



Sisters of Charity
of Australia

Keep in Touch

KIT
MAGAZINE

MARCH 2022 • VOLUME 22 • NO. 01

Inside this month

In this edition of *Keep in Touch*, we look at the Mission of the Sisters in Fiji, which began 65 years ago.

In the Words of Remembrance section, we celebrate the life of Sr Elizabeth Costigan.

And we also mark the Platinum, Diamond, and Golden Jubilees of five of our Sisters.

A time for God's grace

Welcome to *Keep in Touch* for March, at a time when we find we are more in need of God's grace than ever.

The COVID-centric uncertainties of the past two years have been replaced with other, existential threats, and many of us feel overwhelmed not only by the suffering of people at home whose lives have been devastated by severe rain events and floods but are also disturbed watching the fate of the Ukrainian people play out on social media and the nightly news.



The Congregation has responded both in practical and spiritual terms, donating to help victims of the floods, as well as to Caritas' fund raiser for the victims of the crisis in Ukraine. In that beset country, we are seeing faith-filled and faithful religious Sisters acting on their vocations and responding through their ministries to the greatest refugee crisis the world has known since World War II. May God bless them all, and the suffering people they serve.

While these national and international events are in our hearts and in our prayers, the life of the Congregation is slowly returning to a different sort of normal.

The Congregation has set up its Care of Our Common Home Committee, the six members of which are charged with implementing and supporting the goals of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, as proposed on the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. That story leads this edition of *Keep in Touch* for this edition

Caring for all of Creation has long been one of the corner stones of the Congregation's ethos, as the story *Mission in the Mountains* indicates.

- The Editor

Above, right: Carthage's Cathedral, Lismore, in the recent floods. Image reproduced with kind permission of photojournalist, Kirran Shah

Care of Our Common Home:

The Sisters of Charity and Laudato Si

As a result of dialogue and submissions from Sisters at the Congregation's 28th General Chapter in March 2021, the Congregational Leader & Council initiated the Care of our Common Home Committee.





Care of Our Common Home Committee (from left): Srs Karan Varker on screen, Margaret Valentine, Kathleen Doohan, Anne Taylor, Elizabeth Dodds, and Margaret Guy

Members of the Committee were appointed for three years from September 1st, 2021.

The members are: Sisters Elizabeth Dodds (Chair), Kathleen Doohan, Margaret Guy, Anne Taylor, Margaret Valentine, and Karan Varker.

The Committee's focus is on relevant sections of the Chapter Direction Statement and the Laudato Si Action Platform under the auspices of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in Rome.

We are engaged in partnership with our Sister Congregation, centred in Dublin, and connected particularly with their Care of the Earth Committee.

Other partnerships have also been fostered, especially with Religious Congregations and other organisations whose focus is Ignatian Spirituality.



The importance of gathering information from our Sisters as to how they were responding to care of Earth in the reality of their lives and our community homes cannot be emphasised enough. Responses from our Sisters were far beyond what the Committee had believed possible.

These responses formed the basis for future work as we move from environmental consciousness to ecological conversion.

A global endeavour was to encourage our Congregation to join with so many others in ensuring

our investment portfolio was free of any engagement with the fossil fuel industry.

In October, the Congregation made a commitment to divest from fossil fuels. This was announced prior to COP 26, Glasgow Oct-Nov 2021.

Recently, the Committee articulated its STATEMENT of INTENT and from this will concentrate on the seven goals of the Laudato Si Action Platform.

For further information, please email Sr Elizabeth Dodds congregation@rscoffice.com

Mission in the Mountains:

The story of Sr Agnes Fitzgerald

The recent call by the Care of Our Common Home committee for input from the Sisters was richly answered. One reply came from Srs Mary Maguire and Colleen Holohan in the Blue Mountains.

They proposed that Sisters in the Blue Mountains had already been practising the core elements of what we now know as the foundation of the Laudato Si' Action Platform for decades. In this, the Sisters were educated by the local Indigenous Gundungarra and Durag people of the of the Gully, a traditional summer camp with a constant flow of fresh water.

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The Sisters of Charity who lived in Katoomba and ministered in the Blue Mountains areas – including Leura and Blackheath – the latter not far distant from the Megalong Valley (thought to be from the local language meaning Valley Under the Rock and described as “a rural paradise of verdant pastures and pristine forests”) and the Gully peoples’ winter camp in Burragorang Valley (itself now almost completely drowned by the Warragamba Dam) – came to know this region well.

