

We acknowledge the Yuibera people, the traditional custodians who walked upon and cared for this land and river for thousands of years. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the First Nation people to country. We respect and are grateful for the wisdom of the elders for preserving the rich heritage and national resources for us.

Fr Don

I began by thinking of all you have done and been involved with, in the 3 years you have been here with us. And I could rattle off a great list but on further reflection I realised that all your undertakings are about one thing – being with the people of God; the people entrusted to your care, to walk with us, guide us, lead us in prayer and worship so that together we live out our baptismal calling.

A strong point of your ministry is knowing how to be with people especially in time of need. After the tragic loss of 2 brothers in Sarina you walked the main street of Sarina to listen to what people were saying. And responded to their needs with an evening mass, as well as presiding the funeral. After the floods you visit the people affected in our local area and drove your friend Bishop Tim Harris to visit the communities of Proserpine and Bowen. And then you were with the communities and people affected by the bushfires. Being a presence among them; showing the face of God and the church.

On a lighter note you were able to enjoy the company of the shearers in the pub in Longreach. All part of being with people and listening to their stories – meeting them where they are.

Another of your pastoral strength is visitation. You have a time set aside especially for visiting the house bound. As well as taking your turn to be on call for the hospital and important part of your pastoral care is to the sick and dying.

You have listened to people and from those listening meetings you have established parish pastoral councils to work with you in discerning and meeting the ongoing needs and concerns of our faith communities. We appreciate your collaborative approach to ministry – working with people. In doing this you are able to recognise in people their particular gifts and skills and encourage them to use them. Francis in *the Call to Holiness* says *The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts.* You walk with us, empower us, and encourage us to do this.

One doesn't have to know you for long to appreciate your love and concern for your own family. This grounds you and carries across into your ministry – a genuine understanding of people and relationships and both the joys and difficulties of living in the modern world.

We appreciate your depth of knowledge of scripture, theology, church teaching and documents, liturgy and your ability to make these accessible to people, particularly in your homilies and bulletin front pieces, but also in meetings, discussion groups, and answering challenging questions. Amid writing and reviewing risk assessments, making sure there's the appropriate choice of toppings for Saturday night pizzas and the many other necessary but often mundane things you attend to, you still find the time to keep up your reading and learning. You are across current news happenings, both locally and globally, where Pope Francis has been and what he has said as well as his apostolic letters and encyclicals and the statements and letters from our own Australian Bishops - recent examples are the documents on euthanasia and the Pope's beautiful letter on the importance of the Christmas crib. From your homilies and bulletins pieces it is also evident that you bring prayerful reflection to the readings. You bring the Sunday scriptures, the church's teaching and local and global issues together to help us understand where and how God is working in our world and the response this requires from us. You make real for us a God who is truly in our midst, as you guide us to live and make real the mission of Christ in our world today.

As we gather in this wonderful facility and once again experience the hospitality of St Patrick's college, we are reminded of the school communities that you responsible and how you give generously of time to them.

For 3 years now Fr Don you have worked tirelessly among our different faith communities sharing your wisdom, your love of God and his blessed mother and your gentle prayerful celebration of the Sunday eucharist with us. Francis in quoting St Bonaventure in *The Call to Holiness* says *The greatest possible wisdom is to share fruitfully what we have been given* and you most certainly have done that

In this same document Francis also says *you learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable*

Fr Don you have a great capacity to live to enjoy life but a life that is interwoven with theology and holiness; a life given to making God's love visible.

The third last section of *Laudato si* is on Sacramental Signs and the Celebration of Rest. Francis is speaking of Sunday eucharist and rest, but he says *Rest is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence*. He continues *The law of weekly rest forbade work on the 7th day, so as it says in Exodus 23:12 your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant and the stranger may be refreshed.*"

So rest is about another way of working and being refreshed. Don your time of study will be another way of working – but one where you will have to concentrate on only one thing. You go with our prayers and blessing. May it also be a time of refreshment and renewal and enjoyment.