

**THEME** Ministry in Lutheran schools in a multi-faith society

## Lakeside: a school in mission to a community

On my office pin board is a photo of an old bell tower in Hessel Road, Harkaway. This is all that still remains of the first Lutheran school in our area which began in 1856. Although our college was only established in 2006, Lutheran education in this area began 150 years earlier. These early settlers, whose names still appear on local road signs, were a tight knit community sharing a common language, culture and faith which clearly defined them as distinct. As with many of these early Lutheran communities, the school and church existed side by side, twin pillars of community life and custodians of faith and culture in a strange and alien land.

Just think how much the landscape has changed in that time. Back then, the nearest shops were a day's ride by horse and buggy. Now, Harkaway is the leafy preserve of well-heeled professionals. Today the south eastern

suburbs of Melbourne are booming with migrants of a very different kind. They come from all corners of the globe, a multiplicity of languages and cultures all seeking to make a home in this land of opportunity. The challenge of our schools today is to engage in meaningful ways with people who claim a very different history and cultural identity. I wish to offer a few points of reflection that I have found helpful in shaping my own thinking in this regard.

Lakeside College was established to be a school in mission to a community that has no existing congregation or identifiable Lutheran presence. That brings its own challenges in terms of community profile, but also an opportunity to think outside the square about what it means to be in mission to pluralist modern Australia. The Lutheran confessions (Article 7 Augsburg Confession) propose a

definition of 'church' that is liberating and empowering. The church is not defined in terms of buildings, organisational structures or constitutions. The church *is* where the word and sacraments *are*. That is not to overlook that there must also be *people* who gather and structure to that gathering, but the *church* is always the work of the Spirit, through these means of grace. We can be confident that where these are, faith is being formed and the gospel is changing hearts-because it is God's work. That gives confidence and freedom to think in new ways about the forms of expression that 'church' can take, even in, with and under the routines and schedules of a school day.

Christianity is not a series of propositional truths but a lived experience. The good news of Jesus is a call to a life of following and a way of being. Lutheran schools are educational



We share a common human agenda about who we are; the meaning of love, life and death among other things

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Lutheran schools are educational communities in which the gospel informs all this living and learning

communities in which the gospel informs all this living and learning. Relationships are the currency through which this transaction takes place. Our school communities have a distinctive gospel shaped culture with behaviours, practices, attitudes and symbols that reflect God's love in authentic, tangible ways. We welcome our students, staff and families into an experience of the gospel in community that is transformative. It is an

invitation to come and see Jesus that will win the heart.

The theology of creation is always the touchstone for engaging the 'other' in dialogue. This is to recognise our common humanity as created in the image of God, with all the inherent dignity, worth and respect that embraces. This approach is not forced or coercive but gentle and compelling because it grows out of love and respect for the other as a child of God and not an object to be controlled or manipulated. It respects individual autonomy and the freedom of will that is God's fragile gift. This leads to dialogue then that is genuine, respectful and sincere. It should be noted that true dialogue risks both parties being changed by the experience!

True dialogue implies that we are also truly heard. It is vital that we can be free to faithfully articulate our views. I have found the metaphor of 'fences and gates' helpful. We share a common human agenda about who we are; the meaning of love, life and death among other things. These are the 'gates' through which shared areas of common concern can be explored. Much can be learned from each other in these matters and perhaps even enrich or sharpen our own perspective. There

are also fences. These are the boundaries that delineate our differences. It is dishonest to pretend that Christians do not have points of difference with people of other faiths, and they with us. The search for truth is not served by a religious reductionism that lacks texture and taste. The fences define where we are not agreed and these are as equally important to recognise and respect. These fences impel us to further dialogue and deeper understanding in order to dispel prejudice and misunderstanding.

While times have changed, the example of our pioneers can help inform our mission and ministry to a 21st century audience. They remind us that the gospel of grace at the heart of our schools, is a universal message that transcends time and culture. Their resolve gives us confidence to step out courageously, knowing that our future is firmly anchored in God's eternal plan to redeem the world with love.

**David Spike**  
Principal  
Lakeside Lutheran College  
Pakenham Vic



Pastor Nathan Hedt, Mrs Yvette Hedt and District Bishop Greg Pietsch

## Ministry in Lutheran schools in a multi-faith society



Christianity, believing in the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, is an inclusive faith. It is based on universal love, rather than privilege of birth or place in society.

Multiculturalism is a new word for an age-old reality. Multiple cultures, religions, and races have long lived side-by-side in mixed communities across the world. Prior to colonisation the peoples of northern Australia intermixed with others from further north. They traded and even intermarried with people who lived in places we now call Indonesia, and even as far away as the Philippines.

In past centuries, in the lands they colonised, western cultures liked to give the impression that theirs were the only ones that mattered. 'Oriental' and 'aboriginal' cultures remained merely to add some romance and colour to what was, essentially, a white, western, and 'Christian' culture. Language, commerce, politics, and legal systems all conspired to maintain this false impression, accompanied by the threat of military might and violence.

Now the colonial era is largely over, cultures, religions, and languages, suppressed for a time, are being reasserted. Societies once subjugated under western political structures are readjusting. The results are messy, often violent, and cause people to flee in large numbers for their safety.

All of this can be predicted, and none of it is unusual. It's how empires come to an end. It takes them ages to grow, and even longer to fall apart. This time it's just a little bigger, more complicated, and globally more widespread than in the past.

Jesus himself lived during the Roman Empire, in one of its most multi-faith and multi-cultural regions. Trade routes between Europe, Asia and Africa, passed right near his home town of Nazareth. It was not a homogeneous Jewish place. The land was full of foreigners, including the occupying Romans. Earlier, in the days of the Old Testament, multiple tribes and religions had jostled for power in the same area. Their descendants still lived there. The Roman governor Pilate tried him, the Idumean King Herod condemned him, and who knows where the soldiers who crucified him came from. Legionaries could come from as far away as Germania or Britain, both pagan and animist societies.

