For five days, families from around the world, with 40 Cardinals and 200 Bishops, took part in this massive gathering. It began with a Pastoral and Theological Congress. Speaking at the opening session, the newly appointed President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, gave a warm and enthusiastic welcome to participants. He said, “We are many and one in virtue of Christ and the Holy Spirit. We represent different peoples and cultures of the People of God’. This was specially manifested in the concluding Festive Vigil and the Final Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe which attracted a huge crowd.

World Meetings of Families have been described as ‘World Youth Days for families’. They were initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1994 as an expression of his irrepressible confidence in the importance of family life for the Church and for society. Each meeting is convened by the Pontifical Council for the Family and is hosted by a Diocese in a different city. Previous meetings have been held in Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Manila and Valencia.

The theme of this gathering in Mexico City was ‘Family, Teacher of Human and Christian Values’. Australia was represented in various ways. A delegation of 20 Australians attended. It was led by Bishop Eugene Hurley of Darwin Diocese who participated in his role as President of the Australian Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life. Bishop Eugene Hurley commented:

“It was a great joy to accompany the Australian delegation to Mexico for the World Meeting. Having time to be with families and to reflect daily with them is a great gift to any bishop. The celebration in Mexico was packed with rich theology, deep prayer and excellent liturgies. I was so impressed with the warmth and the devotion of the Mexican people, young and old. I think we have much to learn from the obvious passion the Mexican people have for their faith. Their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is absolutely inspiring and leaves me with the challenge to replicate it in my life. I am deeply grateful to Mavis and Ron Pirola who lead our pilgrimage beautifully and shepherded all of us through unchartered waters. The family is the basic unit of society and as mentioned in Mexico is the school of love. I commit myself and the Bishop’s Commission for Pastoral Life to working tirelessly for the family in Australia.”

Australian delegates were from six Dioceses, namely, Darwin, Melbourne, Rockhampton, Sandhurst, Sydney and Wagga Wagga. Melbourne ArchDiocese was represented by Gerard and Anne O’Shea, of St Patrick’s Parish, Mentone.

The whole event concluded with the Holy Father speaking by satellite TV. Thanking all for their role in this ‘wonderful moment’, he announced that the 7th World Meeting of Families will be in Milan in 2012. The theme will be ‘Family: Work and Celebration’.

New Principals
Welcome to the Diocese

The Diocese of Lismore is pleased to welcome the following three new Principals and two Acting Principals to parish schools in 2009:

Karen Robson – Acting Principal
St Peter’s Primary School, Port Macquarie

Geoff Leary – Principal
St Joseph’s Primary School, Port Macquarie

Leon Walsh – Acting Principal
McAuley Catholic College, Grafton

Aaron Beach – Principal
St Mary’s High School, Casino

Alain Sauvage – Principal
St Joseph’s College, Banora Point

Karen Robson – Acting Principal
St Peter’s Primary School, Port Macquarie

Lea Walsh – Acting Principal
McAuley Catholic College, Grafton

Alain Sauvage – Principal
St Joseph’s College, Banora Point

The family as the basic school of life was the underlying message of the 6th World Meeting of Families. Held in Mexico City from Jan 14-18, it was a colourful and inspiring experience of the Universal Church.

“It is in the Home Where One Learns to Truly Live”

by Ron and Mavis Pirola

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Catholic Mission has launched a worldwide prayer vigil through its international partners for the victims of the tragic Victorian Fires. The Australian National office of Catholic Mission has been inundated with emails, phone calls and letters from many of the 160 partner countries through Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific and the Americas with expressions of prayer and solidarity.

Catholic Mission’s international offices in each country have a wide network of many thousands of supporters in schools and parishes and they are being asked to pray for all those affected and especially to bring God’s hope and comfort to the families who have lost members to the fire.

Martin Teulan, Catholic Mission’s National Director said:

“World Youth Day in Australia showed us the vastness of the Catholic Church and the richness of faith around the world. We are an international community of Catholics who help each in time of need and who will now want to help Australians rebuild their homes and their hearts through solidarity in prayer. We are sure that a Million prayers will lift the spirit of the victims.”

