the shed took about a week's worth of lessons. Some of the most challenging aspects of this project included achieving the twisting effect in the large swirl and learning to control the spray paint to create clean, crisp lines.

We would like to thank the Maintenance Team for preparing the shed, and the College Executive for entrusting us with this project. To round out the experience, our artists gave a short presentation at the Term 2 Assembly. This mural has been a fantastic experience, bringing our class closer together and giving us the chance to leave a colourful mark on our school.

Mel Ficarra - Head of Senior Pathways

RECOGNITION AT THE VICTORIAN PREMIER'S VCE AWARDS

Recently, Damascus College Ballarat proudly celebrated the outstanding achievement of Samuel Brown, Class of 2025, who was recognised at the Victorian Premier's VCE Awards at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, receiving the VCE VET Community Services Award. The Premier's VCE Awards recognise Victoria's highest-achieving students across VCE studies, VCE Vocational Major and VET programs, celebrating students who have demonstrated exceptional excellence, commitment and achievement in their chosen field.

Samuel's recognition reflects not only his academic success, but also his compassion, dedication and commitment to serving others—qualities that have long been part of who he is. Since graduating from Damascus College, Samuel has continued his studies and is now undertaking an Arts/Law degree at Victoria University. Principal Steven Mifsud was honoured to attend the awards ceremony alongside Samuel and his family, sharing in this special occasion and celebrating a wonderful achievement for both Samuel and the Damascus College community. Congratulations, Samuel, on this well-deserved honour.

Damascus College Ballarat FaceBook



National Volunteers Week: May 18-24, 2026

Volunteer Week (May 18-24, 2026) was an opportunity to celebrate and recognise the vital work of volunteers and say thank you. We acknowledge the people in our parishes and agencies who are vital to the continuing work of the mission of the diocese.

The theme for National Volunteer Week 2026 is "Your Year to Volunteer". This theme honours the contributions of volunteers and invites people across Australia to make 2026 a year of meaningful involvement, in ways that work for them. This year is also a moment to thank those who already give their time and to invite others to discover how volunteering can create connection, purpose and lasting positive change.

Volunteering



I am writing this on Pentecost Sunday – after a week celebrating Volunteer Week. During the week I attended the Volunteer Expo held in St Patrick's Cathedral Hall. What an impressive range of services available.

The Feast of Pentecost and the Gifts of the Spirit brought me to ponder the many ways those gifts of the Spirit are evident in the lives of the hundreds of volunteers who are quietly going about their work every day around us.

I am currently volunteering with the Court Network. This is a free community support service, provided by volunteers, which enables people to better understand and navigate the courts. Facing court can be an intimidating experience for anyone and hopefully our presence can help to lessen some of the fears.

We provide free, non-legal support, information and referral services. The volunteers are impartial and non-judgemental to all persons, including applicants, respondents, victims, witnesses, defendants, and their families and friends. We don't know, and don't need to know, what categories Court Users fit into when we approach them. We are there for all who need help navigating the system.

Many court users have no legal representation and may be attending court for the first time. They may be unfamiliar with court rules and processes, lack knowledge about what is expected of them, feel unsafe, and may not

be able to understand or participate effectively in the court processes. Often, they are in need of someone to listen, provide support, and connect them to other support services.

Court Network operates in many courts throughout Victoria and also operates a phone service which was set up during COVID when we were not allowed to be present in courts. This service continues with calls coming in from Support Services or Police asking for us to make contact with prospective Court Users, or direct from Court Users themselves who are facing issues and don't know where to head. We are not able to give legal advice but can talk them through what might be ahead for them and hopefully refer them to the assistance they need.

We can assist before, during, and after court. We believe everyone who attends court should be treated with dignity and respect.

Court Network was established by Carmel Benjamin AM in 1980. Carmel began to notice a lack of support and services for court users. She did more than just think about it, she took some action. It was in 1977 that the foundations of Court Network began to take shape – an innovative, non-governmental service providing vital court support and information to all court users. Officially launching three years later, her pioneering initiative was the first of its kind in Australia and became an international model for court support services assisting victims, the accused, and their families through each stage of the legal process.

To quote Carmel, "When you approach individuals without knowing why they are in court you acknowledge their humanity with a rare openness and kindness, and when you share with them the information that they need, and support them with concern, you dignify their presence while making their experience more understandable. By doing this you act as the link between the court and the community that Court Network was designed to be."

This is what we as Court Networkers strive to bring to our volunteer work.

Sr Marie Davey rsm

Celebrating the Spirit of Volunteering

Like most parishes, the Gariwerd Parish (Ararat/Stawell) are blessed with many volunteers who generously give their time and talents to serve others. Our parish, our community, and indeed our country, depend on volunteers. But why do people so willingly devote a portion of their week or month to helping others? We asked some of our volunteers what motivates them and their responses highlight the joy, friendship, and sense of purpose that volunteering brings.

St Vincent de Paul Shop and Conference - Our St Vincent de Paul volunteers are passionate about serving people in practical and meaningful ways. "I love meeting people."

"I enjoy the company of the other volunteers."

"I like being able to help where I can."

"I enjoy making the shop look its best."

Through their dedication, they provide support, friendship, and assistance to those who need it most.



Country Women's Association (CWA) - The CWA is a wonderful group of friendly and talented women who gather regularly in our parish. Known for their generosity and exceptional cooking, they also provide valuable support to parish families, particularly when catering for funerals. Their volunteers share:

"I love cooking and sharing with others, especially when we cater for funerals."

"We happily support each other."

"I like meeting people and being able to serve others."

"Working together is good too."

Chaplaincy at Hopkins Prison - A small and committed team visits Hopkins Prison each week to celebrate Mass and provide pastoral support to prisoners. Their reflections are heartfelt:

"I can listen to these men and help support them."

"Mass with these men each week is a great experience."

"We certainly get more than we can give."

"It's the best Mass of the week – the planning, music, participation, and enthusiasm are wonderful!"

"I enjoy my visit each week, and we share lively and meaningful celebrations together."

Sunday Mass Volunteers - Many parishioners contribute to our Sunday liturgies through reading, music ministry, altar serving and distributing Holy Communion. They tell us: "It is such a privilege to assist at Mass."

"It helps me understand the Mass better."

"Singing, reading, and serving as a Eucharistic Minister makes Mass more meaningful."

"I really like being a special part of our parish celebrations."

"I love taking Communion to the sick."