In times of upheaval, people naturally migrate to places of safety and freedom. They carry with them their culture, customs, religion, and language. Sometimes, however, people are violently uprooted and become refugees, strangers in a strange land. (Exodus 2:22) It can take many years, even generations, to recover from such devastation.

Christianity, believing in the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, is an inclusive faith. It is based on universal love, rather than privilege of birth or place in society.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.' (John 3:16 NRSV) Our Saviour was an extraordinary figure who demonstrated acceptance and open hearted generosity to his neighbour. He was consistent in every relationship, even with his heavenly Father. He 'did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave'. (Philippians 2:6-7 NRSV)

As a Lutheran educator you know that God has placed a special gift into your hands. The gospel, that Christ died for our sins and we are freely forgiven, resurrected, and restored for his sake, resonates in everything you do. It informs your administration, your classrooms, your staffrooms, and your policies and practices. No part of your school is 'off limits' to the gospel. That doesn't make you or your school weak – it makes you strong. You are strong because there is no divine ledger to be balanced, no one waiting for you to fail. You don't have to meet God's approval because he has already given his judgement. 'The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.' (Mark 16:16)

These days there will naturally be multiple faith and cultural communities in your school. If you don't have them yet, you soon will. It's what being Christian, Lutheran, and part of modern Australia will mean. It will be a challenge for a while as you readjust, but ultimately it's a good thing. You have a special opportunity to live the love of Christ, to show what your faith means deep down inside, and to accept people in the same way God accepts you, whether or not you think you have met his standards.

I believe that Lutheran schools are up to the challenge, and I take this opportunity to encourage you in it. God bless you as you serve your community, sharing with them the love of God for all people.

**Bishop John Henderson**

# What is the typical Lutheran school?

## A true story

At a gathering of Lutheran principals I was asked which school I was from and upon hearing 'Sunshine Christian School' the questioner replied, 'So why is the principal of a non-Lutheran school attending a function for principals of Lutheran schools?'

People often say that Sunshine is not a typical Lutheran school but then again, what is the typical Lutheran school? We may not have 'Lutheran' in our title but as you will discover, Sunshine Christian School reflects the very heart of the educational and pastoral ministry of our church.

## A little school in Melbourne's west

As you drive through the western suburbs of Melbourne, it's easy to miss our little school, as most school gymnasiums are bigger than our entire campus. Many principals like to walk around campus to take a break from paperwork – this takes me 20 seconds.

Our current enrolment of 91 students, from prep to year 6, share four classrooms, one meeting/worship space, a library, basketball court and administration block. No grassed oval is in sight so we make use of local parks and ovals when we can.

82% of our students have English as a second, third or fourth language and they speak more than twenty different languages. Of all Lutheran schools in Australia, ours has the highest percentage of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. We have a significant refugee population with many of our

recently arrived students born in Malaysian refugee camps.

*'We don't want our daughter to go to a public school. We know your school is a good school. You will not ignore her soul. You will teach her about God. You will teach her about duty to others. This will not happen at the other local schools. This is what we want!'*

The school receives enrolments from practicing Christian families – but also practicing Hindu and Buddhist families. Only three students are Lutheran and these hail from non-European Lutheranism. Our school is blessed by a practicing Christian staff coming from many denominations including Baptist, Anglican, Uniting, Presbyterian and Lutheran.

Sunshine Christian School was opened in 1982 by the Uniting Church of Australia. The key founder, Isabel Bell worked hard and sacrificed much to provide the funds for the school to be founded. Faced with closure by the Uniting Church in 2004, Principal Diane Milnes contacted Lutheran Education Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania (LEVNT) and, with St Matthew's Lutheran Church embracing the role of supporting congregation, Sunshine Christian School officially joined the Lutheran system in late 2004.

Through the tireless and dedicated work of staff, council and church members, the school has continued to grow and blossom as it serves the multicultural community of Sunshine.

## Why do parents choose Sunshine?

For many of our new migrant families it is a necessity of their faith that their children attend a Christian school.

For families fleeing persecution, it means a great deal to them that their child is known by name by all school staff. It means even more to them that they can send their children to a small, safe and openly Christian school.

Last year I met with a family who wanted to enrol their daughter. Knowing that they were practising Buddhists, I asked them why they chose a Lutheran school and they said: 'We don't want our daughter to go to a public school. We know your school is a good school. You will not ignore her soul. You will teach her about God. You will teach her about duty to others. This will not happen at the other local schools. This is what we want.'

How wonderful it would be for all families in our system to have this desire for their children – that their soul not be ignored and that they learn about duty to others.

## A usual day at Sunshine

Of a morning you will find Pastor Cecil Schmalkuche (from St Matthew's congregation) greeting the families in their mother language. He has learnt many languages as new migrant



Practical activities support numeracy development



We enable our EAL learners to experience success across the curriculum



Excursions are important



### Camps are integral

communities have moved to the area. He makes a mental note of prayer needs and possible welfare concerns. He notices that due to new enrolments we need to add a new mural to the current collection to ensure every child's language and culture is represented.

The secretary is ringing a partnering organisation to find out about the outcome of a funding application. A prep student arrives at her desk without lunch and she takes the time to ring the person in the phone tree who can inform this child's parents of the need for the lunch to come to school. With that out of the way she rings a translator to book an appointment for a teacher-parent conversation, remembering to check the specific dialect needed.

The bursar pops into the office to ask whether a particular parent has asked about fees as she wants to ensure they know help is available if they need it. The doorbell rings and a new family wants to enrol. With minimal shared language, the secretary sits with the family and finds a way to get the information to complete the form.

As the principal does a morning walk around the school he sees the 1/2 class learning a song about the different cultures in God's big family – complete with show-and-tell of traditional clothing some of the children have brought to class. The Christian Studies teacher had the same class consider initiation

experiences in different faith traditions and Christian denominations earlier in the week as a way of exploring the Christian concepts of communion and baptism.

The prep class is doing some intense work on sentences this morning using visual learning cues to ensure all can access the learning activities.

