



Keep in Touch

Sisters of Charity Newsletter - Partners in Mission

Vol. 2 No. 4 December 2001



Editorial

Once again we find ourselves in the season of Advent. The church year does not start with something that has happened such as Christ's birth or resurrection. The church year starts, instead, with a strange emptiness, a sense of expectation. The church year starts with waiting and wondering.

We wait and we wonder. Unless we do this we'll not find a reason to celebrate. Waiting and wondering are signs of a heart that lives, a heart that remains open to God. Yet waiting and wondering are not honoured in today's society.

The people who wait in this world are the powerless people and those who wonder are the small children. Making it in today's society means you're too busy to wait and too smart to wonder, too adult. Why do waiting and wondering make us uncomfortable?

Waiting and wondering provide the church year with a powerful start. Waiting and wondering prepare us for a life where God acts, where the unexpected future is unfolded. John the Baptist waited and wondered. Joseph heard a dream and he too waited and wondered.

You and I are invited to wait and wonder this Advent, to look for Christ. He was born in obscurity in Bethlehem. He will come again in glory but for now he is hidden and can only be found by those who wonder and wait.

As the year draws to a close, I would like to thank all those sisters and colleagues who have shared their stories or reported happenings in K.I.T. during the year. Please keep the articles coming in 2002. Please note the change of postal and email addresses if you are forwarding material to me.

To Sister Annette and Council my appreciation for your support for K.I.T. My gratitude to Sisters Claudia and Mark for proof reading the material. To Melinda Gutierrez who is responsible for the typing and setting out of the material and to Wendy Fothergill who assists Melinda with the photostating and who is responsible for the mail out, a special thank you.

May the joy and peace of the Christmas season be experienced by each of you and your families

Maria Wheeler RSC

A Joyous and Peaceful Season

An Australian Unsung Heroine

Sister M. Giovanni Ackman

Amy Vera Ackman was born at Randwick, Sydney in July 1886 to Annie and Michael. Her parents belonged to the Jewish religion and had been married in the Sydney Synagogue. Shortly after her birth the family returned to Melbourne where her father died before she was two years old. Amy and her mother later moved to Kyneton where her mother opened a fancywork business.

The Ackman's had been so impressed by the attention and kindness shown at St Vincent's Hospital to the Aboriginal boy, Jackie, who cared for Michael's racehorse, that they decided that when she became old enough to attend school Amy would be sent to a convent school. Her mother abided by this decision and Amy was sent to the Sisters of Mercy School, Kyneton, with the stipulation (honoured) that she was not to be taught any prayers or given any religious instruction.

Despite her mother's request that she not be given instruction Amy absorbed much of the Catholic traditions. Through her mother's care and concern for the poor in the area Amy's understanding of the Christian religion was enhanced.

At the time of leaving school she felt very unsettled and often discussed religion with her mother.

She also started to pray catholic prayers and bought herself a 'penny Catechism' and a New Testament. She was received into the Catholic Church at the age of twenty-one but kept the news from her mother whom she loved dearly and who was in poor health.

When Amy and her mother moved to Melbourne, she took up optometry and after qualifying, set up her own practice in Collins Street. In this capacity she also worked at the Outpatients at St Vincent's Hospital, Fitzroy where she first came in contact with the Sisters of Charity.



Following the death of her mother Amy gave careful thought to the religious life and in 1914 was admitted to the Sisters of Charity Novitiate and in April 1917 made her first vows, being known as Sister Giovanni.

After completing her nursing training at St Vincent's, Darlinghurst in 1922, Sister Giovanni worked in the Admissions Office where she came in daily contact with the poor. From here she became Administrator, first at St. Vincent's Bathurst, then Lismore, then the Private Hospital, returning then to St Vincent's Sydney. During the period of this last appointment she was elected a Congregational Councillor in 1949.

In March 1953 Mother Giovanni was asked to go to Brisbane to undertake the building of what was to be called Mount Olivet Hospital.

