

The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

SUMMER 2025-2026



Joy-filled ministry

Louise Cimarosti shares the Bible with students from one of her SRE classes at Warialda Public School

Louise Cimarosti

SRE teacher, Warialda Public School

I WAS NEW CHRISTIAN AND A UNIVERSITY STUDENT WHEN I first tagged along to someone else's Special Religious Education (SRE) class just to see if it was something I'd enjoy. I hadn't stepped foot in a primary school since I was in primary school! When I started Ministry Training Strategy (MTS), I was given a couple of SRE classes at a nearby school, and honestly, I felt completely out of my depth. In those early days, my MTS trainer or an experienced teacher would come with me, sit in on the lesson and give helpful feedback so I could

grow in confidence and learn how to teach well. Whilst I had taught a lot of kids' church by that point, it is different to a classroom setting.

Resources and support

Everything taught in SRE must be approved by the Department of Education. There are at least two options that are approved for NSW SRE. Christian Education Publications (CEP) *Connect* is the one I have

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used and it is excellent. I feel very confident teaching it. I love their curriculum because it is comprehensive and gives you great freedom to adjust it to your teaching style, your class, or your abilities. Completing the Youthworks training which includes theology, class management and things like lesson preparation is also a great programme to cover before stepping into the SRE space. The training enables you to go into a school, not necessarily as an amazing teacher but with the tools to help you teach well rather than going in blind.

Warialda Public is a beautiful school. I started teaching SRE at it five years ago, shortly after we arrived to take up ministry at Warialda Anglican Church. I teach the four SRE classes from Kindergarten to Year 6 back-to-back every Friday morning. There have been two different principals since I've been there and they've both been really welcoming. The first was a lovely supportive principal who values SRE. He would sometimes come in while I was teaching then email me out of his own time and say, 'Hey, good job' and give me encouragement. The current principal is a beautiful Christian lady and she values SRE just like the previous principal did. Unfortunately for us in Warialda, I am currently the only SRE teacher, which means if I am sick or our family is ever away, the classes have to be cancelled. It would be wonderful to have partners in this ministry to share the load.

Long-term gospel fruit

When I first started teaching SRE not quite 20 years ago, it was an opt-out system so the classes were bigger. As it has moved to an opt-in, I've seen a trend of kindergarten students not enrolling in SRE. However, of the 220 students at Warialda Public School, this year we have just shy of 100 enrolled – so about half the school does SRE which is wonderful. It's always a joy when kids come up to me in the playground at lunchtime and say, "Can we do Scripture?" I say, "Well, I'd love to have you join us. Ask your parent to write a note and you can be in my class," and within a few weeks they are in my class because the kids

themselves have taken the initiative.

I've found committing long term to teaching SRE so helpful, as it's impossible to learn 100 student's names straight away. I've also appreciated having opportunities to get to know the children and their families over multiple years. One of the beautiful things about teaching SRE in a small town is that I'm not just the SRE teacher – students know me as a mum from the school and they also know me from seeing me at the pool and in IGA, so I'm able to minister to them not just for half an hour on a Friday morning but throughout the year. SRE is a joy-filled ministry and a real highlight is getting to know the kids well and building a relationship with their teachers who also hear the gospel each week.

Encouragement and motivation

People lacking confidence to teach SRE is probably the comment that I hear the most in relation to SRE. As a way to mitigate this, I'd encourage you to volunteer as a team with someone else or shadow an experienced SRE teacher who can model it in a way that is accessible. The fact that the curriculum is already set for you is helpful and does mean you can potentially share a class with another teacher. For those who are time poor, tag teaming and sharing a class might be possible or only offering a class for one grade each term at a small school rather than having no SRE. If you know SRE teaching is not an option for you, please consider how you might encourage or enable someone else to teach – for example, could you babysit so another person in your church might be freed up to teach?

It's moments like this past Easter when a kindergarten boy heard the account of Jesus' death and resurrection for the first time – his sadness and shock at Jesus' death and then wonder and excitement at Jesus' resurrection – that keep me teaching SRE after so many years. What a privilege to be the first person in a child's life to share the gospel of our Lord!

Volunteering for SRE

Corinne Irwin

St Peter's, South Tamworth

I initially taught Scripture for five years, once my two oldest children had gone to high school and I felt I was able to volunteer. I have filled in this year for Terms 2, 3 and 4 after being asked to help by our SRE coordinator because the need for teachers was high. The school community is very supportive of SRE volunteers but if we cannot cover classes, the programme will not run.

Teachers welcome SRE volunteers to the classroom and assist with technology, behaviour management and handing out booklets to aid the time to flow well. The children love seeing you and enjoy the activities – witnessing them learn about God is a precious experience.

I do not have a teaching background and felt ill-equipped at first: the content for lessons has improved a lot in the last few years which has helped me streamline my lesson preparation. Prayer with the other SRE teachers, my family and friends has helped me become more confident teaching the children. The knowledge that God goes before us and is with me has comforted me and given me wisdom as an SRE teacher.

A blessing in this ministry is the awareness that God is working through SRE teachers to teach and share God's promises for us. Another is the connections I have developed with all the teachers I have encountered on this journey and the ongoing opportunities to witness in our public schools. The children's delight when you arrive to teach is so encouraging.