The 3/4 class are studiously silent in their Auslan lesson as they practice conversing in sign language. Having Auslan as our LOTE provides students who are already working in their second language a greater chance of success and affirms our commitment to inclusivity through support for Australia's deaf community.

The 5/6 class is exploring a theme of journeys caused by war. The students are considering what it would feel like to be displaced by events well out of their control.

### Our challenges

There are three boys in year 1 from three different cultural groups (South Sudanese, Vietnamese and Myanmarese) who are the best of friends. From the first day of prep these boys formed a strong friendship and are always seen playing in the yard together. Their parents do not have a common language to communicate or enough English to help their children learn to read in English. Our

parent teacher interviews involve the services of translators and it is a continual challenge for us to innovatively involve parents in their children's education. We have regular parent learning evenings to engage parents in gaining skills to support their children, while one of our wonderful Student Support Officers (SSOs) runs prep readiness classes covering basic literacy and how schools function. We also run English classes for parents when desired. Despite this, most of our prep students come to school without basic readiness in language. As a result, we employ skilled SSOs to work in each class during literacy and numeracy teaching each day to provide increased individual and targeted learning. Our data shows that the majority of our students entering prep without English are on par with peers from English speaking backgrounds by the end of year 1.

Last year, I was about to nod off on a bus ride to a camp north of Melbourne. One of the students said 'Mr Brennen, why are there so many trees here? I have only seen a few trees at the same time.' It is a reminder to us that closely tied to language learning is real world experience with the vocabulary you are learning about. The student and I talked about the difference between 'the country' and 'the city', 'forests' and 'parks'.

We have a core belief that families should not be excluded from a Christian education



Playing together

based on economic status. Last year we made changes in order to reduce school fees for a majority of our parents. Our school fees are among the lowest in the system and we undertake to ensure that once a child is enrolled at the school they do not leave through a change in economic circumstances. Valuable camps and excursions are funded in a manner that does not see parents bear additional cost.

There are occasions where families struggle to access health care and we provide assistance where we can. We work with local optometrists to ensure students receive glasses, and foot the bill if necessary. We are mindful of the sometimes traumatic background of our refugee students and connecting families to counselling services is an important part of our ministry. Our staff cannot ignore the background of our students or ignore what happens outside the school gate as a majority of our children come from 'at risk' backgrounds. We work to do everything we can to help whole families.

Our biggest challenge is dealing with a growing waiting list without room to expand and managing the disappointment of many families seeking a Christian education.

### Our Lutheran heritage

I was in our little hall setting up for assembly when two boys walked past and asked if I needed help. One of the boys has severe hearing loss and also comes from a non-English speaking background. In my rush to get things done I had not remembered that I needed to adjust my communication in order for both boys to understand my instructions. One of the boys noticing this, turned to the boy who could not understand what I was asking, and using sign language explained clearly to the other one what I wanted him to do and off they went. We seek to foster this very love of learning and serving others in our students, staff and community.

We seek at all times to be inclusive – regardless of learning needs, language

barriers, cultural background or financial status. God freely gave the gift of love through Christ to all and as a school we do everything we can to share this love with our community without restriction.

I firmly hold that our Lutheran ancestors would look kindly upon our school which serves a marginalised community. We recall a prime reason the Lutheran church in this country was formed was the desire of a persecuted minority to educate their children as they saw fit. Persecuted because of their beliefs, language and culture, the first Australian Lutherans were a refugee group not that dissimilar from many in the Sunshine Christian School community.

**Thomas Brennen**  
Principal  
Sunshine Christian School  
Sunshine Vic

# The St Peters Springfield experience

## A growing community

Springfield is a growing city in the south-west development corridor of Brisbane, Queensland. It's one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. The infrastructure build has been phenomenal. From December 2013 to December 2015, hospital, suburban rail connection, corporate headquarters, cinemas, retail outlets, university buildings, recreation lagoon, high density residential apartments, sporting fields and roads will have all been added to Springfield Central within one kilometre of St Peters Springfield. This extraordinary expansion is drawing thousands of new families to the region. St Peters is well placed to meet the needs of these new arrivals.

**If the Lutheran school exists solely to nurture the faith of students raised in the Lutheran church, then this limits its mission significantly.**

With this influx of families, typically with young children, the demand for schooling is high. In a year in which enrolment growth slowed in private education state-wide, St Peters Lutheran College, Springfield, has enjoyed 15% growth, understood to be the highest among independent schools in south-east Queensland.

## College demographics

St Peters Lutheran College, Springfield is a K-12 college, the daughter school of St Peters Lutheran College, Indooroopilly. Opening in 2008 as P-8 with 96 students, enrolments are currently 417 students in P-12 and 33 kindergarten students. The school has a capacity of 950, so there is more growth ahead, God willing.

The cultural diversity of our school community reflects the wider community and provides a snapshot of modern Australia. Springfield has a significant Indian population, with the suburb having been master-planned by the Springfield Land Corporation, headed by Maha Sinnathamby, a prominent Indian-Malay-Australian businessman. In our local recreation precinct, Robelle Domain, a bridge was recently opened called the 'Mahatma Gandhi Inspiration Bridge', which among other things testifies to the Indian contribution to our community. St Peters students were invited to sing the National Anthem at this event.

Moreover, an examination of the ethnic background and religious affiliation in our school data is fascinating. Our data suggests:

- » 24 languages other than English are spoken at home. Anecdotally, this is even higher, with other languages spoken at home but not reported. Interestingly, for a Lutheran school, German is not among the languages of those spoken at home by any of our families; nor is French, the foreign language taught at the college
- » 15 Christian denominations and six non-Christian religions are reported
- » Catholic and Anglican are the largest two denominational groups at our college, with a combined total of 31% of students

- » 31% of students have no religious affiliation
- » 10% of students identify as Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Bahai, Mormon or Sikh
- » 8% of students are identified as Lutherans (including those listed as 'nominal Lutheran'). This percentage has remained constant from the inception of the school as it has grown

This diversity adds to a vibrant sense of encounter and opportunity that pervades our school. Yet the last statistic reveals much about the changing nature of Lutheran schools and the challenge to the church and its mission.

