

Faith well placed as plan pays off for Parramatta



"There's a palpable sense of energy among our lay people," says Daniel Ang as he discusses *Faith in Our Future 2014-2018*, the pastoral plan of the Parramatta diocese. PHOTO: ROBERT HIINI

BY ROBERT HIINI

FRESH hope and new possibilities have been born in Western Sydney nearly one year into Parramatta's pastoral plan, *Faith in Our Future 2014-2018*.

Daniel Ang, director of the diocese's Pastoral Planning Office, shared the diverse responses to the pastoral plan thus far among the diocese's 47 parishes and 80 schools.

From evangelisation teams, parish plans and welcome kits, through to the uptake of prayer resources for children and new websites, there has been a considerable effort among communities to renew their life.

The plan was launched last February with the aim of helping people to grow in and share their faith, focusing on five major areas: families; youth; ethnic diversity; the vocations of ordained, religious and lay people; and evangelisation.

"There is a palpable sense of energy among our lay people especially," Ang said just after the release of *Welcome & Evangelise*, a free booklet with ideas for how parishes can practically achieve both.

"There are just so many possibilities available to us, a myriad of resources that parishes can utilise to grow their Catholic identity and mission – online resources, adaptable programs and processes, and pastoral initiatives on offer locally and overseas.

"Our parishes have shown a remarkable genius and creativity in the ways in which they form, support and chal-

Prayer kit 'a very simple idea, but, I think, a good one'

lenge their people in the Gospel, drawing others to consider the Catholic faith anew. They know there is no need for resignation or complacency."

One parish's initiative, in particular, suggests that Ang's enthusiasm for the planning and pastoral support process of his diocese is far from misplaced. The parish created a prayer kit including a prayer book, cross, and a set of rosary beads

which is given to each public school student in their sacramental program while Catholic school students receive one kit per class.

"Students take it home and set up a prayer space in their house, with pictures of their loved ones, relatives and friends, around which families can gather to pray. They take a photo of it to bring back to class, to share and reflect on with their peers."

In one fell swoop, it traverses longstanding impassés to greater faith involvement – of schools lamenting 'uninvolved' parents or of practising parents looking askance at the religiosity of schools.

Ang remarks, "It's a simple, inexpensive initiative that connects the life of the parish with the school and encourages prayer in the home. And the parents of these children make a connection between the school and the parishes in which their children are being socialised. A very simple idea but, I think, a very good one."

There are plenty of opportunities the Church is yet to fully take hold of, he says,

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