Many people look forward to these visits and greatly appreciate the connection."

Individual Volunteers - Many people quietly serve in ways that bring companionship and joy to others. Some volunteer in local nursing homes, sharing music, conversation and their time with residents.

"Playing music at the nursing homes is wonderful for me, and the residents love it."

"Many of these people are lonely, and I know the visits make a difference."

"I love going to the nursing home and sharing food and friendship."

"I enjoy listening to their stories and spending time with them."

A Heartfelt Thank You - To all our volunteers, thank you. Your generosity, kindness, and willingness to serve enriches our parish and wider community in countless ways. Whether your contribution is large or small, visible or behind the scenes, it is deeply valued. As the words of many volunteers remind us, we often receive far more than we give. Through friendship, service, and shared purpose, volunteering strengthens our parish and helps build a caring and connected community.

Sr Maree Holt - Gariwerd Parish

Image: Ararat Vinnies Festival 2017

Selflessness is like leaven that makes the human, ethical and spiritual dimensions of a society grow, and it is a distinctive element of the "City of God." In a world that is constantly influenced by a logic of self-interest and profit, where the term "growth" is reduced to the economic-financial sense, it is important to think and live according to a more authentic mentality that leads to integral human development.

This is the mentality we find in the Gospel, which says:

"If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you?" (Lk 6:33-34).

Taken from Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to Spain (June 9 2026) Encounter With Volunteers.

St James' Answers the Call: *Laudato Si'* and the Stewardship of Rare Species

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis issued a profound reminder: "Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it."

At St James' Primary School Sebastopol, we strive to bring these words to life daily by cultivating Ecological Spirituality within our students and staff. Our curriculum highlights the sacred synergy that connects all living things, encouraging students to form an intimate relationship with the land they inhabit.

We believe that intimacy with a place breeds a natural desire for advocacy. Whether our students are sitting on the banks of our local waterway, Yarramloke, exploring the force of the moving current, or noticing sap trickling from a tree on the school grounds, they are developing wonder and awe for God's creation. By embracing First Nations perspectives and connecting with Country, our students' lives are made richer and more deeply connected.



The next step in our *Laudato Si'* journey comes through a partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Known as 'Raising Rarity,' this citizen science and conservation outreach initiative connects schools and local communities directly with expert ecologists. St James'—alongside partner schools Siena Catholic Primary School Lucas, St Francis Xavier Primary School Ballarat East, Wendouree Primary School and Buninyong Primary School have been appointed stewards of *Leucochrysum albicans* subsp. *Tricolor*, an endangered native plant from our local bioregion commonly known as the Hoary Sunray or Sticky Paperdaisy. Throughout the year our students will propagate, cultivate, and monitor this threatened species. By building seed banks and logging critical growth data, they will contribute directly to the Victorian Conservation Seedbank. Through this practical work, St James' students are not just studying science; they are living out the calling as custodians of the Earth, establishing vital "backup" colonies to protect against wild population decline and ensuring a symbiotic future for our local ecosystem.

Students have embraced this crucial work with dedication and purpose. The more they learn about living on the grasslands of the volcanic plains and the irreversible changes that have taken place, the more they want to advocate. Through our research we discovered that less than 1% to 2% of the grasslands remain. This information fuels their desire to continue planting both on school grounds and at Yarramloke. When students know the names, stories and facts of the land they live on they understand the need for ecological justice and action. April Bright, a Marrithiel and Marranangu woman from Wagait Country in the Northern Territory points out "If you don't care for Country, Country will not care for you." We are excited to be involved in this program and to continue our journey of Caring for Country.

Claire Lay - Teacher

THE BIG SPUD DINNER FESTIVITIES

On Friday, June 12, 2026 the Dean Hall & Mechanics Institute was filled with community spirit at the much-loved Big Spud Dinner. St Mary's Primary School Clarke's Hill was proud to host the children's table, where younger attendees enjoyed colouring and playdough activities throughout the night. It was wonderful to see so many smiling faces as families came together to celebrate.

With the support of Bryden and Melinda, kids enjoyed the fantastic showbags, which were a highlight of the night. From viewing the creative entries in the 'Big Spud' competition, to enjoying a variety of delicious potato dishes, the evening was a great success. Importantly, funds raised will contribute to the ongoing maintenance of the Dean Hall for the whole community to enjoy.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications



Building Respect Across Ballarat Worksites

During Domestic Violence Prevention Month (May), CatholicCare Victoria (CCV) highlighted its ongoing advocacy and prevention work through the Building Respect – Construction and Trades Culture Shift initiative across Ballarat. The initiative, which was already underway as part of the broader Respect Ballarat program, focuses on promoting respectful workplace cultures, gender equality and violence prevention within the building and trades sector. Delivered through funding from the Ballarat Foundation in partnership with Respect Victoria, the initiative supports community-led action to address the underlying drivers of family and gender-based violence before harm occurs.

CCV Senior Manager of Family & Wellbeing Services, Domenic Vigilanti, said Domestic Violence Prevention Month provides an important opportunity to continue conversations around prevention, respectful relationships and community responsibility. “This month is about bringing awareness to the role all of us can play in preventing violence and creating safer communities,” Mr Vigilanti said. “The work we’re doing through Building Respect is about supporting workplaces to foster cultures where respect, equality and accountability are part of everyday conversations.”



Over the next 12 months, CCV practitioners will continue working directly with workplaces across Ballarat’s construction and trades industry through onsite toolbox talks, mentoring and education sessions focused on respectful relationships and bystander action. The initiative also supports workplace champions who can help influence positive behaviour and encourage respectful conversations among peers. “We know there are many people already leading by example within these industries,” Mr Vigilanti said. “Our role is to support and empower those individuals to continue challenging harmful attitudes and helping create positive cultural change.” Mr Vigilanti said prevention work must focus not only on responding to violence, but on shifting attitudes and behaviours before violence occurs. “We need to move away from the idea that disrespectful behaviour is just part of workplace culture,” he said. “Everyone has a role to play in creating environments where people feel safe, respected and valued.”

As part of the initiative, CCV is encouraging practical ways for bystanders to respond safely when they witness disrespectful behaviour, including redirecting conversations, walking away from harmful discussions, or showing through actions that disrespect is not acceptable. The organisation hopes the work will continue beyond the funded project period by helping employers embed respectful relationship messaging into workplace inductions, policies and ongoing training. CCV continues to provide specialised family violence support services across the region, supporting victim survivors, individuals using violence, and families impacted by family violence.