SRE Training

After first contacting your vicar to talk through the possibility of volunteering, you will need to undertake up to five online training modules for Primary SRE and six online training modules for Secondary SRE to become an accredited SRE teacher. This is completed through Youthworks and only needs to be undertaken once. Each module takes two hours and is highly practical and immediately relevant.

Once training is complete, maintenance of SRE accreditation involves two hours development training each year a volunteer is actively teaching. A convenient way to do development training is online through Youthworks at the beginning of each year.

Diocesan Trainer, Reverend David Freeman can do face-to-face SRE training. Face-to-face training will run when needed and if there are sufficient numbers. Let your vicar know if this may be your preferred method of training and he will communicate with David.

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Reverend Neil Hunt joins an SRE class for a creative re-telling of the fall of Jericho from the Old Testament

AROUND THE DIOCESE AT LEAST 27 PARISHES OR SPECIAL Districts deliver SRE, with some supplying teachers to more than one school. Often SRE is delivered through an ecumenical partnership between a combination of Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Uniting, Lutheran and Pentecostal church members. Frequently there are not enough SRE teachers to cover all of the classes that could be run as is currently the case for **Delungra Public School.**

At **Gunnedah South** three SRE classes are taught weekly using a seminar-style lessons, alternating between K – 2 and 3 – 6 each week, with one combined class at **Gunnedah Public**.

Reverend Tim Stevens writes: There are two classes at **Guyra Central School**, with around 65 kids in total. SRE was only started last year, so this has morphed under God into something big! In our context, the families at our school are very eager for their children to attend SRE classes, but we are struggling to find teachers to meet this gospel need.

At **Mullaley Public School** SRE is taught to around 20 K-2 students through team teaching, using CEP Connect material. Unfortunately, this year the class at **Tambar Springs Public School** did not have enough students to run.

In a combined teaching arrangement, SRE teachers have a total of six classes between the **Manilla Central School** primary campus and **Attunga** and **Somerton Public Schools**.

In **Armidale** the 24 classes covered by 19-20 SRE teachers, some new, have had the encouragement of seeing new students join throughout the year.

Approximately half of each class, a total of 500 students, attend SRE through **Tamworth South Public** and **Hillvue Public Schools**. Coordinator Libby Lukins shares: Just this week a Year 2 boy (T) said in one of my lessons, “We need to be good to get to heaven”, and straight away one of his friends (Z) piped up and said, “No, we just have to trust Jesus”. Z said immediately afterwards, “I believe in Jesus and trust him.” How great to see God working powerfully in kids’ lives.

The parish of St Andrew’s, Kootingal have five teachers who teach SRE at **Moonbi Public**, **Tintinhull Public** and **Kootingal Public Schools** – 180 kids in total each week. The ‘Borrow Bible’ programme where kids take *The Jesus Story Bible* home for a few weeks to read has been popular. SRE is well supported by staff **Boggabri Public School** where about 80% of the 100 students participate in classes taught assembly style by five SRE teachers who share the load.

Jenny Taggart coordinates the eleven SRE teachers at **Tamworth Public School** and says: Lydia loved Kindergarten SRE so much that she asked her mum to take her to church. Now she and her mum are both attending St Andrew’s, Kootingal. Lydia loves Sunday School

and is sharing what she has learnt at church each week with her SRE classmates.

Three SRE teachers from Walcha cover six classes between **Walcha Public**, **Woolbrook** and **Niangala Public Schools**. Reverend Neil Hunt writes: It’s Thursday mid-morning and I’m heading out of Walcha for one of the highlights of my week: small school SRE. I’m there early for setup, a cuppa with the staff and handball with the kids. One of the kids rings the old bell, they’re inside in a flash, we sit in a circle, I grab my guitar and look like I’m going to start one of our Scripture memory songs, but stop to ask, “How do we start Scripture again?” “PRAY!!” they shout in unison. We’ve been working through the Bible story of the LORD saving his people out of slavery in Egypt and bringing them into the land he promised them. Each week we see how the “little” salvation of Israel points to the ultimate salvation of God’s people in Jesus.

In **Quirindi** three of the seven SRE teachers are in their seventies, with multiple having been involved with teaching SRE for many years. Lessons have been continuous in most of the eleven schools they teach at, rarely missing covering the 22 classes involved. Heather Roworth, the coordinator, has been teaching SRE for over 30 years and says, ‘If the timetable says SRE, someone arrives!’

In **Lightning Ridge** there are a total of four SRE teachers with some accredited to teach across both Primary and High School. One SRE teacher also goes to **Goodooga Central School** twice a term for two classes, each of around six to eight students. Lightning Ridge Central School has a high SRE enrolment – about 115 students out of less than 300 K-12 student population. High school SRE is the largest subject in terms of numbers of students in a class with an average of 12-15 students, an increase from 3-5 students a few years ago. SRE teachers get to give out Scripture book prizes for each class at presentation day in memory of a congregation member who taught for many years, showing the standing SRE has started to gain in the school.

There are three SRE teachers across four classes at **Barraba Central School**. In the past two years the Youth Group has grown from an average of five kids each week to 10-15 kids, including 20+ individual kids. Most of this growth is from Year 6 kids coming to Youth Group after an invitation from SRE.

Please pray for:

- ongoing good relationships with school principals
- an increase in SRE numbers, classes and teachers
- children who now believe to continue to grow and mature in their faith and trust in Jesus
- children to open their hearts to their need for Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and urge their parents/carers to take them to church where they too can hear the Word of God trust in him.



