

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

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faith story

I would like to think that my faith journey began the day I was born into a loving family and extended family. I learnt from an early age that family was the most important part of culture, sharing, caring and giving.

My journey begins with my mother Marjory Watson, who was born at Noonkanbah in the Kimberley in 1914 on the Fitzroy River of the Nyikina tribe. My mother was taken away and sent to Beagle Bay mission on the Peninsula 80kms from Broome where there were Sisters of St John of God and German Pallottine Fathers and Brothers who ran the mission. Mum did not talk much of what happened but said she loved the Sisters and Fathers to bits. She went about her learning and loved religion. Mum was baptised there. She missed her family deeply though during that time.



On her return to Derby she worked as a housekeeper before marrying my Dad which lasted 53 years before Dad died. Mum always had in the corner of the room statues of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the Saints. This was where prayers and the Rosary were said. Our place became a place where Bishop Raible, Sisters and Priests would come as there was no church or presbytery in Derby in the early years. They were always welcomed in our home. I remember Bishop Raible would play our old Pianola.



In 1954 the first Catholic school opened in Derby. I was 8 years old and one of 20 students that attended the school. The school was situated at the back of the old corrugated iron church. Sister Ignatius was our first teacher and besides doing school work we would spend time cleaning and polishing the brass. For me it was a time where I could be with God to talk to and feel his love, and realise that I was special. I wish that all kids could have that opportunity to experience of belonging. That's where the scripture classes began and the understanding about what being a Catholic meant. Beside my parents the Sisters of St John of God and the Pallottine Fathers played a part in developing my faith journey. The Sisters prepared us for life, to have the ability to be part of church and for young Aboriginal girls a message/creed for living.

Moving to Perth and wanting my children to have the same experience of my faith journey, I turned up to the local church to find I was the only Aboriginal person there. But my trust in God and the love He had for us kept us going. I was commissioned as a Catechist for the Archdiocese of Perth and Special Minister of the Eucharist. I taught scripture to after-school children at my then parish church for ten years. When you let the love and trust of God into your life everything falls into place.

The passion for Catholic Aboriginal Education and equality led me to join the Catholic Education Office and they gave me the opportunity to keep pursuing and learning and building on my faith journey. At this time I joined the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in the 1980's, of which I became Chairperson and thus part of NATSICC. Being part of NATSICC led me to meet so many Aboriginal people also passionate about their faith. I was there when the elders wrote the Aboriginal prayer. It is still very emotional for me to have experienced such devotion by our elders. At St Joseph's House of Spirituality in Baulkham Hills [Sydney] I had the chance to spend time with the Josephite Sisters. It taught me so much more about faith and spirituality, the love of the Bible. Living with 90 nuns, 2 priests and a Brother was strange for me.

My highlight was doing a street retreat, which took place in Sydney, and meeting 'Mum' Shirley Smith. I worked alongside her, visiting the juvenile centres. We went one Sunday to the park to pray when I met the sole Aboriginal man there. He asked me where I came from and I offered him a sandwich. He replied; "he had eaten at the Salvos and would take me for a feed". I thanked him and said no thanks. Did I meet God that day? I like to think I did because after that I did not see another Aboriginal person.

I went to Ireland and Rome for the Beatification of Edmund Rice. My faith journey took me to another level to see Pope John Paul and thousands of Catholics.

I was lucky and grateful to have had my Grandmother Emily in my life as she taught me how to understand my Aboriginal spirituality and Catholic faith. She was also a Catholic but did not lose her own Aboriginal Spirituality. I



have respect for my humble beginnings from the early teaching from a loving family. It taught me to be respectful to your elders, honesty, love, courtesy and to be grateful for what you have. On the day you are born God sets a path and it's up to us what path we want our journey to take. I believe what I have achieved through my life has been my faith in God and those early teachings. I hope that I have been a role model for all the children and people I have met along the way.

I have taken a full circle after a long time away from NATSICC and now I am back on NATSICC. God has a plan, it's not over yet. I am so proud to be working with such dedicated people who ensure Catholic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a voice in the Church. Remember what Pope John Paul II said in Alice Springs: "Until the ABORIGINAL people of Australia have made their contribution to the church, it will not be the church God wants it to be". I thank my five children and husband for letting me pursue my faith journey through life and having them by my side.

"Halt at the Crossroads
Ask Yourselves which is the way.....
Take the Risk
Walk the way
And You will find Rest"

Jeremiah 6:16

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a personal reflection on our formation course...

There is a popular saying that nothing good comes easy! This is the central idea that I want to stress in sharing my experience in the just concluded formation course on **Pallottine Spirituality**.

It was indeed an intense year, one which might, at face value, discourage one. But analysing its benefits I cannot but express my gratitude, to my Region in particular and the Society through the General Council, for this wonderful opportunity of not only deepening my knowledge but also my experience of our founder and his foundation.



We were eleven in number – seven priests, three sisters and one lay person – from Italy, Brazil, Nigeria, Bolivia, India, Slovacchia, Ukraine, Poland, and Belize. It was a year in which we tried to live the ideal of the Cenacle, with all the difficulties and joys of co-existing as an international group.

We were encouraged to approach community life as envisioned by Pallotti. Initially there was a great deal of caution as we felt our way, trying to understand our differences and unique backgrounds. However it wasn't long before the exercises and life together moulded us into a small but active group, determined to focus on the things that held us together rather than on our differences! It was indeed a year of intense learning on how to form and live a constructive and mature community life in the midst of both commonness and diversity!

The first hurdle seemed to be the intensity of the program – in the morning lectures, in the afternoon presentations on Pallotti himself and on the UAC and its components. One could submit, or complain! I decided on the former and was greatly rewarded. The benefit was an in-depth personal interaction with the person, life, spirituality, motivation and inspiration of St Vincent in the first place and secondly with the foundation, spirituality and mission of the Union of Catholic Apostolate and its components.

As was stressed to us, the heart of the course is not necessarily knowledge but the deepening of one's personal experience and acquaintance with the person of Pallotti. Complementing this was the time we were given to become familiar with his personal writings, with commentaries of others about him, and with the descriptions of the UAC and its components as founded by him. If anything we could have benefited from more time so as to be even better prepared to pass on our learnings to our own entities.

For us Pallottines in particular, and for the Church in general, the entire person, life, spirituality, mission and foundation of Pallotti are indeed God given treasures that have not yet been fully explored. All of us, and in particular those charged with formation, have to engage constantly in that exploration.

A historical identity that is well handed over, is a historical identity that is well conserved for the future.

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you commented...

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