On 15 October 2015, many catechists met with Bishop Michael McCarthy, either face-to-face at the Kevin Castles Centre, Rockhampton or via video conferencing at various centres throughout the Diocese – Barcaldine, Bundaberg, Clermont, Emerald, Gladstone, Longreach, Mackay, Sarina, Walkerston and Yeppoon. In all, nearly 90 catechists were able to gather through the generous assistance of 14 Diocesan schools and colleges who readily agreed for catechists to use their school video conferencing facilities and provided morning tea. The theme of the Gathering was Planting Seeds of Hope.

Carole Danby, Project Officer for Evangelisation Brisbane, was the guest presenter on the day and shared her great expertise with catechists. Her particular focus was on the Language of Religious Education/Instruction to enable catechists to share their own beliefs and those of others in a respectful manner.

Using the language of owning and grounding in RI lessons enables respectful discussion about differing beliefs, informs and acknowledges diversity of beliefs and practices, avoids jargon and technical terms, checks out students’ understanding and does not presume students’ beliefs or experience.

In her talk Carole also shared some useful tips such as the following: setting up a prayer focus with liturgical colours, using a treasure chest to highlight the treasure that is the Bible, using a story scarf when telling bible stories, and songs such as The Free Be We Be (sung to the tune of Hokey Pokey) and the more reflective Marty Haugen songs of Hands of Healing and The Song and the Silence.
The Language of Religious Education/Instruction:

OWNING AND GROUNDING

Owning occurs when I claim a belief as mine and present it to students for consideration. Owned statements begin with phrases like:

I believe...
I think...
I feel...
In my experience...
It seems to me...

Grounding is the process whereby a belief statement is attached to the group who holds it, or to its source. Grounded statements begin with phrases like:

Many Christians believe ...
For Christians, the Bible is ...
In the Bible, Paul says in Romans 8 ...
Christians observe Sunday ...

Fact-type statements are those which can be scientifically, historically or empirically proven, for example: approximately, one-third of the world’s population follow the Christian religion, and do not need to be owned or grounded.

By using the language of owning and grounding in RI lessons, RI teachers and students have a way to express their beliefs without threat; dialogue about beliefs is encouraged, unnecessary negative reactions among students are avoided and students are free to consider belief statements without being pressured.

The Morning Offering

Creator God
I give you today
All that I think
And do
And say
I give you the good times
As well as the bad
The times when I’m happy
The times when I’m sad
Fill me with grace
And make me strong
With you by my side
I can never go wrong
Amen

Make a large circle in the air with arms
Hand in front of body, palms upward
Place index finger on side of head
Make fists and stack one on top of the other
Move two hands outward from mouth
Thumbs up
Thumbs down
Smiling face
Sad face
Start from feet and move hand up the body
Flex arms showing muscles
Indicate beside you with your hand
Cross over hands in front of you and shake head from side to side.
Hands together in praying gesture.

With actions provided by Carole Danby
Another valuable feature of the day was the opportunity for catechists to share activities which have worked well for them in their RI lessons or to share special moments in their teaching RI. Ideas shared included:

- Programs used: Access Ministries workbooks and DVD, Connect, Christ Our Light and Life and Infant Jesus Society at the Mackay Special School.
- Dramatising Gospel stories.
- Reflection time.
- Internet for extra resources eg crosswords, word search relating to bible stories.
- Favourite prayer: Hey, God! Help me to be the best person I can be.
- Re-write Gospel story as a mini-play with as many characters involved as possible for a whole-of-class participation - the main characters, a commentator as well as crowd responses.
- Colouring sheets for little ones - an old favourite currently being revisited by adults! Base the picture to be coloured on a picture of the Scripture story just used in their lesson and which links to activities in their activity books. An enjoyable way for the children to finish off their lesson! It also helps them to remember the story when you want to do a re-cap at the next lesson.
- Three-minute quiet time at start of lesson.
- Engaging/action songs from Andrew Chinn and other artists to enhance lessons.
- Teaching young children to pray the Our Father and pray it at the end of the lesson.
- On special occasions like All Saints day: introduce saints and their way of life.
- Information has been prepared for use in all Bundaberg district state schools informing parents/guardians of the RI program in state schools.
- Inviting students to take “something precious” from the bag.
- *If I Were a Butterfly* song with actions.
- One-minute silent meditation at the start of RI lessons for both younger and older students.
- Having an assistant in the classroom is a great help.
- For Years 1 and 2 students: visual and tactile resources such as playdough to make the animals in the story of Noah works well along with their student activity book.
- Prepare weekly lesson as a powerpoint presentation for students.
- Children like music and competitions.
- Using the electronic whiteboard has been a wonderful addition to the classroom. Lessons can be prepared as powerpoint presentations which include elements such as the key points of the lesson, prayers, music, video clips. The presentation can be carried on a memory stick. Gradually a library of lessons could be built up for future use.
- Welcome pack for new teachers and assistants.
- Great resource for recounting Bible stories: *The Children’s illustrated Bible* Bible stories retold by Selina Hastings, illustrated by Eric Thomas.
- “Stickmen” pictures with the Bible story written on the back - very good to use when the Bible story is not a common one.
- Lesson plan structure: start with the morning offering (adapted for an ecumenical class) followed by bible story, activity sheet, question time (to enable to students to ask questions) and closing prayer.
Responding with kindness to a troubled student has helped the student to change his attitude and behaviour.

Need to develop material for RI teachers to use to support a school community suffering bereavement or trauma.

Training in the use of interactive whiteboard would be beneficial for those who would like to use it.

All the children need to know they are loveable and special and have a purpose in life.

Celebrations of the Easter and Christmas stories: each class prepares their role during preceding lessons. The celebrations contain music, drama and narration. Parents are invited to attend these RI presentations. Example from an Easter pageant: Year 1 recited an Easter chant and sang *Alive, Alive!*, Years 2 and 3 enacted a drama, Years 4 and 5 narrated the story using suitable props to illustrate the events from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.

Creating a card to illustrate the Sacrament of Eucharist (The text is: *Jesus truly present in the Sacred Host*) (for single arrangement schools only following the Catholic program).

All catechists will receive an annual parish approval letter through their parish office. It will be similar in design to the Form 2 Principal’s Approval issued by Education Queensland. New catechists will continue to receive their certificate of approval to teach/help with RI in state schools once they are registered but they will need annual approval to continue to teach/help.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all catechists for their dedication to their students in state schools and all the RI coordinators for their support and organisation.

May the blessings of the Holy Family be showered on you and your loved ones during this Christmas season.

See you next year.

Pat