The Sisters had arrived in 1902, establishing “a first-class boarding school” at Mt St Mary’s in Katoomba. From there, Sr Agnes Fitzgerald (August 28, 1867 – September 26, 1962) was missioned in that same



Sr Agnes Fitzgerald

year to visit the poor and the sick of The Gully, just outside of Katoomba.

The Gully community had lived together in what is now called Garguree from at least 1894 until they were forcibly evicted by the local council during the building of the Catalina racetrack in 1957. When Sr Agnes – known to the Gully community as “our little Sister” because of her diminutive size – arrived in the Mountains, she found access tricky – she often had to walk for miles and clamber over rough terrain to gain access to rudimentary homes with mud floors heated by log fires, often in bitterly cold conditions to get to people in need.

In the 1940s, Sr Agnes recorded her memories of the Gully and her interaction with the residents. Former Archives Manager Denise

Corrigan researched an article for *Keep In Touch* (March 2012) entitled *Sisters of Charity early ministry at Katoomba*. In 1902, not long after the school was founded, Sr Agnes was given a visitations ministry, according to Jim Smith’s book, *The Aboriginal People of Burragorang Valley (If we left the Valley our hearts would break)*, (Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2016).

Sr Agnes was called upon at all times of the day and night and in all sorts of weather for the visitations. Once, she was teaching music at Mt St Mary’s when she was told that a man was asking to see her. “Come down quickly, at once, on the instance” was the message relayed. She arrived as quickly as she could to discover she was needed to visit a mate of the visitor. The man – Mat Cooper – had become ill out in the bush at Nellie’s Glen, suffering from fevers, chills, and an inability to speak properly.

The group of men with him had remembered that they had a bottle of rum – half was dispensed to the sick man, while his friends then demolished the second half and carried him back to his mother up the mountain. Mat survived, and Sr Agnes was impressed that his friends had managed to carry him across the inhospitable topography about 15 kilometres up the mountain.

In another event Sr Agnes recalled, she was summoned by the Gully mid-wife, Mrs Alice Cooper, to a location far from the convent.



The Gully. Screenshot from the video *Bringing Back the Sweetwater - The story of Garguree, The Gully*

The parish priest was away, and there was a baby who was dying in need of baptism. The mother refused to have her child baptised by a nun, given her husband was named for William Wentworth, and an Anglican. "I thought we had better follow the same religion," she explained. Her child survived the convulsions which saw the Sisters called, and the infant had been taken out for a walk when Sr Agnes and her companion Sister arrived.

Sr Agnes wasn't pleased: "I felt very annoyed with Mrs Cooper for sending us on such a wild goose chase after all day teaching in school." But Mrs Cooper had another request: "Sisters, there is a baby really dying but it lives far in the bush." Sr Agnes said: "As the child's salvation depended on our visit, we could not refuse."

Later in another dark, little hut, heated by a log fire, Sr Agnes broached the subject of Baptism with another mother. The woman, worried both by the fact that she was not a Catholic and that (the

sacrament) seemed a portent of death, refused. Nightfall was coming on and Mrs Cooper was anxious to get the Sisters away from the possible bad behaviour and drunkenness of the men who would soon return from town.

Sr Agnes stood her ground and said to Mrs Cooper: "We cannot go and leave the child unbaptised as it will die tonight and no matter what rudeness we may have had to put up with, we cannot leave – unless you promise to baptise (the child)." Sr Agnes checked that Mrs Cooper knew what to do. Realising that the mid-wife had been well-instructed when she was a pupil in a convent school, Sr Agnes left her in charge of the matter of the infant's salvation. Mrs Cooper had her chance later in the night when the exhausted mother gave the baby over into Mrs Cooper's arms.

More about Sister Agnes Fitzgerald can be found in her life story, *Melody in the Sun* written by Sister Mary Bernadette Warner Shand who died in 2008.

A special memorial to the Sisters of Charity and Sister Agnes is erected overlooking the Gully. The Gully is located off Gates Avenue, Katoomba, about 1.2 km from the station, just behind the Katoomba Aquatic Centre. If visiting the Blue Mountains, this is certainly worth a visit.



Note: The former Gully community, now Garguree, is public land – you can find a video about its importance and revitalisation here –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojrSqQ4ub70>

The Care of our Common Home Committee thanks Liz Sheridan, our archivist, for the research provided on this topic, and Christine Hogan, our Communications Manager for writing up the details above.

From Potts Point to the Pacific:

The Mission to Fiji, 1957-1966

The Congregational Archives holds a diverse collection of photographic prints, slides and negatives that provide a visual record of the history of the Sisters of Charity of Australia and their ministries both in Australia and abroad.