If the Lutheran school exists solely to nurture the faith of students raised in the Lutheran church, then this limits its mission significantly.



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The welcome of all cultures and faiths does have implications for how to care for our students

### Intentional ministry – small things make a big difference

Providing effective ministry to our students across cultures is not complicated on the one hand, but on the other hand, it does not happen automatically. A little creative thought goes a long way. For instance, to greet students in their mother tongue provides a simple but significant point of connection. If you stop to ask students about the language they speak at home, they are usually only too happy to share some words. It is noteworthy that for some students there may be discomfort in speaking their home language at school, to staff and to fellow students. This would appear to be a lingering self-consciousness about their heritage, and a desire to fit in with and be like all the other students. Yet once they realise they have permission to be who they are and that they can teach staff and other students about their heritage, they grow in pride and ownership of their identity. Their cultural identity becomes something to celebrate rather than something to hide. Our desire is for students to find full acceptance in Christ as the basis for their sense of self and the path to this goal starts with positive interaction, particularly with staff sharing the love of Christ.

### Worship considerations

Providing authentic worship in this context requires some care. Different religions do teach different things and to pretend all religions are the same is disingenuous. The LEA policy on school worship is helpful here. The over-riding consideration is that students must not be forced to worship God. God is love and never forces his love on us, always inviting relationship and response.

If they do not profess faith in God, they are still obliged to listen to chapel presentations, classroom devotions and to complete Christian Studies subjects, and can do so without dishonouring their own faith or its traditions. The school's stance on this is made very clear at Open Day presentations, in our Prospectus and upon enrolment. In addition to this, the study of world religions in our secondary classes, is an important part of the education of our students promoting tolerance and understanding among students.

Often students who profess a different faith will hear the Christian story and want to participate. This presents a challenge. Can a Sikh read God's word publicly in worship? Can a Hindu play the part of Joseph in the Christmas nativity play?

We are guided by scriptures that clearly define the gospel as being for all, so we have chosen to include students from other cultures and faith traditions and allow their participation in worship. The gospel accounts of the visit of the Magi, Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, his encounter with the Roman centurion and other like stories are instructive. Jesus does not turn these people away because of their ethnicity or religious difference, but welcomes their worship in response to revelation in various forms without condition.

### Education and mission

St Peters Springfield was established by the St Peters College Council, aside from congregational initiative. This is not typically the story for schools of the LCA. Yet the desire for a worshipping community has seen people within the school seek to establish a congregation. A church plant commenced with the establishment of St Peters Springfield as a preaching place of St Peters Lutheran Church Indooroopilly. This provides a community for those who seek to explore their journey with Jesus more. This worshipping community is readily accessible to our wider school community. The key event is a monthly Friday

night Community Celebration which families attend for children's activities, informal worship and a community meal.

Every Lutheran school wrestles with the tension between being a place of learning, answerable to the state, and a place of proclamation of God's word through which God works to build his church. The statement *The Lutheran school as a place of ministry and mission* articulates this tension:

*The LCA is a church in mission. Thus the Lutheran school at the same time as it works in the Kingdom of the Left is also working in the Kingdom of the Right. Young men and women and staff are challenged regularly with the gospel and the Spirit does his work, as some are encouraged in their faith and others are brought to faith.*

We do not shy away from proclamation of the gospel, and provide opportunities to people of all faiths to encounter Jesus. We commit to God in prayer all members of our wider school community and we trust the Holy Spirit to call them to living faith in Jesus.

### Symbols of unity

Multicultural opportunities can become powerful symbols of unity. For instance,

Harmony Day provides an accessible opportunity to celebrate diversity. While this is a secular initiative, like many occasions (Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Grandparents' Day, etc) it provides an opportunity to speak the gospel and point people to Christ, in this case proclaiming Christ as the source of true harmony.

### A hospitable school

The welcome of all cultures and faiths does have implications for how to care for our students. Perusal of our tuckshop menu reveals vegetarian and halal options, among other dietary considerations. This initiative requires some investigation for sourcing products. Our tuckshop manager does this willingly due to her passion for providing hospitality for all, which is an expression of her faith. Through small gestures such as this our students feel included, our parents feel supported, and trust between families and the school is fostered.

### Help from our LCA partners

The support of the church's agencies is invaluable. Australian Lutheran World Service provides outstanding events and opportunities that assist the school in ministry to all of our families. Events such as annual awareness

days provide exposure to global issues of poverty, development, foreign aid, refugees, etc. In conjunction with the Christian Studies program, we have run refugee sleep-outs, which provide a simulation of Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. While providing insight into refugee issues, these sleep-outs remind our community of the importance of welcome, a crucial aspect of our outlook at St Peters. This theme has brought to light members of our own community who have experienced the refugee journey personally, in some cases due to religious persecution.

It is a joy to hear them tell their story and give voice to their experience, which becomes part of our school story.

As a school committed to continuous improvement, we seek to develop and enhance our ministry to all students. We do so confident that an inclusive approach bears witness to God's inclusive nature revealed through Jesus.

**Pastor Matt Wilksch**  
Chaplain

**Ms Jill Lange-Mohr**  
Principal  
St Peters Lutheran College  
Springfield, QLD



Can a Hindu play the part of Joseph in the Christmas nativity play?

# Celebrating our multi-cultural nature

*A crowd gathered... because each one heard them speaking in his own language... [Acts 2:6]*

St Peters Lutheran College, Indooroopilly Qld, was established by the Lutheran church in 1945 with 56, mostly Lutheran, boarding students. This year, as we celebrate 70 years of schooling, we look at our journey and our community today and recognise that St Peters has become a reflection of the growing, multicultural city of Brisbane. Our students now come from all over Australia and the world to make St Peters the largest Lutheran school in Australia, with approximately 2,000 day students and 150 boarders.

Several years ago we made the decision to line the side of our chapels with flags to celebrate the diversity within our school. These flags represent the countries in which our students and their parents were born. Currently we have 72 nations represented, from countries as near as PNG and New Zealand, to Taiwan, Vietnam, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Paraguay, Zambia...the list goes on. These flags provide a strong visual impact and a reminder of the multicultural nature of our school community.