Alycia Johnson - Marketing and Communications, CatholicCare Victoria



RCIA AT ST BRIGID'S BALLAN

At St Brigid's Church, Ballan, we are truly blessed to be part of a welcoming and faith-filled community that gathers around those seeking something more in their spiritual lives. Through meaningful relationships and shared experiences, many of us have been inspired and guided by parishioners who live out their faith with sincerity and joy. The Easter Vigil was a profound and joyful celebration, reminding us that Christ continues to bring light into our lives. The liturgy, rich in scripture and tradition, created a powerful sense of reverence and unity. As we gathered with the wider parish community, we felt both supported and uplifted, recognising that we were becoming part of something much greater than ourselves.

This sacred occasion marked not only a milestone in our faith journey but also a deep sense of peace and belonging. It was a moment of grace that affirmed our decision to fully enter into the life of the Church. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Father Justin, Father Shaiju, and the RCIA team for their guidance, encouragement, and dedication. Their support has been instrumental in helping us grow in faith and take this important step toward becoming full members of the Catholic Church.

Marcus, Samantha & Jasmine
Photo - Rite of Election 2026



Collaboratively Leading for Head, Heart and Hands

Catholic Education Ballarat partnered with Australian Catholic University to deliver **THCT605 "DOBCEL & ECSI Intensive: Enhancing Catholic Identity for Head, Heart and Hands"** for a second time in the diocese.

The second group from across the Diocese gathered in Warrnambool for the week of July 20 - 24. The Intensive brought together principals, assistant/deputy principals, Religious Education Leaders and teachers of Religious Education from both primary and secondary schools. Also joining in the fabulous four days of intensive study and dialogue was Fr Matt Restall.

The course was facilitated by ACU lecturers Dr Teresa Brown and Dr Chris Reed. Some of the participants are using this study as a unit towards their Masters. The course explores how the documents of Vatican II form the foundation of ECSI (Enhancing Catholic School Identity), particularly in the areas of Revelation and Tradition.

The Enhancing Catholic Schools Identity (ECSI) Project is a priority for enhancing Catholic identity in schools within an increasingly secular and pluralist environment. It provides a theoretical framework and language that assists staff, students and school communities in clarifying their Catholic identity and beliefs and confirming their future direction and practices.

Staff had an opportunity for in-depth study of their schools' ECSI data and a chance to form recommendations for action based on the data. We thank all who have given the time to be away from their schools (and parish) for such a valuable opportunity for formation.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications

"We have to look together how to be a missionary Church – a Church that builds bridges, that enters into dialogue, that is always hospitable".

May 8, 2025. First speech of Pope Leo XIV

SUPPORTING CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES ACROSS BALLARAT

Your savings can help support Catholic schools and wellbeing programs here in our Diocese.

From a learning centre at **Emmanuel College** to student wellbeing initiatives like **Paw Pals Therapy Program**.

Earn a competitive rate of interest while supporting the life of our Church close to home.

Work for a Catholic organisation?
You could earn a bonus interest rate* on your savings today.



*Bonus interest rate subject to terms and conditions. Visit the CDF website to read the full Disclosure Statement and Product Information Statements.

www.catholicdevelopmentfund.org.au/communityfund
1800 134 135



Image: St Augustine Creswick



Image: Emmanuel College



Image: Paw Pals

LAST MASS IN MACARTHUR

Mass on May 31, 2026 at 8.30am marked the last Mass for the Catholic community in Macarthur (Part of the Western Border Parish) at the Macarthur Uniting Church. St Malachy's Catholic Church was closed and sold in 2021, but Mass continued to be celebrated in Macarthur at the Uniting Church on the fifth Sundays of the month.

After 150 years of continual worship, and 10 years of ecumenical gatherings of the local Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Church congregations, the Macarthur Uniting Church closed its doors on June 21 following its final service.

This news has been met with a blend of sadness and gratitude as parishioners reflect on the cherished memories, shared faith and unity these gatherings have nurtured.

Western Border Bulletin

Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Our Diocesan Community - August 2026

National Families Week

The aim of National Families Week is to celebrate the vital role that families play in Australian society.

Our Concept of Family...John and Jan Cosgriff – Ballarat East Parish

Our own family began 60 years ago when we were married, but we were each part of large working-class families and our relationship and bond with our two families of siblings is ongoing and their lives and families are enmeshed with us and our family.

All of our 10 children have meaningful involvement in the community in different areas and we are very proud of the people that they are and the many great things that they do. However, they are also family people and their caring family values move forward into that next generation. We have 29 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren, who all bring us a lot of joy when we celebrate together and great comfort to us and to each other in times of sadness.

Our philosophy in our role as parents is that we do not tell our children how to live their lives, but we live our life and make sure that they are able to witness it.

Neve Griffiths – Bungaree Parish

Family is incredibly special to me because it is the one place where I know I will always be accepted, supported, and loved no matter what I am going through.

To me, family is more than just the people you are related to, it is the people who stand beside you through every high and low in life. When I think of family, I think of warmth, comfort, and safety. Family creates an environment where you are encouraged to grow and become a better person. Family helps shape who we are and reminds us that there is always someone there.

For me, some of my closest friends are like family too. The people who care for you, support your dreams, lift you up when you are struggling, and stay loyal through every stage of life are the people I consider family.

Family is a constant source of love, strength, belonging, and connection that makes life interesting, meaningful and makes even difficult times easier to get through.

Noeline Hogan – Birchip Parish

National Families Week is a timely reminder to stop and acknowledge what our families mean to us. I have a children's book called "The Family Book" by Todd Parr. It mentions many different types of families in society today; big, small, mixed coloured, blended, fostered, single parents and so on. Parr points out that all families, regardless of subtleties, can have many things in common.

For example; the love they have for one another, their sadness when they lose someone they love, the celebration of special occasions together and importantly the help many families give each other to be strong. It's a simple pre-schooler book that says it's ok if your family is different, you are not alone or unusual.

I have been married to Leon for 31 years. He's a Mallee sheep and cropping farmer from between Birchip and Watchem and we have four children together. Emma, an ICU nurse; Sean is in construction management; Ben is an electrician and part time farmer and Patrick is an auto electrician. We represent the typical nuclear family!

