

First Anniversary Memorial for Bishop Joe Grech, RIP

28th December, 2011: Sacred Heart Cathedral

A Reflection by Anna Tuck

My first memory of Bishop Joe goes back to the day of his consecration as Bishop of Sandhurst. This cathedral was packed, not only with the priests and people of the diocese and Bendigo but also by the bus loads from Melbourne of family, friends and members of his beloved Maltese communities. Our new, charismatic Bishop was originally from another country and culture and as he walked down the centre aisle, his face was beaming with joy and recognition of so many visitors whom he knew by name, as they reached out to shake his hand. It was easy to see later, why Bishop Joe would be given the commission by the Bishops of Australia, for the special care of immigrants, refugees and strangers to this land.

At that time, I was working in the diocese in the area of Adult Faith Education and Pastoral Development and during my first meeting with Bishop Joe, he told me of his interest in the diocesan website and his hopes of making the best use of it to communicate the Good News as frequently and widely as possible by every up-to-date means. It was very apparent that communicating, relating and "putting flesh on the Word" with faith, hope, love, passionate conviction and commitment would be some of the hallmarks of his ministry, not only here in Sandhurst but nationally and internationally especially with young people.

No doubt, all of us here tonight would have heard him on many occasions, passionately sharing his reflection on his beloved Scriptures, for our living and making a difference in today's world and experienced the conviction of his teaching and outreach to all. It was all about relationships - his relationship with his God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the expression of that relationship in his relationship with each person. He constantly assured us of God's love for us and reminded us of the unique, divine and special creation that each one of us is and the part we each have to play. Throughout his ministry here in Sandhurst, Bishop Joe supported, encouraged and participated in adult faith education and lay leadership programs at diocesan, regional and parish levels.

The symbol I bring to tonight's memorial is a crucifix. The image of the suffering Christ was always before Bishop Joe, to such an extent that he had a huge picture of the crucified Christ painted on the wall of his chapel in his home at Genazzano. No doubt we have often seen him at this lectern, with his arms raised in prayer and praise to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then extended to embrace his people like the cross bar of the crucifix.

In recent years, my relationship with Bishop Joe was as a member of the Board of

CentaCare, which has the sub-heading in its logo "Relating to People". In February this year we celebrated twenty five years of the work of CentaCare in this diocese and a commemorative booklet was prepared as part of celebrating the story. This is the token of remembrance which I also bring tonight on behalf of CentaCare, because it contains Bishop Joe's last written message to us. He wrote this a few weeks before he died, in time for the booklet to go to the publishers.

When the celebrations took place and his words to us were read out for the first time in February, it was like a message from the grave. For this reason, they were all the more powerful. Many of you may not have heard this message to CentaCare and on this night of remembering, I feel that it is fitting to share at least some of his words with you, because they also highlight Bishop Joe's own mission and ministry and one which he encourages all of us to continue to live out each day, in our relationships with our God and with one another.

Dear Friends,

In his 2006 Encyclical "God is Love" (Deus Caritas Est) Pope Benedict XVI writes: The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity.

These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could easily be left to others but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being".

In this way, the work of CentaCare is integral to the Church of this Diocese of Sandhurst. It bears witness to the beliefs and convictions of the Church, in terms of the promotion of justice and charity. It is the face of the Church out in the market place. It is the work that is motivated by the Gospels and flows from the central message of God's love for us and our call to love and respect one another.

Over the past twenty five years, CentaCare has provided this expert and dedicated care, advice and assistance to thousands of people in this diocese. Over the years, so many couples, families, young people and individuals have grown through periods of uncertainty in their relationships to become people of hope and wellbeing. Family members resolved difficulties and grew in appreciation, respect and love of each other. Some people supported, have been amongst the most disadvantaged in our communities, suffering from loneliness, mental illness and all sorts of difficulties.

**May this important ministry continue to bring hope, growth and wellbeing into the lives of so many individuals and families into the future. My congratulations to CentaCare.
God bless.**

Yours sincerely in Christ.

Most Rev. Joseph Grech, DD Bishop of Sandhurst.

We say thank you Bishop Joe, thank you to Mons. Frank Marriott and teams for Administering our diocese during the last twelve months and we say:

Rest in peace Bishop Joe but please pray that our diocese of Sandhurst will soon be blessed with the appointment of a new Bishop, in the spirit of Vatican II, to walk with us in faith, hope and love, to build on the foundations laid and to lead us into the future, with all its possibilities and challenges.