



THE SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF AUSTRALIA

## Keep in touch

DECEMBER 2015 / VOLUME 15 / NUMBER 4



Celebrating  
**200** Years  
RELIGIOUS SISTERS  
OF CHARITY

# Going out to the Margins

### Where it all began 177 years ago!

A plaque presentation ceremony was conducted by the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries at the Parramatta Female Factory, where the first 5 Sisters ministered to the female convicts.

**Pictured right:** Sr Helen Clark unveils the Plaque; Reverend Peter Williams blesses the plaque; Sisters, Trustees and Friends.



### Living the reality of the Chapter Statement 12 months on from 8 December 2014

At our 2014 Chapter we the Sisters proclaimed:

*'We are Sisters of Charity, women of Mary Aikenhead, contemplatives in action impelled by the love of Christ.'*

*'We live the joy of the Gospel. We respond courageously to the call of mission, going out to the margins, walking in partnership with others.'*

On the 19th November, at the house of the Berala Community, Sr Dorothy Bayliss was missioned to Riimenze, South Sudan, by Sr Clare Nolan, Congregational Leader with these words – 'today on your birthday, Dorothy, we mission you to be with and to serve the people of Riimenze in South Sudan.'

The Councillors, Srs Margaret Beirne, Cate O'Brien and Suzette Clark then prayed this prayer – 'Compassionate God, we pray that Dorothy will be blessed with good health, energy and a deep sense of your abiding and constant presence. Dorothy, know that you go with the love, prayers and support of all the sisters who remain here in Australia.'

**Pictured right:** Dorothy's missioning; Sr Dorothy Bayliss; Washing of the feet (Chapel Harold's Cross).



# Going out to the Margins

## Words in Action in Queensland rural

by Heather Grant-Campbell

Queensland farming families continue to do it tough with 80 per cent of the State drought declared in 2015.

Sustained severe climatic conditions result in more than failed crops or de-stocked pastures. They perpetuate a vicious cycle of financial debt, heightened stress, and physical and mental ill-health.

Against that background, it's not surprising that Downs & West Community Support, (DWCS) a ministry of the Sisters of Charity Community Care, has witnessed unprecedented demand for pastoral support and practical assistance in 2015.

Downs & West Community Support began in May 2007 as a drought appeal to support people on farms and in rural towns in Queensland's south: from the 'salad bowl' Lockyer Valley through the Burnett region and west beyond the Darling Downs. It was possibly the first of its kind, providing practical household assistance and uplifting social support primarily to farming women, recognised as the glue that keep families together. Over the years, wellness days and retreats have become highlights in an otherwise depressing calendar for DWCS clients.

In 2014-15, 482 household hampers, 1000 toiletry packs, 94 Christmas hampers and almost 300 Christmas gifts for children and adults were distributed, eight wellness days were hosted, attended by about 145 women and a coastal photo workshop retreat was sponsored for 15 rural women. Clocking up 93,345 kilometres, Downs & West Community Support is very grateful to St Vincent's Health Australia for providing a vehicle so this ministry could meet the needs of those in rural and remote areas of QLD.

Practical support extended to mini-renovations, household tidies, backyard blitzes and re-fencing: jobs that need doing but require money and energy to do them. Coordinator Sr Christine Henry shares a couple of examples: "A kitchen caught fire in a split second back in May. And it stayed a burnt-out reminder until DWCS was able to organise a new stove top and oven, materials and labour to fix it.



"For 18 months, I'd passed a tractor in a paddock in exactly the same spot, whenever I was out in the Southern Downs. I wondered why and made some careful enquiries. This family had faced 16 years of drought, they'd handfed stock before being forced to cull the herd; floods came and washed away top soil and fences. Then some hopeful rain. The farmer started working the paddock, turning the soil, to plant seed – and the tractor got a flat tyre. They literally could not afford to replace one tyre, so there it sat. DWCS organised for a new tyre to be delivered and fitted in May 2015. On 1 June, driving that same stretch of road, I was delighted to see the tractor parked by the roadside and the paddock ploughed".

Increasingly, much of Sr Christine's time and energy has been diverted to urgent pastoral support as a record 12 community agencies directly referred clients in extreme need to DWCS. These are typically rural families dealing with loss of income, property, and too often, loss of life.

It's work that Sr Christine is convinced Mary Aikenhead, the founder of the Religious Sisters of Charity, would approve of 200 years on.

"We communicate God's love in word and concrete action, providing compassionate care and sharing available resources with those who are among Australia's neediest, providing service in a meaningful, compassionate way," she says.

Sr Christine is often asked by city residents why farming families don't 'just leave'. In the words of a DWCS client: "Although the work is constant, the crops are slow, cattle prices are down, this is my home, this is my life. I am most grateful when you come and have a cuppa with me and my husband. You listen and encourage, never judge".

**Top to bottom (left to right):**  
Practical support from DWCS: Re-fencing;  
DWCS car donated by SVHA; The burnt-out kitchen;  
Sr Christine Henry rsc.