It's hectic when we come together, we do all the normal things together; laugh, argue, and annoy each other. We can't wait to see each other, and sometimes we can't wait to leave! We are tolerant and patient and sometimes we're not.... but most importantly we love and support each other.

More stories can be read at: <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/national-family-week-may-13-19-2026/>

Honouring the Past, Building the Future

In the heart of Creswick, St Augustine's Primary School has been a cornerstone of community life for over 170 years. Established during the Gold Rush, the school has grown across generations while remaining anchored in its Catholic faith and strong sense of place.

Today, St Augustine's supports 144 students from Foundation to Year 6, fostering academic excellence alongside social and emotional wellbeing as part of the wider parish and local community.

A \$3.6 million redevelopment, supported by the Catholic Development Fund (CDF), DOBCEL, and Federal Government, is shaping the school's next chapter. Light-filled classrooms, improved ventilation, and flexible learning spaces to support both structured teaching and inquiry-based learning. New specialist areas have broadened opportunities across science, the arts, physical education, and collaborative learning, helping students grow in confidence and belonging. "The \$3.6 million redevelopment at St Augustine's is far more than a construction project. It represents a transformational shift in how children learn, feel, and thrive each day," Principal Michael Heenan said.

The redevelopment also preserves the school's heritage. Restoration of the historic chapel and the original buildings ensures the school's identity and story remain central to its future. "It is about preserving identity, story, and belonging," says Michael, "ensuring that while St Augustine's has moved from 1966 to 2026 in its facilities,



it never loses sight of where it began."

The support of the CDF was central to making this vision a reality, ensuring every child who walks through the school's door is given the opportunity to grow in confidence, curiosity, and faith. It is a story of continuity and renewal – preserving heritage, reimagining learning, and building a future full of promise.

The school was equally privileged to have the new buildings blessed by Fr Marcello Colasante, whose presence and prayer reminded us of the deep connection between our faith and our daily work in education. The blessing was a meaningful moment, grounding the new spaces in Catholic identity and mission. This special occasion would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of many within our community, especially staff, students and families.

Visit www.catholicdevelopmentfund.org.au/blog to read the full story.



The Hands That Feed Us

Since arriving in Australia, I have come to appreciate many things about life here. One of them is the deep connection many communities have to the land.

Like many people, I do not often stop to think about where my food comes from. I buy bread, fruit, vegetables, or milk from a shop and take them home. Yet behind these simple things are people whose hard work makes them possible.

As I have learned more about the Diocese of Ballarat, I have become aware of the important role women play in farming communities, particularly across the Wimmera and Mallee regions. Many women are involved in running farms, managing businesses, caring for livestock, supporting their families, and contributing to their local communities.

What strikes me is that much of this work happens quietly. There are no awards for preparing meals after a long day on the farm. No headlines for helping a neighbour during a difficult season. Yet these acts of service help hold communities together. As Christians, we often speak about serving others. Women farmers remind us what that service can look like in everyday life. Through their dedication, resilience, and care, they help provide food for our tables and strength for our communities.

The next time we gather for a meal and offer thanks to God, perhaps we might also remember the people whose labour made that meal possible. Among them are many women whose contribution is often unseen, but never unimportant.

Simon Zakari - Seminarian for the Diocese of Ballarat
Image: www.123rf.com

Our Diocesan Community - August 2026

Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division

Australia's Catholic bishops have urged a renewed focus on ways to make Australia a more cohesive society. Each year since 1940, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has issued a statement for reflection and discussion in the lead-up to Social Justice Sunday (August 30) on a key issue in society. The latest statement, **Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division**, was released on August 7. "This statement invites us to see our current social climate as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel," writes Conference President, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB in the preface to the statement. "We offer Jesus and the hope born of his death and resurrection. When we choose forgiveness over enmity, hospitality over isolation and solidarity over vilification, we help to create the conditions in which a more peaceful society can prosper."

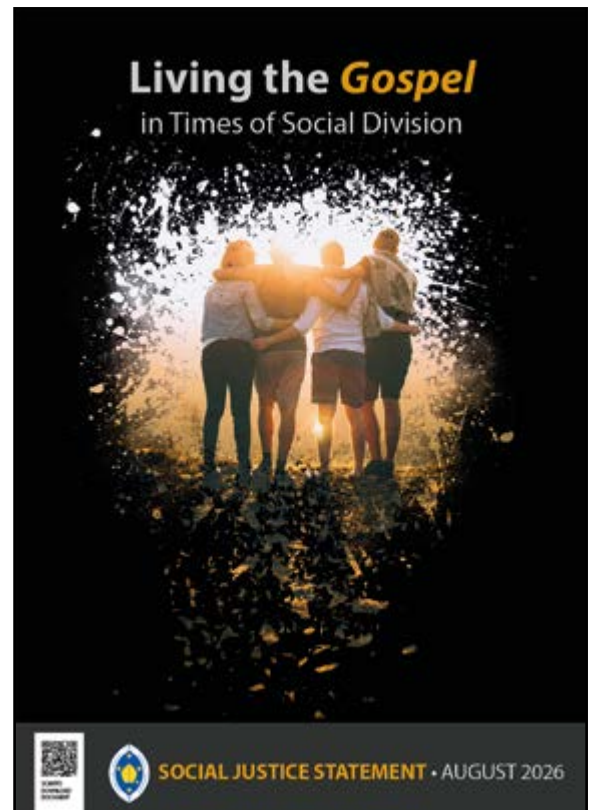
The statement explores recent developments in Australia including the Bondi Beach attack of December 2025, as well as the alarming rise in Islamophobia and other forms of racism. It also lists a range of actions to build social cohesion, which it argues can only come through practising a "culture of encounter". "Love draws us out of ourselves and into a culture of encounter with others," the statement says. "It entails drawing close to others who have very different life experiences from ours. It means deep solidarity with them, seeing their plight with our hearts and not just with our eyes, listening intently and not just hearing, not passing by, but stopping to engage with them with great compassion, not pity."

Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service chair, Bishop Tim Harris, said the Church had a key role to play in building a culture of listening and inclusion. "Our starting point is the conviction that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and possesses an inherent dignity that can never be diminished by race, religion, culture, language or background," Bishop Harris said. "The Church serves society best when it creates spaces where people can encounter one another as neighbours rather than strangers. Australia has been enriched by successive generations of migrants, refugees and First Nations peoples whose stories form part of our national identity. Yet social cohesion cannot be taken for granted. It must be renewed through acts of solidarity, hospitality and mutual understanding."

