



**FORMATION FOR MISSION CASE STUDY**  
**Maitland Newcastle Catholic Schools Office**  
**Aussie Camino**

**Target Participants**

This pilgrimage is open to all staff from the grounds person to the Principal. It is also available to all CSO personnel and other members of the Diocese. It is intergenerational and interreligious.

**Aim of the Program**

“Spirituality is a constellation of different activities” (*Across the Great Divide: Bridging Spirituality and Religion Today*, Ranson, D. 2002, p. 18) The program aims to provide an entry point for all staff (Catholic and other than Catholic) engaged in service to families and students, to explore their spirituality through an experience of ‘Camino’. Unlike traditional formation programs, this engages in the kinaesthetic spirituality of walking. English Priest, Daniel O’Leary writes: “All we have to do is start walking. As we walk we become lighter, leaner, looser. We see more clearly as we gradually become more empty. And the more empty we become, the more room there is for God to fill us.”

It aims to provide significant space for reflection, prayer and journey in the spirit of Mary Mackillop – a woman of courage, integrity, forgiveness and hope. “Attending” (Ranson, 2002, p.19).

The pilgrimage aims to provide space for theological reflection on life, work, family and faith through accompaniment and dialogue. It provides a space for those (many) who are no longer formally connected to the institution of the Church to encounter Christ through creation and fellowship. It assists participants to move from a contemporary understanding of spirituality as “ego-therapy” into a deeper understanding of the Hebrew context that spirituality is “concerned with force and energy, a vitality in life, a coming awake’ an increased awareness about life and a deepened sensitivity to its murmurs and rhythms.” (Ranson, 2002, p.17) “Spirituality is attention combined with intention.” (Simone Weil cited by Ranson, 2002, p.17)

Camino aims to heighten an awareness of a deeper relationship with ourselves, with others, with the world and to provide space for a greater consciousness of meaning as a result and a desire to change the way we live. A moment of metanoia. Through its very openness to diversity it challenges all pilgrims to a personal encounter with Christ through witness, and experience: from atheist to Monsignor.

The Camino experience, it is hoped, will also renew the spirit and commitment of staff who are weary. This provides a positive energy and approach to faith which has been sadly lacking. The benefit of this is that it makes others interested, and acts as a point of evangelisation. It forces staff to talk and reflect about their faith because other pilgrims who are sometimes there for reasons other than spirit on the Camino, ask those questions of them in a very natural and interested way. It takes people out of their “Catholic Bubble” and places them in a position where they explain why they are on pilgrimage. They become accountable for their faith. I saw one of our staff challenged

by another pilgrim who said to them “if you are not committed to Catholicism why are you working for the Catholic System, why are you there?” The conversation which followed surprised even the staff member. They discovered within themselves a surprising depth of faith which I feel had lain dormant for some time. They discovered a passion they had forgotten. This experience is the only one that I have seen do this so effectively for people who are “Professional Catholics” in a sense. This is not captured in evaluation sheets, these are the anecdotal gifts along the way.

### Description of the Program (design, content, processes)

Camino is designed to take people out of their comfort zones and into liminality: the place where heaven meets earth, the place where Jesus waits. It strips you at each stage, of yet another piece of unnecessary baggage, until lighter, we walk more gently through life. The experience can ravage, soothe, surprise and challenge. No-one goes unchallenged.

Uniquely Australian, this pilgrimage is raw, it's tough and it forces you to dig deep into your psyche and soul., Luke Mills is founder of the Aussie Camino. He has registered and developed the route. Details to pilgrimage with Luke can be found via the following link:

<http://www.aussiecamino.org/wordpress/>

The Maitland Newcastle the Camino begins with travel from Newcastle to Melbourne.

“The Aussie Camino is a 230km long trail from Portland (Victoria) to Penola (South Australia) in recognition of St Mary Of the Cross MacKillop and the pioneering priest Fr Julian Tenison Woods. It borrows from the traditions of the ‘Way of St James’ – better known as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.” (Excerpt from *The Guide to Aussie Camino* written by Luke Mills) Unlike St James Way the distances and accommodation are a bit non-negotiable unless you have a support vehicle which I would recommend, to make the pilgrimage more accessible. The walk itself was seven days long, with the longest day being 38.5 km. Accommodation is primarily in regional pubs with an average over- night cost of \$50. Luke has adapted this a little since our pilgrimage, making this day into two and overall walking -eight days. For Maitland -Newcastle our pilgrimage including to and from Melbourne was ten days.

Each day began with a reflection on Mary MacKillop, Mass was celebrated wherever and whenever we could, but this was optional because of the diversity of the group.

The value of the walk lay in its space for reflection and dialogue about life, the big questions and faith. It also lay in the eclectic nature of the group. We deliberately did not fill the pilgrimage with only our people, but left the two groups open for others from other walks of life to join us: Ages ranged from thirty -five to eighty; belief from atheist to Monsignor; professions from Principals to grounds person and doctors; experience of pilgrimage from none to many; relationship status from single to widowed with everything in between. This resulted in rich and deep conversations from charism to abortion, death, grief and same sex marriage to name a few. Atheists challenged believers and believers challenged atheists in respectful and ongoing sharing. No-one left the pilgrimage untouched in some deep way. Catholic teachers engaged in spirited conversations with state schoolteachers who wanted to understand why teaching in a Catholic school was important and or different. Camino makes room for pilgrims to articulate what they believe and why they believe. It is an unfolding experience which awakens and frees the spirit from the cacophony and noise of life.

