

The TWEC Story

The Tenison Woods Education Centre (TWEC) was established in 1993 by the Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar in response to a number of factors that coalesced at that time. Firstly, there was the closure of the Boarding School at Lochinvar thus freeing space for another ministry to be located on the site. Secondly, a number of Sisters had completed or were pursuing theological studies. Thirdly and most significantly the Diocesan Pastoral Plan developed at the Diocesan Synod of 1992/93 highlighted the need for adult faith formation.

One of the pastoral goals accepted by the Synod was that

in every parish of the diocese all the baptised have the opportunity and formation to make their contribution to the life and mission of the Church.

Underpinning the pastoral goals were ten theological principles. The third principle stated:

To grow to Christian maturity and participate fully in Christ's mission, all of us – clergy and religious as well as lay men and women, youth and children – must continually deepen our understanding of the faith through formation that is faithful to the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition.

Being aware of the need in the diocese for adult faith formation, the Congregational Leadership at the time made the decision to commit personnel and resources to do what it could to assist the diocese address those needs.

The Sisters of St Joseph came to the Diocese of Maitland in 1883 at the invitation of Bishop Murray to educate the children who were disadvantaged because they lived in small rural communities, the coalfields or the poor suburbs of Newcastle. The ministry of the Sisters in TWEC has resonated with their long experience in education and has embodied the spirit of the Josephite heritage which

is open to present and emerging needs, takes a prophetic stance, seeks justice, is focused on the sacredness of the human person, empowers people and works for the transformation of church and society. (cf. Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph)

The Centre was named in honour of Fr Julian Edmund Tenison Woods, whose concern for the poor settlers and their families in colonial South Australia led him, with St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, to found the Sisters of St Joseph. He was a man who valued learning, music and the beauty of the natural world. Above all he was a man of God who laboured to bring the good news of God's love especially to people deprived of opportunity because of distance and poverty. For these same reasons the Sisters in the TWEC ministry have travelled to country parishes when invited to run courses and provide formation for liturgical ministers and assist the parents of children preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation.

Over the years the Sisters have offered faith formation that is not merely knowledge-based, but one that respects the wisdom gained from life experience, is attentive to God's presence in life and in the living tradition of the Catholic community. Face-to-face formation, where participants and presenters interact with each other in a community setting has been the hallmark of their courses. (See Appendix 2)

The TWEC program has featured two longer, systematic courses. The *Christian Formation Course (CFC)* has run in different locations and in different formats across the diocese since 1996, and has been responsible for the ongoing faith formation of some two hundred people. The delivery of the CFC has been revised over the years in an effort to accommodate the demands on people today. The second is the *Taste and See* program which is a systematic formation in the Catholic understanding of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The course invites participants to *listen like a disciple* and become a living word of God in the world around them.

A variety of other formational opportunities have been offered each year, including:

- retreat and reflection days presented by local and visiting speakers;
- seminars on *Lectio Divina*, ecological spirituality, Catholic Social teaching, liturgy and papal documents e.g. *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'* to name a few;
- organised visits to Mary MacKillop Chapel and Museum in North Sydney; CSIRO Energy centre in Mayfield; the Shortland Wetlands; the resting place of Fr Julian Tenison Woods in Waverley Cemetery; Aboriginal Sacred Site in the Yengo National Park near Wollombi;
- events to celebrate Mothers' and Fathers' Days;
- awareness-raising forums on refugees, asylum seekers, indigenous achievements, foster care and mental health issues planned and presented by a TWEC sub-committee called Disciples under the Southern Cross;

Of special significance has been the Annual TWEC Dinner which has served since 1995 as a fundraiser as well as an opportunity for people to hear well-known Australians speak of their particular fields. The speakers have been drawn from a wide range of interests. Such people as Geraldine Doogue, General Peter Cosgrove, Wayne Bennett and Professor Marie Bashir have accepted the invitation of the TWEC Dinner Committee, another TWEC sub-committee that has done great work over the years.

Hospitality has been a special feature of the TWEC ministry. Individuals and groups have been nourished in body and spirit with good food, companionship, and when needed, a quiet, restful place for reflection and renewal.

A network of people have supported and collaborated in the TWEC ministry. As well as the two enthusiastic sub-committees already mentioned, members of the TWEC Administrative Board for many years worked with the Sisters in an advisory capacity as well as taking responsibility for the planning and review of courses and financial management of the Centre. Beyond these groups an ever widening circle of people have formed the TWEC network: people who have participated in courses and support TWEC ventures. Many are now actively engaged in parish ministries and some have become presenters in TWEC courses.

TWEC has had the support and encouragement of bishops, priests, parish communities and other religious since its beginnings in 1993.