On 28 August 2016, about 80 catechists joined with Bishop Michael McCarthy, either face-to-face at the Kevin Castles Centre, Rockhampton or via video conferencing. (Many thanks to the Catholic schools and colleges throughout the Diocese who readily permitted catechists to use their video conferencing facilities and provided morning tea and lunch).

The theme of the gathering was God’s Leaven, based on the writing of Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium (EG): “Being Church means being God’s people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encour-aged, given hope and strengthened on the way.” (EG 114) — words which are so very appropriate to the role of the catechist in state schools.

Catechists were warmly welcomed by Leesa Jeffcoat, Director of Catholic Education – Rockhampton Diocese who spoke of the important role that catechists play in the lives of children.

In his address, Bishop Michael spoke of how infant Baptism required a post-baptismal catechesis in order for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1231) and how the work of the catechist contributes to this catechesis.

Drawing on Lumen Gentium 11, Bishop Michael then outlined the effects of each of the seven sacraments: Baptism incorporates us in the Church; Confirmation endows us with special strength to spread and defend the faith; through the Eucharist, we manifest unity of the people of God; through Penance we are reconciled with God and with the Church; the Anointing of the Sick lightens our suffering and saves us; Holy Orders enables those called to feed the Church in Christ’s name; while Matrimony helps married couples to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children.

Further reflecting on Lumen Gentium, Bishop Michael added that all are called to belong to the new people of God (LG13) and that Jesus commanded his Apostles: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the end of the time.” (LG17). The work done by catechists is very much in response to this command.

Bishop Michael concluded by thanking all catechists for the great work that they do in the state schools throughout the Diocese.
Carole Danby was the special guest presenter on the day and offered numerous suggestions on how catechists might support their schools in times of trauma and distress, including:

- Avoid platitudes eg ’Don’t cry’, ‘be brave’, ‘cheer up’.
- Write a card eg ‘holding you in prayer as you grieve . . .’
- Before your lesson, check out with the classroom teacher how both he/she and the students are coping.
- Offer the ’Daily Prayer’ which includes the words: ’I give you the good times as well as the bad, the times when I’m happy, the times when I’m sad.’
- Set up a prayer focus to engage the senses.
- Use coloured streamers and give to each student to write anything they liked about the person – place in prayer space.
- Play quiet music and invite students to draw.

Under the general theme of Images of God, Carole also discussed with catechists how to deal with difficult questions which might arise in the RI lesson. When asked such a question, Carole suggested these guidelines:

- How shall I respond? Stop, think, consider. Ask a further question – ’What do you think?’
- For whom is the question difficult? You or student?
- Why is the question difficult? - I’m not confident! The topic is complex! Raises theological concepts even adults find difficult!
- Is RI the place to handle this topic? What are the boundaries? Seek guidance, give yourself time, value the questions, encourage further seeking. Do not be afraid!
- What is the student’s real question? Is it a concern they have - listen with your heart. Is it a challenge?
- Keep the question open by inviting the student’s thoughts on the matter.
- Keep your response simple.
Questions can open the way to new understandings:

- Students’ big questions are to be explored, developed, nurtured and celebrated.
- This is where learning occurs as students reconstruct, clarify and evaluate new understandings.
- Helps them to make connections between their world and their understanding of God who is revealed through the Bible and through the faith of those they like and respect.
- Use a question box for students to place questions in and answer them in future lessons – saves the current lesson from being side-tracked.

The Bible is full of images of God. We can look to Scripture to find out what God is like. Rina Wintour’s *Quiet Reflections* and *Quiet Reflections for Kids* are useful resources. The following is a list of resources (including stories) which are also helpful:

- The Giving Tree (Shil Silverstein)
- Little Refugee (Anh Do)
- Lost Sheep series (Andrew McDonagh)
- Car Park Parables series (Paul Clark)
- You are Special (Max Lucado)
- The Rainbow Fish (Marcus Pfister)
- My Dad’s in Prison (Tess Rowley and Tim Rowley)

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

In the final session, Carole offered a number of suggestions to help with classroom management:

- Pay attention to the language you use: particularly by using the technique of owning and grounding beliefs and practices. (See Rekindling Hope Christmas 2015 edition for further details.)
- Be prepared.
- Wait for students to come to attention.
- Invite children to pray.
- Be in the vision of the children.
- Remind the children of the rules of the classroom.