*'We have noticed your tractor in the paddock every time we travelled out your way in the past 18 months.*

*We wondered why and discovered it needed a new tyre. We would like to help you out.*

*On Wednesday 27 May, a new tyre will be delivered and put on for you.*

*You will be contacted the day before to organise the time of arrival.*

*The receipt and invoice are enclosed.'*

DWCS



Downs & West Community Support's efforts were enabled by committed volunteers and generous individuals, workplaces and communities fundraising.

Continued support is an imperative – follow the efforts of Downs & West Community Support on Facebook at

[facebook.com/pages/Downs-West-Community-Support](https://facebook.com/pages/Downs-West-Community-Support)

and on the ministry's website

[downsandwestcommunitysupport.org](https://downsandwestcommunitysupport.org)

## The Heart of Hospitality

by Srs Deirdre Hickey rsc and Clare Nolan rsc

*"Hospitality is much more than a simple welcome or an offer of food or drink. Hospitality is an attitude of heart that opens up to others and receives them on their own terms...hospitality, therefore, means the creation of a free space within myself where the stranger can enter and become a friend..."*

Fagin, SJ

The House of Hospitality at West Street Darlinghurst, under the care of the Sisters of Charity is more than a house, it is a home. It is a response to the Gospel imperative:

*'I was a stranger and you made me welcome...'*

Matthew 25:15.

Clare and Deirdre have been the blessed Sisters of Charity to offer this ministry of hospitality for 19 years. We share what we have with women who are suffering illness or loss in their family, which is what leads them to our door, seeking accommodation whilst tending to their sick family member. Most women come from country areas around NSW and are grateful to have a comfortable, caring space to stay. They are free to come and go to the hospital. Some only stay a short time and some stay longer. We are open to all in their different needs.

The women express to us often what it means to be with us and sense it is a place of prayer and compassion. They are especially grateful for the listening ear, the shedding of tears when they return to West St after a big day in the hospital. And for the laughter which can soften the pain sometimes.

We can accommodate six women who know that we are Sisters of Charity and many of the women value our offer of prayer for their loved one and for themselves. This ministry is hugely supported by our own Sisters.



Sr Clare, (standing) offering hospitality, joined by Sr Deirdre (right).

This place of friendship and hospitality sees strong bonds being created among the women which go beyond the place. The house has re-united friends, reconciled families and other miracles. We are privileged to hear the personal stories and can be delighted by such things as one of the women from PNG (Raywin Fred) named her first baby after Deirdre. Then there are our dear friends from the Solomon Islands. They often come to St Vincent's for medical care and we make sure they are settled in their home nearby, attend to their needs where possible and offer any help they might need in their time at Darlinghurst.

We are enriched by our home of hospitality. We receive much more than we give. Together, we try to make our home a place of healing, hope, friendship and telling of stories.

# Going out to the Margins

## Teaching at Corella Creek in the Northern Territory

by Sr Colleen Noonan rsc

Around mid-year in 2015, a snippet appeared in our congregational fax asking if anyone would be interested in helping out at an aboriginal school in the Northern Territory. After doing some research, I applied and was missioned to help out at Corella Creek. Corella Creek is a place approximately 200kms north of Barkly Homestead on the single-lane Tablelands Highway. The indigenous community has lived there for some years. The facilities consist of about ten houses, a school, and a residence for the Principal. About 400 metres down the road, there is a Health Clinic, with a house for the resident nurse (now used by the second teacher) and a room for the Doctor. This was where I resided. The clinic now is closed but is used as a base for the fortnightly visit of nurses from Tennant Creek. Alcohol, gambling and smoking are not allowed in the community.

On Monday, I walked to the school, where Jodie, the relief teacher introduced me, to the children, who were delightful. As the Principal was away I assisted Jodie with the Math's class in the larger classroom. She was taking the Yr 4, 5 and 6. There were also three senior girls present, who worked on their own programmes on computer. There were about 15 children in the room. Ability levels were varied as some had not been to school in the early years and lacked the basics. Next door in a tiny classroom were the Transition, Yr 1, 2 and 3 groups, again about ten children in very cramped conditions.

The math's assignment was long division with remainder!! Not the easiest lesson especially as they did not seem to know their tables and the task, despite using concrete aids was onerous. After recess we progressed to *Smart Words* a spelling programme. The children worked at their own level and asked for help when needed, but it quickly became apparent that few could actually read the instructions. Some were not using the correct method and copied others or used inventive techniques to complete the task without any real understanding. The obvious need was for more individual attention, which was not easy given the numbers who required assistance. Also the children did not like to have errors shown to them.



Sr Colleen Noonan arrives at Corella Creek, N.T.

*The children are lovely and lively, not really used to following directions but have a beauty that is difficult to define.*

School commences at 7.50am as the first computer class (from Alice Springs School of the Air) is at 8.00am for Yr 4. The other children have group Physical Education, commencing with BBC (Breathing, Blowing and Coughing) a programme designed to encourage better habits and reduce the ear problems so prevalent amongst aboriginal children. The physical activities that followed showed that the enthusiastic children had great agility and strength in body movements.