Listening is especially important. Genuine listening does not require us to agree on every issue, but it does require recognition of the dignity of those with whom we disagree. The Church can and must be a sign of unity: a community where every person feels at home and all are encouraged to use their gifts to build a more just, peaceful and cohesive Australia."

ACBC Media Statement

Full statement can be read on the diocesan website at this link - <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/service-and-agencies/welfare/social-justice/social-justice-statement-current/>



WELCOME TO VIOLET

The St Brendan's Coragulac community now a part of the Emmaus Parish, Colac, Lakes to Coast welcomed Violet Cooper to receive the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation, after completing the Living Your Christian Life Program. Fr Andrew Hayes celebrated Mass.

From Violet....On Sunday, November 30, 2025 I made my Eucharist and Confirmation at St Brendan's Church. This is where I was baptised 9 years ago. My family came to church and I chose Nana and Pa as my sponsors because they are kind, caring and always look after me.

Before this special day I was able to do some helping jobs. I cooked food for sick people, and at Mass I took up the offertory procession and collected the money in baskets. Thanks to Marita and Pat for helping me and Liz

for a yummy cake. Thanks everyone at St Brendan's who celebrated with me after church with a morning tea.



Elizabeth McGuane



Jim Ryan's Retirement

Jim Ryan retired from the Diocesan Social Justice Commission recently. He announced his retirement at the June 2026 meeting. His departure marks the end of many years of dedicated service and leadership, during which he made an outstanding contribution to the work and mission of the Commission.

The Diocesan Social Justice Commission was established by Bishop Peter Connors in 2011, and Jim became a member from its inception. He served as Chair from 2011 until 2018, leading meetings with enthusiasm, wisdom and a strong sense of purpose. His ability to communicate effectively, encourage discussion and keep meetings focused ensured that the Commission functioned efficiently and productively. Throughout his involvement, Jim has been an inspiring and highly valued member, tirelessly advocating for justice issues and helping to shape the Commission's response to social concerns.

The Commission meets four times each year, with additional meetings scheduled as required. As outlined in its Terms of Reference, the Commission's role is to assist and support the Bishop in leading the Church to be faithful to the Gospel mission in matters of justice. Jim has played

a significant role in advancing this mission, contributing his insight, commitment and passion to the Commission's work over the past fifteen years.

Over the years, the Commission has addressed a range of important issues including refugees and asylum seekers, mental health, homelessness, the cost of living and domestic violence. Through Jim's active participation and leadership, the Commission organised forums, promoted community awareness and supported the preparation of statements addressing these concerns. His advocacy and commitment to social justice were instrumental in ensuring that these issues remained central to the Commission's work.

The Commission has also focused on matters such as overseas aid, unemployment, housing and environmental stewardship. Jim was deeply engaged in these discussions and supported the preparation of submissions to Parliamentarians on legislation and social justice issues. He also encouraged and strengthened the Commission's support of a range of social justice agencies, reflecting his genuine concern for those most vulnerable in our community.

As the Commission continues its work on current and emerging issues, it remains committed to building stronger connections with parishes and schools throughout the diocese. This engagement seeks both to draw on their insights and experiences and to provide support where needed. Jim's longstanding commitment and dedication to collaboration, advocacy and Gospel-centred justice has left a lasting legacy that will continue to guide and inspire the Commission in the years ahead.

A DAY OF CONNECTION, LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

Sharing goals, direction and insight are essential to creating the positive culture behind Catholic Education Ballarat (CEB). CEB staff came together recently at Damascus College Ballarat to focus on professional growth, strategic planning and strengthening our collective mission.

The program started with a NAIDOC Week-themed session, updates on the CEB Reconciliation Action Plan, practical learning around AI in the workplace with Coby Reynolds, commissioning of new staff members, organisational updates, and collaborative discussions on the DOBCEL Strategy 2035.

The gathering provided valuable opportunities to reflect, learn from one another and celebrate the important work taking place across our teams in support of Catholic education throughout the Diocese of Ballarat.

The day concluded with a showcase of cross-team collaborations and an engaging Q&A panel, leaving participants with a 'full cup' to create impact in Term 3 and beyond.

DOBCEL Communications - FaceBook



Our Diocesan Community - August 2026

Laudato Si' Week 2026



Laudato Si' Week is a celebration held annually from May 17-24 to mark the anniversary of Pope Francis's landmark encyclical on caring for our common home. Sponsored by the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, this global celebration unites Catholics to listen and respond together to the cry of creation, rejoice in the progress we have made in bringing Laudato Si' to life, and intensify our efforts through the Laudato Si' Action Platform, as well as other opportunities for education and action. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference committed to celebrating Laudato Si' Week annually in their Social Justice Statement (2021-22): Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor. 2026 The Theme for 2026: From Hope to Action invites us to move from hope to action. Hope is not passive; it is lived and shared through daily decisions, community life, prayer and concrete acts of care. This commemorative year reminds us that ecological conversion grows step by step, through restored relationships, protected creation, and strengthened communities. The next chapter of Laudato Si' begins with us, wherever we are.

Reflection from Sandra Dillon: Pope Francis' landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'* on caring for our common home in 2015 was followed by the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* in 2023, eight years later in which he wrote, "I wanted to share with all of you, my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet, my heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home. Yet, with the passage of time, I have realised that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be near the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons."

Last October 2025, Pope Leo presided over the 10th anniversary celebration of *Laudato Si'* in Rome, where an estimated 1000 representatives from environmental and indigenous groups were gathered, and he told them they needed to put pressure on national governments to develop tougher standards to mitigate the damage already done. Pope Leo said that some leaders had chosen to "deride the evident signs of climate change, to ridicule those who speak of global warning and even to blame the poor for the very thing that affects them most." Pope Leo is strongly continuing Pope Francis' call for ecological conversion. The 2026 *Laudato Si'* week theme was "From Hope to Action" urging Catholics and all people of good will to take concrete steps to protect creation.

In honour of Laudato Si' Week at the Cathedral Parish, the Cathedral Parish Earthcare Group created a special display to mark this important time in the Church's calendar. This year's theme, "Hope to Action: One Week, One Action – A Global Catholic Response," invites all of us to move beyond awareness and into practical steps that care for our common home. The display encouraged parishioners to reflect on how each of us can make a meaningful contribution, no matter how small, toward protecting the environment and promoting ecological justice.

