



AN EASTER MESSAGE

from

Bishop Shane Mackinlay



We are now three months into this year of Jubilee, which we celebrate every twenty-five years after Jesus' birth. In this year's jubilee, Pope Francis has asked us to focus on our call to be Pilgrims of Hope.

Being hopeful is a deeply Christian attitude; Saint Paul speaks of faith, hope and love as the three most basic Christian virtues. So, hope is something more than looking towards the future with optimism. It's actually a call to action: to be people who put our faith into action to make the world we live in more hopeful – to bring lasting change in our world by bringing light and hope, especially in those places where people experience darkness and discouragement.

Many of the situations that we know need new hope can feel remote or beyond our influence. Homelessness, poverty, exploitation, cost of living pressures, and the suffering caused by violence, war and climate change can only be addressed by governments, corporations and large social organisations. However, the impetus for large-scale action about these issues is very much shaped by broader community awareness and concern. All of us can contribute to this by our interest and our attempts to influence attitudes, values and priorities.

At the same time, we have many opportunities for making a direct impact in our local community. A good example of this is the community garden that has recently been established at St Kilian's Church in Bendigo. It is a sign of hope in many ways: it has created a beautiful and inviting space that is good for the environment and also good for the people of this area; developing and caring for the garden is a focus for shared activity and for gathering, bringing together different age groups to work on a project together. And, almost as a bonus, it produces fruit and vegetables for a range of people in the community, including those in need. This is one of many activities where people have come together in our community to make our life together more hopeful.

As part of our celebrations for this Year of Jubilee, we have nominated five places in the Diocese which give us a particular opportunity to be pilgrims of hope, commemorating and drawing inspiration from the contribution that people of faith have made to building up hope throughout our history. As well as our Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Bendigo, we have nominated the graves of two of our most significant pioneer priests: Dr Henry Backhaus in Bendigo and Fr George Galen in Wangaratta. In what is now part of the Rutherglen parish, we have nominated a 600-year-old river redgum in Wahgunyah that was the site of the first Mass celebrated in the region, over 150 years ago. And finally, in Numurkah, we have nominated the recently established St Mary of the Cross garden and history trail, commemorating the first school established by Mary Mackillop and her Josephite sisters in Victoria.

I encourage you to visit at least some of these places of pilgrimage during this year. As well as reminding us of important parts of our history, going as a pilgrim reminds us that we are always on the way; we have a goal, but we have not yet arrived at the end of our journey.

At Easter, we celebrate that, whatever we might experience along our journey, the God revealed to us in Jesus is one whose faithful love accompanies us and strengthens us, opening new hope in even the darkest moments that appear to be the most abandoned and hopeless. It is precisely in the darkness of Jesus' death on the cross that the new life and hope of his resurrection breaks into our world. Our faith in him is the ultimate hope that guides our own pilgrimage, and all our efforts to share that hope with those around us.