She left for Brisbane a few days later. A property at Kangaroo Point had been offered to the Sisters, by an Anglican lady, Miss Mary Josephine Bedford, to be used for the sick and incurably ill in memory of her late life-long friend and co-owner, Dr Lilian Cooper.

Once in Brisbane she set about calling on the Archbishop and other dignitaries to seek their help. The Archbishop liked to recount the story of her first visit to him when he asked, "Mother how much money do you have for this building?" to which she replied, "Nothing your Grace". Banks were approached for low interest loans, fund-raising committees were established; Art Unions were organised as well as street stalls and a major appeal. Sister Giovanni and a companion commenced a campaign of door-to-door collecting.

Those sisters who acted as companion on her begging rounds have told many a story. One such story refers to her lack of direction and ability to get lost. It was getting dark and Sister Giovanni confessed, 'I have no idea where I am, we must be miles from home. I will ask in this house'. When the owner opened the door Mother Giovanni recognised him: "Oh, Mr What are you doing here? To which he replied, "Well I live here". It was the house at the back of their small convent. Her choice of person(s) to approach was also somewhat haphazard if not unusual: "That's a well-kept house, I think we'll go in there", or "I'm sure that lady will help us, her hat is in a nice style".

The Foundation stone for the new hospital was laid in October and the hospital was opened in September 1957 at a cost of £428,000.00. Mount Olivet is truly a memorial to the enthusiasm and dedication of this remarkable woman.

In 1963, when Mother Giovanni completed her time in charge at Mount Olivet she volunteered to go with the first group of sisters sent as missionaries to Bundi in PNG. Here she helped to care for the health of three hundred children.

Soon after her return to Mount Olivet in 1966 she suffered a stroke and died on 23rd August.

Mother Giovanni is featured in the Bicentennial publication **Unsung Heroes and Heroines of Australia.**

Ceremony to mark the Centenary of the death of Sister Scholastica Gibbons RSC

To mark this special occasion the Good Samaritan Sisters held a simple but moving ceremony which highlighted the extraordinary life of Scholastica who accepted the challenge to co-found, with Archbishop Polding, a new Australian Congregation, while still remaining a Sister of Charity.

At one time she held positions of Leadership in both Congregations, being the co- Founder of the Good Samaritans (originally known as Sisters of the Good Shepherd) and the Superior General of the Sisters of Charity.

Margaret Walsh, the author of the newly launched book, "The Good Sams", gave a moving address during which she portrayed Scholastica as a woman of courage, prepared to embrace a broader vision of the Church of Australia, while facing tensions and criticism that went with such action.

Two plaques were unveiled in honour of Scholastica by Sister Annette Cunliffe, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity and Sister Sonia Wagner, Congregational Leader of the Good Samaritan Sisters. One is by Scholastica's grave at Rosebank College at Five Dock, the other has been presented to the parish of St John the Baptist, Kinsale, Co. Cork, Ireland where Scholastica was born.

At the grave of Scholastica a litany was recited in her honour and those present prayed to her as:

To the memory of
MOTHER MARY SCHOLASTICA GIBBONS
Sister of Charity
Born 26th October 1817, Kinsale, Ireland
Died 15th October 1901, Marrickville, NSW
Co-founder with Archbishop John Bede Polding
of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan
of the Order of St Benedict.
Remembered with Gratitude
Presented to the Parish of St John the Baptist, Kinsale
By the Sisters of the Good Samaritan
Australia, 2001

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Remembered with Gratitude

Scholastica
the Foundress
Woman of charity
Woman of generous heart
Woman of hope
Woman of strength and single mindedness
the way
Woman, lover of penitents
Woman, carer of the poor, the sick and the dying
Woman, nurse to the wounded
Woman, visitor to the lonely
Valiant woman
Contemplative woman
Suffering woman
Peace-loving woman
Obedience
Beloved of the Sisters of Charity
Beloved of the Sisters of the Good Samaritans

In Memoriam

Sister Myrna Lynch, RSC

Myrna died on Monday 3rd September after a long battle with cancer.