Following are just some of the offers of prayer which have been received:

Fr. Albert Byaruhanga, the Director of Catholic Schools in Uganda wrote:

With sorrow I extend my sympathy to you and the families of those who have perished in raging fire. May God rest them in peace.

Fr. Albert will be asking Catholic school students in Uganda to pray for those affected.

Fr. Celestino Bundi, the National Director of Kenya wrote:

A few days ago I learnt there was wild fire which killed your people. We are together in prayer at this time of pain. We have also lost 200 people through fire incidences. May God bless you.

From the National Director of Sierra Leone, Monsignor Dan Sullivan:

Please pass onto everyone that I am saying my Daily Mass Intention for the people of Australia and there is such compassion and concern for your Country.

The very first response to the request for prayer support came from the West Indies Director, Fr Donald Chambers, to assure you that our prayers are with you and the people of Australia at this time.

“I will immediately forward your request to your Caribbean colleagues and invite them to lift up our Australian brothers and sisters to the Lord and place them in His loving arms where they will receive his comfort and his peace. May He also give them his strength, especially those who have been directly affected by the fires.

“May God’s peace be with you all!”

Catholic Mission calls for a Million Prayers for Fire Victims
Last Thursday on the 12th February, St Joseph’s Primary Tweed Heads put their nose to the ground to raise funds for the Victorian Bush Fire Appeal. They showed true Australian comradeship raising $1,906.50 for the Victorian bushfire victims.

The whole school community became involved with the appeal. Students wore mufti and donated what they could.

Staff at St Joseph’s Primary, Tweed Heads went beyond the call of duty to raise money for the Victorian bushfire victims. On assembly two staff members performed a memorable rendition of a favourite nursery rhyme, while Sue McGill and Cheryl Tilley treated parents and students to a breathtaking belly-dancing performance.

Parents willingly donated extra cash for these performances.

The highlight of the morning was when the Principal, Tony Boyle, (right) offered to push a tennis ball, with his nose, the length of the netball court, for a donation of $100 to the Bushfire Appeal. Staff willingly sent the hat around and raised over $300 and Tony obliged, to the delight and amusement of all!

Canned food, linen, clothes and other goods from St Joseph’s School community have also been collected and sent to the victims, along with our constant prayers.

St Patrick’s School, Macksville, Raises the Level

Staff, students and families of St Patrick’s School, Macksville banded together to raise money for those affected by the Victorian Bushfires. The school raised close to $1,500 in a wonderful show of support for those who have been devastated by the recent fires.

Principal, Mr Vin Butler said, “I am overwhelmed by the generosity of our families, especially at this time of uncertain financial times. I grew up in some of the worst affected areas around the Churchill area in Victoria, so my heart goes out to those who have lost everything.”

St Patrick’s held a mufti day to raise money for the appeal. The school came together during the Appeal day for a Liturgy to pray for those most affected. All money raised will be sent the bushfire victims through our Catholic agencies in Victoria.

Trinity Catholic College, Lismore, Commences the Year with a Mass

The College Commencement Mass was held on Tuesday, 10th February in the Trinity Sports Centre. Father Paul McDonald, St. Carthage’s Cathedral Administrator and Father Richard Foley, Parish Priest of Coraki, Woodburn and Evans Head, co-celebrated the Mass. A special feature before the Mass was a Rite of Welcome by Brother Peter and College Captains Fiona Toohey and Riordan Wagner to our new Year 7 students. Heads of House and the ten House Captains led their respective student groups through the Assembly.

This year the theme, JESUS THE LIVING WATER from St John’s Gospel story of the ‘Woman at the Well’, will be a special theme in our Liturgical celebrations.

The Commencement Mass was a fitting occasion for the launch of this theme by the use of two banners which were expertly painted by two Year 9 students, Lily Knowland and Karissa Wallace.

