

Kangaroo Island retiree awarded ACU liturgy scholarship

Paul Bennett may be well into retirement, but thanks to a prestigious scholarship from Australian Catholic University, his life's most important work is about to begin.

The 72-year-old, who is pursuing ACU's Master of Theological Studies, is the recipient of the 2023 ACU Centre for Liturgy Postgraduate Scholarship, an award he says comes with immense responsibilities.

With the scholarship, the devoted Catholic is hoping to use his liturgical studies in pastoral care of the sick and in an educational role in the community of Kangaroo Island.

Kangaroo Island is located 110km south-west of Adelaide, or five and half hours in travel time, and home to roughly 4700 people. The island's small Catholic community, where Mr Bennett and his wife worship and volunteer as pastoral care workers, is visited frequently by priests to celebrate Mass.

However, Mr Bennett said the realities of living on a remote island – Australia's third largest - meant the laity were responsible for pastorally caring for the community, including those who were seriously ill or dying.

"I hope to assist our overworked priests by providing liturgical support wherever I can as they have to travel a great distance to bring us the sacraments," Mr Bennett said.

Mr Bennett will use the scholarship to provide a wider understanding of sacraments and sacramentality and he also hopes to extend this study into pastoral applications of the liturgy for the sick.

As well as studying theology at ACU, he is undertaking a ministry formation course with the Archdiocese of Adelaide due to a strong desire to become a permanent deacon, although his age may prevent him from being ordained.

"It is my desire to be of the most service I can be," Mr Bennett said.

"I have lived a very rich, full life, but my experience at ACU is making my life even more exciting. It's deeply fulfilling and meaningful and purposeful. It makes me happy to wake up every day."

ACU Centre for Liturgy director, Professor Clare Johnson, said Mr Bennett exemplified the Church's vision for lay people to have a key role in providing evangelisation and pastoral care, especially in remote locations.

"Paul Bennett is an excellent student who has had a lifelong passion for caring for the human person. He brings a wealth of experience to his postgraduate liturgical studies and the opportunity to reflect deeply on the central place of liturgy in the Church will enable him to act knowledgeably and effectively to advance the liturgical apostolate among his community.," Professor Johnson said.

"The Centre is very pleased to support Paul's ongoing study of the liturgy in pastoral care settings, and we look forward to seeing the fruits of his study on beautiful Kangaroo Island."

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