The children are lovely and lively, not really used to following directions but have a beauty that is difficult to define. As with any classroom there were some more challenging members but in general the children are keen to learn but stymied by the lack of some of the basic foundational knowledge and the fact that programmes that are not geared to them and in language that is beyond their comprehension e.g. Grade 4 was asked to design a tessellation for a paved courtyard.



While the children are at Corella Creek, they attend school, but often the family has to go to Tennant Creek for hospital, welfare services or funerals and the children need to go with them. As the distance is so great, one and sometimes two days of school are missed. There is a further difficulty of the children coming in and out of the care of grandparents at Corella Creek, depending on events in their parents' life. Some families are caring for as many as twelve children, which make the dynamics in the household very challenging. Problems can be carried over into the classroom.

Space does not allow full details of daily events but they included:

- A fire in the wiring at the 'clinic'.
- The pump blowing up so no water in the area where I was living.
- A six foot snake.
- Power turned off.
- Computers all failed and Principal had to spend the day on line having each one fixed.
- The food truck arrived just as we were returning to classroom.
- Padre Colin and two teachers from School of the Air were flying in so had to be transported to and from Brunette Downs by a teacher.
- The men putting up the notice boards that had been down all year had to ask the Principal for nails.
- A basketball hoop was erected.

Some of these events meant that the teachers did not always have uninterrupted teaching time with their classes, or were perhaps supervising the other classes as well or attending to other survival issues.

Other challenges I recognised included:

- Children arriving unexpectedly and having to be provided with books etc. No knowledge of their level, so testing was required.
- Some children arrived who had rarely been to school. e.g. one intelligent nine year old boy arrived who did not know the letter 'A'.
- There is need for a process for enrolment and transfer of children and someone to do it.

- Prepositional language is unknown e.g. behind the desk, under the table etc. Activities such as those when teaching new arrivals e.g. intensive English program could be valuable.

Despite the difficulties encountered I believe that most children were making progress and I could see new learning during my month there. However, I would like to see more opportunities for keen students to have other learning experiences perhaps through Skype or telephone assistance, opportunities for boarding schools with good support, some intensive reading and English programmes for beginning students and a better student/teacher ratio in remote areas.

## Remote and Rural Ministry

Sr Anne Mayberry rsc, Coordinator

Our goal in Remote and Rural Ministry, is to give support to families in remote and rural areas, who are experiencing difficulties as a result of drought, floods, fires and personal trauma and also to enable children in those areas to have the same opportunities in education as other students.

To that end, we have responded to many needs in areas of the Upper Hunter Valley, Southern Tablelands and the Riverina. The majority of contacts have been made through Sisters in these areas.

I have visited nine schools on a regular basis – including state schools, and delivered food hampers and gifts from city children. Homeless people in the Riverina have also received food hampers.

Money has been sent/given for extra curricula activities for children, as well as utility costs, food for families, travel expenses for medical appointments and in one situation, relocation expenses for a family who became homeless when a farm was re-possessed.

In one instance we gave money to help cover the cost of a pauper's funeral.

Aboriginal children in Wilcannia are fortunate in so far as they have a wonderful lady who provides Art classes outside of school hours. They delight in making clay objects as well as writing books and having them printed. She has been most grateful for financial assistance.

We continue to support the Royal Flying Doctor Service, financially, each year. Working in this sector is full of surprises and joys and is at the same time humbling.

Sisters of Charity Community Care Limited  
Remote and Rural Ministry  
Email: [communitycare@rscoffice.com](mailto:communitycare@rscoffice.com)



The stall at St Joseph's: Sr Anne Mayberry, Coordinator with Mrs Margaret Fitzpatrick, volunteer.