But understanding and celebrating the heritage of our community needs to go beyond flags on the wall. It is important to avoid 'cultural tokenism', which occurs when cultural

diversity and differences are not upheld and accepted in everyday life, and amounts to little more than artefacts. Incorporating relevant, culturally based experiences and celebrations in school programs help to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for every student, family and staff member as well as increase people's understanding of, and respect for, diversity and differences.

It is important that we approach the design of our cultural celebrations with a deep respect for other cultures and for different ways of being and belonging in the world.

It is always important that these ceremonies are developed in consultation with students, staff, families and community members. There is the need for reflection and action for revitalisation or change to ensure activities remain culturally relevant and meaningful.

One way we do this is by celebrating Multicultural Week. Throughout the year at St Peters we nominate a specific week to focus on and celebrate each aspect of St Peters life. Multicultural Week each year celebrates the diversity of the cultures. This highlights one of the wonderful aspects of being a member of the St Peters' community. By participating in the activities, we hope that peoples' understanding of the principles of being truly multicultural; including the responsibilities of all members of our community, respect and fairness for each person and the benefits

that having such diversity brings, continues to be developed.

Throughout the week we focus on what it means to live and work in a multicultural school. Through our Multicultural Committee, led by a dedicated school prefect and captain, students develop, lead and run a variety of activities for the week, culminating in a whole-school celebration – one of only four big occasions in the school year that our whole school comes together. Over 2,000 students, staff and parents line the chapel forecourt area for the multicultural ceremony, and the cheering is loud as students, often dressed in national costume, walk with the flags of their countries for the 'Parade of Nations'. This can be especially empowering for some students, who often don't often speak up about their cultural background, but who can boldly stand with their flag and all that it stands for. As one student explained, 'I don't think many of my class realised where I was from until I walked with my flag, and it's given me the chance to talk about why my family moved to Australia'.

The whole ceremony is framed in a Christian service, with the Pentecost story from the book of Acts retold and the Lord's Prayer spoken in over 15 different languages by native speakers. The message of the ceremony is that God has called us into a rich and diverse community, a community of people whom he loves and calls into community with him.



'I don't think many of my class realised where I was from until I walked with my flag, and it's given me the chance to talk about why my family moved to Australia'



Over 2,000 students, staff and parents line the chapel forecourt area for the Multicultural Ceremony

We are many cultures because this is God's gift in creation, and all our lives are enriched through this diversity. And the activities are enriching – through dance, food, colour, song and other educational experiences we all have opportunities to engage with different experiences and traditions and to rejoice in the rich tapestry.

At St Peters we use the term 'multicultural' as our way of describing the fact of our diversity and of God's call to live together in that diversity. However, recognising our community as 'multicultural' is not an end in itself.

Being a 'multicultural' school community is never about providing ways of remaining separate from one another in our community groups, nor is it about assimilating us all under a traditional western Christian banner. The gospel of Christ calls us to more than that!

We can use the understanding of God as Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as how we are called to live as a multicultural community. The Trinity is not about assimilation – the Trinity is about uniqueness and unity held together. So too our calling of God in Christ as a multicultural school is not a call to assimilation. There is a more important descriptive term that speaks out of our life in Christ and of how we live our lives as this multicultural community: cross-cultural! Being a multicultural community, being cross-cultural, is about integration through respectful relationships. It is about

how we are called to live out our life in Christ through faith. It is about journeying between our own and other cultures, and showing understanding and respect.

An old Latin saying 'Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi' means 'what we pray is what we believe', and this prayer, written by a student for the multicultural celebration, sums it up beautifully:

*God of all nations, we praise you today for all the students and staff of our school. Thank you for the amazing gifts and experiences that each person brings to our school. Strengthen the bonds of friendship between peoples of all races and ages; that we may lean on each other in times of trouble. May we strive to be more like you, to love everyone despite their age, situation, values or ethnicity. We pray for acceptance and tolerance of each other's beliefs, that we can form strong relationships between cultures. Encourage us all to forgive those who have hurt us, to open our hearts to your forgiving mercy and faithfulness. Let us work in harmony together and put aside differences which come between us. Let us be patient and understanding of those around us, allowing us to work together to create a caring community of St Peters.*

*In Jesus' name we pray,*

*Amen*

Being a multicultural community, being cross-cultural, is about integration through respectful relationships. It is about how we are called to live out our life in Christ through faith. It is about journeying between our own and other cultures, and showing understanding and respect.

**Kirstin Munchenberg**  
Chaplain  
St Peters Lutheran College  
Indooroopilly Qld



..students, often dressed in national costume, walk with the flags of their countries for the 'Parade of Nations'



At St Peters we use the term 'multicultural' as our way of describing the fact of our diversity and of God's call to live together in that diversity

# I will send you out to fish for people

## OCEAN FOREST COLLEGE

A K-10 CO-EDUCATIONAL LUTHERAN SCHOOL



where small is beautiful



**And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' [Mark 1:17 NRSV]**

What a challenge that was – and is. How are we supposed to do that in Dalyellup, Western Australia. That's the question constantly on our minds as both a Lutheran college and fellowship here.

Dalyellup is fairly new and changing. It was only established in 1999 as a joint venture between property developer Satterley Property Group and the Department of Housing and Works. This means about every fifth house here is a commission house, mixing the richer with those not so rich in earthly goods.

Growth has been rapid. Census figures show the population in 2001 was 352; by 2006 it was 3,239; and in 2011, 7,109. This has continued to increase with a new suburb of about 300 homes popping up in the last 18 months, and another property developer with sites set up now to build hundreds more homes.

The demographics are also interesting with the average age of 29 years (eight years below the national average). About 30% site no religion, and 50% one or another Christian denomination. Stats say 70% were born in Australia (though many are first generation with strong ties to home countries); 7% are South African; 7% are from England. Other nationalities include New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Scotland, Filipino, and some Italian, Indian and other. There are a significant number of Indigenous people. Many of the people here came in with skills for the mining industry, and many are FIFO workers (*fly in, fly out*). A reasonable number also bought in Dalyellup as a retirement destination, and a significant, private aged care facility exists in the town.

