

**75th anniversary address
by Helen Forde, CEO, Jesuit Mission**

Sydney Thanksgiving Mass and afternoon tea, Sunday 31 May 2026

Good afternoon everyone.

On behalf of Jesuit Mission Australia, welcome, and thank you for joining us as we celebrate a remarkable milestone - 75 years of Jesuit Mission.

A special welcome to those joining us for the first time. We are delighted to have you with us.

I have to say, standing here today and seeing more than 200 people gathered to celebrate Jesuit Mission's 75th anniversary is deeply moving.

Looking around this room, I see the living story of Jesuit Mission - missionaries, family members, supporters, volunteers, parishioners, school communities, staff and friends who have helped shape this mission over many decades. Some of you have been walking alongside Jesuit Mission since the 1950s. Others have joined us more recently. Together, you represent generations of people who have carried this mission forward.

Your presence today is a powerful reminder that Jesuit Mission has always been a community united by faith, solidarity and a commitment to walking alongside those on the margins.

Today is a celebration of 75 years of faith in action.

And above all, it is a day of gratitude.

Gratitude for the generations of Jesuits who responded to God's call.

Gratitude for the supporters, parishes, schools, volunteers and partners who have sustained this mission over 75 years.

And gratitude for the communities across Asia who have welcomed us into their lives and shown us what courage, resilience and hope truly look like.

As I prepared for today, I found myself thinking about the late Fr Phil Crotty SJ.

Phil was my hero, mentor and friend.

When I first joined Jesuit Mission as the first lay person and first woman to lead the organisation, I was terrified.

How could I possibly follow someone like Fr Phil?

Phil had spent more than 50 years in Hazaribag. My own overseas experience amounted to three months volunteering with the Jesuits in Cambodia.

In our office today, Phil's well-worn Jesuit Mission hat still sits on a shelf, a quiet reminder of a life spent in service.

I remember sitting down with him for one of our first coffees and asking him what it was like to leave Australia as a young Jesuit scholastic and travel to India.

I said, "You were barely in your twenties. Most of you had never travelled overseas. You boarded a ship and spent six weeks at sea, heading to a country where the language, culture, food and customs were completely unfamiliar. What was it like? How did you experience India?"

Without even pausing to think, Phil replied:

"We were dead mad, but we were called by the Spirit."

And then he added:

"India was like the Wild West. We had no idea what we were doing. But we soldiered on."

I've never forgotten those words.

Looking back, I think Phil was being both humorous and profoundly honest.

They capture something essential about those early missionaries.

There was courage.

There was faith.

There was a willingness to leave behind certainty and comfort in order to accompany others.

In many ways, they embodied what St Ignatius invited all of us to do: to be available to God's call wherever it may lead, trusting that the Spirit is already at work before we arrive.

That courageous, pioneering spirit is what we celebrate today.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1951, Australian Jesuits first arrived in Hazaribag.

They went not as experts, but as companions.

They walked alongside tribal communities, Dalits and some of the most marginalised people in India, sharing their lives, learning from them, and working together to build a more just future.

We stand here today deeply grateful and humbled by their witness.

We remember in a special way the many missionaries who have gone before us.

We acknowledge that three Australian Jesuits continue that missionary presence in Hazaribag today: Fr Bob Slattery, Fr Tony Herbert and Fr Bob Billings.

We are also honoured to recognise those missionaries who have returned home after years of service: Fr Paul Horan, Fr Tom Keogh, Br Kevin Huddy, Fr Hans Hendricks and Fr Renato Zecchin, who are with us today.

And of course, Australian Jesuits Mark Raper, Sacha Bermudez-Goldman and David Holdcroft who are currently serving in international works.

Would you please join me in thanking them for their extraordinary contribution.

Today we are also privileged to welcome family members of those missionaries.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the families of Fr Hans Hendricks, Paddy and Geoff Meagher, and John Rush.

And I would like to offer a very special welcome to Mrs Mackinson, who travelled on that very first voyage to Hazaribag in 1951.

What an extraordinary adventure that must have been, and what a gift it is to have you with us today as we celebrate this anniversary.

If there are any other family members of Hazaribag missionaries here today whom I have not mentioned, would you please stand so that we may acknowledge and thank you as well?

The missionary story is not only the story of those who went.

It is also the story of the families who supported them, prayed for them, worried about them, and shared in the sacrifices that mission required.

Today we honour you too.

Of course, Jesuit Mission's story does not belong only to missionaries.

It belongs to all of you.

For 75 years, supporters, volunteers, parishes, schools and benefactors have responded with extraordinary generosity and solidarity.

What began as one mission in Hazaribag has grown into partnerships with Jesuit organisations and communities in more than 10 countries across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, responding to some of the

world's most pressing challenges through education, livelihoods, healthcare, ecology and humanitarian assistance.

Yet at its heart, the mission remains the same: accompanying people living on the margins with dignity, compassion and hope.

None of this would have been possible without you.

Before I conclude, there are a few people I would like to thank.

Firstly, Fr Steve Curtin SJ and his Jesuit brothers. Thank you for celebrating this beautiful Mass with us today and helping us mark this milestone in such a meaningful way.

Thank you also to Danielle Whitmore and the Parish Community Choir for leading us so beautifully in prayer and song. Your contribution has enriched this celebration and lifted our hearts.

I would also like to acknowledge the Jesuit Mission team.

I have the privilege of working alongside an extraordinary group of people who are deeply committed to our mission and values. They bring compassion, professionalism and dedication to their work every day, often behind the scenes and without recognition.

The impact we celebrate today would simply not be possible without all of you. Thank you for your commitment, your generosity of spirit and your unwavering dedication to serving communities living on the margins.

In the Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius invites us to become people of gratitude, because gratitude is the foundation of love.

Today, as we look back on 75 years, our hearts are full of gratitude.

Gratitude for those who came before us.

Gratitude for those who continue the mission today.

And gratitude for each one of you who has chosen to walk alongside Jesuit Mission.

Our anniversary theme this year is One Vine, Many Branches.

It is a fitting image for Jesuit Mission.

From the small beginnings of Hazaribag in 1951, the mission has grown and flourished through many branches - missionaries, families, supporters, volunteers, parishes, schools, partners and communities across more than 10 countries.

While our branches may be many, we are united by a common purpose: to accompany those on the margins and help build a more just and hopeful world.

Thank you for your faith.

Thank you for your generosity.

Thank you for your solidarity.

Thank you for helping write the next chapter of this remarkable story.

In a moment, we will share our 75th Anniversary video.

As you watch it, I invite you to remember that this story belongs to all of us.

It is the story of courageous missionaries, generous supporters, committed partners, dedicated staff and resilient communities who have walked together for 75 years.

It is a story that continues today because of each one of you.

After the video, please join us for afternoon tea in the Ron Dyer Centre. We would love the opportunity to continue celebrating with you, sharing stories and renewing friendships old and new.

Happy 75th Anniversary, Jesuit Mission, and thank you for being part of this remarkable journey.