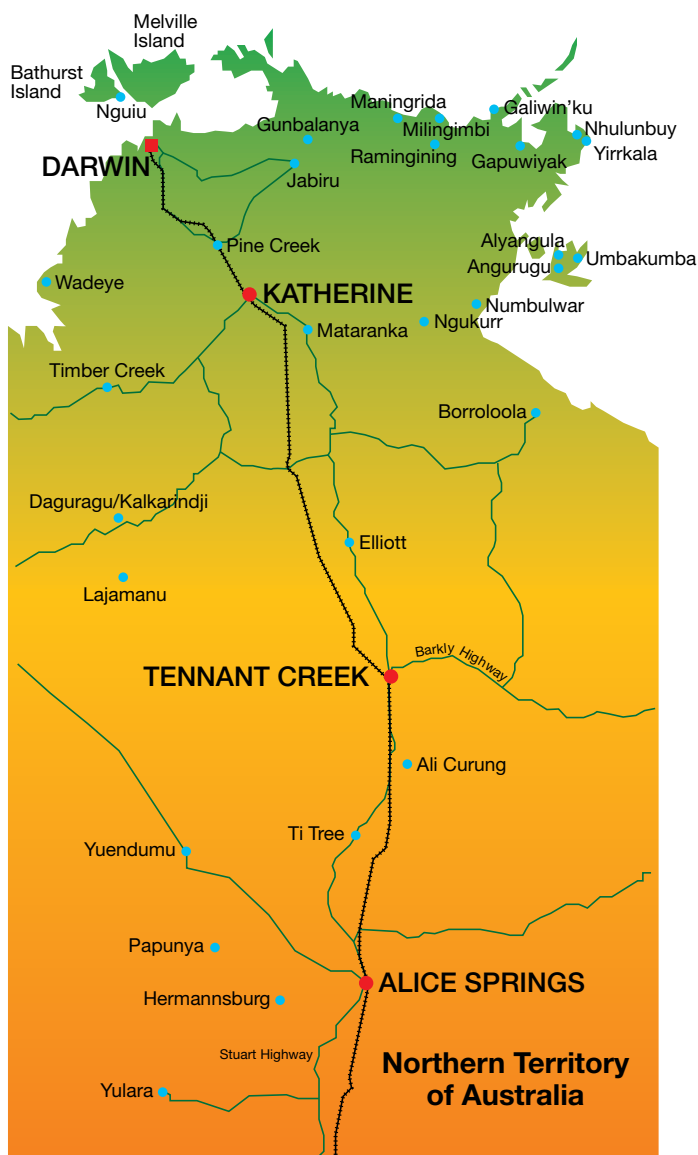
# Going out to the Margins

## Ministry in the Northern Territory

by Sr Leone Wittmack rsc

As a Sister of Charity I have worked for most of my life in our Health Services in a number of Nursing and Mission roles the most recent being the Group Mission Leader for St. Vincent's Health Australia. I have also worked in a number of developing countries. However, in recent years ministering in the Northern Territory has been drawing me to reflect deeply as a place where I would love to be but because of a number of circumstances it has never become a reality until now!

A few weeks before our Chapter I answered an advertisement for the position of Mission Facilitator CatholicCare NT. Because of my past experience as a Mission Leader I thought I would throw "my hat in the ring" and I was very fortunate to be the successful applicant. So in February 2015 I headed for Darwin to commence a ministry in a part of Australia that the Sisters of Charity hadn't worked in before. As the only Sister of Charity in this vast Territory I am proud to bring the spirit of Mary Aikenhead to this part of Australia. This ministry certainly reflects our recent Chapter Statement as it allows me to live the joy of the Gospel with all its challenges, to go out to the margins of Australia while walking in partnership with others.



CatholicCare NT is a social services agency of the Catholic Diocese of Darwin which covers 1.35 million square kilometres most of the NT, and is a member of Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA), a national body representing the Catholic social services sector. It is a not-for-profit organisation, providing counselling and other support services and programs to individuals, couples, families, children groups, schools and agencies across the Northern Territory. We also provide Safe Houses in some of the remote communities. Funding for our services is provided by both the Australian and local governments.

We have over 200 very committed staff with 30% of them being Indigenous. It is our intention over 2 years to increase this number to 40%.

### My role at CatholicCare is General Manager Mission and Culture.

I am a member of our Executive Team and am responsible to ensure that our Vision, Mission and Values are integrated in all we do. I work closely with our Human Resource team and our Communication and Media person. I also provide support for our Director and other members of the Executive. However one of the most fulfilling aspects of my ministry is meeting and working with all our staff in the numerous urban and remote localities in which we deliver our services. Inducting our new staff in our Mission and Values provides me with a great opportunity to meet all the staff on a one to one basis and enables me to form a good supportive relationship with them. I deliver our Orientation Programs and provide reflection and Mission development to our Managers.

*As the only Sister of Charity in this vast Territory I am proud to bring the spirit of Mary Aikenhead to this part of Australia as we continue to be challenged by God's Mission in our world.*

**Our Mission, Vision and Values** are based on Catholic Social Teaching which calls us to strengthen individuals, families and communities in ways that respect their dignity and culture. We are committed to promoting justice and inclusion, caring for the most vulnerable while working for the common good and having stewardship for creation all of which is very evident in the work of CatholicCare.

Working with our Indigenous staff is a real privilege and they certainly continue to teach me many things. This year at NAIDOC week, we launched our Reconciliation Action Plan which was a great occasion. As our services stretch over most of the Northern Territory we have a wonderful opportunity to work closely with our Indigenous people to provide quality services as well as create meaningful business partnership with Indigenous groups.

Reconciliation Week gave us another opportunity to celebrate. In Darwin we celebrated with the Larrakia people inviting the Elders, members of the Stolen Generations to join us and share their stories. Some of our staff are the children of these wonderful Elders and so this opportunity was of special and significant importance for everyone.