A pendulum swing

Bishop Rod expresses to Synod his joy at the many opportunities present for the gospel both within and beyond the Diocese

Bishop Rod Chiswell

I RECENTLY HEARD GLEN SCRIVENER speak about the surprising shift towards Jesus by people in the UK. Most astounding was the increase among young men. In 2018 there was just 4% of males between 18-24 calling themselves Christian and regularly attending church but by 2024 there was a staggering 21%. Could this be the start of revival? Many are saying yes.

I regularly hear stories of people just showing up to churches in our Diocese wanting to learn more about Christianity. A *Taste and See* Evangelistic course regularly run in Armidale saw up to 65 people coming to learn more about Christian faith last term! Many were young people checking out Christianity. Could it be that the pendulum is swinging back?

I also recently talked to Steve McAlpine, author of *Being the Bad Guys* and *Future Proof*, and speaker at our Next Phase conference in May 2026, and he agreed that the pendulum seems to be swinging back more quickly than everyone expected. Many people are realising that the popular ‘You Do You’ way of thinking does not work, nor even satisfy. They are searching for a better way and rediscovering the value of having God at the centre rather than self. It is therefore a great time to be

part of God’s church and an exciting time to be disciples of Christ. Now is the time to live unashamedly according to God’s word, to press into the difference with our culture, even when it means persecution, and to model to those who are seeking a better way an alternative that is true.

My prayer is threefold: that we will be ready to share the life changing good news of Jesus with our family members, neighbours, and friends; that many will come to our churches seeking true purpose and meaning and find it in the Lord Jesus; and that we will be equipped and ready to disciple them.

Godly church leaders

For that to happen in Anglican churches across Australia, God will need to continue to raise up godly and capable church leaders who are passionate about the life-changing good news of Jesus, who uphold the primary authority of the Scriptures in matters of Christian life and doctrine and who are not afraid to stand against the tide of our culture – always ready to speak the truth in love. The opportunities for evangelical clergy to serve in Anglican Dioceses around Australia has never been greater. My vision continues to be to keep all eleven curacy positions in the

Armidale Diocese filled, so that we will be able to send at least two well-trained clergy each year to serve in more needy areas of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Pray that the Lord might help us to continue to train and send faithful gospel workers into the wider harvest field.

For that to happen of course we will need to stay proactive in the work of recruiting and training clergy as they come out of theological colleges. Next year we will have three new curates join our clergy team:

- Timothy & Susannah Chan will be going to St Paul’s, West Tamworth
- Chris & Naomi Tompkins to St Peter’s Cathedral, Armidale and
- Samuel & Grace Ogg to Lightning Ridge.

This third appointment will be in partnership with BCA and with the understanding that Samuel will go on to serve in another BCA-funded parish after his two-year curacy. I’m very excited about this new curacy position as it represents the start of an excellent remote rural ministry training pathway that I hope will continue to provide well-equipped clergy for gospel-poor parts of Australia.

I’m also pleased to announce that St Peter’s, South Tamworth has appointed Jimmy

Alley to continue the good work at Coledale Frontyard church. The Diocese is deeply indebted to the Reverend Jum Naden for his valuable work over the past seven years ministering in Coledale. As Reverend Xavier Lukins shared at Synod, Jum's excellent leadership and musical skills along with his trust in God's spirit and powerful expounding and applying of God's word have been used by God to grow the Coledale gathering. Jum's heart continues to yearn to serve the smaller, less-resourced Indigenous churches in New South Wales and in the longer term he desires to help aging Indigenous pastors and to take part in raising up the next generation of Indigenous leaders.

In other chessboard movements for 2026, Reverend Jared Lidgerwood will be taking up the Vicar's role at Tenterfield, and Reverend Nick Stone will be taking up the School Chaplain's role at The Armidale School. Both appointments are wonderful answers to prayer.

Please pray that God will raise up a godly and capable minister for Boggabri.

Diocesan support

In order to support local churches around our diocese in the exciting season that lies ahead, the Anglican Diocese of Armidale continues to provide resources for evangelism and discipleship initiatives and is striving help parishes with the nuts and bolts required to keep the wheels turning smoothly. To that end we have three Diocesan Commissions: The Commission for Evangelism and Mission (CEM) chaired by Reverend Matt Sheridan will focus on making disciples, The Commission for Education and Discipleship (CED) chaired by Reverend Kurt Langmead with a focus on growing disciples, and The

Commission for Parish Support (CPS) formerly known as PAMDC, chaired by Phil Firth with a focus on supporting parishes to ensure good governance, sound financial management and the timely upkeep of parish facilities.

We also now have ten gatherings for encouragement and training each year and the establishment of local theological training in Tamworth for lay people through a Moore College Diploma of Biblical Theology (DBT) via a blended delivery mode. Contact me at the Diocesan Registry Office (02 67724491 or bishop@armidaleanglicandiocese.com) if you'd like to learn more.

Updates on other ministry initiatives

The Reverend Julie Cook began her work as the Armidale Diocesan Deacon for women in January. This is an answer to prayer and I'm very thankful to God for raising up Julie to take on this role. I can already see the difference that position is making when it comes to the recruitment and support of women engaged in paid ministry roles around the Diocese. I am certain we will only see these benefits increase as time goes on.

