



Visiting the Western District of the Western Border Parish

The 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Ballarat marks a significant milestone in the history of this Catholic community in Victoria, Australia. Established in 1874, the diocese has been a spiritual and cultural cornerstone for the region. The celebrations in 2024 included special Masses, pastoral visits by Bishop Paul and community events across various parishes, reflecting on the diocese's rich heritage and commitment to faith. These events brought together clergy, parishioners and the wider community to acknowledge the past, recognise the present and look forward to the future.

On June 8, 2024, the western district of the Western Border Parish in Victoria was graced with a special visit from Bishop Paul. His visit was a significant event for the local Catholic communities, particularly as it coincided with the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Ballarat, an occasion of deep historical and spiritual significance.

The visit began in Casterton, where Bishop Paul was warmly welcomed by Fr George Kuruvila. Fr George had prepared a modest yet heartfelt lunch for his Bishop. The meal was more than just a culinary experience; it was an opportunity for the Bishop and Fr George to engage in meaningful conversation, reflecting on the challenges and joys of pastoral ministry in the rural and remote areas of the diocese. The atmosphere was one of camaraderie and shared purpose, as they discussed their dedication to serve their parishioners and the broader Catholic community.

Following lunch, Bishop Paul took the opportunity to visit one of the parishioners. The visit was a testament to the Bishop's deep commitment to his flock, as he made time to connect with individuals of the local community. The local parishioner was honoured by the bishop's presence and their conversation was undoubtedly rich with shared memories and insights.

The next stop on Bishop Paul's itinerary was the small yet spiritually significant town of Tarrayoukyan. Here, he celebrated Mass at St Joseph's Church, a humble but cherished place of worship that has served as a beacon of faith for the local community. The Mass was concelebrated by Fr George and Fr Damian Heath, with around twenty four people in attendance. Although the congregation was small, the significance of the occasion was profound. The celebration of Mass was a moment of reflection on the enduring presence of the Catholic Church in the region, its history and the faith that has sustained generations of worshippers.

The day concluded with a warm and festive shared dinner at the home of Paddy Neeson and Anne Pekin, two cherished members of the parish community. The dinner was a fitting end to a day filled with spiritual nourishment and communal bonding. The gathering provided an opportunity for parishioners to connect with Bishop Paul in a more informal setting, sharing stories, laughter and perhaps even a few memories of past celebrations and events in the parish. The hospitality of Paddy and Anne was a testament to the strength of community ties in the parish, and the evening was marked by a spirit of joy and gratitude.



On June 9, 2024, Bishop Paul continued his journey through the Western Border Parish with visits to two important church communities: St Malachy's Church in Edenhope and St Michael's Church in Harrow. The day began with Bishop Paul's arrival at St Malachy's Church in Edenhope. The Mass celebrated by Bishop Paul and Fr George was a reflective occasion, where Bishop Paul shared messages of hope, faith and the importance of community in his homily. Following

the Mass, the parish community gathered for a shared morning tea, a tradition that has always played a vital role in fostering fellowship among parishioners. This particular morning tea was made even more special by the inclusion of delicacies from the Philippines, reflecting the diverse cultural heritage within the parish. The array of Filipino treats was not only a delight to the senses but also a symbol of the rich multicultural fabric that characterises the Edenhope community.



At midday, Bishop Paul travelled to St Michael's Church in Harrow together with Fr George, where they were greeted by a small crowd that had gathered in anticipation of the special Mass. Following Mass, the community gathered for a shared lunch, a sign that exemplifies the collegiality and strong sense of community within the parish. The lunch provided an opportunity for parishioners to also connect with one another and with Bishop Paul in a relaxed and welcoming environment. The meal was a celebration of both the spiritual and communal life of the parish, showcasing the unity and fellowship that have long been the hallmarks of the Harrow community.

On June 16, 2024, Bishop Paul continued his visit to the Western Border Parish with the celebration of Mass at Sacred Heart Church Casterton. The Mass was concelebrated by Fr George, whose dedication to his parish has been a source of inspiration and guidance for the local community. The liturgy was marked by a deep sense of reverence and joy, as parishioners reflected on the rich history of their diocese and their own personal journeys of faith. Bishop Paul's homily resonated with the congregation, as he spoke of the enduring strength of the Catholic community in the Diocese of Ballarat and the importance of remaining steadfast in faith and service.

Following the Mass, the celebrations continued in the Sacred Heart Parish Hall, where a shared dinner was held. This gathering was a true reflection of the parish's strong sense of community, as people from all walks of life came together to share a meal, stories and fellowship. The dinner was not just a social event, but a continuation of the spiritual celebration that had begun in the church. It provided an opportunity for parishioners to connect with one another and with Bishop Paul in a more informal setting, reinforcing the bonds of faith and friendship that are so vital to the life of the parish.

On Monday, June 17, 2024, Bishop Paul carried on his visit with a series of engagements that brought him closer to the young minds and educators of the region. This visit provided an opportunity for the Bishop to connect with the students and staff of three Catholic schools, reaffirming the Church's commitment to education and the spiritual growth of its younger members. The day began with a visit to Sacred Heart Primary School in Casterton. Bishop Paul, accompanied by Fr George, was warmly welcomed by the students and teachers. The visit provided a unique opportunity for the children to interact with their Bishop in a relaxed and informal setting. Bishop Paul took the time to converse with the students, engaging with them on various topics and showing a genuine interest in their lives and education. His gentle and approachable demeanour made a lasting impression on the young students, who were delighted to meet such an important figure in their Church.

Following the visit to Sacred Heart Primary School, Bishop Paul and Fr George made their way to St Malachy's Primary School in Edenhope. Upon arrival, they were greeted by the school staff and enjoyed a morning tea together, which allowed the Bishop to connect with the educators who play such a vital role in the spiritual and academic formation of the children. After morning tea, they ventured out to the playground where the children eagerly gathered around the Bishop. Bishop Paul answered their questions with patience and warmth, making the encounter both memorable and meaningful for the students. The visit then moved indoors, where the children and teachers gathered in the school hall. Here, Bishop Paul was asked a series of questions by the students, which he answered clearly and thoughtfully. His responses were not only informative but also deeply respectful of the children's curiosity and enthusiasm. The exchange highlighted Bishop Paul's commitment to nurturing the faith and understanding of the younger members of the Catholic community.

Later in the day, they visited St Joseph's Primary School in Coleraine. Bishop Paul met with the staff and students, offering them the chance to meet their Bishop in person and engage in conversation. This visit was particularly special for the pupils, as it provided a rare opportunity to interact with a senior Church leader and ask questions about their faith and the Church's role in their lives. Bishop Paul reiterated the importance of this visit in the context of the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Ballarat, emphasising the historical and spiritual significance of the occasion. Throughout the day, Bishop Paul's interactions with the school communities were marked by his warmth, accessibility and genuine care for the well-being and spiritual growth of the children. His visit was a powerful reminder of the Church's enduring commitment to education and the formation of young Catholics, and it left a lasting impact on everyone who had the privilege of meeting him.