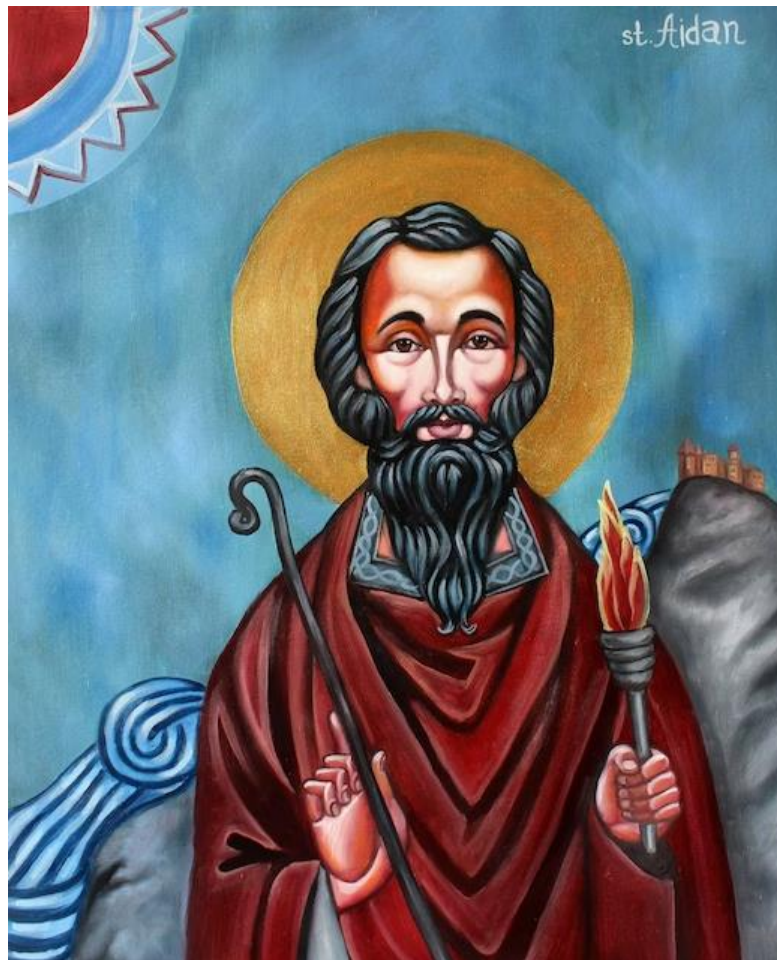# ST AIDAN'S CHURCH
TAWONGA

PAROCHIAL DISTRICT OF YACKANDANDAH - KIEWA

Church opened on 1957

Everlasting God,
you sent the gentle bishop Aidan
to proclaim the gospel in word and deed:
grant us to live as he taught
in simplicity, humility and love for the poor;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

ST AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

In the seventh century, Saint Aidan was the Bishop of Lindisfarne, an island in the North Sea, where he converted the Celts living in England's far north. Thirteen centuries later, Saint Aidan's name lives on in a Christian ministry on the other side of the world away, in the beautiful Kiewa Valley, Victoria.

Little is known of Saint Aidan's early life, save that he was an Irishman, possibly born in Connacht, and that he was a monk at the monastery on the island of Iona in Scotland. Saint Aidan lived in a time of conflict in the British Isles. There was conflict between Christianity and the pagan religions of the Anglo-Saxons and also conflict between the Christianity of the Celts and that of the Romans.

In 633, King Oswald of Northumbria determined to bring Christianity to the pagans of his kingdom. From his fortress of Bamburgh, he sent messages to Iona asking for missionary monks to come and minister to his people.

Aidan arrived in Northumbria around AD 635 accompanied by 12 other monks and was established as Bishop of the area. King Oswald gave him the island of Lindisfarne, (now known as the Holy Island) for his Bishopric. It was eminently suitable for him since the island was cut off from the mainland except, twice a day during the periods of low tide, when a land bridge was uncovered. It provided both solitude and a base for missionary work. Here St. Aidan established an Irish-type monastery of wooden buildings...a small church, small, circular dwelling huts, perhaps one larger building for communal purposes and workshops as needed. There the monks spent time in prayer and studious preparation before venturing out into the community to spread the gospel.