Our services stretch from the Tiwi Islands in the north to the APY Lands in South Australia with our main offices in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. From these centres we also work in Wadeye (Port Keats), Nauiyu (Daly River), Bathurst and Melville Islands, Santa Teresa, Titjikala, Fink, Maningrida (West Arnhem Land) and the APY Lands in South Australia. Travelling to all of these areas can be quite a challenge. Just to get to Tennant Creek you usually fly to Alice Springs 1500kms from Darwin and then drive back 500kms to Tennant Creek. To get to Tiwi and Wadeye is usually a 30 minute flight or a long drive or a bumpy sea crossing to Tiwi especially in the wet season. Most of the other centres are at least a 3 hour drive.



**Above:** Leone with Rose Namikili Graham. Rose a Warrumunga Woman painted the artwork titled *Family*.



**Right:** Leone meeting with Aunty Pat Braun, Family Relations Worker for CatholicCare Tennant Creek, Rose Namikili Graham artist and her daughter discussing the proposed Art.

However the effort is well and truly worth it as working with and getting to know our very committed staff who do a wonderful job walking alongside and working with very vulnerable people in quite difficult circumstances is an absolute privilege for me. They are an inspiration!

### **Catholic Community**

Living in Darwin I am part of the Nightcliff Parish. One thing you come to realise very quickly in the NT is the number of cultures that pray and play together. The Catholic Multicultural Community celebrate well, and I have been able to participate in a number of these celebrations by adding to the music through drumming. We are also very fortunate to have Bishop Eugene Hurley as our Bishop who is well known for his commitment to Social Justice especially for the Indigenous people, Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

There are also a number of Religious Congregations in the Northern Territory and in Darwin we often take time to pray and celebrate together. It provides an opportunity for support and some good laughs. Having a Sister of Charity in the Top End allows for some of our own Sisters to come and visit. This year Annette Cunliffe, Elizabeth Costigan, Joan Stapleton and Pat Walker dropped in to say hello. It's always good to see some familiar faces and catch up on the news from down south.

As you can see, I love my Ministry in the Northern Territory. In the last 10 months I have met wonderful people. The work of CatholicCare has a such a positive impact on the lives of many. Working with our Indigenous staff and going out to all the remote communities where we offer services is truly inspiring. This is a vast land and the spirituality of our Indigenous people is so tangible. I thank my God and the Sisters of Charity for allowing me this opportunity to minister in the Northern Territory and to bring the charism of the Sisters of Charity to this part of our country.

If you would like to know more about the Mission of CatholicCare NT you can visit

[www.catholicarent.org.au](http://www.catholicarent.org.au)



Leone accompanying some of the Warrumunga women during a Smoking Ceremony.

# Going out to the Margins

## The 'House Church' at 227 The Mall, Leura

by Sr Mary Maguire rsc

In 1975 when Mt St Mary's Katoomba closed, the Sisters moved to 227 Leura Mall. In the years since then, the house has undergone a couple of renovations, the major one took place in 2000.

Leura itself has also changed over these years from a sleepy little village to an up-market one.

The ministry of the Sisters, on the one hand, has stayed connected to St Canice's School, Katoomba. On the other hand it has developed into what some refer to as a 'house church'.

Sister Colleen Holohan ministers to the children, parents and staff of the school. This involves being present to parents who sometimes do not understand their children, and to children for whom the world seems like a battlefield. Often there is practical help to be given to families by way of a hot meal, or financial help. One of the residents of the nursing home the Sisters visit contributes to this. She tells us that she has never had children of her own and now, in the twilight of her life is her chance to help others. She is not a wealthy woman and gives out of her generous heart.

Sister Mary Maguire's ministry is in the 'extensively useful' category. Each week a group meets at the house to meditate. They follow the John Main, Christian Meditation method. The group is lead by Barbara Smith, whom many Sisters will remember. Barbara is a very competent spiritual guide who is highly regarded in the community.

Every month a WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) group meet. In this group there are three married couples, so the emphasis is not on women only! While keeping abreast of Church matters, this group also studies a contemporary spiritual book. At present they are studying Elizabeth Johnson's, *Quest for the Living God*.

As Sisters have lived at 227 Leura Mall for over 40 years the local people know the place well. They drop in for a chat, or to ask for prayers. Mary's scones have a reputation of their own!



Sr Colleen Holohan with St Canice's children.



Above: Meditation Group at 227 The Mall.

Left: Sr Mary Maguire rsc.

Colleen and Mary share in each other's ministry of love and concern for others, especially for those for whom life has not been friendly and who are often misunderstood.

When asked how they live out the call to be 'contemplatives in action' the Sisters responded, 'by recognising God's Presence in the routines and surprises of everyday life'.

Each week the nearby nursing home is visited and where possible the residents are assisted to feel more part of the community. They are prayed for every day along with their very dedicated staff.

The house and the garden at 227, lend themselves to stillness and contemplation. These gifts of the 'house church' are appreciated by the local people.

Colleen and Mary see the importance of passing on to these women and men, the spiritual riches and resources the Congregation has given to them in the many opportunities for retreats and courses they have received over the years.

They agree with Fr Brian D'arcy who wrote in 'A Different Journey' "...the Church will be saved by its laity, or it will not be saved at all." These words are lived out in the parish of the Upper Blue Mountains every single day.