### The four principles of formation (*Framework*, p14) that are most evident in participant evaluation

**Formation of the heart:** This pilgrimage opened up space for each participant to listen with the ear of their feet, to their spirit and the whisper of God. It is possible to find something of your soul on this journey. Jesus is encountered in the people beside you and the characters from the wonderful coastal and rural communities of regional Australia. Walking through the Australian landscape is to experience the scripture of this great and beautiful land, with its breathtaking and wild coastline, the wide- open spaces of stock routes and pine tree forests. It is a place of deep silences, never ending sands, roaring winds and hail, a place of forged friendships, tears, prayer and laughter. It is an experience of God through communal and personal reflection and prayer an encounter with the revelation of God through creation. It is an experience of discomfort and disturbance which awakens a stilled yearning and enables a question to emerge.

**Respectful, experiential and relevant building on participants personal story and everyday reality:**

This pilgrimage is a doorway for new-evangelisation. It opens a doorway for those who are disconnected and or experiencing disenfranchisement with institutional Church. Research tells us that the faithful are generationally missing from practicing their faith in a formal way and that they describe themselves as 'spiritual' rather than religious. The same is indicated in evaluations. Being able to be in dialogue over a period of time that is characterized by respectful accompaniment is a path towards renewal.

**Is explicitly Christological:** The experience of a Camino is very much grounded in life, death and resurrection. At the heart of the Camino is an experience of living the Paschal Mystery. Pilgrims travel through pain, fatigue, exhaustion, a myriad of small deaths, to the luxuries of blister free feet, pack free backs or privacy; journeying each day in fellowship, and encountering humanity at its very best; walking with humility, pilgrims share astounding stories of grief or hardship and joy. They then fall exhausted into bed, only to rise again full of optimism in the new day. For many, this is a time of dealing with grief in life and a chance for renewal. On our second Camino, a pilgrim, not from our Diocese, revealed she was carrying the ashes of her husband. This brought an entirely new understanding and sacredness to our journey together. The sharing of life stories along the way by companions is an experience of forgiveness hope and life. These connections emerge along the track sometimes naturally and sometimes facilitated by the leader/s. The theological principle which springs to mind is that of a Catholic Sociology, moments of deep relationship which are trinitarian in nature, magnified by creation, personhood and heart. The Camino provided daily opportunity for pilgrims to reflect on the scriptures individually or as part of the morning reflection. This was in addition to the Pilgrim guide provided by the Aussie Camino. Whilst Mass is optional because not all pilgrims are Catholic, Mass is offered in parish communities and if you have a priest as we did, then along the track. These were extremely powerful moments, and in fact were attended by nearly all pilgrims. One the first pilgrimage, we celebrated Palm Sunday in Mt Gambier... it was a powerful pilgrimage towards The Passion.

**Is differentiated according to individual and community needs:** The Camino is a pilgrimage for all ages, races and creeds. It crosses "the great divide, between spirituality and religion" (Ranson, 2002) providing an entry point back to Jesus at a time when the Church has lost its moral authority. It's a space where respectful conversation about any topic is welcomed and theologized. It challenges everyone, even the most fit, sometimes in the most surprising ways. It meets a growing interest in our only Saint and brings some interrogation and exploration of a Catholic Historicity and Spirituality. All are welcome on Camino and their purposes for attending are as vast as the ocean.

### Selection of participants

Interested pilgrims were required to attend information and formation sessions. There was no need to 'cull' participants because all were welcome. When the pilgrimage was full, a waiting list was developed. The only caution was the necessity for a certain level of good health as it did involve significant exercise. Both pilgrimages filled quickly. There is already a high interest in the possibility of the pilgrimage being run again, from both school and diocesan staff, but also from parishes. This pilgrimage has the capacity to build church.

### Mode(s) of Delivery/Facilitation

This has a couple of different modes of delivery.

*Prior to the pilgrimage:*

Formation and information is provided about the concept of pilgrimage and in particular – Camino. A personal experience of Camino is shared during this time.

Walking formation and preparation: The practical and the sacred became one as we walked a few pre-camino walks, developing relationships and community prior to departure. These were also begun with prayer. Pre- reading on Mary MacKillop and the Josephite charism was provided for participants by myself.

*During the Pilgrimage*

Luke Mills, or the designated leader, facilitates the practical aspects of the experience during the pilgrimage itself. Luke has also planned the daily morning reflections. A small prayer book on the charism of Mary MacKillop was provided for the pilgrimage itself for daily reflection by our office. Scripture was included in this. Mass was celebrated at the beginning, during and at the completion of the Camino. Speakers were available at different points of the Camino to share the history of significant sites and the journey of Mary MacKillop. Access and speakers were provided at the MacKillop Centre in East Melbourne, the school in Portland and also to MacKillop place in Penola.