Another area of ministry I'm thankful for in our diocese is growth in outreach to Aboriginal people. I was greatly encouraged when I attended the Yarning About Indigenous Ministry Day in Narrabri in September. Listening to Reverends Michael Duckett and Doctor Simon Gillham explain the Scriptures and share insights on Indigenous ministry was very stimulating. Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Collarenebri, Walgett, Uralla, Tamworth and Armidale all now have outreach gatherings happening regularly. I have been particularly encouraged by the recent establishment in East Armidale of a gathering called

Boomerang Church. It emerged following a request made to Reverend Dave Freeman from an Aboriginal Aunty for a carols service just before Christmas 2024 in a cul-de-sac at the end of Mosman St. In response to the request, a small team hosted a simple carols service with a BBQ for that community which saw about 20 locals: men, women and children come together. Following that gathering, a couple of the Aunties asked if we could have a Christian service more regularly and so began Boomerang church. God willing it too will grow.

Please pray that through Boomerang Church many Indigenous people in Armidale will hear the good news of Jesus and come to trust him as Saviour and live with him as Lord.

Investing in gospel ministry going forward

With so many good things happening in the Armidale Diocese it might be easy for us to grow comfortable or even complacent. I recently came across a prayer penned by the early church father Augustine, who wrote:

"O Lord, our Saviour, you have warned us that you will require much of those to whom much is given – grant that we whose lot is cast in so goodly a heritage may strive together the more abundantly to extend to others what we so richly enjoy; and as we have entered into the labours of other people, so to labour that in their turn other people may enter into ours, to the fulfillment of your holy will. Amen." (*Be Thou My Vision*, 2021, Day 21)

Brothers and sisters, let us remain thankful for the goodly heritage we have in the Armidale Diocese. Let me encourage us all to keep using well what God has entrusted to us to grow and extend his kingdom.

With love in Christ, Bishop Rod Chiswell

Thanking Jonathan Earnshaw

Reverend Geoff Hearne

Reverend Jonathanathan Earnshaw began as a curate-in-charge of the Peel Valley District in 2001. He was priest in charge of Peel Valley/Nundle from 2001 to 2003, whilst also becoming the Dioceses' first safe ministry trainer/coordinator. He was then vicar of Mungindi until 2008 when he became Associate Minister at Moree from 2008 – 2013. Following this he used his accounting skills as Registrar of the Diocese of North-West Australia, until returning to us in 2018 where he took up the combined roles of part-time vicar at Bundarra and the inaugural Armidale Hospital Chaplain. From 2020 to 2021 he took on a travelling locum role and began in Tenterfield before heading off to Baradine for a term. During this period, the parish of Tenterfield asked if Jonathan would be their vicar, so he returned to Tenterfield and was there until his retirement earlier this year.

Sometime in those years, Jonathan was on Diocesan Council but said he couldn't remember when because he's now ancient and feeble minded, which is classic Jonathan. He's always self-deprecating and quick to tell you he is dying and everybody hates him.

When I told Jonathan I was to be the vicar of Moree, he told me that

everybody there hated him, the parish council wanted to get rid of him, and the congregation couldn't wait to see the back of him. When I arrived in Moree, it was the actual opposite, so much so I felt incredibly inadequate. People would tell me what a great preacher Jonathan was, what a great visitor he was, what a great pastoral carer he was, and he knew everybody in every shop in the town. That was the standard I had to start to measure up to.

Jonathan's greatest character attribute is his love for Jesus. He has a great ability to preach well and to live in accordance with the gospel. He is a man of integrity, faithful to his calling as a minister in this diocese and his desire for others to love Jesus. So, this is a motion of thanks for I'm pretty sure it's not farewell. I think Bishop Rod has plans for Jonathan to do locum work and he is likely to say 'yes' after complaining that he's lost his marbles, he's likely to die and no one really wants him anyway.

Andrew Davidson, from Tenterfield added to the motion: "Jonathan was greatly loved in Tenterfield. Probably the group that really cried the most were the Scripture classes. They absolutely loved him in SRE. He had a wonderful way with kids."

Exciting growth



Reverend Nathan Tuckwell
St Mark's UNEchurch

IT'S BEEN A REAL JOY TO SERVE AS YOUTH ENCOURAGER since the start of the year and to see and hear about faithful, persevering and creative gospel ministry in the week-to-week life of local churches across the region. Praise our great God for what he is doing among young people in our diocese. Across Australia, young people are showing interest in Christianity in a way that hasn't been seen in generations!

Youth events

This year for the first time, the Diocese took a group of high schoolers and leaders down to the Youthworks Leaders In Training conference (LiT) at Port Hacking, south of Sydney. Students heard

solid Bible talks, were trained in exegesis and how to teach the Bible faithfully and spent time praying with people from different churches. We are grateful for the partnership with Youthworks that resulted in heavily discounted tickets for those from our diocese who went along. We are planning to take another group of high schoolers to LiT in Sydney in January 2026.