The same day a collection was made for the Bush Fire Victims in Victoria which was then presented to Father Paul McDonald for a blessing during the Commencement Mass. The Trinity community raised a staggering $5,000 in a one day collection.
St Augustine’s Primary School, Coffs Harbour
Celebrating Family and Buddies in our School Community

The Kindergarten and Yr 6 students at St Augustine’s Primary School enjoyed a special Liturgy together as part of an introduction to this year’s ‘Buddy System’. The Kindergarten students were allocated with a Year 6 buddy to take special care of them as they settle into school life. The buddy will assist their kindergarten friend in their classroom on a weekly basis, be a friendly face on the playground and a caring friend to go to in times of need. The Kindergarten and Year 6 students, their families and teachers thoroughly enjoyed joining together as Faith community and as a sign of love and friendship at the start of our school year.

Our Lady of Lourdes Infants School, East Lismore
Our Lady Of Lourdes Feast Day

On Wednesday 11th February Our Lady of Lourdes Infants School, East Lismore celebrated a special day in the life of their school. On this day 151 years ago St Bernadette saw a lady in a grotto outside the town of Lourdes in France. This lady was Mary the mother of our Lord and she appeared many times to Bernadette and asked her to pray the rosary. Thus the school was named after the Lady of Lourdes.

The school celebrated their feast day with the retelling of this story by Year One during a prayer celebration that was attended by many of our school community. Following a picnic morning tea, the celebrations continued with a game of T-ball involving parents, grandparents, students and staff. Everyone had a great time.

This is a big year for Our Lady Of Lourdes Infants School. The school will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary on the weekend of May 30-31st with all ex students, staff and families invited to join in the fun. We would love to see you there! For more information on our 50 Year Celebration please contact the school. Ph: 02 66 215519 or visit our website www.lise.lism.catholic.edu.au

Buddies help kinders settle in
Holy Family Primary School, Skennars Head

Year 6 students from Holy Family Primary School, Skennars Head love to welcome the new kindergarten children. The Buddy Programme was initiated to support the Kinder children in their first year at “big school” by uniting Year 6 and Kindergarten.

Each Year 6 student is paired with a Kinder child and the photos of the buddies are placed on the walls of the Kinder and Year 6 classrooms.

The buddies enjoy shared activities such as art and craft, story reading time and computer skills sessions. The Year 6 students also assist and care for their buddies in the playground. Both class groups are very enthusiastic about the programme.

The Buddy Programme is a wonderful initiative at Holy Family School and it embodies Jesus’ message “Whoever welcomes one of these children, welcomes me…” Mk 9:37
Mt St Patrick College, Murwillumbah

A perfect HSC result

Kara Roberts, a student of Mt St Patrick College, Murwillumbah, received a perfect result of 100% in her 1 Unit Studies of Religion exam in the 2008 Higher School Certificate. Kara’s was second in the State in the 1 Unit Studies of Religion exam.

Mt St Patrick College results in the 2008 HSC were outstanding. The College was named as one of the best performing 200 schools in the State for the third consecutive year. We were ranked 127th out of 685 schools and were among the top 20% of schools in the State for the third consecutive year. At the local level, Mt St Patrick College topped the region and was 3rd on the North Coast out of twenty seven schools. Ryan Walker, the College Dux, received an Academic Achievement Award on Australia Day for obtaining the best results in the local area.

Mt St Patrick College was mentioned forty nine times in the Board of Studies Distinguished Achievers List for receiving a Band 6, a mark of 90 or above, in a subject. Seventy eight students sat for the HSC with twelve students receiving a Band 6 in 1 Unit Studies of Religion, eight in General Mathematics, six in Earth and Environmental Science and five in Geography. The average mark obtained by Mt St Patrick College students was above the State average in all subjects indicating the high level of performance of all students in 2008 cohort. This particular statistic is outstanding and reflects the high level of academic success achieved by students irrespective of their course of study.

Michael Crichton had his major work for Visual Arts selected for ‘ArtExpress’, an exhibition of the best artworks by students in the HSC.

St Joseph’s College, Tweed Heads

‘You have a friend’

Nowhere is the St Joseph’s College motto of ‘Peace Through Justice’ better exemplified than through the involvement of College students with the charity, ‘You Have A Friend’. The organisation works to support the marginalised and needy in the Tweed area by providing food and company to the homeless on a regular basis.

