



Catholic Enquiry Centre Newsletter

The Catholic Enquiry Centre is a work of the National Centre for Evangelisation,
an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Greetings from the Catholic Enquiry Centre (CEC).

Firstly, let me thank you for your ongoing financial and prayerful support of the CEC; it is greatly appreciated. Recently, we were asked by a donor if the CEC had enough resources to be effective in sharing the faith. While assuring them, and you as supporters, that we are working in new and effective ways to promote the faith and respond to enquiries, we are also aware the CEC must work in partnership with local communities. Our two articles in this issue reflect this balance. The first highlights parish managers and secretaries as evangelists as they respond to local

enquiries. The second article explores the reach of the CEC website and our promotion strategy.

Further, the CEC is reviewing its resources which are gifted to seekers, or utilised by evangelists. In 2020 we updated *Discovering Prayer: A 30 day prayer journey of encountering God and love*, printing another 5,000 copies. In 2021 we are reviewing *Call and Response: An Introduction to the Catholic Faith*, drawing together a focus group of local ministers and evangelists to ensure it relates to current questions and trends.

In thanks and support we would like to invite you to become part of the CEC evangelisation strategy. Please find included with this newsletter a free copy of our resource *Discovering Prayer*. This book invites seekers into a prayer life and to form a relationship with Jesus. You can

use the book yourself to accompany your prayer life, or you can give it to someone as a way to start a gentle discussion about God, Jesus or Catholicism. This new larger print edition is available online from www.catholic.org.au (\$22.00 for five copies - includes GST and postage).

Finally, we do enclose a donation/bequest form with each issue of this newsletter. You can also make donations online at www.catholicenquiry.com. However, if you only wish to make one donation a year, or whenever you can, then please simply disregard the form.

Wishing you every blessing and prayers that you and yours stay safe from COVID-19.

Malcolm Hart

Director

National Centre for Evangelisation

PARISH SECRETARIES: FRONTLINE EVANGELISTS

One of the most common questions asked of the Catholic Enquiry Centre is, "How do I get a copy of my Baptism certificate?" Such enquirers are required to locate and connect with the parish where they were baptised to source a copy of the certificate. This made us think, what other requests do parishes get, and who answers them?

In most cases it is the parish secretary. She or he is often the doorway into the parish, and for those not regularly attending Mass, their first impression of a parish could be through their encounter with the parish secretary. These men and women in our parish offices are our frontline evangelists.



Deborah Foote is parish support manager in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Her role includes training, employment, liaison, legislative compliance support, networking and general pastoral support to the 55 parish staff and office volunteers in the Archdiocese. Deborah says:

"It is so important that there is a friendly, caring voice or person answering that phone call or doorbell. They are the face of the Church, the very first point of contact for some who may have been away from the Church for some time. We are so lucky in our Archdiocese that so many go the 'extra mile' to cater to all needs for our parishioners and those marginalised. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved this especially; the effort parish

offices went to to reach out to people who couldn't leave home, and those who couldn't come to Mass, to ensure they were not alone, was phenomenal.”

Sharon Cashman is the parish secretary for the Goulburn Mission comprising the parishes of Goulburn, Crookwell and Taralga in regional NSW. Sharon has been parish secretary for over 20 years. She knows the way she greets and engages with people who come to the parish office is critical. She says:

“I love my job! I get to meet so many people on different paths on their journey. Some days it's Baptism enquiries, sacramental enrolment or assisting families organising funerals. I also enjoy the variety of financial work and data input. COVID-19 has had many challenges with the extra workload required – recording names, cleaning, helping people with using the app to sign in – but as I stand at the door to help, it's lovely to say 'hello' and meet the parishioners and get to know them. I am blessed in Goulburn to have great support from many volunteers within the parish.”

In parishes where the secretary is the only staff member, the skill set required is extensive. Many require secretarial, financial and record-keeping skills. In recent years they have added to that list the understanding and implementation of all areas of compliance and professional standards from child protection, work, health and safety, copyright and public liability. Due to COVID-19,

parish secretaries have all the extra tasks that go with ensuring a COVID-safe environment and managing “checking-in” procedures. It's an extensive duty statement.

However, the most critical role these men and women have is to not only be the face of the parish, but the face of Christ as well. During their busy days, they are called upon, often at the drop of a hat, to respond with compassion and understanding to people who are grieving, mentally or physically unwell, or just unsure as to how they should navigate aspects of Church life. It takes a person focused on Christ's mission to know how to put aside an urgent task and give their full attention to the person on the phone or at the door. And it takes time, patience and extra effort to add a note of kindness or offer of prayer to the many people who correspond via email.

Evangelisation is lived out in many and varied ways. It may not always require proclamation or teaching, but personal witness is always central. Evangelisation is lived in our day-to-day life, in our workplaces and interactions as we are the face of Christ in the world. The evangelisation efforts of parish secretaries rarely see the limelight, but it is often through their gifts of administration and management that allow others to shine the light of Christ. The CEC gives thanks to God for all parish secretaries who are gifted with a true missionary spirit!

CEC WEBSITE - OUR MOST POPULAR PAGES IN 2021

In today's digital world, the CEC's promotion strategy relies heavily on the effectiveness of the CEC website. In a similar way to the work of parish secretaries highlighted above, the CEC website acts as the first opportunity for many people to learn about the Catholic faith. As such, it is essential that it includes relevant, up to date information in an easily accessible format.

The CEC website features a range of questions and answers commonly asked by those new to, or enquiring about, the Catholic faith. During 2021, the most viewed questions on the CEC website have been as follows:

1. How do I go about obtaining a copy of my Baptism or Confirmation certificate? (2,229 views)

2. Can non-Catholics be godparents? If not, can we choose not to have godparents? (1,006 views)

3. What is the Catholic Church's position on drugs and alcohol? (567 views)

4. Why are there differences between the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Bibles? (491 views)

5. Are Catholic priests allowed to marry? (439 views)

6. Are there any guidelines regarding who can be a witness at a Catholic wedding? (344 views)

Every visit to the CEC website presents us with an opportunity to propose the message of Christ to the enquirer. Thank you to those who make this evangelising work possible.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Donations can be made by completing the attached slip, or online via our [website](#).

The NCE resource, *The Bridge*, is now available online at <https://bit.ly/3d3hZ24>

To receive the CEC Newsletter electronically, subscribe at <https://bit.ly/2YLzXIF>

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