



**St Pat's Community Support Centre  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Speech**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**

St Pat's Community Support Centre, Fremantle  
Thursday 1 December, 2022

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for coming together this afternoon to celebrate this very significant occasion in the life of Saint Patrick's Community Support Centre.

Michael has already very warmly welcomed you all so I hope you will understand if I do not run through the list of all the many dignitaries who have gathered with us this afternoon. Let me simply say that, in a very real sense, every single person here is a VIP, a very important person, so rather than singling anybody out I just want to say welcome to you all.

Anniversary celebrations are always important occasions, and today's celebration is certainly no exception. As you would understand I attend many such anniversary celebrations, but today's is, in my mind, one of the most significant. Fifty years ago, Brother Ignatius Hannick, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, came across an elderly man sheltering under a tree, quite close to Saint Patrick's Basilica. Given that at the time Fremantle had something of a rough reputation and had become a haven for people who in one way or another had been shunned or excluded from other parts of society - people who, in Pope Francis's words, were on the margins - the site of a homeless man would not have been all that uncommon. It seems, however, that there was something about this man which touched the heart of Brother Ignatius. He went back into the presbytery, gathered what was left over from the community meal, and took it out to give it to the man. It was not very long before Brother Ignatius, with the help of the presbytery housekeeper, was regularly preparing up to one hundred hampers to give people who would queue up on the Presbytery veranda.

How often has this kind of story been told in the long history of Christianity! So often great works of mercy and charity begin from very simple and humble beginnings. If you walk from Saint Mary's Cathedral in Perth, down Victoria Avenue towards the river, and pass between Mercedes College on one side and the Cathedral Presbytery on the other, it is good to remember that this very significant Catholic Girls College owes its origins to the extraordinary courage of eight young women who set out on the long sea voyage from Ireland to Australia in 1846, leaving behind them all that they knew and loved, in order to bring, in a very concrete and practical way, the teachings and love of Jesus Christ to the recently-established colony.



This is just one example which has been repeated over and over again. The Catholic presence in Perth itself began in similarly humble circumstances. Both for those first Sisters of Mercy, and for the Benedictine monks who arrived with them under the leadership of Dom Rosendo Salvado, the words which Jesus spoke about himself, were almost literally true: *foxes have burrows and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*. Given the origins of the Christian faith – given, that is, that Jesus was born in a rundown stable; that he and his family were refugees, who had to leave their homeland in order to escape persecution; and that Jesus himself was, in a sense, often homeless, wandering from town to town, spreading his message of love and forgiveness - it is no wonder that those who take their Christian faith seriously should be especially sensitive to the plight of the homeless, the lost, the despised, the misunderstood, and the marginalised.

For fifty years it is this sensitivity, this compassion, and the example of total self-giving which is in every way the defining characteristic of the life and mission of Jesus, which have been the inspiration and the driving force of those who have ensured that Saint Pat's Community Support Centre continues to exist and to flourish.

We are very fortunate in the Catholic Church at the moment to have Pope Francis as a leader. He is constantly reminding us that we must be what he calls "a poor Church for the poor": that is, a Church which is on the side of the poor. Very early on in his time as Pope he gave an interview - something which, prior to Pope Francis, was a very rare event for a Pope. In that interview, when asked to speak about his understanding of the Church's role in society, Pope Francis used an expression which has become famous, at least in Catholic circles and possibly even beyond. "*The Church*," he said, "*is like a field hospital. When a wounded soldier is brought into the field hospital, the doctors do not begin by checking the soldier's cholesterol or blood sugar levels. They begin by treating the soldier's wounds. First heal the wounds. Everything else can come later.*"

This, the Pope insisted, is the mission of the Church today: to be a healer of wounds. Francis then went on to say, "*and not just a healer of wounds but a warmer of people's hearts*". I suspect there is no better description of the work of Saint Pat's community centre than this: that it seeks to be a healer of people's wounds, and a warmer of people's hearts. And, of course, there is probably no better description of the daily ministry of Jesus than to say he went about healing people's wounds, be they physical, emotional or spiritual, and warming people's hearts.

Today we are gathering for three reasons. The first is to thank God first and foremost, and then all those who have allowed God to work through them for the last fifty years, for the healing of wounds and the warming of hearts which has changed and enriched the lives of so many. The second is to thank God first and foremost, and then all those who allow God to work through them, that still today people can come to have their wounds healed and their hearts warmed through their contact, not just with the services Saint Pat's offers but more importantly, with the people who offer those services. And thirdly, to ask God to continue to raise up people who have eyes to see the needs of others, ears to hear their cries, and hearts that drive them to reach out with compassion, with tenderness and with care.



On my own behalf, and on behalf of the whole Catholic community of the Archdiocese, I want to express my admiration and my gratitude to all those who, in so many different ways, have continued the work begun by Brother Ignatius Hannick all those years ago. As we sometimes say in Catholic celebrations: *ad multos annos* .... may this continue for many more years to come.

Thank you.