On 22nd March in Barraba, we once again gathered youth – students and leaders from around the diocese and further afield. Isaac Shumack from St Paul's West Tamworth spoke clearly and with conviction, challenging us all to take the biblical gospel seriously, and equally to take seriously sharing it with those God has placed around us. The anonymous Q&A time showed us that young people



Above and opposite page: Youth and leaders from St Paul's, West Tamworth enjoy time together, whether relaxing or helping to run end of year church activities

are wrestling with topics such as sexuality, gender, neurodivergence and assurance. It is a reminder for us to continue faithfully teaching the gospel and applying it to real life while working hard at creating spaces where safe, caring, relationships can thrive and real and present personal issues can be worked through. Whether these spaces are Sunday church, Bible study groups, or structured youth group programs, it is vital that young people are deeply disciplined and not out-disciplined by the world.

Between the 14th – 16th of November, 310 youth and leaders gathered at Youth Muster in Tamworth for a weekend of solid Bible teaching, fellowship in the gospel and connecting with other high schoolers from around the Diocese. We heard from guest speakers Andy Stevenson and Mike Dicker from Youthworks in Sydney as we spent time in the book of Colossians.

Preparing for the future

In his presidential address at Synod, Bishop Rod shared details about the amazing work of God in young people being interested in Christian things and coming to faith and all that is happening in this age group around the world and in Australia. He also spoke about the need to train and to send people to lead churches into the future. And my question is, 'Where will those people come from?'. I reckon some of them are sitting in our churches and youth groups, being led by ministers, by parents, by other people in their churches. So, I want to encourage us in two ways.

The first thing to say is that you have a youth ministry. If you're in a church and you're a Christian person, you have a youth ministry whether you wear the hat of youth leader or not, whether you wear the hat of minister or not, whether there's a structured youth group in your church, whether there are high schoolers in your church or not. If there are high schoolers in your town, you have a ministry to them. I guess the question to ask isn't, 'When should I start a youth group?', or 'When should I start a youth ministry?' because we already have a youth ministry. The question is, 'What are we doing to reach and disciple the young people around us?'; 'What's our plan for evangelism and discipleship with high schoolers?'

If you want to be sharpened in this space, then I want to invite you to think about joining a small new thing we're going to start in 2026. It's

a youth leader network group that will meet online via Zoom. There won't be heaps of meetings, but they are particularly for those who coordinate youth ministry in your church. This might be a parent, a lay person, a vicar, a curate or an Assistant Minister. It's simply a way to gather online from all different parts of the Diocese to think together about our plan for discipling and reaching young people, to share what we are doing and encourage each other. I want to commend it to you as we kick that off in the new year.

The second thing I want to say to encourage us as a diocese is that we do have an opportunity. We have an opportunity to reach many young people with the gospel. Are we willing to make the most of that opportunity? Are we willing in our churches to invest the effort and the resources in reaching young people with the gospel? Are we willing to do what needs to be done so that we can see more and more high schoolers come to know Jesus?

As we consider the future, I would ask us all to think hard about the opportunities before us. It is no small thing that hundreds of young people gather in Barraba and Tamworth each year, and the numbers continue to grow.

I'd like to say thank you to the Youth Committee, both to those who finished serving last year and to those who have continued to serve or have joined us this year. It's such a privilege to serve alongside such godly and capable people and I love how representative of the Diocese this committee is: Sarah Baker (Manilla), Elliot Chapman (Gunnedah), Callum Dowling (Lightning Ridge), Georgia Burke, Keziah McIntosh (both Armidale), Greg Stones (Gunnedah) and Reverends Cameron Maxworthy (Inverell), Caleb Torrance (Wee Waa), and Isaac Shumack (West Tamworth).

A greater focus on children's ministry, regional outreach events and camps, local training of key leadership, and more evangelistic preaching are just some of the opportunities that are before us. My prayer is that we would be willing to make the most of these opportunities. That each of our churches would think creatively about how to reach young people in our towns. That people can be disciplined and equipped to disciple others so that Jesus would be honoured as saviour and Lord in the lives of many young people now and in the future.

If you'd like to get in touch, please email youth@armidaleanglicandiocese.com



Renewed focus

Reverend David Robinson from Glen Innes shares with Christian brothers during the North Kigezi clergy conference

Reverend Simon Carter

Retiring Chair of North Kigezi Partnership

THE NORTH KIGEZI PARTNERSHIP HAS EXISTED FOR A number of years with the purpose of equipping, encouraging and supporting gospel workers in North Kigezi to be disciple-making disciples of Christ. The North Kigezi Diocese (NKD) is a huge place with a great Bishop, whom we give thanks to God for, and there are enormous gospel opportunities. Uganda is a deeply Christian nation with 82% of the population identifying as Christian, and there are very high levels of weekly attendance at church. The nation itself is demographically young, and according to the latest STATISTICA and World Health Organisation reports that around half the population are under 17 years of age.

The North Kigezi Diocese has 13 Archdeaconries, 80 parishes and 220 sub-parishes, with a regular Sunday attendance of around 120,000 in the Anglican Church. Bishop Onesimus says that in the last 12 months, he's had 10,000 people respond to Christ and become Christians. There's an amazing gospel work happening in North Kigezi and our partnership is strategic because Bishop Onesimus is desperate for trained people to disciple new Christians. We provide a tripod of supports through assisting the Next Gen Conference, the Clergy and Spouses Conference and Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College (CNBC).

