

Doing good and doing it well: Thirty years of Catholic Outreach

03 Sep 2020

By The Record



Anne Brink, former Catholic Outreach Director Peter Mc Minn, Maureen Byrne, current Catholic Outreach Director Marietta Russo and Maureen Labouchardiere at the Catholic Outreach 30th Anniversary Brunch. Photo: Supplied.

Parish Pastoral Care Program Coordinators from across the Archdiocese of Perth gathered at the Catholic Pastoral Centre in Highgate on 15 August, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Catholic Outreach with a Mass celebrated by Applecross Parish Priest Father Nelson Po, followed by a brunch event.

As the anniversary celebrations coincided with the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, Fr Po encouraged the community gathered to draw inspiration from the life of Mother Mary, in his homily.

“This event is about celebrating the years of service to the people of the Archdiocese and giving thanks to hundreds of volunteers, coordinators and clergy who have been involved in the outreach ministry since its inception,” Fr Po said.

“Our Blessed Mother’s Assumption into heaven is a reminder of Mary’s life of total faithfulness and service.

“We see in Mary the fullness of the response we must make to God in our own lives – Her Assumption into heaven invites us to always make an effort to live our lives properly and to be faithful to our baptismal promises as Christians,” he stated.

Fr Po added that the work carried out by the Archdiocesan agency is a response to the call to be always Christ-like by serving and reaching out to others who are in need.

Catholic Outreach began from a conversation that transpired between the then Western Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission Director Tony McAlinden and a local couple needing assistance and community support (in the 1980s) as they dealt with illness, that led Mr McAlinden to question why there wasn't something in place to help them.

With the support of Perth's seventh Archbishop William Foley DD, and various parties in the Archdiocese of Perth, Mr McAlinden channelled his passion and extraordinary energy to develop an agency that would meet the challenge of reaching out to local people in need (in 1990) becoming the first Executive Officer of Catholic Outreach.

After examining models from Brisbane and Melbourne, Mr McAlinden realised the programs "had to be owned by the parish."

"It is about opening doors for parishioners to help other people," he said.

Then Auxiliary Bishop Robert Healey, is reported to have described the agency as "the best idea the Church has had for a long time."

Since then, Catholic Outreach has been a part of the landscape of the Archdiocese of Perth establishing and supporting parish-based care programs which offer emergency short term help to people in the community.



Applecross Parish Priest Father Nelson Po celebrated a Mass for the 30th anniversary of Catholic Outreach. Photo: Supplied.

Following Mr McAlinden retirement due to ill health, Peter Mc Minn became the Director in 1999 and, with Betty Thompson by his side as Catholic Outreach Officer since 2006, the agencies mission was further strengthened with the introduction of a number of innovations that have allowed Catholic Outreach to continue its evolution and service.

Mr Mc Minn who served 20 years as Director, commended those involved with the agency for their on-going dedication and enthusiasm.

Today, there are more than 25 voluntary care programs working successfully in direct response to relief of sickness, distress and suffering encountered within the parish and wider community.

“It is a shining reflection of the achievements of this agency through the endeavours of the people who lend it their hands and hearts – the coordinators and the volunteers in the parishes,” Catholic Outreach Marietta Russo remarked.

These Coordinators include Maureen Byrne, Anne Brink and Maureen Labouchardiere who have been involved in the Gosnells Parish Care program Marycare since it was established in the parish in 1994.

“Actions speak louder than words. It seemed to be an essential element of parish life that ordinary people could be called on to provide support to other ordinary people with ordinary problems,” Mrs Bryne remarked.



Catholic Outreach Director, Marietta Russo, with the agency's first Executive Officer, Tony McAlinden. Photo: Supplied.

When asked if any particular situation stood out in the last 26 years as epitomising what the care program is all about, Mrs Bryne said it was one of “a mother of three young children who suddenly found herself with a broken ankle and on crutches.

“With the lady working away, she needed early morning help for a few days to get the children organised for school until her family could arrive to help her,” Mrs Bryne stated.

“Another incident, was an older gentleman who needed someone to just sit with his wife, who had early dementia, simply to allow the husband time to have a shower without having to worry what she would get up to.”

“After all this time, we still feel the calling to use our gifts and talents in this way,” she added.

“When I reflect on the work of Catholic Outreach, I am reminded of some simple words from Mary Ward, ‘Do good and do it well’ – The number of volunteers and the volume of tasks completed over the years are evidence that this maxim is practised throughout the Archdiocese,” concluded Ms Russo.