In May this year a new shopping complex is due for completion which will make it more attractive to elderly investors.

### Of the fellowship and college

It was the vision of certain members of St Mark's Lutheran Church in Bunbury to establish a college here at the inception of the Dalyellup development. This became reality in 2003 after a number of years of hard work. The decision was made to close St Mark's, sell its property in Bunbury, and establish a new congregation in Dalyellup with the idea the college would be its home base, at least for the first years.

In the beginning, the very fact that the college was convenient, new and Christian, attracted many people from the community. Many South African families also found a home in the Lutheran fellowship that met on campus. With the establishment of an independent government high school next door, and two government primary schools with new facilities in the area, attracting new families to the college has been more challenging. The arrival of an African speaking pastor also meant many South African families shifted from the fellowship. So, at this time both the college and fellowship face new challenges in 'fishing for people'.

At a recent strategic planning session for the college one of the strong features of attraction of parents to the college is the sense of supportive community between parents, students, fellowship and staff. Families coming from all over the world value this 'village' character of care, support, and working together for the growth of our children, and also ourselves, and they wish to see this open to, and extending into, the wider community. This is something we want to promote and grow as a fellowship and college, as we step forward with the Lord.

At its tenth anniversary service (and other events) the congregation broadened its thinking about the goodness of community and invited the whole community to come join the celebration of our place and ministry in Dalyellup. We hired a bouncy castle, face painter, and had lots of picnic style games for a Sunday afternoon carnival.

The college has held a special Science Spectacular for the community, and within the college has a special dress up, activity and food day to celebrate our diverse cultures.

The pastor and principal meet regularly to pray and offer mutual support and encouragement to one another for their personal and professional lives.

In all this, like the disciples, the big picture looks far too overwhelming and keeps us on our knees praying for God's abundance AND HELP as we seek to obey his calling.

**Andrew Leske**  
Principal  
Ocean Forest Lutheran College  
Dalyellup WA

**Rev Rodney Witmitz**  
St Mark's Lutheran Church  
Bunbury WA

# Welcoming The Stranger

## Affirmations For Faith Leaders

*A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.*

*Together with faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of conscience around the world, I affirm:*

### **I will welcome the stranger.**

My faith teaches that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of my community and the newcomer.

**I will remember and remind** members of my community that we are all considered “strangers” somewhere, that we should treat the stranger to our community as we would like to be treated, and challenge intolerance.

**I will remember and remind** others in my community that no one leaves his or her homeland without a reason: some flee because of persecution, violence or exploitation; others due to natural disaster; yet others out of love to provide better lives for their families.

**I recognize** that all persons are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings. All those in my country, including the stranger, are subject to its laws, and none should be subject to hostility or discrimination.

**I acknowledge** that welcoming the stranger sometimes takes courage, but the joys and the hopes of doing so outweigh the risks and the challenges. I will support others who exercise courage in welcoming the stranger.

**I will offer** the stranger hospitality, for this brings blessings upon the community, upon my family, upon the stranger and upon me.

**I will respect and honor** the reality that the stranger may be of a different faith or hold beliefs different from mine or other members of my community.

**I will respect** the right of the stranger to practice his or her own faith freely. I will seek to create space where he or she can freely worship.

**I will speak** of my own faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faith of others.

**I will build bridges** between the stranger and myself. Through my example, I will encourage others to do the same.

**I will make an effort** not only to welcome the stranger, but also to listen to him or her deeply, and to promote understanding and welcome in my community.

**I will speak out** for social justice for the stranger, just as I do for other members of my community.

Where I see hostility towards the stranger in my community, whether through words or deeds, **I will not ignore** it, but will instead endeavor to establish a dialogue and facilitate peace.

**I will not keep silent** when I see others, even leaders in my faith community, speaking ill of strangers, judging them without coming to know them, or when I see them being excluded, wronged or oppressed.

**I will encourage** my faith community to work with other faith communities and faith-based organizations to find better ways to assist the stranger.

**I will welcome the stranger.**

**The Lutheran World Federation**  
[www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)



# Lutheran schools are richly diverse communities



With the Lutheran church being established in Australia in 1838, it took only another year for five Lutheran schools to commence – four in South Australia and one in Queensland. A fascinating part of the Lutheran education story is that two of the ‘original’ Lutheran schools were established for Aboriginal children (Piltawodli Lutheran School, Adelaide and German Station Lutheran School, Nundah, Brisbane). History tells us that the Piltawodli School, on the northern banks of the Torrens River in Adelaide, was led by German Lutheran people who were committed to listening to and learning with the Aboriginal people, endeavouring to respect their language and culture, and to understand their story. It would seem that the teaching at the German Station Lutheran School in Nundah, Brisbane, worked similarly.

The three other ‘original’ schools were set up in Hahndorf, Glen Osmond and Klemzig. These South Australian Lutheran schools were started to support the pioneer German

Lutheran families in teaching their children Lutheran doctrine, German language and culture and the Christian way of life.

One might safely assume that all students and staff were Lutheran and the dedication to nurturing the young ones into the Christian faith was steadfast.

This nurturing focus continued from 1839 until World War I with at least 171 Lutheran schools operating across Australia, at various times, and offering a sound and deep education in the German language, Lutheran doctrines and other necessary curriculum areas of learning. Sadly, all Lutheran schools in South Australia (except Concordia and Immanuel Colleges) and Queensland were closed by the respective state parliaments in 1916, and it took until the 1980s for a strong, continuous growth of Lutheran schools to commence.

From 1983 until the present year, the graph below indicates the growth of Lutheran schools (Figure 1), with an annual average percentage growth in this 32 year period in excess of 4%, albeit in the past three years, growth has slowed to between 1-2% per annum.

In 2015 there are 57 early learning education centres and 85 Lutheran schools in Australia, educating over 40,000 students and employing nearly 6,000 teaching and support staff. The 1983-2014 comparison data for staff and students in the Lutheran and non-Lutheran categories are depicted in Figure 2.

