

Tamboko, Don Bosco and Makira WYD 08 pilgrims with Byron Bay and Bangalow parish

Archdiocese of Lismore, Australia

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The 8th of July was an amazing and amusing day for the Tamboko, Don Bosco and Makira WYD Pilgrims! The Henderson International Airport was packed with parents, relatives and friends who came to farewell and wish good luck to the WYD pilgrims! The Pilgrims were over excited! Everything went perfectly well regarding to our first trip “DOWN UNDER”! The Diocese of Lismore was our host Diocese during our prior week home-stay in Brisbane before the WYD events in Sydney. Tamboko, Don Bosco and Makira group was assigned to Byron Bay as their host parish.



Captain Cook first sighted the Cape Byron Headland and named it ‘Cape Byron’ in 1770. It is located at Australia’s most easterly point. Byron Bay evolved from a settlement whose main industries were cedar cutting, logging, dairy, pig farming and whaling in the mid 1800s. Byron Bay has some magnificent sights, such as the Cape Byron Lighthouse, whale and dolphin watching, stunning white beaches, the green lush rainforest and beautiful parks. Byron Bay’s little town has its own flavour, very quiet and peaceful! Byron Bay and Bangalow were affiliated as one parish, which had happened just a week before we arrived. Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tonga Pilgrims were hosted by the Bangalow parish.

Rev Fr Anthony and his parish council organized a week full of exciting, amusing, energetic, spiritual, cultural and educational activities. We had Mass at 9:00am every morning and then set off for the day’s program.

The first activity on Thursday, gave us the opportunity to visit the residence for the aged at Pine Haven at Suffolk Park and this was one of the highlights of our program. The chance to pray, to bring life, joy and happiness to the elderly residents of the Byron Bay and Bungalow community. As soon as they heard the singing, chanting, jumping, clapping and clicking, their faces shone with great joy. They began to move their hands and feet! Oh! What a great feeling! The Solomon Islands group shared their traditional songs and dances which filled their hearts with the spirit of great joy and life! I was very proud of our Tamboko, Don Bosco and Makira young people’s contribution and the gift of joy and happiness they shared with the senior members of Byron Bay community. Lunch was served and shared with the staff before we left for Xavier Catholic College for the rest of the day’s programme.

The pilgrims from Tonga, PNG, Canada, Vietnam, Korea and the Solomon Islands were hosted in Byron Bay, Tweed Heads and Ballina gathered at Xavier Catholic College for cultural activities, music, games, Australian bush dances and a sausage sizzle night! Everyone had a great time and felt at home with each other in a friendly atmosphere. The “ bonfire” warmed up our hearts that night! Our gratitude and appreciation to the staff and the young people of Xavier Catholic College for their generosity, friendship and the warm welcome was extended by all the pilgrims.

We were invited to the Millumbimby council on Friday. The Aboriginal community at Naidoc celebrated their Reconciliation Day. The pilgrims had the opportunity to share their cultures and customs with the Aboriginal community in Byron Bay. The visit to

the Macadamia Castle was a great amusement for all because it was the first time they saw the Australian animals. They were given bags of animal food to feed them. We had great fun!

At 5pm, we gathered again at Douglas home at Nashua for a shared meal. We sat around the bonfire with our host families enjoying each other's company while the live music band was entertaining us through the night. There was a moment for the pilgrims to share their traditional dances and songs again! We never tired of showing off our Solomon Islands dances especially with our traditional grass skirts, decorated bamboos and shell money. The Sudanese community in the parish joined us and they stole the night show! Amazing, awesome, beautiful and friendly people! Their voices and dances were absolutely fantastic! We had a real African Queen style with a taste of the Pacific and Melanesian fashion parade night!

Again our host families, relatives and friends organized a day of games, singing, preparation for Sunday Mass and a BBQ at Crams farm! What a magnificent park. It is surrounded by a beautiful lake, lush green forest with magnificent mountains behind the scene. Tug of war was the main event. The Tongans dominated the Australians, PNG and of course, the Solomon Islands. At the end, the three countries joined together to challenge the Tongans. At last, we "won!" Sunday Mass was planned together and then each group found a spot to practice their dances and songs. Solidarity, sharing, listening, understanding and accepting ideas from each other taught us a great lesson. We were so happy and thankful for another wonderful and a successful day we had together.