Carole provided many other suggestions which can be found in her powerpoint emailed/posted to catechists after the Gathering.
A number of catechists from Rockhampton and Yeppoon recently participated in a day retreat at The Haven, Emu Park, in preparation for Advent and Christmas. Margaret Hallinan facilitated the retreat on the theme: New Beginnings Transformation and Hope. Participants were led through a meditative reflection on The Mountain of the Lord’s House and then invited to explore the link between wilderness and advent – watchfulness, a place of exposure, knowing ourselves. These reflections were then expressed in the form of group collages (see below):

Because most people lead such busy lives, participants were next invited to consider a proposal for a new way to experience Advent by considering what they truly desire, by refocusing their minds, and by slowing down and doing first things first: tasting the depth of our longing for the Saviour. At the end of their reflection they were asked to write a small group prayer on one of these three aspects of the proposal. Below are the prayers which were composed:

**Desire**

Dear Father,
we come before you in our need ..............
We choose to call on you and to trust you for your plans for us to succeed and be joyful in you.
Guide us to make the right decisions each day.
Open our eyes and our hearts to see the good around us and your everyday miracles.
Give us the knowledge that you desire us to know that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.
We ask this through your precious Son, Jesus.
Amen.

**Don’t Rush - First Things First**

Father,
let this Advent be a time for us to have a change of heart.
Through appreciation, patience and thankfulness, teach us forgiveness, Lord Jesus.
Help us to slow down, to wait and take in the atmosphere of silent prayer.
Increase our faith and love of service during this Advent season.
In this time of transformation, help us to contemplate the birth of our Lord and Saviour.
Amen.

**Refocus**

Lord,
thank you for our day – for the busy times, for the quiet times.
Help us to focus on the important things as we place our trust in you on our journey through Advent towards the coming of our Saviour at Christmas.
Amen.
Paperwork 2017

Reminder

All RI coordinators to ensure that the Education Queensland Form 1 (application for Approval) has been completed and has been signed by your parish priest/administrator (for a single arrangement) or by all religious leaders who are signatory to the cooperative agreement before sending it to the principal of the state school.

All Catechists to obtain a copy of the annual parish approval form which has been signed by your parish priest/administrator and also a copy of the Education Queensland Form 2 (principal’s approval) completed by the principal of the state school on receipt of the Form 1.

Please check if you will need to renew your Bluecard in 2017.

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Santa's Christmas Prayer

by Warren D. Jennings

The sleigh was packed,  I will fill all the stockings  
the reindeer were fed,  and not leave a track.

But Santa still knelt  I'll eat every cookie  
by the side of the bed.  that's left for my snack.

"Dear Father," he prayed,  I can do all these things Lord,  
"Be with me tonight.  only through You,

There's much work to do  I just need your blessing,  
and my schedule is tight.  then it's easy to do.

I must jump in my sleigh  All this is to honour  
and streak through the sky,  the birth of the One,  
Knowing full well  That was sent to redeem us,  
that reindeer can't fly.  Your most Holy Son.

I will visit each household  So to all of my friends,  
before the first light,  lest Your glory I rob,  
I'll cover the world  Please Lord, remind them,  
and all in one night.  who gave me this job."

With sleighbells a-ringing,  
I'll land on each roof,  
I'll cover the world  
Amid the soft clatter  and all in one night.

of each little hoof.  
With sleighbells a-ringing,

To get in the house  I'll land on each roof,  
is the difficult part,  "I'll land on each roof,  
So I'll slide down the chimney  Amid the soft clatter  
of each little heart.  of each little hoof.

My sack will hold toys  
My sack will hold toys  to grant all their wishes.  
to grant all their wishes.  The supply will be endless  
The supply will be endless  like the loaves and the fishes.

like the loaves and the fishes.

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As I come to the end of my time as Diocesan Coordinator for Faith Education and Formation, I would like to thank all catechists for your great support over that time, especially in the early years when I was learning the “job”. It has been such a pleasure to work with you all. I admire you greatly for your dedication and loyalty to the many children whom you instruct each week, and how you wish only the very best for them that they might hear the good news of the great love that God has for each and every one of them. Particularly, I would like to thank all catechists who will be retiring at the end of this year. Thank you for your many years of dedication. May God continue to shower you with many blessings. With love and grateful thanks,

Pat