

## Burns Creek School - Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands consists of over 900 islands along two volcanic chains in the south-west Pacific Ocean. The Solomon Islands was granted independence in 1978, and has a population of over 600,000, who are predominantly Melanesian.

The Society in Australia has one twin in the Solomon Islands – St Louis de Montfort in Burns Creek which is twinned with St Joseph’s Conference in Nyngon, NSW. Burns Creek is a ‘settlement’ which means that is it government land that people have been occupying for the past 20 years or so. There is no running water or sewerage, no mains electricity and roads are gravel and severely potholed.



A striking feature of the settlement is the number of children. Part of the work of the conference members is to care for children from broken relationships in the community. Many seemed to have extra “adopted” children and it is normal for families to take in children who do not have adequate care.

The Vice President of the Society in the Solomon Islands, and St Louis de Montfort conference member, Sr Julian Ketai, started a school in Burns Creek three years ago because of the many children in the settlement with no access to education. The school is a special work of the Society in the Solomon Islands, and is run by a Board from the local parish and community.

The school has two sections, an early childhood education school (ages 3-6) and a primary school. Both are built from wood and pandanus palm with dirt floors and no windows. The

facilities in the classrooms are basic and there are up to 60 children in each class. There are 780 students and 12 teachers, some of whom are part time volunteers.



Sr Julian is herself a volunteer who commits her time to the running of the school and has been described by Western visitors as a 'living saint'. This term does not sit comfortably with her, but aptly describes her selfless commitment to her community through the work of the Society, which is seen replicated in many countries that Australia twinning with by Vincentians who themselves, often lack what we in Australia consider to be 'the basics'.

The Society in Australia is looking at ways to further develop twinning relationships in the Solomon Islands, and to provide support to the work of the school through project funding.

