It is intriguing to think that San Clemente High School opened its doors 100 years ago as a place for ‘well to do’ young ladies to be educated. It evolved over time as a boarding school, a sanctuary for prisoners of war and a refuge for immigrants while under the care of the Dominican Sisters. In 1927 San Clemente had ten religious staff and three hundred students, both boarders and day pupils.

During the 1970s the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle took over the school and in 1983 San Clemente became co-educational. Since then the numbers have steadily increased, and the present enrolment is 740 students.

San Clemente is now a thriving, inclusive co-educational Catholic high school, represented by many cultures. Students travel daily from as far north as Karuah, Port Stephens, Raymond Terrace and Medowie as well as the inner Newcastle City region.

Central to San Clemente is the specialised help for students with learning difficulties, hearing impairment, refugees, students speaking languages other than English, as well as gifted and talented students. The growth of the school is a reflection of the Dominican spirit and way of life which follows St Dominic’s teachings of being flexible enough to make connections, to keep moving and remain abreast of the times.

Over the last several years the school has strived to strengthen the Dominican charism which was laid one hundred years ago.

Rosemary McAllister, the school’s Religious Studies Coordinator said, “It was, and still is, a mission of the Dominican community to develop an attitude and practice of itinerancy and mobility and move towards new frontiers to reveal the Order’s motto of Veritas meaning truth.”

San Clemente High School in Mayfield, named after the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, is preparing for a milestone celebration of events to commemorate a centenary of dedicated learning under the Dominican philosophy which dates back 800 years.
We have a great inheritance which we are justly proud of, however, it is our sacred task now to write a new chapter in the Dominican story, to live Dominic’s charism today. It is our responsibility to make the Dominican story real by reading the signs of the times, develop positive relationships, preach to spread the good news, be contemplative, provide service to others, study to develop the mind and educate the whole person."

San Clemente is creative and progressive with cross curricula initiatives, which are addressing the realities of the world. The school has imbedded a Positive Education program which focuses on connecting, learning, giving, being active and taking notice. Its philosophy and whole school approach blends well with its Catholicity and particularly the Dominican charism.

San Clemente welcomes approximately 38 varying nationalities; 6% are Indigenous, 9% are funded Students with Disabilities and 3.2% are students on Visas.

San Clemente is proud of its Learning Support Centre, named after the late Dominican Sister Karen Feldt. The Feldt Learning Centre currently supports in excess of seventy students who are funded for additional needs, as well as many other students who require additional support. The school has earned itself a reputation for providing exceptional care to these students and it is not uncommon for families to enrol their children from great distances. Furthermore, it proudly continues to support students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect, including a number of refugees. These centres have been purposely placed in the middle of the school grounds and the community has come to understand that this centre is like the heartbeat of San Clemente, it is a place to go if any extra assistance is needed – it is what we are about.

In celebrating the school’s centenary, the challenge that lies ahead is to create awareness that we are a school which is rich in Dominican spirituality, charism and tradition. The school is preparing their students for real life, providing them with the tools of resilience and perseverance to cope with the challenges and demands of the times triggered by global, highly technological and materialistic cultures. As well teachers are providing an education where they can envisage students to be responsive, contemplative and innovative leaders, who will feel liberated enough to be agents of change in modern society.

“St Dominic looked at the present with all its possibilities and challenges, so Dominicans today must also look at the present with all its possibilities and challenges. It is our mission to make the links so that the community can recognise the Dominican ways continued in modern society”, said Rosemary McAllister.

Where did it all begin? In 1867, eight Dominican Sisters from Dun Laoghaire, Ireland responded willingly to a request from Dr James Murray to bring Catholic education to the newly created Diocese of Maitland.
1916 saw the beginnings of San Clemente, Mayfield. On the Feast of All Dominican Saints, 9th November, 1916, His Lordship Dr Dwyer granted to the community of St Mary’s, West Maitland, the option of taking up a new Convent at Mayfield, North Waratah, where a Catholic School was much needed. After much prayer and consideration, the community decided to undertake the proffered work, and on the Feast of St Joseph, 1917, an agreement was signed for the purchase of Mr Julian Windeyer’s property at Mayfield at the corner of Kerr and Bull Streets. The house was immediately set in order for a Convent, temporary classrooms arranged, and on Sunday 15th April, under the escort of Rev V F Peters, Administrator of St John’s Cathedral, Mother M. Joseph de Lauret (Priress), and Mother M. Philippa Byrne (Sub-Priress) set out with the little band of Sisters – Mother M. Concepta O’Donohoe (Superior), Sister M. Bonaventure Lamond and Sister M. Winifrid Keating who had been chosen to begin the work at “San Clemente”.

The priest in charge of the Parish, Rev H O’Laverty, welcomed the Nuns on their arrival, and friends had the house in perfect readiness. That same evening the Bishop paid the Sisters a visit, and next morning His Lordship blessed the building and said the first Mass in the little Australian “San Clemente”. The school opened that morning, April 16th 1917 and 50 children were in attendance.

Besides the 50 children of the parochial school, the Sisters also received external pupils and boarders. In 1919 they moved to the present site of San Clemente on the corner of Crebert and Havelock Streets.

The Dominican Sisters purchased ‘Redcliff’ to use as a convent in 1919, with a view to opening the school there. Redcliff was originally owned by Frank Witherspoon. He was a prosperous property owner, being the proprietor of the A.J.S. Bank in Charlton Street and other valuable buildings.

Presently there is a significant focus on ensuring the Dominican charism is brought to life in the school. In 2016 during the Order of Preachers 800 Jubilee year the school launched new Mission, Vision and Values statements which reflect the positive education nature of the school and its Dominican charism.

All former students and members of the wider community are welcome to celebrate the events during the Centenary year. A San Clemente Ball is being held on 19th August at Newcastle City Hall and the school will be having an open day on Sunday 27th August. For more information regarding these events please email: MFS-Centenary@mn.catholic.edu.au

**SAN CLEMENTE MISSION STATEMENT:**

At San Clemente we are called to be a Catholic community inspired by St Dominic, developing the whole person through study, service and prayer.

**SAN CLEMENTE VISION STATEMENT:**

Through active involvement, giving and positive connections our students will take notice and keep learning, living the Dominican pillars, striving towards excellence and truth (the Dominican pillars are prayer, study, community and service).