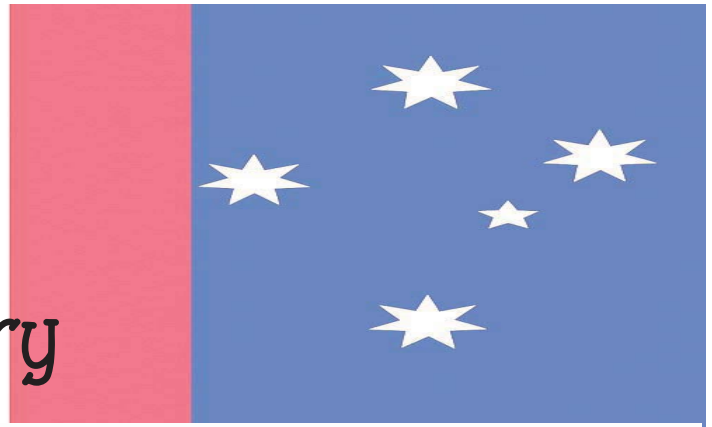


Society of St Hilarion 70th Anniversary



From Caulonia to Adelaide: The Society of St Hilarion's 70-Year Legacy of Faith, Culture, and Care

Seventy years ago, four men from Caulonia, Calabria, Giuseppe Ciccarello, Ilario Fazzalari, Ilario Lamberto, and John A. Costa, planted the seeds of a legacy that would flourish across generations and continents. Their vision: to honour Sant'Ilarione, the patron saint of their hometown, and to nurture a sense of belonging among Italian migrants in Adelaide. What began as a modest religious celebration has grown into a vibrant cultural institution, known today as the Society of St Hilarion.

The Founding Fathers: Migration and Vision

Each founding father brought with him not only faith but also a deep commitment to community. Ilario Fazzalari arrived in Australia in 1927 at age 16, working in glasshouses before purchasing the historic Hardys Wines Homestead in Underdale. He became a pillar of support for fellow migrants, offering shelter and helping them find work. Giuseppe Ciccarello carried a miniature statue of St Hilarion with him when he emigrated, which became the centrepiece of the first Feast. Ilario Lamberto and John A. Costa were equally instrumental, organising meetings and laying the groundwork for what would become a formal society.

In 1955, the first Feast of St Hilarion was held at St Joseph's Church in Flinders Park. The following year, a life-sized statue was imported from Bologna, Italy, and the celebration moved to St Francis of Assisi Church in Newton. Thus began a tradition that would evolve in scale, location, and meaning.

The Feast Evolves: A Journey Through Time and Place

Over the decades, the Feast of St Hilarion adapted to the changing needs of the community. From 1957 to 1965, Newton remained the central venue, culminating in the 10th Anniversary celebration. In 1973, the Feast shifted to Campbelltown Memorial Oval, where Rev. Don Mimmo Lamberto from Caulonia presided over Mass. By 1977, the event had moved west to Mater Christi Church in Seaton, reflecting the demographic spread of Italian migrants.

From 1979 to 1989, the feast and procession began at Mater Christi Parish and concluded at St Michael's College Oval in Henley Beach. The 40th Anniversary in 1995 featured the play Saint Ilarion, and the 60th Anniversary in 2015 included a commemorative book launch and Mass by Rev. Don Giovanni Coniglio.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a scaled-down celebration. But resilience prevailed: in 2022, the Feast was relocated to Gleneagles Reserve in Seaton, supported by the first government grant. Archbishop Charles Balvo presided, and Progetto Tarantella performed. The 70th Anniversary in 2025 was marked by a grand Gala Dinner and Feast attended by Mayor Francesco Cagliuso of Caulonia and other dignitaries.

Nick Fazzalari: Architect of Expansion

No figure has shaped the Society's growth more than Nick Fazzalari, son of founding father Ilario. At age 10, Nick attended every committee meeting and managed the soft drink stall at the first Feast. His passion never waned. He served as president for 20 consecutive years, stepped down briefly, and returned for another six.

Under his leadership, the Society expanded beyond religious celebration to include aged care, infrastructure development, and international cultural exchange. Nick pioneered fundraising events, including Adelaide's first Italian dinner dance at the Latvian Hall in Wayville, and oversaw the Society's participation in Carnevale and other multicultural festivals.

Securing Funding and Establishing Aged Care

In the late 1980s, a member of the Society discovered that the Australian government offered funding for aged care services tailored to immigrant communities. Recognising the urgent need to care for elderly Italian migrants, the Society acted swiftly.

They secured a federal grant of approximately one million dollars and added \$400,000 in savings from Feast events and community support. In 1987, they purchased the Weerona Nursing Home in Lockleys, renamed it the St Hilarion Nursing Home, and began offering culturally sensitive care. The facility was administered by a board of Italo-Australian professionals, including Dr Frank Chitti (Chairman), Dr Ben Barbera (Vice Chairman), and Nick Fazzalari (Chief Executive Officer).

The success of this initiative led to further expansion: Villa St Hilarion in Fulham was built to provide low-care accommodation, followed by a 50-bed nursing home in Findon. These facilities became sanctuaries of dignity, language, and tradition for ageing migrants.

Infrastructure and Cultural Flourishing

Nick's dream of a community hub came to life with the Riverbank Function Centre in Welland, built by the River Torrens. It hosted countless events, including a visit from Prime Minister John Howard and Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock. Though later sold, the Centre remains a symbol of the Society's ambition and reach.

International Recognition and Visits

The Society welcomed numerous dignitaries from Italy, including Bishop Gilliberti and folk singer Otello Profazio in 1991, and Bishop Bregantini and Mayor Nicola Franmartino with a 64-person delegation in 1997. These visits reinforced ties with Caulonia and elevated the Feast's profile. The 2024 feast featured performances by Mimmo Cavallaro and Progetto Tarantella, blending tradition with contemporary flair.

In 2025, Mayor Francesco Cagliuso attended the 70th Anniversary Gala Dinner, celebrating decades of service and cultural preservation.

The Arm of St Hilarion: A Sacred Symbol

Inspired by Caulonia's tradition of carrying a silver arm relic in procession, Nick Fazzalari sought to replicate this in Adelaide. With help from Don Mimmo Lamberto, a replica arm was carved from olive wood by Vigliarollo, a Caulonian artisan. Bishop Gilliberti secured a bone relic of St Hilarion, which was embedded in the arm. Today, it is carried by procurators during the feast, embodying spiritual continuity between homeland and diaspora.

A Living Legacy

From its founding fathers to its modern stewards, the Society of St Hilarion has woven a tapestry of devotion, service, and cultural pride. It honours the past while embracing the future through care for the elderly, celebration of heritage, and the enduring spirit of Sant'Ilarione.

Giuseppe (Joe) Geracitano
November 2025