During the 19th century one could imagine the strong focus Lutheran schools maintained on quality Christ-centred education; today Lutheran schools continue to hold such in focus. However, the remarkable social, cultural and technological changes evident in recent years has also seen our Lutheran schools operating in quite a different world. This has ensured the strong focus on our Lutheran schools as Christ-centred places of care and learning continues as Lutheran Education Australia collaboratively prepares leadership, theological formation and finance/governance/risk programs for our schools. It also has meant an acceptance and recognition that the ministry of our schools is relevant and inclusive of the people in our communities. As can be seen from the LEA statistical data, Lutheran schools today serve richly diverse communities. Families from various Christian denominations and other religious backgrounds come to Lutheran schools for a Christian education for their children and a variety of other reasons.

This edition of SchoolLink contains numerous stories from Lutheran schools that tell us about the challenges of starting Lutheran schools in places where there is no Lutheran congregation. The Lutheran church has, for the most part, commenced schools which have been born out of the local congregation or parish. These stories tell us of a small Lutheran school in western Melbourne with only 94 students, but with the highest per

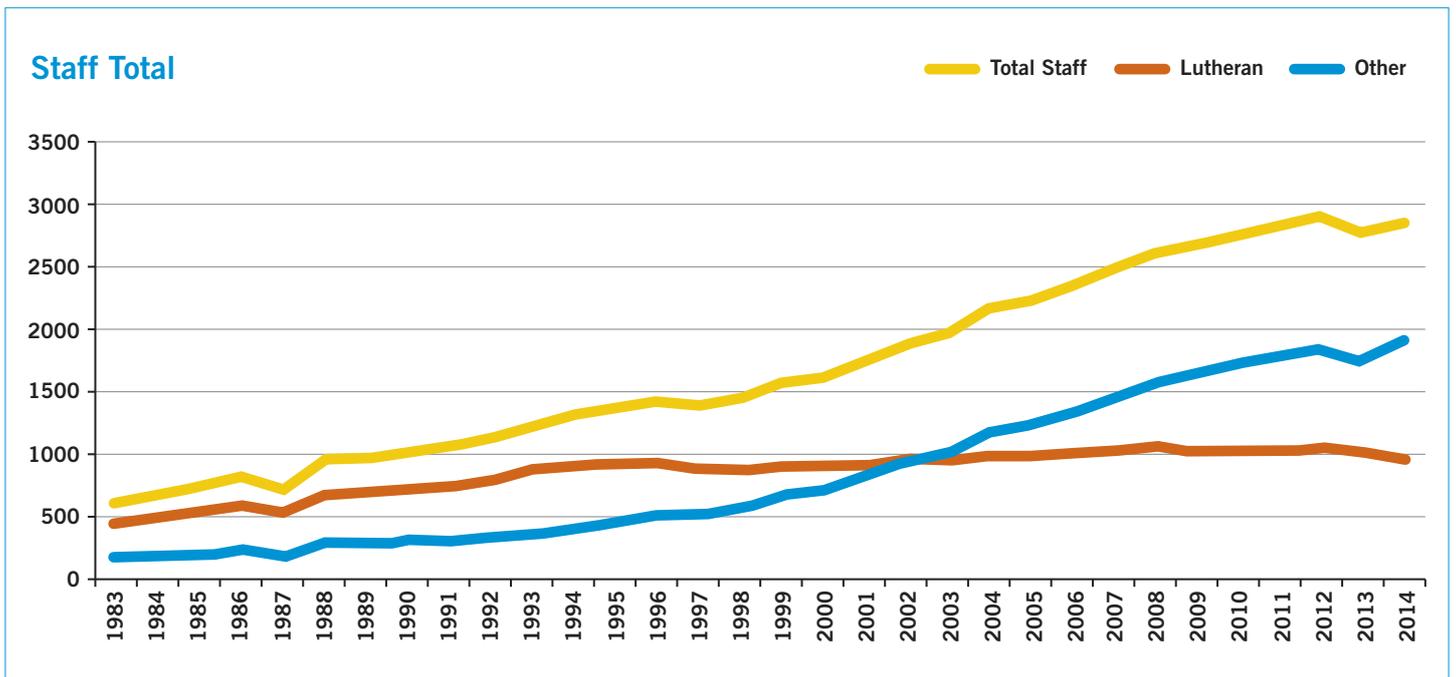
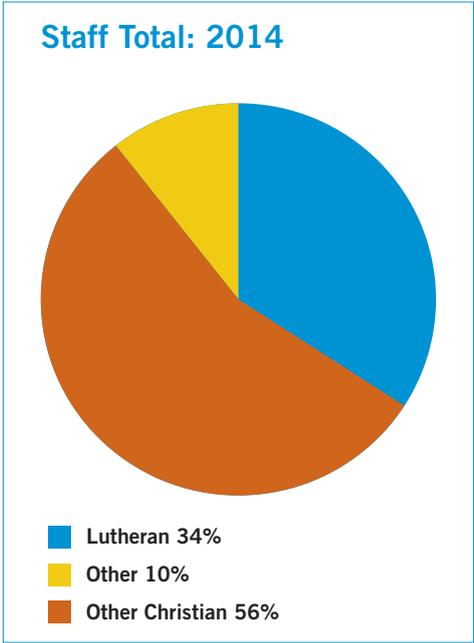
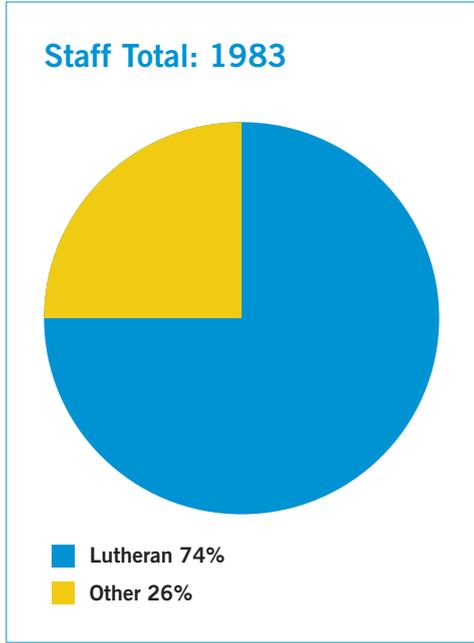
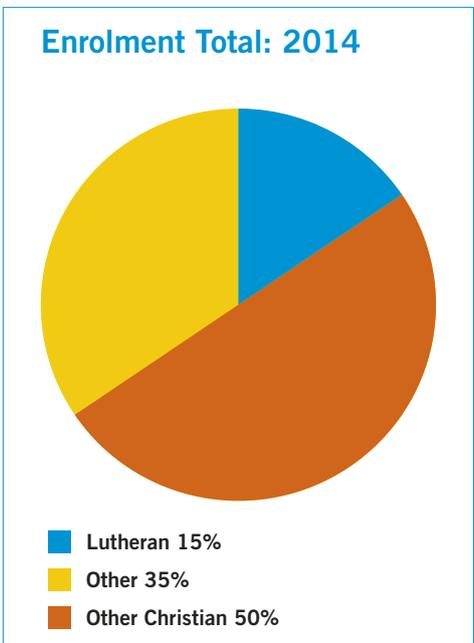
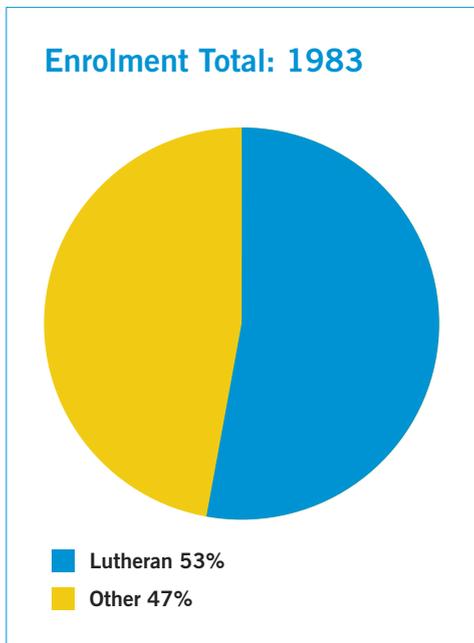