## Ministry at Shellharbour City Parish – 2004 to 2015

by Sr Kerry Barrass rsc

I arrived on 8 October 2003 at Flinders NSW. From the time I arrived I have loved my ministry, working with the elderly, first and foremost, V.S.O.P. – *Valuing and Supporting Older People!*

I was asked to give the weekly spiritual reflections for St Vincent de Paul Society. Also, to be a presence in the two Catholic schools in our Parish. Then I was asked to look after the spiritual needs of the elderly in the high and low care, Aged Care Homes. I love meeting them and socialising with them. There are a lot of elderly still in private homes who are struggling to stay there. With help from our local Aged Care facilities and Community Services in the home they are able to manage with the extra help. They want to be independent for as long as they're able.



Being a 'bushie' I have for the last 24 years tried to help the farmers, as they are really 'doing it tough!' I try to go out to Warren, in the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese NSW, each year and take out some goodies for the families on the land.

For example, when I went this time I had a car load of goodies and a few bags of children's clothes for the Principal of the Catholic Primary School. I also go with the President of the St Vincent de Paul in Warren to a few farms. I love to meet with these beautiful people who appreciate everything you give them. I felt this time it was hard to leave them as they haven't much while we have so much to help us. If I was younger and healthier I would ask to live there just to be able to listen and take an interest in them and be their friend.

At the moment the V.S.O.P. meet monthly, beginning with a reflection. We have raffles, lucky door prizes, a good 'natter' over lunch. They all love to meet up each month and share. Life is good and I am very blessed!

## Year of Consecrated Life

by Sr Jean Marie rsc

Father Thomas Kurunthan, Parish Priest of St Peter Chanel and St Joseph, Berala held a special Mass on Sunday 25th October to express gratitude to the Institutes of Consecrated Life that had served and many still serving in the Parish. The Sisters of St Joseph, Sisters of Charity, Wagga Presentation, the Dominican Sisters of St Cecilia and the Marist Brothers were all represented.

Four Sisters of Charity, Srs Dorothy Bayliss, Jean Marie Brennan, Marina Ward and Karen Nguyen represented our Congregation. Father said in his Newsletter, "In our Parish we have reason to be grateful to the Consecrated Religious as we look back into our own Parish history." The luncheon provided by the Parishioners, following the Mass, was ongoing evidence that they are still very grateful for the presence of Religious in the Parish.

**Right:** Sisters, Marina, Dorothy and Jean Marie celebrate with Parishioners.



## Seasons Greetings!

*'May an abundance of gratitude be with you for what you have given and received during the year. May thanksgiving overflow in your heart and gratitude be the gift that finds its source in the knowledge that you truly have made a difference. May the hope of the Advent/Christmas season settle within you and enliven your spirit.'*



# Transitions

## Sister Loretta Bani rsc – we are proud of you

by Sr Margaret Costigan rsc

At 2.00pm on Tuesday 2nd June 2015 Sister Loretta Bani rsc was farewelled at Assisi Centre Aged Care in Rosanna where there is a hostel for ageing in place and a nursing home. She had been nursing there for 14 years.

At the farewell Loretta was deeply touched by those who attended and those who could not be there, but sent messages. Fiona Kool, Director of Care, had just been appointed in the beginning of this year, but has worked at Assisi for some years in different roles. She knows Loretta well and delivered the send-off speech. Sheila Sheary, Clinical Services Manager, who has worked with Assisi for many years in different roles, voiced her shock at Loretta's leaving and spoke of how much she will be missed.

The CEO, Martin Sammut, was not able to be present in the afternoon but came to see Loretta personally later before she left, also warmly expressing his appreciation.

Domenic Barbaro and Renato Vecchies, two wonderful doctors who are dedicated to serving the Italian residents at Assisi were unable to be there. Loretta had always found them very supportive and appreciative. Loretta's message to those at Assisi is: *I'm really grateful for the kindness all staff and doctors have always shown to me.*

Loretta entered the Sisters of Charity in 1969 having previously obtained her state enrolled nursing certificate in Ballarat where she continued to work for a time. Then she came to work at Caritas Christi Hospice in Kew, which was where she first came in contact with the Sisters of Charity.

It was while working there the call to enter religious life with this congregation was generously accepted and so Loretta travelled to Sydney to join the Novitiate of two and a half years. After her profession Loretta trained as a registered nurse at St Joseph's Hospital Auburn and then remained on the staff there for a while.

In 1977 Loretta returned to Melbourne to start her ministry at Caritas Christi Hospice Kew where she was involved for ten years.



During that time she pursued further studies in post basic geriatric nursing. Mother Dorothea Devine rsc had asked her to start a Day Centre, for which these studies further prepared her.

Sir James Gobbo who at the time, among other responsibilities, was President of the Knights of Malta, and the President of Co.As.It., asked Mother Dorothea if he could meet with Loretta. She was excited by this meeting and inspired by his vision and enthusiasm in developing further services for their people. So when the Community Day Centre opened there was a designated time slot for the Italian Community.