‘You Have A Friend’, the brainchild of local businessman John Lee has been running since May 2008. The Sunday breakfasts in Coolangatta and Murwillumbah and the Thursday BBQ lunches at Murwillumbah are now accepted and welcome events attracting a number of regular patrons. Students from Years 10 to 12 at St Joseph’s and a number of staff voluntarily assist the association by serving tea, coffee and biscuits to a number of ‘friends’ each Tuesday evening at Jack Evans Boat Harbour, Tweed Heads. Students in Year 7 also contribute by donating grocery items for use at the coffee carts.

As a part of the Community Service Programme at the College involvement with ‘You Have A Friend’ provides students with the opportunity to reach out to the most abandoned in society by offering them experiences of community and belonging. Most importantly students are able to take up Christ’s challenge and model a more just and humane world.

Mt St Patrick College student Kara Roberts discussing her 1 Unit Studies of Religion mark with her teacher Mrs Jane Egan. Kara was second in the State with a mark of 100%.

Our Lady Help of Christian’s Parish School, South Lismore

An exciting start to 2009 at OLHC

There was a buzz of excitement at Our Lady Help of Christian’s Parish School, South Lismore on Thursday 29th of January as all the students returned for the year. The kindergarten students were the most excited of all. The Year 6 students happily supported their kindergarten buddies to settle into the school routine happily and with confidence. This buddy program has been working beautifully for the past five years and the results have been positive for all involved.

“We really love helping our little ones settle into school,” was the response from a Year 6 student.

We are now well into the first term and the school has a positive atmosphere. This sets a great tone for the rest of the year.

Thank you Year 6.
St Carthage’s School, Lismore
St Carthage’s ‘Buddy Program’

St Carthage’s Catholic learning community has always implemented a successful buddy and peer support program throughout the school. This year the program was extended to incorporate the orientation of Kindergarten students to school. The benefits of the program have been endless. Year Six students have developed rich interconnected relationships with our Kindergarten students. They have fostered a supportive and nurturing environment. Their radiant spirit has ensured that our Kindergarten students have been made to feel welcomed and cared for. Their positive role modelling has allowed the students to easily adapt to school routines and procedures, something that could have been daunting in a large school. As a consequence, our newly inducted Year Six children are further enhancing their leadership and mentoring skills, whilst our Kindergarten students are blossoming as independent learners.

St Joseph’s Primary School, Kempsey
Linking school and church

The Parish Children’s Choir was formed 8 years ago in response to a call in the All Saints Parish newsletter for more musicians to join the music roster and sing at Mass on Sunday. Local guitarist, Bradley Clarke and St Joseph’s teacher, Helen Hart, joined forces to organise a group of children to sing at Mass each month.

The children meet with Bradley and Helen prior to Sunday’s Mass, listen to the Gospel and readings, help select appropriate hymns and practise singing them. Approximately 25 children, from Kindergarten to Year 6 attend the Parish Children’s Choir and a place next to one of the three microphones is highly sought after. Children are selected to participate in the readings and Offertory Procession and they are supported by staff members from St Joseph’s.

The Parish Children’s Choir is much appreciated by the older members of the congregation. It has encouraged attendance at Sunday Mass and is a great opportunity for children to participate in the liturgy and practise their faith. Helen Hart

Former school captain receives Victoria Cross
Mt St John’s Primary School, Dorrigo

It was with great pleasure and excitement that we heard of Trooper Mark Donaldson being awarded the Victoria Cross for service in Afghanistan late last year. Mark was a long-term resident of Dorrigo and a student here at Mt St John’s for much of his primary schooling. In 1990 he was elected school captain. His Year 6 teacher, Mrs Meredith Marsden, remembers him as being a happy, friendly boy with a very positive attitude and a great sense of humour – “a really great kid,” she said.

We are hopeful that Mark will be able to visit the school on his next trip to Dorrigo and speak to the students about his experiences and memories of school.