Figure 1



Photo courtesy of St Peters Lutheran College, Springfield Qld



capita number of students and families from non-English speaking backgrounds. These stories inform us of Lutheran schools calling Lutheran pastors to be a part of their communities and to explore, within each context, how we can be as Christ to all people. These stories show us how Lutheran schools can be inclusive, welcoming and loving places.

The Board for Lutheran Education Australia, together with LEA and regional and school staff, daily work through ministry joys and challenges. As the Lutheran World Federation statement Welcoming the Stranger states:

*My faith teaches that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone, the native born and the foreign born, the member of my community and the newcomer. I will remember and remind others in my community that no one leaves his or her homeland without a reason: some flee because of persecution, violence or exploitation; others due to natural disaster; yet others out of love to provide better lives for their families.*

[The full Welcoming the Stranger statement has been reproduced on page 13 of this edition of SchoolLink]

As Jesus crossed social and cultural boundaries (Luke 17; John 4) so we too want to welcome, lead and support all people in the name of Christ. This has occurred in Australian Lutheran schools in 1839; praise the Lord we have the daily opportunities to be a Christian presence in Australian society in 2015 and beyond.

May God continue to bless the people in our Lutheran schools, and the communities they serve.

**Stephen Rudolph**  
Executive Director  
Lutheran Education Australia

Figure 2

# Ministry in Lutheran schools in a multi-faith society

The church is not defined in terms of buildings, organisational structures or constitutions. The church is where the word and sacraments are.  
**Lakeside**

It is dishonest to pretend that Christians do not have points of difference with people of other faiths, and they with us. The search for truth is not served by a religious reductionism that lacks texture and taste.  
**Lakeside**

We recall a prime reason the Lutheran church in this country was formed was the desire of a persecuted minority to educate their children as they saw fit. Persecuted because of their beliefs, language and culture, the first Australian Lutherans were a refugee group not that dissimilar from many in the Sunshine Christian School community  
**Sunshine**

Being a 'multicultural' school community is never about providing ways of remaining separate from one another in our community groups, nor is it about assimilating us all under a traditional western Christian banner. The gospel of Christ calls us to more than that!  
**St Peters Indooroopilly**

The over-riding consideration is that students must not be forced to worship God. God is love and never forces his love on us, always inviting relationship and response.  
**St Peters, Springfield**

Can a Sikh read God's word publicly in worship? Can a Hindu play the part of Joseph in the Christmas Nativity Play?  
**St Peters, Springfield**

If the Lutheran school exists solely to nurture the faith of students raised in the Lutheran church, then this limits its mission significantly.  
**St Peters, Springfield**

Christianity, believing in the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, is an inclusive faith. It is based on universal love, rather than privilege of birth or place in society.  
**Bishop John Henderson**

It is important that we approach the design of our cultural celebrations with a deep respect for other cultures and for different ways of being and belonging in the world.  
**St Peters Indooroopilly**

We don't want our daughter to go to a public school. We know your school is a good school. You will not ignore her soul. You will teach her about God. You will teach her about duty to others. This will not happen at the other local schools.  
**Sunshine**

Our staff cannot ignore the background of our students or ignore what happens outside the school gate as a majority of our children come from 'at risk' backgrounds. We work to do everything we can to help whole families.  
**Sunshine**

As Jesus crossed social and cultural boundaries (Luke 17; John 4) so we too want to welcome, lead and support all people in the name of Christ.  
**Stephen Rudolph**

I don't think many of my class realised where I was from until I walked with my flag, and it's given me the chance to talk about why my family moved to Australia.  
**St Peters Indooroopilly**

The pastor and principal meet regularly to pray and offer mutual support and encouragement to one another for their personal and professional lives.  
**Ocean Forest**