During her busy life Loretta accepted opportunities to refresh her spirit and broaden her knowledge. One of these was a 3-month live-in course called 'Kairos' at Pennant Hills in Sydney. In 1988 she took part in the Ignatian Spirituality Program at Pymble and in 1997 completed two terms Clinical Pastoral Education course (CPE) at St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst.

Another change in ministry and location took place when in 1986 Loretta went to Mount Olivet in Brisbane to work in the Activities Program. Then in 1988 Sister Nola Riley rsc asked her to take up the position of Supervisor at Marycrest Hostel, which is part of the same complex and for which Loretta was well suited.

In 1994 Loretta was appointed to Sacred Heart Hospice, Darlinghurst. Then in 1997 Loretta's ministry took on a change of direction at 'L'Arche Genesaret' in Canberra.

At this remarkable place people with and without intellectual disability shared life in Community. Genesaret is one of the facilities of an International Federation of L'Arche, which is an initiative of Jean Vanier.

Loretta had not returned to her own country since leaving there with her family as a child to come to Australia. So in October 2000 she travelled to Italy and met up with her relatives. She was able to visit the Holy Land and Ireland as well. On returning to Australia in May 2001 her recent ministry involvement with the Italian community began through Co.As.It. – Comitato Assistenza Italiani – (Italian Association of Assistance) and then with Assisi Aged Care in Rosanna.

In the early 1980's, the leaders of Melbourne's Italian community had recognized a need for a specialised aged care services to support Melbourne's fast-growing elderly Italian population. It was then that Assisi obtained the Rosanna Road property, a former Sisters of Mercy novitiate and convent.

Loretta continued to explore ways of assisting her community and in June 2001, through Co.As.It., worked in home care and at the Day Centre in Kensington. Then in September 2002 she became a staff member at Assisi Aged Care. Her latest position was in a supervisory registered nurse role for the hostel and with the evening Staff, who are deeply sad that Loretta has left as she was so much loved and appreciated.

You may wonder what would be next for Loretta. Over the last few years Loretta has been companioning Sisters of Charity in Aged Care at St Catherine's, Balwyn, Corpus Christi, Clayton and Mercy Place, Parkville. This has more than kept her busy. There is no doubt that in the future other doors will open for this committed woman.

So her contribution for those in aged care is ongoing, and those who are fortunate to have her assist them know of her gentleness, efficiency, kindness and reliability. Who knows what other calls Loretta will hear and to which no doubt she will respond with characteristic generosity and courage.

Thank you Loretta Bani rsc, a loving, faithful and committed Sister of Charity for your ministries and blessings for the future.

## Sister Margaret Valentine rsc



"We are going to miss you, Margaret, as leader and friend".

In 2007 Margaret Valentine RSC was appointed as Parish Pastoral Coordinator (PPC) of the Bulahdelah Parish (later to be called the Myall Coast Parish) – a rural Parish in the Maitland/Newcastle Dioceses, consisting of 3 Mass Centres – Bulahdelah, Tea Gardens and Karuah and a little Primary School at Bulahdelah.

In her role as PPC Margaret was responsible for the day to day running of the Parish and the Pastoral Care of all the parishioners.

After nine years of ministry Margaret felt that it was time for her to leave this role within the Parish to enable someone else to take the Parish forward with new ideas, fresh enthusiasm and energy.

On Sunday November 29 the Parish farewelled Margaret in grand style.

Sr Jean Montgomery writes:

*After a reflective, moving Sunday Celebration, led by one of the Parish Lay Liturgical Ministers, the community moved to the Parish Centre, where a magnificent tribute was paid to Margaret. Speeches were made and presentations of gifts given to her. There was no doubting the love the people have for Margaret. They spoke of the love and selflessness Margaret had given to them over the past 9 years and their memories of her will last forever. They are so grateful for her hard work in leading them forward into a 'new way of being Church' to each other and to the wider community.*

## Sister Genevieve Walsh – retirement from Catholic Education after 50 years

In addressing Dr Dan White, Executive Director of Catholic Education, Sydney, Genny wrote:

*'At the end of this year, I will have spent 50 years in Catholic Education. For 12 years I taught in many grades Kinder to Year 6 as appointed by my Congregation, the Sisters of Charity of Australia. During that time it was a privilege to work with children spiritually and educationally. In conjunction with the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, I have spent 28 years in Principalship. I loved my time in this role as I have been on team with many committed teachers and it has always been a privilege to draw out of them their leadership potential, and many have gone on to Leadership roles within the system.*

*For the last 10 years I have had a varied role within the system. Roving Principal based at St John's Primary School, Auburn. Through this role I have visited many schools in our system and for Term One in 2007 was acting Principal at St John's, Auburn. Also during this time I have valued the opportunity to support Principals, Teachers and Children in an Administrative and Pastoral role at St John's. I have particularly loved working with the Sudanese Students and Parents, walking with them and over the years seeing their potential come into fruition educationally, culturally and socially.'*

The Principal, Antonella Dolores, of St John's Catholic Primary School, Auburn wrote the following in the School News letter to the School Community about the retirement of Sr Genevieve, (Genny), Walsh.