Laudato Si' Week is an opportunity to come together as a global Catholic community, united in prayer, reflection and action inspired by Pope Francis' call to care for creation. It invited everyone to think about some simple yet impactful actions that could be taken, whether it was reducing waste, conserving energy, supporting local environmental initiatives or deepening your understanding of ecological spirituality, each action contributes to a larger, collective effort. Sincere thanks go to Deneise Walsh and Joanne Rix for their time, creativity, and dedication in putting the display together. Their work helps to inspire and guide our parish community as we respond in hope and action.

"The challenges identified in *Laudato Si'* are even more relevant today than they were ten years ago. These challenges are social and political, but first and foremost spiritual. They call for conversion... In Scripture, the heart is not only the center of feelings and emotions but also the locus of freedom... It is only by returning to the heart that true ecological conversion can take place. We must shift from collecting data to caring, and from environmental discourse to an ecological conversion that transforms both personal and communal lifestyles."

Words from Pope Leo XIV address at the Raising Hope for Climate Justice Conference on October 1, 2025.



A Year of Pastoral Formation

As a seminarian for the Diocese of Ballarat, I am grateful to reflect on my pastoral year at St Mary MacKillop Parish, Western Border. From February to December 2025, this placement was a deeply enriching experience that strengthened my faith, pastoral skills and understanding of parish ministry.

Throughout the year, I participated in many aspects of parish life. Assisting at Masses, preparing liturgies, proclaiming the Word of God, preaching and supporting sacramental celebrations helped me grow in confidence and appreciate more deeply the beauty of

the Church's worship. Pastoral visits to the sick and elderly, together with assisting families preparing for Baptism and Marriage, taught me the importance of listening, compassion and accompaniment.

Youth ministry and Catholic education were also significant parts of my formation. Through Altar Server training, school visits, retreats and youth events, I gained valuable insight into faith formation and the lives of young people. Parish initiatives, including the multicultural celebration for Christ the King and adult Gospel-sharing groups, strengthened my appreciation of community and discipleship. I am deeply grateful to Fr Paddy Mugavin, Fr Cay Trinh, the parish staff, my feedback group and all parishioners for their support, encouragement and friendship. This pastoral year has strengthened my vocation and prepared me for the next stage of formation at Corpus Christi College, Melbourne. Please continue to keep me in your prayers as I journey toward priesthood. Be assured of my prayers for you all.

Channa Thilakarathna - 5th Year Seminarian

Full story on www.ballarat.catholic.org.au - Western Border Parish News

Celebrating 70 years of priesthood

Fr Damien Heath celebrated his 70th ordination anniversary on July 22, 2026. Fr Damien was born in Casterton, one of seven children. He attended Sacred Heart School where he remembers being taught by some extraordinary nuns. He finished his schooling at St Patrick's College in Ballarat, studied at the Werribee Seminary for eight years and was ordained at St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat.

His very first public Mass was at Cavendish while based in Hamilton under Fr Dunworth. Fr Damien served for three years at the Cathedral Parish in Ballarat, followed by six years in Colac. He then travelled to Chile where he spent six life changing years. (On one day in Chile, he officiated nine weddings. On another day he officiated 97 Baptisms!) Fr Damien was the first priest from the Ballarat Diocese to work in Latin America.

Fr Damien went on to lecture in Moral Theology in seminaries in the USA, England, Ireland and Spain. He was also on the staff of the Seminary in Fiji. After returning to Australia, he was Parish Priest at Bungaree, Red Cliffs and Apollo Bay. He was also a member of the staff of Corpus Christi College Seminary in Melbourne.

He retired to Coleraine in 2007, but continued for many years to celebrate Mass with parishioners in Balmoral, Coleraine, Horsham, Tarrayoukan, Edenhope and Casterton, driving kilometres on a Sunday to celebrate Mass, through fog and frost, heatwaves and rainstorms and many, many kangaroos for many years. The community has been very grateful that he travelled as they love having him celebrate Mass.

Fr Damien's sermons are a rich experience. Often gospel readings were examined from ancient and modern viewpoints, topped off with a little philosophy and moral theology. The political hotbed of Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus becomes alive when Fr Damien breaks open the word.

Fr Damien is well loved around the diocese but most especially in the Western District.

Fr Damien once considered studying medicine rather than becoming a priest. Clearly he didn't make his decision based on monetary gain. So many people have benefitted from the path he chose 70 years ago. His warmth, humour and amazing intellect continue to inspire so many of us. Congratulations, Fr Damien.

*Adapted from Louise Le Nay - St Patrick's Balmoral (2016)
Fr Damien pictured with the Balmoral Community (2026)*



Student voices shaping the future at Student Agency – Schools that Listen forums

Students from across the Diocese of Ballarat have come together in recent weeks for the Student Agency – Schools that Listen forums, a key initiative placing student voice at the centre of school improvement.

Held in Ballarat, Warrnambool, Horsham and Robinvale, the forums brought together children and young people from Catholic schools to share what matters most in their learning and school experience, and to explore a central question: What makes a great school for all?

The forums are part of DOBCEL's broader Student Agency – Schools that Listen initiative, which is grounded in the belief that students are active partners in shaping meaningful and engaging learning environments.

Delivered in collaboration with Dr Penelope Jean Stiles, and supported by Dave Runge, the initiative draws on contemporary research and practice in student voice, leadership and school improvement.

Across each location, students and school staff engaged in a dynamic learn, share and do approach. They worked in mixed-age groups through hands-on, creative activities designed to build relationships, strengthen networks and develop skills. Students are now taking these ideas back to their schools – sharing their learning with peers and putting their ideas into action within their own contexts.

The April forums marked the first in-person gatherings for the program, following a series of online workshops



involving students, teachers and parents. Together, these experiences are building momentum for a more connected and student-informed approach to education across the diocese.

The Ballarat forum, hosted at Damascus College, was featured on WIN News, highlighting the strength of student voice and engagement across the region.

DOBCEL acknowledges the leadership and contribution of staff supporting the initiative including Julia Petrov, Monique Ryan and the wider team, whose work behind the scenes has been integral to its success.

As the Student Agency – Schools that Listen program continues, these forums represent an important step in strengthening student voice across the diocese – ensuring that the perspectives of young people help shape the future of their schools and communities.

