



Easter Message 2024

In November 1851, gold was discovered in Bendigo, and six months later, Dr Henry Backhaus arrived on the Bendigo diggings to minister to the approximately 15,000 prospectors who had thronged to the area to try their luck on the banks of the Bendigo creek. He celebrated the first Mass in the district in Golden Square. Despite the very rough living conditions and the long drought in the region, families began to arrive shortly after, and baptisms were soon requested. Dr Backhaus recorded the first child he baptised – a baby boy called James Joseph – and very many generations since then have been welcomed into the Church and had their names recorded in the registers of the district.

A little over twenty years later, the Catholic community was flourishing, and the four missions of St Kilian's (Bendigo), Beechworth, Heathcote and Wangaratta, were established as the Diocese of Sandhurst. This Easter, we mark the 150th anniversary of that event. There is, of course, much to celebrate as we reflect on this journey: the building of so many churches and our beautiful cathedral; the establishment of parishes; providing schools for the education of young people; offering care and outreach to those in need; the generous service of priests, religious, and countless volunteers and staff. Through all this, the fundamental blessing that we give thanks for is the commitment of our communities to living as people of Christian faith, led by the Holy Spirit, building up justice, peace and love, and proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ entrusted to us.

Over more than 170 years, our Catholic faith has been lived out and passed on in this region in times of peace and times of war, in times of prosperity and times of hardship, in times of joy and times of sadness, even in a couple of times of pandemic. At the heart of all these experiences is what we celebrate again at Easter this year: the death and resurrection of Jesus, which marks the culmination of his ministry proclaiming and inaugurating the reign of God, his utter faithfulness and unreserved love for each of us, and the power of God to bring new life in the deepest and darkest of shadows, overcoming the power of all that holds us captive, and even death itself.

As each of us makes our own contribution this year to the long tradition of Easter celebrations in this Diocese, may the generations of faithful Christians who have gone before us encourage and inspire us to make Jesus' giving of himself the pattern of our own lives, so that we might be renewed in the faith and hope that we proclaim.

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