Sunday was another grand day for all of us. The parish church was filled up with our families, relatives and friends. This was our last day together with everyone. The singing was fantastic! You can imagine the Tongans singing voices and of course, the PNG and the Solomon Islands! It was magnificent! The Solomon Islands contribution and participation in the Mass, were the Prayers for Vocations and the dance for the Offertory. The parishioners spontaneously expressed their appreciation and gratitude with a huge applause, which filled up the church in a joy-filled spirit!

Rev Fr Anthony stressed the fact that we, the young pilgrims from the Pacific countries especially from the Tonga, PNG and the Solomon Islands had a lot to offer to their young people and his parish. We really are true witnesses of Jesus Christ. Our presence, contribution and participation in the life of his parish for the whole week, renewed and strengthened the Catholic faith of his people. He thanked all the pilgrims and wished us all the best for the WYD08 events in Sydney.

All the pilgrims made a guard of honour outside the church while our host parents, relatives and friends proceeded to the parish hall for the rest of the programme. We had morning tea together followed by our Peace and Justice Workshop. Each representative from four respective countries shared views on various conflicts, which affected the lives of young people in their local community. These are the main issues which had been presented by each leader:

1. The Solomon Islands – The tension in 1998
2. Tonga - The burning down of the Town in Nukualofa in 2005
3. Australia – The Cronulla Riots in 2005
4. PNG – The unemployment of the young people.

What are we going to do with these conflicts when we go back to our respective countries? Amazing and interesting responses from each group. John Tebaubau from

the Don Bosco shared the Solomon Islands responses and their contribution to the large group.

1. Initiate Workshops, Awareness in schools, youth groups, local communities and churches focused on the following:

Alcohol, drugs, maruana,

Re-enforce rules and guidelines in schools, at home, local community and local church.

Initiate youth programmes, like youth retreats, prayer groups, youth seminars and sports, in order to occupy the young people.

It is also worthwhile to look very carefully at family values how the parents take interest in the development of their own children.

Families should be well organized.

Parents must spend and give enough time for and with their children at home.

I hope that our young people from the Solomon Islands will put these desires and proposals into action in their own families, youth groups, schools, communities and villages.

Moments of thanksgiving and expressions of gratitude was done beautifully. Presentation of gifts and expressions of our appreciation through traditional dancing and singing. It was a very unique and awesome moment for everyone. I was touched and felt by a real family and friendly atmosphere among everyone present! Fr Anthony and the parish council members accepted all the magnificent carved, weaved and painted traditional presents and gifts as tokens of our TAGIO and GRATITUDE!

The planting of trees was to mark this very significant week of being together as one family and to highlight all the WYD08 activities in Lismore Diocese before we departed the next day for Sydney!

Our Solomon Islands group gathered around our tree proudly singing “God saves us Solomon Islands”. It was an AMAZING and AWESOME feeling and moment! We concluded the day with cheers to wish everyone good luck for the rest of excitement of the WYD08 in Sydney!

It was easy to say hello but it was hard to say goodbye! The atmosphere of sadness was very much felt during our last farewell Mass on Monday morning with our families, relatives and friends. We left about 9:30am for Sydney after an unforgettable and a memorable week with our host families in Byron Bay and Bungalow Parish. Every good thing comes to an end! TAGIO TU MAS!

My experience of the WYD08 home- stay wasn't only to have a roof over my head, or just to have an accommodation, it was more than that. Family spirit, solidarity, friendship, love, generosity, sharing, dialoguing, appreciation and acceptance of differences in culture, language and colour were the most important qualities and values of life lived out and this was most felt during and through the whole week. I strongly believe that the theme of the XXIII WYD08 was well lived out throughout AUSTRALIA the week before the actual event in Sydney because of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit were well shared, lived out and witnessed in the lives of every pilgrim and their home- stay families, relatives and friends!