DOBCEL Communications

Refreshed Learning Spaces



Students and staff at Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School, Wendouree, have welcomed newly refurbished learning spaces as a \$2.45 million building project is completed. Member for Wendouree Juliana Addison MP recently visited the school to view the upgrades and meet with the school community ahead of an official opening later this year.

The project was funded through a \$2.4 million Victorian Government grant and a \$50,000 school contribution. Works include refurbished learning areas, upgraded student amenities and important maintenance improvements.

Principal Jaci Commons said, "These new learning spaces will make such a positive difference for our students and staff, providing calm, contemporary and thoughtfully designed environments that support strong teaching, learning and wellbeing," Ms Commons said.

Designed using the Science of Learning and Cognitive Load Theory, the new spaces maximise natural light, reduce visual clutter and feature integrated technology, improved acoustics and new teaching walls. Audio technology has also been installed to support students with hearing needs and enhance teacher voice projection. Students Nina Polidano and Maverick Ryan recently guided Ms Addison through the new facilities, sharing their enthusiasm for the school and its community.

Catholic Education Ballarat Communications

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE OPENS STUDENT-RUN SHAMROCK CAFE



A student-run café has officially opened at St Patrick's College Ballarat and is proving a hit with students and staff alike. Part of the VET Hospitality program, the café is giving students a taste of the industry in a real-world setting.

The Shamrock Café has quickly become one of the busiest places at St Patrick's College, with students and staff flocking to the student-run café since it officially opened in the Whelan Food Centre in Term 2.

Run by VET Hospitality students under the guidance of teacher Mr Brett Earl, the café is giving students the opportunity to develop practical, real-world skills in a fast-

paced and rewarding environment. Students typically prepare the food during their VET Hospitality classes and open the café on Fridays—before school, at recess and at lunchtime. Profits from the café are being reinvested into the VET Hospitality program to further strengthen learning opportunities, with a portion also donated to the Ballarat Soup Bus to support those in need within the local community. Mr Earl said he had been incredibly proud of the way the students had embraced the opportunity. "The students have shown great enthusiasm and professionalism since opening day," he said. "They've worked hard behind the scenes preparing food, serving customers and learning what it takes to operate a successful café. It's been fantastic to see their skills and confidence grow so quickly."

Year 11 students Aiden Atherton and Nash Cleary said the experience had already taught them valuable lessons and helped them grow in confidence. "I've been working front-of-house taking orders and making coffees and it's definitely improved my communication skills because you're talking to so many different people all the time," Nash said. "You learn how important teamwork is too because everyone has to work together to get the job done." Aiden agreed, saying the popularity of the café had been one of the biggest surprises. "We didn't realise how busy it would be," he said. "It's been really good seeing everyone around the school support the café and come in to buy a toastie or a milkshake." The boys said they were especially proud that the café was not only providing students with hands-on experience, but also helping raise funds for those in need. "It feels good knowing we're giving back as well," Aiden said.

Both students encouraged others considering studying VET Hospitality in the future to give it a go. "You learn a lot and it's really hands-on," Nash said. "It's a great experience and a lot of fun." And the most popular item on the menu? "Chocolate milkshakes, definitely chocolate milkshakes."

Katie Spurgo - Marketing and Communications Manager

Mitch's story



"My story's a little bit of a sad one," Mitch says. At just 33, he found himself living in the bush with only his dog for company. Separated from his three children and struggling with his mental health, he couldn't see a way forward. **What Mitch thought was the end of his story became the beginning of something different.** After reaching a crisis point and attempting to take his own life, Mitch was referred to Peplow House. "I like to think that Peplow House found me," he says. For four weeks, Peplow House gave Mitch something he hadn't had in a long time.

A place where he felt safe, accepted, and treated with dignity.

The team at Peplow House helped Mitch access food, attend appointments, reconnect with his children, and rebuild his confidence. "It gave me the opportunity to socialise again...it 100% boosted my self-esteem and helped me mingle back in with the community," he says. Today, Mitch has somewhere safe to call home and knows support is never far away. "Anything that I need help with, they're there straight away... even if I don't think I need help, they're always a phone call away." Looking back, Mitch knows how different his life could have been. "If it wasn't for Peplow House, I'd still be living in the bush." Mitch's story is about finding hope when he thought he had lost it. It's about discovering that asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, but the first step towards rebuilding. And it's about knowing that even in life's darkest moments, the right support can help someone find their way home.

<https://www.catholiccarevic.org.au/resources/mitchs-story-beginning-of-something-new/>



Why is Catholic education important to you

we uphold in each person, the pursuit of justice and the hope we bring to our school community.

ECSI reminds us that our Catholic identity is strongest when we remain grounded in the Gospel while engaging openly and respectfully with the diverse beliefs, cultures and experiences of those around us. This is the heart of a recontextualising Catholic school: confidently Catholic, genuinely inclusive and always open to dialogue with other traditions.

As we continue this journey together, I invite all of us to spend some time with one simple but profound question:

Why is Catholic education important to you?

There is no single right answer. Your response may be shaped by faith, by values, by community, by tradition, by hope for your children, or by the opportunities our school provides. Whatever your perspective, reflecting on this question helps us to understand better the shared purpose that unites us as a Catholic school community and the unique gift we are called to offer the world. Sit with the unknown.

Tegan McDonald - Principal, St Patrick's Primary School, Koroit

Congratulations to St Joseph's Charlton students

On Sunday, July 26, students from St Joseph's Primary School Charlton celebrated a significant milestone in their faith journey as they received the Sacraments of Initiation, with Fr Gerry Prunty celebrating the Mass.

Surrounded by their families, parish community and school staff, the students were supported and celebrated as they took this important step in their Catholic faith. The occasion was a joyful and prayerful celebration, marking the beginning of a deeper connection with Christ and the Church community. Congratulations to all the students and their families on this special day.

Mary Hogan - Principal



Special Milestone

On July 22, 2026, the Diocese of Ballarat celebrated a remarkable milestone as Fr Dan Arundell marked 70 years of priesthood. Ordained at St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat, on July 22, 1956, Fr Dan has dedicated his life to serving God and the people of the diocese with humility, generosity and faith.

Born in Terang and one of ten children, Dan attended St Thomas' Primary School before attending secondary school at St Patrick's College, Ballarat, and later entering the seminary. Over seven decades, he served in parishes across western Victoria, including Mildura, Warrnambool, Swan Hill, Maryborough, Edenhope and Timboon, as well as a period of ministry in The Bronx, USA. Wherever he served, he became known for his pastoral care, genuine interest in people and strong community connections.

