

The *Road to Bethlehem*: Connecting school and community

Brenton Luchow

Community Relations Officer, Central Coast Adventist School, Erina, NSW

It is a balmy summer evening and Central Coast Adventist School is preparing to open their gates. Everything is ready for the ‘hordes’ about to stream through the gates. Camels are saddled, farm animals are in their pens, tax collectors are out in force and the Roman soldiers are ready to maintain order. As the sounds of the marketplace are heard beyond the gates and the aromas of curries, burgers, hot chips and baked potatoes are wafting through the air, it is clearly not a regular school day.

Each December, for the past 11 years, *Road to Bethlehem* has transformed the school campus into a bustling, 1st century theatre. The local Adventist churches and Central Coast Adventist School join forces to launch an event of truly biblical proportions. With a drama cast numbering close to 200 plus another 200 or so stallholders, street vendors, entertainers, technicians and guides, this community event is like no other event on the Central Coast in NSW.

The drama tour, set across seven distinct scenes, is the real draw card of this event. The nativity story is presented with a firm biblical foundation but interpreted in a fresh way. It is this element that draws over 3,000 people each year. Participants come from Wollongong in the south to Port Macquarie in the north and range in age from babies to grandparents. The core audience is Central Coast locals from all walks of life and representing a range of Christian denominations and religious faiths. They all share, in common, a desire to walk the road that leads to the infant Jesus and to remember the true message of the Christmas story.

The event also engages a family audience with plenty of quality food options and retail stalls, plus activities including face painting, crafts, carpentry lessons, camel rides, farm animals and the *Coastline Pinnacle Challenge*—an activity for youth aimed at developing motivation, resilience and self-worth. There is also stage entertainment from a variety of local performers and artists hosted by local Christian radio station *Rhema FM, Central Coast*.

So why does *Road to Bethlehem* take over the school campus each year?

“All share a desire to walk the road that leads to the true message of the Christmas story.”



Each of the Adventist churches on the Central Coast has a desire to share the message of Jesus in an authentic and engaging way. This is a desire also shared by Central Coast Adventist School. The *Road to Bethlehem* partnership allows resources to be combined to present an event on a scale that would be challenging for a single entity. The event also presents a united front to those who attend the event and allows people to ask questions and talk about the true Christmas story. Put simply, *Road to Bethlehem* is our gift to the Central Coast community.

Central Coast Adventist School benefits from the *Road to Bethlehem* event in a variety of ways. It provides an opportunity for the wider community to view the campus and experience the unique community within which we operate—to get a better picture of who we are and what we do. While it is difficult to quantify, well over 50% of people who enrol their children in the school reflect on *Road to Bethlehem* as a significant factor in their decision to choose Central Coast Adventist School.

The impact of the event goes far beyond the school gates. *Road to Bethlehem* is a significant opportunity within the school community for the engagement and expression of faith. A significant number of the actors in the drama are sourced from the school community—students, parents and staff. The stallholders and food vendors are also largely from within the school community. There is something incredibly powerful that takes place



“*Road to Bethlehem is a significant opportunity within the school community for the engagement and expression of faith*”



[Photography:
David Geoffrey
Gosling
Photography]

Teaching & Professional Practice

when you have such a diverse group of people from a range of faith backgrounds and family situations, all working together towards a common goal. Differences can be put aside to focus on the things that are held in common, new friendships can be formed, and ties strengthened.

Central Coast Adventist School is well known in the community for being a school that truly cares about its students and community. The relationship between staff and students is not typical of most schools. To staff, students are much more than a name on an attendance roll; for students, staff are approachable and willing to engage above and beyond the usual expectations. *Road to Bethlehem*

provides an opportunity for this to be observed by prospective families. Throughout the event staff, students and parents are seen interacting as a team, working together for a common purpose. The bonds that are forged here carry through into what happens during the school day and contributes to the unique nature of the school.

Road to Bethlehem provides an opportunity for the Central Coast community to experience Jesus, whom the Adventist churches and Central Coast Adventist School know and love.

Visit www.roadtobethlehem-erina.org for further details about *Road to Bethlehem* on the Central Coast. **TEACH**



Endnotes

¹ *Road to Bethlehem* programs also take place in Nunawading, Victoria and in Livingstone, Western Australia.

² Central Coast Adventist School is a K–12, non-selective, co-educational school with an enrolment of over 900 students in 2013. The school has been providing quality Christian education on the Central Coast, NSW since 1969. You can find out more about Central Coast Adventist School online www.ccas.nsw.edu.au

Some recent *Road to Bethlehem* statistics

- 200+ involved in drama production
- 200+ involved in serving, hosting, logistics and technical production
- Live animals include: 3 camels, 1 donkey, 6 sheep, alpacas, goats, calves, ponies, chicken, ducks, rabbits, plus crocodiles, snakes and spiders
- 10 food vendors
- 12 retailers
- 20+ tents
- 3 mobile refrigerators
- 35 bales of straw
- 2 shipping containers for storing props, costumes and sets
- 50 café tables
- 2000 gift bags distributed
- 5 tax collectors
- 8 soldiers
- 2700 drama tickets available
- 800+ curries sold
- 500+ hot drinks sold
- 300+ burgers sold
- 700+ cups of hot chips sold
- 500+ fairy floss cones sold
- 400+ pancakes sold
- 400+ pies sold
- 300+ potatoes sold
- 200+ cups of popcorn sold
- 1000+ drinks sold