

# Introduction

Mr David Crawford, Assistant Principal

As a Catholic community, we gather today in prayer to acknowledge the value, importance and commencement of a new pathway in Aboriginal Education at St Joseph's College Lochinvar through the opening of the Yalawa Aboriginal Education Centre.

The Yalawa Centre is an educational & cultural hub that brings together St Joseph's College Aboriginal & Torres Strait students, from all year groups and differing Aboriginal nations from across Australia. Yalawa, meaning 'stay and rest', provides a dedicated space, where students can gather, seek support for their academic studies and wellbeing, discuss career pathway options, engage in cultural awareness activities and deepen their understanding of identity, kinship and country.

The Yalawa Centre is a place where students can continue to build their capacity; a place where they can gather as one, and gain the confidence to be people of strength, faith and hope. Originally part of the Tenison Education Centre, that was founded by the Sisters of St Joseph, the Yalawa Centre draws our contemporary Josephite community together. The building and concept evokes the legacy of care for Indigenous people and country, that the Sisters of St Joseph Lochinvar have nurtured and lived. This is a legacy that we, the students and staff of St Joseph's College will strive to uphold and deepen as we strive to meet the needs of 21st Century learners and families.

Today, as part of the Opening Ceremony you will witness a Water Rite. A Water Rite draws upon the waters and spirits of the rivers, and as Christians, renews us in our baptismal promises. Water is the most life-sustaining gift of Mother Earth — it is the interconnection among all living beings. Water sustains us, it flows between us and within us; it replenishes us. Water is the blood of Mother Earth and, as such, cleanses not only herself, but all living things. In our Sacred Space, we have placed water from various parts of Country that represent the Aboriginal students of St Joseph's Lochinvar - from Cessnock, Branxton, Maitland, Morpeth, & Aberglassyn. The water that flows through this land, connects us all, and it is this water that we will place in the Yalawa Centre to forever remind us of the many parts that bring us together as one community.

At the completion of the Liturgy, guests will move to the Yalawa Centre where Wirijari man - Jake Collins-Doherty will conduct a Smoking Ceremony to complete the formal opening of the Yalawa Centre. A smoking ceremony is an ancient aboriginal custom in Australia. It involves burning various native plants to produce smoke, which has cleansing properties and the ability to ward off bad spirits from the people and the land and to make a pathway for a brighter future.

As we stand on the edge of change, we encounter opportunities and challenges, and savour the time to gather as a community to build a better future for all students. The opening of the Yalawa Aboriginal Education Centre acknowledges the past, and present and the obligation we have, to teach and preserve the culture of our first nation people. The Yalawa Centre is a physical sign of our commitment, to ensure that our Indigenous students and families to have a special place within the college to learn and grow.