The North Kigezi Diocese now has a training pipeline that goes from a young person/youth leader attending Next Gen conference for a couple of years and becoming identified as a leader and being trained in teaching the Bible before moving to being involved with Ministry Training Strategy and on to Bible College. This means that as they go through college, they've had multiple years of character formation which is important in seeing people become better handlers of God's word. Despite the East African revival – there are many Christians – they say it's a mile wide but only one inch deep, so the Bible College is seeking to increase the depth of their understanding. The Partnership

is grateful to Sharon Kirk for lots of work behind the scenes over 15 years and, more recently, for overseeing a team who helped to create at CNBC the second largest theological library in Uganda.

2025 NKD clergy and spouses conference

Bishop Onesimus is a man of integrity and good leadership and he's bringing a culture change through programmes like the clergy conference designed to upskill and refresh clergy. In the estimation of Bishop Onesimus, it is fast becoming a key part of supporting the clergy in their ministries and in encouraging godliness. This year's theme was 'Feed My Sheep' with Reverend David Robinson giving the main talks and Reverend Tom Melbourne delivering basic Safe Ministry training alongside solid Ugandan preachers calling their fellow pastors to godly living. Reverend Julie Cook gave three Bible talks from John's gospel to NKD clergy wives.

Julie writes:

A fourth talk was given to the North Kigezi clergy wives by Mama Florence, the Ugandan Bishop's wife. We were all encouraged and reminded to reflect on the joy of knowing, loving and abiding in Jesus as we seek to serve him wherever God has placed us. After each talk, given through an interpreter, Mama Florence summarised what I had said and encouraged the women to share together in smaller discussion groups to reflect on what they had heard from God's word and to talk about how it might apply to their own experience as clergy wives, often serving in remote and difficult circumstances.

I'm thankful for the opportunity I had to spend time with many sisters and brothers in Christ and to be involved in this partnership as we seek to spur one another onward in love and service of the Lord Jesus.



Reverend Julie Cook in Uganda with an administrator at CNBC

Looking ahead

Reverend Tom Melbourne
Chair of North Kigezi Partnership

WHILE OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND IN SUPPORTING OUR Ugandan church partners, we feel that the single most significant impact we can make is to equip current and future leaders in reading, understanding and teaching the Bible. This is, of course, the bedrock on which the Partnership has stood since its inception, with the Next Gen Uganda annual conference having made an eternally significant impact across two decades. Our hope is that, over the next five years, we might be able to work with the key Ugandan leaders to see the impact of Next Gen be both broadened and deepened – reaching more people annually, and revising the training structures and follow-up initiatives to ensure that every delegate is firmly established in the skills and mindset being taught. We envisage this expansion of Next Gen will mean both a need for more local Ugandan ownership, and regular teams of eight to ten Australians being sent. It is a time for us to continue to invest with great thoughtfulness and deliberate strategy, so that more Ugandans can receive this training and it might truly take root in individuals and impact churches.

Alongside a renewed vision for Next Gen Uganda, which will be our primary focus, the Partnership will continue to seek to support Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College, noting that primary support for CNBC comes through CMS and its sending of missionaries to be on the College staff – a key role currently played by Reverend Andrew and Margie Newman from our diocese.

We also envisage supporting NKD to run the annual Clergy and Spouses Conference, with a small two to three person Australian team to be sent every second year to offer sound biblical teaching and maintain critical links with the NKD Bishop and senior leadership.

SUMMER 2025-2026

To the glory of God

Sharon Kirk

As Simon Carter takes a step back from chairing the Partnership we want to thank God for the way he's blessed us through Simon's loving, generous and skilled leadership.

We sent our first Next Gen team across to North Kigezi 16 years ago and Simon Carter was on that team. It would be the first of many trips for Simon. That same year, he took on the role of leading the Partnership, a role he's carried out capably and faithfully. I want to highlight three areas that stand out to me in Simon's leadership: his love, his generosity and his management skills. Anyone who has served with Simon on the committee or had a conversation with him about North Kigezi will attest to his deep, genuine love for our Ugandan brothers and sisters. He wants to see our brothers and sisters know Christ, grow in Christ, and live Christ-like lives for the glory of God. To this end, Simon has listened, cared and sought to understand the difficulties of life and ministry in a diocese very different to our own and there is good reason that many in North Kigezi call Simon a true friend and much-loved brother in Christ.

Over the past 16 years, Simon has made approximately 12 trips to North Kigezi – so many that he's lost count. On various trips, he's been joined by his wife, Erin, and occasionally his children. It's expensive financially and it takes a huge toll on one's time and energy. When COVID-19 created a food crisis in North Kigezi in 2020, Simon suggested the Armidale Diocese raise funds to help feed those who were starving and the food appeal was launched. Through Simon's faith and tenacity, we raised \$121,000. I think he told me that in one purchase, they bought \$80,000 worth of beans and grain.

Under Simon's leadership, the Partnership has served our North Kigezi friends in several key areas. We've been involved in running at least 13 Next Gen conferences. We've helped provide Sunday School training through Bob and Sue Boland. We've invested in Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College and provided support to the college as they successfully worked through an accreditation process. We assisted the running of three Bible teaching conferences for North Kigezi clergy and clergy wives along with financial and prayer support to North Kigezi clergy and clergy-in-training. We've sponsored and hosted several visits of North Kigezi leaders to our diocese. It's been no mean feat and still, Simon never ceases to come up with new insights, creative ideas and thorough North Kigezi updates even while serving as a full-time parish minister. We give thanks to God and thanks to Simon Carter for his leadership for the past 16 years.