On February 11, our new School Captains, Cara Shirley and Rebecca Noble were commissioned and blessed by Fr Jim Reilly at our first Mass of 2009.
St. Joseph’s Regional College, Port Macquarie

Opening mass at new site

St. Joseph’s Regional College, Port Macquarie celebrated the beginning of a new school year at a brand new facility. The opening liturgy was an opportunity to give thanks for the fantastic facilities, to remember the wonderful traditions and culture that the community brings with them and to embrace the theme for 2009, ‘Shine in 2009’. Students carried forward symbols of the House and Pastoral Care groups including a time capsule of mementos reflecting the history of the school. Each Pastoral Care group was given a candle for their classroom prayer table to remind us how the light of Christ shines through each of us.

Fr. Leo Donnelly and Fr. Paul Gooley the school chaplain concelebrated. Fr. Donnelly spoke to the students about the life of St Agnes and challenge the students to live with the same conviction, faith and tenacity as she did in her 13 years.

An important part of the celebration was the “Ceremony of Light”. The school captains from 2008 (Sam Mathews and Ellen Hales) passed on the school candle to the new captains Sam Tinsey and Josie Wright. Fr. Paul blessed the badges before they were presented to the student leaders.

The mass concluded with the school song and a reflection powerpoint focusing on the community spirit of St Joseph’s Regional College Community.

St. Paul’s, Port Macquarie

Swimming carnival

St. Paul’s Swimming Carnival held on Wednesday, 11th February was a great success and a credit to all involved. An exceptional standard of swimming was shown in championships, with many school records being smashed. In the non championship events the level of participation and of giving one’s best was inspiring. House spirit came through ‘loud and strong’ throughout the day and most particularly in supporting the relays. It was delightful to see so many of our students taking the opportunity to live our focus theme for the year and ‘Shine in 2009’. A special note of thanks is especially deserved for our carnival organisers, Kate Felstead and Glen Littler.

Above left: Benjamin Lewis and Harrison Burke, Above right: Bradley Cusato, Dannielle Cox, Hayley Farrugia, Katelyn Dwyer, School Vice Captains Eliza-Jane Priddis & Alex James carry the school candle as part of the opening mass.
... but now I must try to give you a little description of the place we are living in, hoping it will interest you. Well, dearest Mother, as opposite from London as black is from white. The place is very large - a vast country - even in what is called the town, cattle are feeding in the middle of the streets - in England we would not call them streets but country roads. When you see the church crowded and the schools full of children, one wonders where they all come from, so few persons are seen about - but it is to be accounted for when I tell you the little wooden houses or cottages are far and wide between - the children come immense distances to school - there are some who start from their homes at 7 to be with us at 9. Where we live now is also a house (no stairs to go up being all on one flat) standing by itself - fields, country lanes and vineyards all around us - cows and horses feed right up to our verandah - it's all so still and quiet.

(A description of the temporary convent as described in the first letter of the New Foundation in Grafton to Mother Mary Aloysius at Bermondsey. Letter is dated April 24, 1884).

Our new convent is being built on the bank overlooking the Clarence, a lovely view all around, no houses near - except one or two the other side of the bank and the priests' house and church on the same ground - so you see we are quite isolated. There is no fear of being kept awake at night by the noise of carriages or carts or people singing etc. - nothing is to be heard but now and again some dogs or cows and frogs.

Our convent will be very nice when it is finished, the chapel will be at the very top. Don't you think it will be nice to have our Lord looking down upon us all - the chapel window faces the river. It will be a very convenient Convent - 13 cells, a nice community room, work room, noviceship, infirmary, a small room for study, Reverend Mother's parlour, chapter room, reception parlour, refectory, kitchen, a little store room, washing and ironing room and bath room - it has been greatly enlarged from what it was first intended.

(A description of the new convent building as described in the first letter of the New Foundation in Grafton to Mother Mary Aloysius at Bermondsey. Letter is dated April 24, 1884).

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Sister Berenice Kerr, RSM, D.Phil(Oxon.) and Sister Colleen Rhodes, RSM for the gathering of letters, images and research for The Mercy Tradition feature in this issue of "Catholic Life". Editor.