Her requiem was celebrated at All Saints Church, Liverpool on 5th September 2001.

The chief celebrant was the Parish Priest Father Paul Linder.

Other concelebrants included Father John Williams from Hobart, a very close friend of Myrna's.

The following is the eulogy delivered by Sister Deirdre Hickey RSC one of Myrna's long time friends.

'Myrna was born on 16th January 1937 in the War Memorial Hospital Waverley. She was the youngest daughter of Margueretta Mary (Myrna) and George Harrison Lynch, and was one of nine children. Myrna grew up in Bondi, "the only place worth living in Sydney". She attended St Patrick's Primary School, Bondi and St Vincent's College, Potts Point. When I asked her sisters and brother what Myrna was like as a child, their words were unanimous, "She was a beautiful curly haired girl and we loved her" One of her sisters said, "she was a born entrepreneur and could run the country. She certainly organised the family". Family gatherings were special and memorable. Myrna was so proud of her nieces and nephews and their families and her greatest delight was to share in their lives. All of us I am sure have seen photos of significant family events.

On 2nd July 1955 at the age of eighteen Myrna entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of Charity at Wahroonga. Her two sisters accompanied her, as her Dad did not want to go with her.

Following her profession as a Sister of Charity she trained as a teacher and taught within our schools from Brisbane to Hobart. Myrna was a creative educator; a gifted classroom teacher specialising in creative arts. She loved children and the education closest to her heart was the teaching of children with special needs. Wherever Myrna was she created community and developed lifelong relationships.

Her teaching friends shared with me myriads of occasions of her celebrating with them, whether on outings, in their homes, or within her religious community.



She would make her beautiful sponges with passionfruit icing and the teachers would bring a variety of slices etc. quite a banquet! As the sisters came home, one by one, Myrna would say, "These are my friends".

The Sisters shared with me their reflections of Myrna and I'd like to recall some of these.

"I received my love of photography from Myrna. In filming close ups she encouraged me to keep going, to get it into focus, this was a wonderful learning for me. God came into focus in my life. She gave a lot of people a lot of joy".

Myrna knew many of our families. "One Easter I was going home to my family and Myrna gave me marshmallow rabbits, cooked by her, for my nieces and nephews. My sister had never seen so many marshmallow rabbits.

The children came all afternoon taking handfuls of marshmallows yet the supply of rabbits didn't seem to diminish like the loaves and fishes. Myrna's generosity knew no bounds.

* She was open and direct.

She loved people and could waste time with them.

* She gave, never counting the cost.



* A story I love is the one about Myrna's memory of her mother's Venetian rosary beads. When, in Venice, Myrna decided to search for beads, her gift to her family on returning to Australia would be a pair of Venetian rosary beads just like her mother's. She searched and searched for the beads down side streets and in odd places until she eventually found the bead shop. She bought the beads, the wire for threading and pliers to make them. She made five pairs of rosary beads, absolutely magnificent and treasured by her family'.

Myrna loved her pottery. As well as giving shape to the many creative ideas she had, working at the wheel and forming pieces, became a source of inner peace and consolation. She discovered this especially through her times of personal struggle. God was present to her through her pottery and she was drawn to it with a passion.

Myrna was gifted in sharing fun and laughter, however along with this Myrna had her own struggle with her weight. This was Myrna's troubled water and she found her bridge over these troubled waters through her time in America, as part of the Emmaus program. She shared with me that if she had not had the experience of Emmaus she could never have faced the diagnosis of cancer.

In the last four years, Myrna's life changed. She had to come to accept living with cancer and this she did. She integrated her social life, community life and ministry with regular visits to St Vincent's Hospital for treatment. Myrna loved her two doctors, Allan Maher and Robyn Ward, also the staff in Oncology, St Vincent's Private and Public Hospitals.

The community at 40 West St Darlinghurst was a safe haven and she was grateful for their skill and care. However her greatest delight was always to be able to go home to her community here in Liverpool. Myrna said her good-byes. "Now Dee that's all my business done". Her last ten days were spent at St Joseph's Hospital Auburn. She told us many times, "They care for me beautifully here". Myrna died peacefully at 2.45am on Monday morning.