To contribute to the North Kigezi Partnership please go to armidaleanglicandiocese.com, choose the red donate button then select the comment box under the amount donated and write Next Gen Uganda or Uganda sponsorship.

Next Gen 2026

Reverend Trace Akunkunda will lead a team to Uganda in early January 2026, which includes Reverend Lou Davies, Reverend Isaac Shumack, Nathan Craven, Sarah Baker, Talita Craven, Luke Mephram, Nathan Carter and Cailey Magill. Please pray in thanksgiving for both the Australian and Ugandan teams that are organising the conference and for all the preparations that have already happened. Pray for good health for the teams and capacity to make final preparations. Pray for safe travels for the leaders and delegates and above all pray that God will be pleased to use our efforts to convict the minds and hearts of the youth in North Kigezi to love and serve him with all their life.

In response to the death of Robert Boland in July, Australian supporters of NKD have contributed funds to Rwankoma Church School which is overseen by an Australian/NKD committee, including former NKD Bishop's wife Mama Eva, and aims to provide education to children too poor to attend Ugandan Schools.



The joy of fellowship: brothers and sisters in Christ pictured outside St Paul's, Emmaville in September

Penny McCowen

Special District of Emmaville,
Deepwater and Torrington

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A FARAWAY PLACE UP NEAR THE Queensland border, a small and somewhat disconcerted church fellowship waved sadly as their much-loved pastor and his wife, Reverend Keith and Mary Lou Doe, disappeared into the distance. It wasn't a new feeling, as the same little fellowship had both welcomed and waved off many beloved pastors over the years, and vacancy had always been part of the story in between, but this time it was different. This time Vacancy, which had been hovering around the fringes and making vague threats for quite a while, assumed a capital letter and moved in, unpacked and settled comfortably. In addition, the status of 'Parish', which had been around for many decades, jumped in the car and drove off with the Does, and we became a Special District.

So we stood there with our empty vicarage and our unhealthy bank account and looked at one another. You didn't need to be an economist to see that the odds for our survival were not that promising. We were few in number and few in dollars and cents. And it was no great secret that we wouldn't be affording paid ministry for a long, long time.

At this point in your average short, unhappy fairy tale, you might expect the following words – THE END – and you'd probably be entirely justified in doing so. I'm sure many thought the same.

But all praise and thanks to our amazing God, it wasn't.

Because, of course, we were not alone or forgotten, even though we may have felt it. We had the greatest treasure of all – Jesus – and we could trust him to help us.

We had a couple of other things too. We had the oversight of a wonderful, Christ-centred diocese. We had each other. And we had a fierce determination that the regular communion of the body of Christ in our area would continue.

Back then we had three faithful lay preachers and no music, so we sang a cappella for many years! Overall, things ran well but it was

hard work. And then along came COVID-19, which was a real turning point for us. With our screens and projectors, we were already well positioned for the pre-recorded sermons resulting from forced church closures. Consequently, when the world reopened, we had, readily available, quality Bible teaching as well as unlimited hymns (thanks YouTube) easily accessible under our CCLI license. We are forever grateful to the ministry team of St Augustine's, Inverell, who have continued to record all their sermons, even five years post-pandemic. I don't think they will ever fully grasp the depth of our appreciation, even though we try to express it each year with excessive amounts of chocolate.

Probably the most amazing of all is the way God has held us together. Only God could take our diverse little bunch – kind of like Arnott's Family Assorted – and build such a loving and grace-filled fellowship. One of the most regular prayers prayed in our services is that God will enable us to bear with one another in love and he has graciously continued to grant that request. We have also had the incredible joy of new believers joining us and we pray that continues, a thousand-fold!

There are lots of other blessings as well. Two Bible studies run weekly. Scripture is taught fortnightly. We offer *Christianity Explained* courses. We run a Tiny Tots group for mums and bubs and hope to soon open a Little Hub of Love, supporting those experiencing unplanned pregnancy or pregnancy loss, and potentially offer some Christian counselling for the community as well. There are so many needs that it can sometimes feel overwhelming but we reason that anything we can offer is better than nothing, so with God's help we are slowly moving forward.

It would also be impossible to overstate the importance of prayer in our story. Prayer is our single most critical contribution to our Special District, far above all our activities and plans. We are deeply

Serving school communities

David Smith

Principal of Calrossy

I'VE OFTEN THOUGHT THAT BEING A principal is sometimes the best possible job but with some of the worst possible days, such as when tragedy hits communities or enormous conflict arises. In fact, we had a speaker from the Centre for Public Christianity at our Year 12 graduation recently, who said to the kids, "One of the certain things in life is that we will have suffering". How we respond as Christians is important, and it's equally important in Christian communities. Schools are an intersection of messy lives. So much of what we're on about as Christians is relational: it's a relationship with Jesus and its relationships with each other.

In 2016 I felt a strong call to come to Calrossy and our nine years in Tamworth have been a wonderful privilege. Calrossy is a fabulous school. Over our time here the context of schooling has become more challenging in many ways, as our society drifts from first principles and the things that previously held us together – so much of it based on our Christian faith. However there remain incredible opportunities to allow the gospel to speak into people's lives, and it's a great privilege to be part of a school community. We've been through COVID-19 and that's been a challenge. One of the essential things in this context, and it's the same in our churches, is maintaining a razor-sharp focus on what is most important. In our school and the other great independent schools in our diocese, there are opportunities to work alongside, get to know and model life to over 3000 kids. In boarding schools, it's not just the hours from nine to three we have available. This highlights the importance of Christian staff and, where applicable in our Diocese, the value of supporting clergy and laity as chaplains in schools.