Even in retirement, Fr Dan continued active ministry, travelling from Ballarat to support regional parishes for many years. He also faithfully celebrated the 8.00am Sunday Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral until 2023, forming lasting friendships with parishioners.

When reflecting on his vocation, Fr Dan speaks not of achievements but of gratitude. He gives thanks for the people and communities that have shaped his life and ministry.



As we celebrate this significant anniversary, we thank Fr Dan for his faithful witness, dedicated service and lasting impact on generations of Catholics. May God continue to bless him with health, joy and peace.

Adapted from ODC 2011



Top: Bishop Mark Freeman, Jude Gustus, Fr Dan, Bishop Paul Bird, Fr Ed Moloney; Bottom: Denis Foley, Fr Dan, Tony Bongiorno

STEM MAD Showcase

Students from across the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) came together on Thursday, August 13, 2026 at the Damascus College Events Centre to share innovative STEM projects designed to make a difference in the world.



The showcase was the culmination of the STEM MAD (Making A Difference) Collaborative Innovation Research Prototype (CIRP), a DOBCEL Strategy 2035 initiative that brings together schools, students and educators to explore authentic learning through collaboration, inquiry and innovation.

The project has seen students from Emmaus Catholic Primary School and St Columba's Primary School work together to identify real-world challenges and design STEM-based solutions informed by Catholic Social Teaching. Through science, technology, engineering and mathematics, students have explored how their learning can contribute to the common good, care for creation and the wellbeing of their communities.

Following a STEM MAD Kick-Off event held earlier this year, students have spent months researching, designing, testing and refining their ideas. Their work was presented to fellow students, educators, family members and visitors from across the diocese during this special showcase event. Visitors had the opportunity

to explore student projects, speak directly with students about their design thinking and problem-solving processes, and experience student-centred, inquiry-based learning in action.



DOBCEL Communications



MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS

Pope Leo XIV recently released his first Encyclical Letter to all bishops in the world for wide circulation within the Church. The theme of the letter dealt with safeguarding the dignity of the human person in the time of artificial intelligence. Particular attention was placed on care for humanity in these changing times. The Pope said "I invite all members of the Church and of the human family..... to listen to one another, face the present challenges with courage, and cooperate in building a more human and fraternal society". He went on to say "Please take with you a commitment to stay awake and, as 'artisans of hope', to keep on building the worksite of our time. May the Spirit of the Risen Lord Jesus sustain our work together."

In the time of Artificial Intelligence, humanity is faced with a choice. Whether to let itself be guided by technology and progress as the only principles on which to build our

civilization, or should it put at the centre the dignity of the person, reducing technical progress to an instrument.

The document presents a vision for responding to the challenges of artificial intelligence and rapid technological change. Drawing on the Social Doctrine of the Church, it emphasises a dynamic approach that reads the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and upholds the inherent dignity of every human person. Guided by principles such as the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity and social justice, it recognises technology as a valuable expression of human creativity while warning against treating it as the ultimate source of truth or authority. Artificial intelligence, while powerful, cannot replace human wisdom, moral responsibility or the unique capacity for relationships, values and compassion.

The text calls for safeguarding humanity by protecting truth, meaningful work and authentic freedom in an increasingly digital world. It warns of the dangers of misinformation, technological dependence and the use of AI in warfare, where decisions affecting human life risk becoming detached from ethical judgment. In response, it advocates building a "civilization of love" rooted in justice, dialogue, peace and care for the vulnerable. Ultimately, it reminds us that human greatness is found not in technological power but in freedom, love, grace and solidarity, and calls all people to become active "weavers of hope" in shaping a future that places human dignity at its centre.

More can be read here: <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/pope-leo-xivs-first-encyclical/>

Image: © <a href='https://www.123rf.com/freeimages

Parish Mergers

Bishop Mark Freeman has established by decree on July 1, 2026 two new parish entities:

Our Lady of Mercy and Peace, Heartland Parish of Craters, Mountains, Lakes, and Plains (formerly Hampden, Timboon and Camperdown Parishes);

Emmaus Catholic Parish: Colac, Lakes to Coast (formerly Colac, Cororooke and Apollo Bay Parishes).

Fr George Kuruvila has been appointed Parish Priest of Our Lady of Mercy and Peace, Heartland Parish of Craters, Mountains, Lakes, and Plains.

Fr Andrew Hayes has been appointed as Parish Priest of Emmaus Catholic Parish: Colac, Lakes to Coast.

These parish communities are entering a new chapter through the merging of parishes. This process is an opportunity to strengthen shared faith, resources and ministries while continuing to serve our communities with renewed energy and purpose.

While change can bring challenges, it also offers new possibilities for collaboration, fellowship and growth. We give thanks for the rich history of each parish and look forward with hope as we work together to build vibrant communities of faith for future generations.





From January 10, 2026 to January, 10 2027, the Year of St Francis is being celebrated, marking the 800th anniversary of his death. During this year, Catholics are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of St Francis, becoming models of holiness of life and constant witnesses of peace.

Pope Leo XIV in his Letter on the occasion of the opening of the eighth centenary of the death of St Francis of Assisi said, "In this age, marked by so many seemingly interminable wars, by internal and social divisions that create mistrust and fear, he continues to speak. Not because he offers technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace.

The Franciscan vision of peace is not limited to the relations between human beings, but also embraces the whole of creation. Francis, who calls the sun "brother" and the moon "sister", who recognises in every creature a reflection of divine beauty, reminds us that peace must be extended to the entire family of Creation. This insight resonates with particular urgency in our time, when our common home is threatened and cries out under exploitation. Peace with God, peace among human beings and with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the example and spiritual legacy of this Saint, strong in faith, steadfast in hope and ardent in active charity towards his neighbour, inspire in everyone the importance of trusting in the Lord, of living a life faithful to the Gospel, and of accepting and illuminating every circumstance and action of life with faith and prayer."

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: Vital Contribution - Women Farmers - Jo Brady. Back cover: 1. Ballarat Vinnies Festival Mass; 2. Mass celebrated in the new Parish of Our Lady of Mercy and Peace, Heartland Parish of Craters, Mountains, Lakes, and Plains; 3. Dan Arundell's 70th Ordination Anniversary Mass; 4. Fr Damien Heath at the Mass of the Oils with Bishop Mark, Fr Marcello Colasante and Fr Denis Ryan.