*Myrna thank you for your life
Thank you for your love
We believe death ends a life not a
relationship so you will always live in our
hearts.*

Melbourne Sisters gather to remember Myrna

Sister Patricia Walker RSC writes: It was lovely to receive an invitation from the Sisters at St John's Convent, Clifton Hill to join them in a celebration of Myrna's life and death. Wherever Myrna was she created community and something of the lively, welcoming hospitable spirit that animated her was tangibly present during the meal that we shared together that evening. The natural flow on from such a meal was to give thanks in prayer.

Myrna who 'liked all things beautiful' would have delighted in the simplicity, colour and eye-catching décor of the chapel that evening. Sister Cathy Meese, a long time dear friend of Myrna led us beautifully and prayerfully through a reflection, thanksgiving and sharing of our special memories of Myrna ... memories of fun times, tough times, family times, inspiring times, struggling times, hospitality times and special times. So much was shared that evening, especially thanking God for the many and varied ways Myrna had touched the lives of so many of us. Perhaps it is best summed up in the words Cathy used as she lit the Paschal candle at the start of our prayer-

"This candle represents the vibrant, enthusiastic, creative, generous, all encompassing yet fragile spirit of Myrna". As the candle was lit we knew that the spirit of Myrna would live on in our memories.

Thank you to the Clifton Hill community for reminding us of the abiding truth that death ends a life not a relationship.

Sr Pauline receives the Commissioner's Citation

Congratulations to Sister M. Pauline Staunton who was awarded the Commissioner's Citation for her significant contribution to the welfare of the inmates in New South Wales Prisons at a ceremony on 5th October.



Pauline is about to complete thirteen years as the Administrator of the NSW Chaplaincy Service. In this role she has been an initiator in the development and expansion of the chaplaincy service in NSW

Pauline commenced her ministry at Long Bay in 1956 as a weekend visitor and then from 1959 to 1967 at Risdon in Hobart. During 1978/79 she also visited inmates in the Philippines.

In 1962 the Comptroller of Prisons initiated a move that led to the appointment of three full time chaplains to the Long Bay Penitentiary. In January 1988 a subsidy was given to the Churches in order to increase the number of Chaplains in NSW. At this time there were four full-time Chaplains at Long Bay and one each at Parramatta and Cessnock and it was recognised there was a need for a Secretary (or as the interviewing Chaplain put it 'someone to answer the phone at Long Bay').

Pauline was interviewed for this new position by one of the Chaplains and a meeting, at her request, followed this interview with the Assistant Commissioner of Corrective Services. The latter was particularly pleased with the matters raised by Pauline regarding accountability, education of Chaplains and forward planning. It was time to put Chaplaincy 'on the Correctional Services Map'.

Pauline was appointed as the Administrator of Chaplaincy. She began working with Chaplains with the intent of creating a Chaplaincy Service that would be credible and a formidable voice in the Correctional system.

As the service expanded Pauline recognised the need to have a Co-ordinator of Chaplains appointed who would work full-time liaising with the Department, the Civil Chaplains Advisory Committee, the Churches and the Chaplains.

The Department agreed to this and the first full-time coordinator was appointed in 1993, giving Pauline more time to attend to the preparation and monitoring of the budget, payment of chaplains, organising Orientation and Training for new chaplains, planning and organising Conferences and the monthly meetings, plus the many duties that keep the wheels of chaplaincy turning.

In 2000 Pauline was appointed to the Civil Chaplaincy Advisory Committee, the body that comprises member Churches, and has responsibility for liaising with the Government and Department for additional funding and appointment of Hospital and Correctional Centre chaplains. Added to these duties, many times during the week Pauline puts on her 'pastoral hat' as she listens to and assists members of the Correctional Staff, Chaplains and families of inmates and inmates who have problems.