*'We start approaching the end of another year with mixed emotions. This year Sr Genny has made her decision to retire from Catholic Education. Sr Genny has devoted the last 50 years to Catholic Education. Her last ten years have been spent at St John's Catholic Primary School, Auburn. Sr Genny is especially committed to service of the poor and disadvantaged, and a commitment to social justice. She has been instrumental in supporting the refugee students and families at St John's. She has worked tirelessly in pastoral care and as a professional officer ensuring students have the best opportunities we can provide them with.*

*Sr Genny has coordinated Homework Club, supported by the staff, and been a friendly face and helpful member of the school administration office and a constant support and mentor to the school principal. In true Sisters of Charity charism Sr Genny continues "to bring to each person the love, the tenderness and concern of Christ for the poor, seeing Christ in everyone she serves." We wish Sr Genny many blessings as she continues her work with the Sisters of Charity. You will be deeply missed.'*



Presentation by Dr Dan White, Executive Director of the Catholic Education System, Sydney.



# Words of remembrance

## Sr M. Francis Xavier Purcell rsc

by Sr Margaret Beirne rsc

Francie's long life as a Sister of Charity was peacefully brought to a close last Sunday morning. For her, it was for a great blessing that her final days were calm and peaceful and that members of her family and several sisters were able to spend time with her. On Saturday afternoon, as Sister Judith Clark and I sat beside her, she suddenly opened her eyes and asked as clear as a bell: "Are you going home now?" Perhaps, in keeping with her wonderfully unselfish nature, she was anxious not to hold us up. "Why are you here?" she asked a little later, to which I replied "Because we love you." At that, she smiled and didn't speak again. Francie was a gifted musician whose expertise on the piano and organ was finely honed by years of sharing these skills at numerous liturgies and other Congregational celebrations. She also used this great gift in her ministry.

After her first profession as a Sister of Charity, Francie did the usual teacher training of the time and taught for a short while at St Canice's parish primary school at Elizabeth Bay. But it didn't take long for her superiors to realise that her God-given musical talents would best be utilized in giving music lessons. For the next forty or so years, Francie taught music in secondary schools led by the Sisters of Charity: Bethlehem Ashfield, CLC East Melbourne, St Vincent's Potts Point, St John's Auburn and Mount Carmel Sandy Bay in Tasmania. That she carried out this ministry without fuss or expectation of any recognition is testified by many of her ex-students including those from Potts Point who wrote yesterday:

*It is with sadness that we note the death of our beloved Sister M. Francis Xavier, often known to us as 'Francie' or 'Tweet' – on Sunday morning 8 November, at Bethany, St Joseph's Village Auburn. She taught music for many years at the College, and will be fondly remembered by many ex-students. She was so generous in donating her time to playing the organ at the Annual Reunions. Many ex-students will remember her sweet caring manner and her devotion to her students and her music.*

One of her students from the Class of 1970, Dr Tessa Ho, sent a message yesterday from China:

*I am very sorry to be unable to attend Sr Francis Xavier's funeral Mass as I am still overseas teaching in China, but I want to express my condolences; she was a lovely musical presence for us at school and emblematic of the school's long musical tradition.*



When Sr Maria Wheeler was Principal of Mt Carmel Hobart, the time came for Francie to leave the College where she had taught music for several years. Maria says that it was only after Francie had left that they realised who had been locking up the entire school every single afternoon for the past ten years. After this, Francie had some well-deserved time for renewal at Assumption in Melbourne then went on to become the Retreat Coordinator at Currajean Retreat House at Eltham. Her last active ministry was spent at the reception desk at Sacred Heart Hospice Darlinghurst where for the next twelve years she daily welcomed guests in her own inimitable gracious manner.

In all of this, Francie demonstrated an innate courtesy, modesty and, above all, generosity. On one occasion, I asked a friend who is a concert organist to play for a special occasion at St Vincent's College. Panic set in when he had not appeared minutes before the Mass was to begin. Over to the convent I went and asked Francie would she fill in for us. Not a word of resentment, nothing but an enthusiastic "of course I will"; organised to the hilt as she was, she found her music within minutes and played as professionally as ever. Our love and prayers are with Francie's family, the Sisters of Charity especially her own support community and the sisters who have shared her life over the past nine years here at the Village. In a special way, we honour our two health care co-ordinators and the staff of St Joseph's Village.

We thank God for all that Francie meant to us. There are people like her who seem to live utterly without guile, rarely if ever heard to criticise or complain, and greeting everyone with a warm and engaging smile. Through it all shone her deep and abiding confidence in the God who loved her and whom she in her turn loved unconditionally. The words of her motto chosen at her first profession 67 years ago seem to say everything about her faith and lifelong commitment: "As, O Jesus, you love me, so do I love and will love thee". I think she may have said repeated these words when she met Jesus face to face on Sunday morning and He gave her a big hug:

*"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."*



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