*Post Camino*, a dinner was held at which a formation and evaluation session was held and future directions discussed.

### Frequency of Program

This happened twice in 2017 and is anticipated to take place twice in 2018, for roughly twenty people in total.

*See update at the end of this document.*

## **Program funding/costs**

*Budget breakdown for employees of The Catholic Schools Office (NB) These pilgrimages were designed to run into school holidays, so pilgrims were expected to give up part of their holiday break. (This is not always the case, depending on timing of the pilgrimage).*

### **School pays**

Pay Registration cost

1 x Casual Release Day

(Employee to negotiate with Principal - Casual release may be an RFF day. Every school, however, allocates a budget for PD for their staff. Retreats are included in this)

### **Participant pays**

Airfares

Accommodation for 10 nights

Food etc. for entire walk

### **CSO Pays**

4 x Casual Release Days

### **What is included with registration and Package**

1. CSO subsidy / release for employees of The Catholic Schools Office
2. 2 breakfasts
3. Transport from Melbourne to Pilgrimage start(Portland) and return transport to Melbourne from Pilgrimage end(Penola).
4. Shared bathrooms
5. Guide/s
6. Support vehicle to carry luggage and food

### **What's not included**

1. Airfares
2. 2 nights of Melbourne Accommodation before and after organised by Pilgrim (ALL PILGIRMS) [8 nights of accommodation (pub accommodation \$30 - \$50 per night-organised by Pilgrimage guide )
3. Bring own snacks (Participants often buy this before leaving and transport in luggage )
4. Lunch and dinner (pack your own lunch)
5. 6 breakfasts not included – options are available on pilgrimage
6. Ensuites
7. Single accommodation
8. Personal Travel Insurance – strongly recommended.
9. Day pack – personal first aid

### **Identification of participants' needs**

Needs is a broad descriptor.

Need to attend is not judged by the organisers. This is personal and can be for a huge range of reasons. If the pilgrim has their Principal or Head of Department permission they are deemed eligible. Sometimes a pilgrim is identified or targeted by a Principal.

### **Evaluation methods and the broad results of evaluation**

An Evaluation forum was held, during which post -Camino formation was also completed.

Written responses were recorded for future reference. However, the most significant form of evaluation is always the unexpected:

- The emergence of a group of interested people who have indicated a desire to form a “Friends of the Camino Group” and who will assist in the ongoing preparation and delivery of the spirituality of Camino for sustainability into the future;
- A number of the group have discovered a sense of community and have continued to walk together. The ongoing benefits and possibilities are still being explored not only professionally but in spiritual terms
- a number of the group have returned to their work places with a greater commitment to the charism of the Josephite tradition – as a result other formation opportunities are being planned to support these pilgrims and their school communities through an engagement with strategic formation planning;

### *Evaluation continued*

- Principals: A least one pilgrim principal used it as a means to blog every day with his entire community, sharing his thoughts on faith and life as he walked the seven days. He has spoken of the impact this has had on his staff but also his parent body. It has a question in others hearts about their faith.
- Principals also spoke of the time as one that provided clarity around significant decisions that needed to be made within their school, communities and highly recommended it as a pilgrimage of values for the CSO leadership team.
- one pilgrim returned home, entered her studio and painted her response. These portraits of Mary McKillop are included in the images. These images and her sharing will be used in 2018 as part of a faith, story, witness opportunity.
- One of the significant bridges is a connection between parish and life. Two Parishes in the Diocese have contacted me with an interest to also participate. This will bring another connection and dialogue between those who are connected to Parish life and those who are not. Relationship is the key.
- Significantly I have had a number of young teachers also express an interest in this style of pilgrimage.
- The increased interest and value of Australia's first saint is continuing to reverberate through our community. The result of this will be the development of a specific formation opportunity on Mary of Cross – woman of faith.
- One Josephite school as a result of the pilgrimage are looking to reignite their charism by sending staff over a period of time on the Camino.
- Our Diocese is now looking at working together (CSO and Diocese) to plan a Camino within our Diocese to walk in the footsteps of the charisms which formed us.

This Catholic Sociology grounded in a Trinitarian theology has great promise.



One of the pre formation sessions: Walk and talk



Prayer, reflection and then starting the days walk



**Through rain and hail**



**Penola at last!**



***Painted response to the Camino***

By one of the Pilgrims,  
a secondary Religious Studies  
Coordinator and artist: **Rose McAllister**



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**UPDATE: APRIL 2019**

Maitland Newcastle launched the “aMeN Camino” in May 2019. Just over 100kms this is an opportunity to taste a kinesthetic spirituality and perhaps whet a desire to experience other Caminos. Traveling through vineyards, the Watagan Mountains, around Lake Macquarie, following the Newcastle beaches and concluding at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, pilgrims are challenged through pub stays, to be witnesses at a time when many are disaffiliated from the Church. This is a journey of the outer and inner universe, an experience of Christ in Creation. **aMeN to that!**