It should be noted that since the early 1840's the Sisters of Charity have an unbroken line of Sisters involved in some form of ministry to inmates and staff in NSW Correctional Centres.

Go Volunteers



Recently **Sisters of Charity Community Care** held a luncheon at Rosebank, organised by Sister Cathy Meese, RSC the Community Care Co ordinator, for some 60 volunteers who spend time each week with CC assisting others in need.

The day commenced with a prayer reflection and was followed by lunch. Board Member, Mr John Honner was Master of Ceremonies for the day and the Guest Speaker at the luncheon was the entertaining Ms Susie Norton the former Lady Mayoress of Melbourne. As part of the celebrations Ms Cheryl O'Sullivan, a Board Member presented each person with a beautifully inscribed Volunteer Certificate.

A feature of the day was the opportunity for groups within the organisation to mingle and get to know each other and their various ministries. Volunteers can often feel isolated but at this luncheon you felt that you belonged to a community of helpers much broader than your own limited field.

Volunteers were present from Comely Bank, Healesville where they provide respite care for carers; from Strathmore where they visit carers in their homes and provide links for those with limited social contact; from Briar Terrace at Fitzroy which provides a venue for the lonely and those seeking a safe venue where they feel they belong; and from the Rosebank Centre which provides a variety of community programs.



Those present appreciated the fact that their contribution was acknowledged.

Another day for volunteers was held a month later. This time it was a reflection day led by Sr Kathleen MacAlain RSM, during which volunteers were encouraged to look at their own good qualities and how they utilise these qualities to assist others in need. Without such generous contributions from volunteers Community Care and other organisations would find it difficult to continue to provide assistance to those it serves.



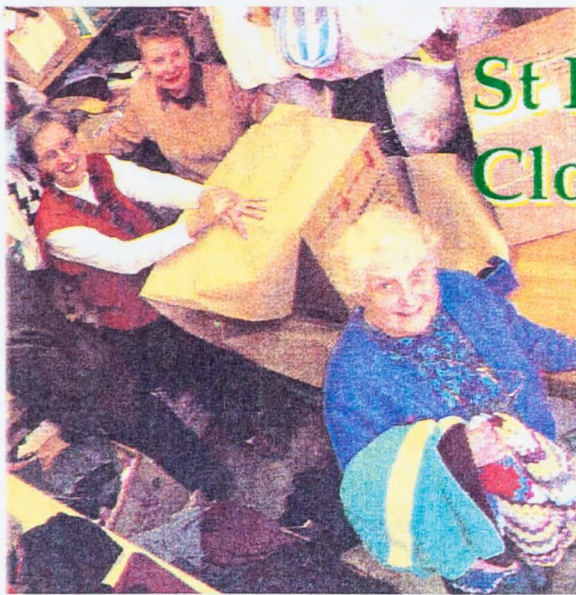


Miss Caroline Duhigg completes her term as Principal at St. Vincent's College at the end of the school year.

During her seven years as Principal the College enrolments have increased significantly and the high academic achievements of the students has been maintained.

Miss Duhigg has also overseen the significant upgrading and refurbishment of the College facilities.

Miss Duhigg will be remembered for her valuable contribution to the education of a generation of young women at St Vincent's College.



Sister Felicia and colleagues, Madeline and Pat packing parcels at the stables

St Paul's Send 3000th Box of Clothing to Needy Families

In 1989 Sister Felicia McCarthy RSC heard that young babies were dying from the cold in Papua New Guinea. Sister Felicia, along with her colleagues at the Villa Maria Society Stables Kew, decided to send some boxes of clothes to the people in Papua New Guinea

Today Sister Felicia and the members of the St Paul's Overseas aid group collect and make clothes for underprivileged women and children in about 60 places around the world.

The small band of helpers has grown to about 400 volunteers and in the past three months they have sent off 16 consignments. Each consignment consists of four boxes, each one weighing 15-20kg.

In addition to the clothing, the group has dispatched baby-care packages and games for children.

If you would like to assist with this work, please phone St Paul's Overseas Aid on (03) 9853 8900.

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