

Article – Catholic Education Sandhurst Ltd (13 May 2022)

Top honour for Philomena



Phil Billington with the Bishop Joseph Grech Award for Senior Leadership

President of Edmund Rice Education Australia Council, Ms Phil Billington was awarded the inaugural Bishop Joe Grech Award for Senior Leadership at a ceremony in Bendigo on Friday 6 May.

The former Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst has been recognised for her courageous and faith-filled leadership for students, parents, and teachers within the Diocese of Sandhurst. The award also acknowledged her commitment to the wider mission of the Church nationally and locally, within dioceses, parishes and communities.

“I am privileged to be the inaugural recipient of this award in honour of Bishop Joseph Grech who was perhaps initially a reluctant leader, but one who grew into this call of God in his life motivated by his love of Jesus and his love of people” said Phil.

“You worked with Bishop Joe, not for him and our years working together taught me much about God, God's mission in our world and opening my heart for others. We miss him but his spirit lives on in each of us,” she said.

In the award citation it is clear that Phil is a worthy recipient of the Senior Leadership Award, as someone who has exercised profound leadership across all aspects of learning and teaching within Catholic education, bringing rich experience, knowledge and expertise, promoting professional learning and practice for all staff.

As a proven leader, Philomena has modelled strong witness to her faith, which grounded her approach to the essential mission and identity of Catholic schools. Her commitment to authentic Religious Education has left a legacy across four dioceses through her leadership of a thorough and collaborative process of review and development of Religious Education pedagogy and curricula. *Source of Life*, a proactive and mission-focused curriculum, with a strong scriptural foundation, continues to animate Religious Education in Sandhurst.

Phil is credited with recognising the potential in others, supporting them through coaching, encouraging creativity and initiative, providing opportunities for people to lead and to flourish. Graduate teachers and aspiring leaders were particularly nurtured, building both confidence and competence.

Philomena also promoted initiatives within Arts education, Aboriginal education, inclusion, theological learning, ecological education, and parent engagement. She always engaged with philosophical and theoretical argument, but then looked past it to what impact it might have and how it may enhance the life of schools, students and staff.

Positive and productive relationships are significant for Philomena and this enhances her leadership. She knew her schools and staff, and actively supported them and their families according to need. Her nurturing of relationships extended beyond schools to many families, and to the Religious and Clergy of the Diocese. Philomena demonstrated a deep regard for their place within the life of the Diocese, and a respect for their parish and school leadership.

Philomena's working life encompassed four states and territories in roles as teacher, principal, consultant, Deputy Director, and Director of Catholic Education. She also continues as teacher, leader, facilitator, and transformer for many across Australia since her formal retirement from Catholic Education in 2014. In all these places and roles, Phil has brought strategic vision, energy, and a strong passion to whatever she was doing, seeking to engage in genuine dialogue, always with respect and authenticity.

With respect and a willingness to foster co-operation, Philomena worked diligently with Bishop Joe to enhance Catholic Identity and the Catholic Mission of the Church in Sandhurst. Philomena Billington is indeed a worthy recipient of the inaugural Bishop Joseph Grech Award for Senior Leadership for all she has brought and given to the Diocese of Sandhurst, and for all she continues to give to communities across Australia.



Bishop Joseph Grech pictured with Phil Billington in November 2010 just prior to his passing.



Bishop Joseph Grech – 6th Bishop of Sandhurst 2001 - 2010