Aidan lived a frugal life, and encouraged the laity to fast and study the scriptures. He himself fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, and seldom ate at the royal table. St. Aidan tirelessly engaged in preaching and pastoral work. He traveled mainly by foot and visited all he came across. As St. Bede tells us; "Whether rich or poor, if unbelievers, to embrace the mystery of the faith, or, if already Christians, he would strengthen them in the faith and stir them up, by words and actions, to alms and good works. He was accustomed not only to teach the people committed to his charge in church, but also feeling for the weakness of a new-born faith, to wander round the provinces, to go into the houses of the faithful, and to sow the seeds of God's Word in their hearts, according to the capacity of each."

When a feast was set before him he would give the food away to the hungry. The presents he received were given to the poor or used to buy the freedom of slaves, some of whom entered the priesthood. During Lent Aidan would retire to the small island of Farne for prayer and penance.

Aidan had to ensure that his efforts did not die with himself and his Ionian monks. St. Aidan realized from the first the value of education and established a school in order to train the next generation of Christian leaders for Northumbria. He began with twelve boys, who learned the practical work of being monks, priests and missionaries by observing and working with the older monks. The monastery he founded grew and helped found other monasteries throughout the area. It also became a center of learning and a storehouse of scholarly knowledge.

Aidan and King Oswald worked hand in hand, especially at first, since St. Aidan and his monks could not speak the language of the people. King Oswald translated for them until they became proficient in English.

In 642 AD, the King Oswald was killed in battle against the pagan King Penda. King Oswin was appointed as Oswald's successor. He also supported Aidan's apostolate.

Aidan preached widely throughout Northumbria, traveling on foot, so that he could readily talk to everyone he met. King Oswin presented St. Aidan with a fine horse and trappings so the Bishop would no longer have to walk every where. No sooner had St. Aidan left the King's palace when he came across a poor man asking for alms. The bishop gave the man his new horse and continued on his way. King Oswin was most distressed when he heard. St. Bede has left us the following account: "The King asked the bishop as they were going in to dine, 'My Lord Bishop, why did you give away the royal horse which was necessary for your own use? Have we not many less valuable horses or other belongings which would have been good enough for beggars, without giving away a horse that I had specifically selected for your personal use?' The bishop at once answered, 'What are you saying, Your Majesty? Is this child of a mare more valuable to you than this child of God?'"

After that response, the King humbled himself before his Bishop and said, 'I will not refer to this matter again, not will I enquire how much of our bounty you give away to God's children." It was later that evening when St Aidan had a premonition of King Oswin death saying to his attendant, "I know the king will not live very long; for I have never before seen a humble king. I feel he will soon be taken from us, because this nation is not worthy of such a king."

It wasn't long after this incident in 651 when King Oswin was murdered in Gilling, by his cousin. Eleven days afterward, St. Aidan also died after serving 16 years in his episcopate. He had become ill and a tent was constructed for him by the wall of a church. He drew his last breath while leaning against one of the buttresses on the outside of the church. This beam survived unscathed through two subsequent burnings of the church and at the church's third rebuilding, the beam was brought inside the church and many reported miracles of healing by touching it.

What St. Aidan had achieved may not have been clear to him at death but subsequent history showed the strong foundations and lasting success of his mission. The missionaries trained in his school went out and worked for the conversion of much of Anglo-Saxon England. Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne is credited with restoring Christianity to Northumbria

Also attributed to St. Aidan: There was also a time when King Oswald's enemy, Penda, attempted to burn out Bamburgh, the kings' city, by piling thatch and wood around the city walls. Bishop Aidan, who at the time was in retreat on his island two miles away from Bamburgh, saw the smoke and flames and raised his hands to the heavens, saying with tears, 'Lord see what evil Penda does!' No sooner had he finished speaking, when the wind shifted and drove the flames and smoke onto those who kindled them. The attackers quickly retreated and the city was saved.

St. Aidan's feast day is on August 31st.

One story has St. Aidan saving the life of a stag by making it invisible to the hunters. Even though, this miracle has also been attributed to St. Aidan of Ferns, the stag is one of heraldic symbols associated with St. Aidan since the stag symbolizes solitude, piety, and prayer. St. Aidan's crest is a torch, a light shining in the darkness, since 'Aidan' is Gaelic for 'fire'.