in the palm of God’s hand, Rhys’ story

A little boy aged ten has had a profound effect on the lives of his school community.

Rhys Donaldson died on Monday April 7, 2014.

He was much a loved pupil of John Paul II Catholic School, Rokeby, having started there in Kindergarten and continued until this year when he was in Grade 5.

Principal, Jim Ireland, says that during his time at the school Rhys created many positive and fun-filled memories. “He was determined, stubborn and very courageous,” says Mr Ireland, “He loved a challenge and was adventurous. He had an infectious smile and loved to interact with his peers and other adults.”

Rhys suffered from Duchenne muscular dystrophy, had little speech and spent most of his life in a wheelchair. Nevertheless, he taught everyone he met important lessons such as: seize the moment; live life to the full; have a go and not be afraid to tell people what you want and feel; share your life with others and be involved.

Rhys had a unique ability to make friends and unite people. Two weeks before his death, he packed out John Paul II Church with family and friends who came to witness his Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. He had a special bond with his teachers and teacher assistants especially Belinda Raphael. Belinda made many memorable home and hospital visits during the last few months of Rhys’ life. Rhys loved those visits!

“It was a true example of an authentic Catholic school in action and doing God’s work as we are called to do.”

Rhys had the support of a loving family. He was the son of Sue and Steve Donaldson and a brother to Daniel, Mitchell, Liam (his deceased twin), Nikki, Aleesha and Tayla.

Principal Ireland thanked his staff for their pastoral care of the whole Donaldson family in their time of crisis. “All staff members” he said, “were wonderful support with visits during Rhys’ time in hospital, class prayer, attending Rhys’ funeral and by organising the gathering event after the funeral. It was a true example of an authentic Catholic School in action and doing God’s work as we are called to do.”

His time at John Paul II showed how inclusive and caring a school community can be, but also what wonderful qualities children living with disabilities can often bring to those around them.

Rhys loved his classmates and they loved him. He loved going to church with his class and the opportunity to go up and get a blessing. Rhys was always close to God and was very spiritual in his visits to the church.

Rhys knew how to seize the moment. He was selected to present the cheque to Archbishop Adrian Doyle for funds that the school had raised for Caritas. When the Archbishop leaned over to receive the cheque Rhys thought it’s now or never and he kissed the Archbishop on the cheek. We can only guess who was the most surprised!

In the week after Rhys died, his class was meditating and one of Rhys’ classmates, Tom, said “I saw Rhys in heaven. He looked happy and he didn’t need his wheelchair.”

As Principal Ireland said at his funeral, “Farewell little man. Thanks for sharing your special gifts with us – you taught us all so very much about life. May God hold you in the palm of His hand.”
from the director

At a recent Principals’ meeting, the questions were asked, “Are our schools too middle class?”; “Do we reach out sufficiently to those families who struggle through unemployment, mental illness or other disadvantage?”; “How can we better care for the educational needs of the children who come each day to our schools from disadvantaged Tasmanian families?”

Principals shared many ways in which they do strive to meet the challenge for our schools to be affordable for all through subsidy or waiving of fees, breakfast clubs, uniform provision for students in need, intensive Language courses for new humanitarian entrant and migrant families, additional funding for Students with Disabilities, and other strategies. However, it was universally agreed that all these actions, while important, are not as crucial as the respect and warmth of welcome and quality of relationship we extend to those families who struggle or don’t enjoy the advantages that most of us take for granted.

We want students at risk through family poverty or a disadvantaged background to feel accepted and at home in our schools and we need to take steps to provide for their learning and well-being. Pope Francis tells us:

“Jesus, the evangeliser par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf Mt 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life.” (Evangelii Gaudium 209)

We recommit our Catholic schools to be available and open to all who desire and support a Catholic Education, regardless of their capacity to pay or their social and economic background.

what is a quasquicentennial?

Sacred Heart Catholic School in Ulverstone is celebrating its 125th Anniversary (Quasquicentennial) on the weekend of June 28 – 29 with a range of activities to suit everyone.

On Saturday, June 28, there will be a cocktail party at Sacred Heart Catholic School, 1 Buttons Avenue, Ulverstone at 7.00pm. Cost is $25 pp and includes a welcome drink and canapés.

On Sunday, June 29, Archbishop Julian Porteous will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving at Sacred Heart Church, Alexandra Rd, Ulverstone at 9.00am. Mass will be followed at 10.30am by a talk from Sr Josephine Brady rsj on the Story of the Sisters of St Joseph in North West Tasmania.

Earlier in the week, the children of the school will be experiencing some of what life was like 125 years ago with ‘olden days’ activities to be held on Thursday, June 26, to mark the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

Successful Conference

Congratulations go to the team at the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office who ran a most stimulating conference in May at the Old Woolstore Hotel in Hobart. Over 200 delegates heard several top class speakers and presenters and gained much to take back to their classes. There was an excited buzz for the whole two days it was held.

Watch this space for lots of pictures from this fabulous event in our next issue!!