Being a principal is an immense role and I've been grateful to work alongside some fantastic people and very godly servants of the gospel. At times it is extremely hard. So much of



Calrossy Principal, David Smith welcomes Junior School students on the first day of Term 1, 2025

school leadership is about change. The other challenging aspect involves managing conflict which generally we do well at Calrossy. Please pray for schools like ours and for Christian educators in the state system, because there are wonderful connections that can be made. There's also a chance in schools like ours to see faith, not just talked about but lived out. Please pray for workers because the harvest is plentiful. We have tremendous opportunities to shape minds and hearts. We don't want kids to merely know what the gospel is, but to accept it and for it to become real as they believe. I'm really pleased that this year we've seen a much, much more intentional focus on prayer at Calrossy. Our chaplains and others have led school and community times of prayer. We're thankful that we also have parents come and pray for us because ultimately, it's God who changes lives.

Many will know that I grew up as a clergy kid in our diocese. I've probably stayed in most vicarages across the Diocese at some stage and I've been delighted to come back 'home'. My dad and Bishop Rod's dad were great mates. They were part of that wave that had a tremendous influence on the shape of the Diocese. Having left Tamworth at 18 to go off into the big wide world, if you had asked me during my 30 years in Sydney where was

home, I would have said Tamworth. I was born in Moree and have lived in vicarages at Ashford, Uralla and West Tamworth. My dad became the Director of Christian Education for the Diocese long before Moore College had external studies or the internet and online courses existed, and his job was to go into small and big centres to train people and equip them to teach the Bible, lead services and do ministry.

I left home to go to university in Bathurst, and Julie and I got involved in ministry there as students. God in his providence is amazing. Some of those students from our university days have gone on to lead significant Christian organisations and yet the Bible focus hadn't been in Bathurst for long and soon after we left that it almost dried up for a lengthy season. To come back to this diocese and see vibrant churches, people committed to the gospel and people growing and being nurtured, has been exciting. We want to give thanks to God for that. We're very sad to leave in lots of ways, but we thank God for our time here – Julie and I have been greatly blessed. I do encourage you to pray for Calrossy, TAS and NEGS, but also to commit to pray for those who go into schools to teach SRE lead Christian School groups or do kids' clubs, as those ministries are so important.

thankful for our strong pray-ers and also that, even though we're small in number, the Lord hears us when we call to him.

I know we are just one of many Special Districts around our diocese and that they are all doing amazing things, so please know that if you're facing vacancy, it doesn't need to be feared! God can make it a really enriching and encouraging time for you. And please don't hesitate to reach out to us – we'd love to chat!

The other common conclusion to your classic, run-of-the-mill fairy tale is that we all lived happily after. Although this is a closer fit than the other option, the truth is that we didn't, but then again, we didn't live miserably ever after either. So, let's try another variation on the theme – love and greetings from the Special District of Emmaville, where we pray we will continue to live joyfully and faithfully until Christ returns or calls us home to heaven.



A lasting legacy



Much-loved members of Calrossy Anglican School, David and Julie are thanked by Senior School students

During Synod in September, David and Julie Smith were publicly thanked for their role in the Diocese during David's time as Principal of Calrossy, with the **Reverend Tory Cayzer** speaking to the motion he presented.

WE'VE OFTEN HEARD THAT DAVID SMITH IS A SON OF THE Diocese, with his parents having ministered in various parishes, and it's always good when a son comes home but we want to give thanks to David and Julie as servants of the Diocese.

David came to be the Principal of Calrossy Anglican School in 2017 at a time when the school was still grappling with the amalgamation and the merging of the separate schools. He successfully led the school through the development of a new single school structure, unified and with common purpose. David has constantly looked at the school as God's school and championed calm Christian leadership for the students, displaying this in his everyday life – demonstrating a dependence on God and that no situation is beyond the leadership team's capacity to work through.

David has always conducted himself with integrity and a desire to lead in a way that reflects his commitment to Jesus in the business of leading Calrossy, while also playing key roles in the wider context of independent schooling and regional boarding schools.

His wife Julie would have to be the biggest advocate for Calrossy, her warmth and genuine love have always been an asset, and together they've displayed love and compassionate care for staff, students and

parents, showing God's searching love for the lost.

David and Julie have also shown steadfast, unceasing commitment to prayer for those within the Calrossy community and are concerned for the well-being of every person connected with the school.

For people as busy as they are with all the demands of Calrossy, I've been so encouraged over the years that David and Julie have never seen this as an excuse to not be committed and active in their church of St Paul's, West Tamworth where they have served as part of the evening congregation and Julie has led the playgroup. Further to this, they have been great supporters of ministry right across our diocese, perhaps especially for the smaller and rural churches.

I first came across them when we were at Walgett – you always know when people are praying for you at those smaller churches. David will always be a son of the Diocese and we particularly give thanks to God for David and Julie Smith as godly, faithful servants of the Diocese and for the legacy they have left at Calrossy.

Please pray for David and Julie in this season of saying goodbye and grieving in the Calrossy and St Paul's communities, asking God to strengthen and equip them to serve and grow in the Lord Jesus in the future.