



What do you do when your son asks if you would like to accompany him on the Pilgrimage of Hope trip to Alice Springs?

Not really an option to say No!

Fortunately, I was familiar with what the Pilgrimage of Hope was about with my son having gone to Fiji the previous year and was aware

that there was a Father/Son pilgrimage to the Red Centre for year 8 and 9 boys.

Having accepted my son's invitation, there were the obligatory introductory sessions conducted by Brother James (BJ) which gives you some of the background information that is required for the pilgrimage. I say advisedly "some of the background information" as the common theme amongst the Fathers was the fact that there was a little less organisation than what might be normally expected from formulating a trip for 48 people. Having said that, it has to be said that with the military expertise displayed by our Logistics Co-ordinator, Mr. Jim Budden, everything ran as smoothly as could be expected given that the mantra of the Pilgrimage of Hope is that you cannot be organised, you have to be "in the moment".

Be prepared to be out of your comfort zone and to confront not only personal issues but issues between yourself and your son. That is one part of the pilgrimage; the other part of course, is the service aspect to Yipirinya School in Alice Springs.

When you see how much Ken Langford-Smith the Principal of Yipirinya School has to do, you will appreciate that even the token assistance we at CCGS can provide for a 4 or 5 day period can make a little bit of difference. Being at the school for the first week of the school term was an eye-opener as the school battles to get students to school when the outside air temperature is hovering around 4° or 5°. Even if numbers are down or fluctuate from day to day, there is still plenty of interaction between us as outsiders



and the students. Even though you may only have a fleeting impact, if any at all, on the lives of the students, there is no doubt that the teachers at the school appreciate the extra assistance that fathers and sons provide.

It is a tremendous experience to be involved in an indigenous school, an opportunity that is not likely to come up for most of us and is to be highly recommended.

Running hand in hand with the service aspect to the school is the pastoral approach which in 2011 was ably facilitated by Miles Protter. These are great sessions which can be soul searching and confronting but are a strong vehicle to enable men to discuss some of their inner feelings and for fathers to have a more meaningful discussion with their sons on issues which in most cases would not be raised voluntarily by either party.

Another reason to consider this particular pilgrimage is it is the only one where there is this active association with your son.

And finally, there is the sight-seeing of the Red Centre. Viewing Uluru and Katajuta in all their glory in the vast Australian outback is something which most of us would put on our "bucket list" and it certainly serves as the icing on the cake for a wonderful experience.

I can highly endorse the whole experience and having BJ lend his own inimitable character to the evening sessions really makes for a very holistic journey.

Hamish (Queenslea) and David St. George