Dr Trish Hindmarsh
Director of Catholic Education

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Graphic Design: Cherie O’Meara. Photography: Mary-Anne Johnson and school contributors. Veronica from St Cuthbert’s Catholic School Lindisfame is our cover girl. She was at a special gathering at the school to meet Archbishop Julian. More shots from the day can be seen on p 5.
Holy Week was commemorated in our Catholic schools in diverse ways. We have photos of the palms and a donkey or two from St Therese’s Moonah, Stella Maris Burnie and St Mary’s Hobart; Stations of the Cross from Sacred Heart Geeveston and St Aloysius Kingston as well as several fundraising initiatives for Project Compassion.

During Holy Week at Geeveston, the Grade Six Class at Sacred Heart Catholic School organised a day of activities for the whole school to experience a little bit of what children in developing countries have to do to survive and make the most out of life. The students made soccer balls out of newspaper, made maracas out of recycled newspaper and carried buckets of water on their heads around the cross country track among other fun learning experiences. On the last day of term the students brought their Project Compassion boxes along and filled a chalk drawing of the Brazilian flag.

At St Aloysius, the Vinnies students organised Purple Day for Peace celebrating the central mystery of our faith at both the Huntingfield and Kingston campuses. They raised over $1000 for Project Compassion.

Holy Rosary Catholic School in Claremont had a Loom Day fundraiser organised by two Grade 4 students, Jorja and Kate, to raise money for Caritas. Loom Bands are the latest craze and the students made some incredible creations. For a gold coin donation they could wear their bands, bracelets, earrings etc. Proud principal, Bernie Brooks praised the initiative of two young students who wished to make a difference and made $350 from this day.

Mr Andrew Pinelli, head of St Virgil’s Junior School in Hobart, had to pay the price for daring students to make a $300 coin line for Project Compassion. He is pictured in his bunny costume!

The coin line at St Virgil’s was very impressive with its message, ‘Live life to the full!’
HAVE LIFE TO THE FULL!
Back in September last year, when Archbishop Julian was installed in his role as chief pastor of the Church in Tasmania, he decided to visit all the Catholic schools and colleges in the Archdiocese. He’s been so busy with many initiatives, meetings and trips for all sorts of different work, that he hasn’t quite managed it … yet.

So far, the Archbishop has introduced himself formally to students at more than sixteen Catholic schools around the state and he is determined to continue until he gets to know students at all 37 schools and colleges better.

Pictured are students at St Cuthbert’s Catholic School in Lindisfarne and St Thomas More’s Catholic School in Newstead. The word is around that the Archbishop likes to question students when he meets them and everyone at both schools was well prepared with some great answers!

The children receive a card to remind them that the most important person at any Catholic school is Jesus.
Catholic schools are never firstly about the buildings, but about people. However, good facilities enable an enriched education for our children and those in our schools are being improved continually as funds become available.

Connections was at the Blessing and Official Opening by Archbishop Julian of the refurbishment of the Prep, Grade One and Grade Two building at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Launceston. This impressive site includes Lego-inspired and jigsaw-inspired ceilings!

We also have photos of the official opening and blessing of the new Edmund Rice Centre at St Patrick’s College, Launceston, by the Federal Member for Bass, Mr Andrew Nikolic and the Vicar General Fr Mark Freeman, as well as some new building work at St Virgil’s College in Austins Ferry which will greatly enhance the learning environment of the students there.
Physical Education Teacher Ross Hubble from St Brendan - Shaw College in Devonport has recently returned from an exchange to Taiwan sponsored by the Devonport North Rotary Club. At 197 cm (6 ft 6 in) tall, Ross really stood out from the Taiwanese. He felt like a celebrity, he said, when he was repeatedly asked for his height.

Ross ate exotic foods, enjoyed Taiwanese hospitality and learned about the Taiwanese educational system. With limited skills in Mandarin, he gave some sports lessons using mainly gestures and facial expressions. The trip led him to think more Tasmanian students should learn Mandarin at school.

He saw some interesting features of school life in Taiwan, such as teachers and students sleeping in class during the day; students being responsible for cleaning the school; and students being discouraged from asking questions as that would dispute the teachers’ knowledge.

Nevertheless, the key factor he found was relevance of what was studied to the students’ futures. I wonder what the Taiwanese thought of us?

In May, Smithton students celebrated the Feast of St Peter Chanel, patron of their school. Students were divided up in house team groups and participated in four activities. All teams participated keenly and everyone encouraged each other. The special day concluded with an afternoon Mass where the Junior Joeys led prayers.

The Year 5/6 STCPPSSA* Primary Football Round Robin was held at Dominic College, Glenorchy, on Friday May 9. The conditions were glorious with over 200 students from Dominic College, Corpus Christi, Holy Rosary and St Brigid’s taking part with all teams playing between four and six matches of AFL football. The excitement and joy surrounding the day was something to be witnessed with all teams giving their best and showing extremely good sportsmanship. Congratulations to all schools involved and thanks to all of the parents, friends and students who helped make the day such a tremendous occasion.

*Southern Tasmanian Catholic Primary Schools Sports Association