

All Saints Primary Tumbarumba, NSW

“All Saints in the High Country”



I have the greatest admiration for teachers, and in particular, principals, in isolated rural, Catholic primary schools. For many, time spent in these communities is part of their career path, and after three or four years they return to the larger cities, to friends and families. For some they are returning to their hometown and giving back to a community, which nurtured them in their own youth. And others come and stay, finding their true vocation in serving these small communities.

Tumbarumba is located in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains in Southern NSW, the easternmost school in the Wagga Wagga Diocese. Maureen Wilson has been principal at the school for about ten years and taught there for a few years before that. She is a dynamic character, much loved by the children at the school.

I was really impressed with the community spirit I encountered when I first visited All Saints in August 2002. Being one of the first schools I visited, it holds a special place in my heart. Talking to Maureen while she was on bus duty I got chatting to a couple of the children and found that they were waiting for the bus that would take them home to Cabramurra, the highest settlement in Australia and just under an hour's drive away, through winding Snowy Mountains roads. And what's more, they were returning later in the evening for the family concert in the hall!

That evening, as the parents came in to the hall I had that sense that some were unsure, perhaps a little apprehensive- after all this was Religion *and* music. But as the night unfolded there was a real warmth in the hall that went beyond the winter heating on a cold August night in Tumba. It was one of those evenings where the school became the face of the church to some who perhaps not seen it for a while.

Catholic schools across Australia and New Zealand are natural points of evangelisation. Parents who have drifted away from the life of the church are drawn back, perhaps by sacramental programs, by school liturgies, or by those beautiful occasions where parish and school combine their resources to celebrate special events in the life of the faith community.

I've found this to be even more so in rural and regional areas as in smaller communities the role of the church seems that much more prominent. Just prior to my last visit to All Saints in November 2004, the school had taken an active role in the parish's centenary celebrations. The school, fittingly, focussed on the role of the Josephites in providing Catholic Education over many of those years. They used my Mary MacKillop song, "A Cross of Stars", to celebrate, through movement and song, the life and work of Mary and the Sisters of St Joseph.

Jesus was on the side of the battlers and continues to be so. He calls us to be bringers of justice and equity. And he surely works through the hands and hearts of people like Maureen who are committed to serving country children in places like Tumbarumba.

- *Maureen Wilson has since passed away. She remains one of the most memorable principals I have met in all of my travels. May she rest in peace. AC*