**ACU Francis Xavier Conaci Scholarship for Indigenous Studies 2018**

**Kate Gavin**

I am saddened not to be in Rome to celebrate with the second recipient of the ACU Francis Xavier Scholarship for Indigenous Studies, Kate Gavin, but grateful to be able to offer a few words through the kindness of the Ambassador.

On behalf of the Benedictine Community at New Norcia and the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation I send greetings and congratulations to you, Kate, and we offer our sincere encouragement and support.

By now you will be quite familiar with the story of the New Norcia Noongar boys, Francis Conaci and Benedict Dirimera. You will have learned how New Norcia’s founding monk, Rosendo Salvado, held these young boys in such high regard, particularly in their moral and intellectual capacity. They both achieved much in their short time in Italy, and their legacy still lives on through this scholarship, and in so many other ways.

I am so pleased that this second scholarship has been awarded to a woman, because New Norcia has a very rich history of remarkable Noongar women. On this very happy occasion, I would like to briefly introduce you to one particularly outstanding New Norcia character, Helen Cuper. In the early 1870s Helen was appointed director of the newly completed New Norcia Post Office, making her the first New Norcia Aboriginal woman ever employed by the government. Showing extraordinary skills in the new technology of telegraphy, Helen went on to become New Norcia’s first telegrapher, and one of the best in the colony...you’ll be pleased also to learn that her successor was an Aboriginal woman too!

Kate, I would like, through the Ambassador, to present you with a copy of Salvado’s Report to Propaganda Fide, which he wrote in 1900, the year of his death. You will be able to read the details of Helen’s delightful story. Along with the story of Conaci, I hope you will be able to draw much inspiration from them in your own studies and career in nursing.

We do hope to welcome you in New Norcia someday, but in the meantime may your exciting adventure in Rome be filled with much joy and discovery, and we take this opportunity to wish you every blessing and assurance of prayers.

Fr John Herbert OSB, Abbot