

## 2008 Religious Education Report

*Knowledge of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

In addition to change, (the ever-constant in life), the Religious Education department experienced a rewarding event-filled year. The new year began with Loretta Kruger filling Val Thornton's vacated post in the Primary school and Tiziana Iacovitti coming into the high school as Helen Donze's replacement in the second term. The team, both old and new, has had a common purpose and all have worked well together to uphold the school's ethos and develop the pupils' knowledge and spirituality. Benedikte Nott, the newly appointed High School Headmistress, with Marilyn Bothma and Ann Owgan have been a source of great support in all school religious matters.

A highlight of the year was the combined Mass celebrated at Brescia during Cultural Week with our sister school, St Ursula's Convent, Krugersdorp. We prepared and delivered the readings, while St Ursula lead the Mass with music and vibrant song. It did not take long before the Brescians joined in the spirit of the occasion, wholeheartedly participating in and enjoying the sacredness of the youth-oriented celebration. This event has been in the pipeline for several years and the preparation and effort on both sides proved well worth the wait.

During 2008 we were privileged to help prepare twenty-four young Grade 4 pupils to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion and thirty-five committed Grade 11 pupils the Sacrament of Confirmation. These two Sacraments are very important spiritual rites of passage for the girls who will continue to need the love and support of their family, sponsors and friends to practise and live the faith to which they have aspired. Their names and photographs appear later in the magazine.

Dawn Giangregorio, Regina Essack and Tiziana Iacovitti will be trained in the new year to minister Holy Communion at the school masses. At present, Loretta, Beverly and Christine Booyse, together with Sister Jeanette and Sister Notburga, assist Father Michael at school masses. Allanah Bannister, a 2008 matric pupil was inducted as an extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion during the year and served at the Confirmation Mass and the final School Mass before the family's departure for Australia. The Bannister girls' ministry in altar service will be missed, as well as the creativity of their mother who generously decorated the white takkies worn by the First Holy Communicants each year, donating all funds to charity.

Early in the year, the Bryanston Parish organized for Professor David Block, the South African world-renowned Astrophysicist and Astronomer, to give his presentation, *The Heavens Declare the Glory of God* in the Brescia House hall. He included his personal story of how *A Jewish Astronomer finds the Messiah...* It was both amazing and humbling to see the breathtaking beauty and complexity of the cosmos reveal the greatness of the God we serve.

During the second term, Bec Bromhead, a young Australian working in the St Vincent de Paul Society, gave an interesting and thought-provoking presentation on her work and adventures in several parts of the world as a volunteer for the society. Her aim was to encourage the pupils to seek ways outside of school hours to be of some small service in the community. The Serviam Club (PS) and the Serviam Committee and WISH Club focused their Christmas project on collecting toys, toiletries and treats for the many families and orphans looked after by the Bryanston chapter of this society. Once again, the Brescia family lived up to the school's motto with their overwhelming generosity.

Primary and High School Community Service involvement reports have been included elsewhere in the magazine. Many thanks must go to Ann Sugden for her tireless outreach efforts with the Primary School pupils. The community service programs in the school teach the girls to meet the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. Brescia is proud of and grateful for the genuine compassion that the girls show both in kind and action in this regard.

The annual Grade 11 Diocesan Mass held at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Braamfontein gave our pupils the opportunity to participate in a joyful, multicultural celebration of Mass, informal praise and worship, and socializing with their peers from Catholic schools all over Johannesburg. That day, the World Youth Day Cross reached its destination in the Cathedral after traveling from school to school since the beginning of the year. During Holy Week, St Benedict's handed the cross to Brescia, who in turn passed it on to St

Ursula's bedecked in prayers and the school emblems of the participating Diocesan schools. As the World Youth Day in Sydney fell during Brescia's mid-year examination time, pupils who were keen to attend reluctantly forfeited the opportunity in favour of their academic responsibilities.

At half term, prior to their study leave for the examinations, the sixty-four matrics of 2008 were bid farewell in a specially prepared and celebratory final Mass as Brescia pupils on the evening of their Valedictory dinner.

Spiritual Retreats gave our pupils necessary time out for reflection and introspection and a different focus from stressful academic involvement. John Bosco Centre, the Walter Sisulu Botanical gardens, the Yukon Centre and the Bryanston Parish facilities were venues put to good use for the girls' spiritual enrichment.

In May, the Religious Education team attended a dynamic and uplifting conference, *Gathering at the Well*, organised by the Catholic Institute of Education and which was held at Maris Stella in Durban. Cardinal Napier opened the Conference with a meaningful and vibrant multicultural Mass. The diverse community from all over South Africa shared a common interest in the religious education of our youth and were inspired by the presenters' knowledge and passion for topics that included art, music, sex education, management, Biblical history, curriculum and meditation.

The team also attended the Catholic School's Office AGM, the Ethos in Catholic Schools meeting and several relevant talks and workshops during the course of the year. Mrs Iacovitti is involved in HIV/AIDS teacher education with the Education Department and gave two presentations, in the Free State and Mpumalanga.

In October we were privileged to have Ursuline Sisters from Rome visit Brescia. Various classes in both the primary and high school prepared activities and displays for their benefit. The questions that were posed about religious life could have overwhelmed our visitors, but they graciously satisfied the girls' inquisitive minds and possibly sparked an interest in one of them for her own future plans.

The Brescia pupils show confidence and willingness when it comes to participating in spiritual activities. Altar server numbers have increased, the readers and participants at Masses are reverent and well-prepared in their duties and there are always more volunteers than can be accommodated. It is a delight to attend a junior Mass with the exuberant singing and actions generated by the littlies. The family Mass is very popular and well-attended by parents and grandparents to whom the service is dedicated. Father Michael Fitzpatrick is a blessing to Brescia in his dedicated ministry to the school. In his time of leave, Father Frank Brae took over Mass duties. His Irish humour and heavy brogue made him a popular stand-in with the pupils. Several of the senior pupils are actively involved in the Alpha Youth program conducted in the parish, to them a spiritually-deepening experience in which they enthusiastically encourage their peers to share.

An ongoing concern in the high school Religious Education is the attitude of a great deal of pupils to the introduction of assessment and examination of the subject. As the school exists primarily because of its Christian Catholic nature and ethos, it is of importance that the pupils regard their Religious Education lessons as a means of increasing their knowledge and developing their own individual spirituality without feeling the threat of evangelization or proselytizing. (*Faith is caught not taught*). The curriculum is Christian-based, life-orientated and is essentially an application of morals and values to their life situations in society and in the world at large. The assessment process gives a pupil a valuable tool to experience the inextricable relationship between a lived faith and the reality of life, to self-assess their understanding of the knowledge they have acquired and discern wisely its application.

Pope John Paul: *The reason for the existence of the Catholic School is the quality of religious instruction integrated into the life of the pupils.*

A project begun at the beginning of this year has been the Scripture prayer session which takes place in the Bethany rondavel before school on Wednesday mornings for any staff and parents who are able to attend. It is a quiet time set aside in which to read and reflect on a passage of Scripture, share insights and then pray for the needs of the Brescia family.

The Nativity play and Carol Services were an appropriate ending to the Brescia school year, sending the pupils and staff on their Christmas holiday in joyful anticipation of the coming of the infant Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.