Of particular significance is a collection of 35mm slides dating from 1957-1966 documenting the first overseas mission of the Congregation at St Teresa's Novitiate, Cawaci, Fiji.

Invited by the Vicar Apostolic of Fiji, Victor Frederick Foley SM, the Sisters of Charity were tasked with teaching English and other secondary school subjects to the postulants and novices of the Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth (SOLN), a Diocesan Congregation founded in Fiji in 1952.

It was hoped that this education would prepare the SOLN to pursue further studies in teaching and nursing, transforming their Congregation from its traditional supportive role in the Mission Stations to one which would manage and work in schools and hospitals across the Pacific.



The slides themselves largely consist of both formal and informal snapshots documenting daily life at St Teresa's Novitiate and at the nearby Sisters of Charity Convent, Maryhill. Scenes include Sisters participating in lessons, recreation, gardening, and fishing as well as profession ceremonies and visits from dignitaries.

The slides also document visits to local landmarks, religious houses and neighbouring communities, including the leprosarium on the nearby island of Makogai.

Cataloguing and describing this collection has been a challenge as the slides often do not contain any descriptive information that could assist in establishing their location, date, creator, purpose, or identifying those in the images.

However, much of this information has been revealed through a close examination of the visual evidence, corroboration of details with other records and through working in collaboration with the Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth.

Furthermore, the choice of medium would suggest that they were intended to be shared as the slides could be projected to a larger group of people than a single photographic print could.



Clockwise from page 6

Sr Florence Bailey (seated, third from left) and Sr Mark Lehmann (seated, fifth from left) visiting the Marist Sisters in the neighbouring town of Levuka, ca 1957-ca 1958

A Sister of Compassion and Sister of Charity with the buildings of St Teresa's Novitiate and Maryhill Convent in the background, ca 1959-ca 1965

Sr Baptist Whyte and novices playing with a puppet, ca 1958-ca 1961

Sr Mark Lehmann and two novices during a geography lesson, ca 1957-ca 1965

Nevertheless, research continues as some questions remain unanswered, such as who was behind the camera documenting this mission and who created the slides.

Highlighting this collection is timely as 2022 marks the 65th anniversary of the establishment of this mission, marking a significant point in the history of both Congregations.

Shown on these pages are selected slides from the Archives.

Our Jubilarians

Sisters Maureen Walters and Maria Carmel Cullen celebrated their Platinum Jubilees.

Sisters Elizabeth Dodds and Annette Cunliffe celebrate their Diamond Jubilees. The two former Congregational Leaders and leading educators entered the Congregation at the same time, so it was fitting that they marked their Diamond Jubilees together as well.

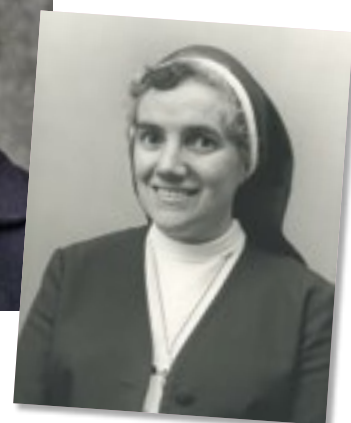
COVID-19 restrictions meant Sister Cate O'Brien's Golden Jubilee celebration was a low-key event with family and friends. Her real Jubilee celebration will be held after Easter.

Sr Maureen Walters

Sr Maureen marked 70 years as a Sister of Charity at the Mononia Convent in Melbourne on January 24.



'Without Thee I can do nothing'



Above, from left:

Sr Maureen Walters during her time she was Congregational Secretary

Sr Maureen Walters as a nursing Sister

Sr Elizabeth Dodds

Sr Elizabeth is the Australian representative of the Cause of Mary Akienhead.



'In God I live and move and have my being'



Above, from left:

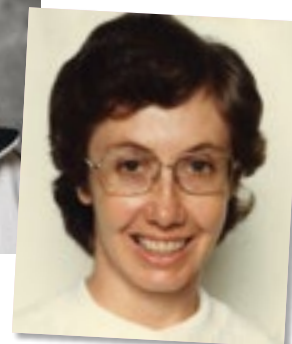
Sr Elizabeth Dodds
Sr Elizabeth (centre)
with her young Sisters

Sr Annette Cunliffe

Sr Annette celebrated her Diamond Jubilee with the members of her Community.



'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me'



Above, from left:

Sr Annette Cunliffe
Sr Annette, ca 1978-ca 1984

Sr Maria Carmel Cullen

Sr Maria Carmel celebrated her Platinum Jubilee in January.



Above, from left:

Sr Maria Carmel Cullen at St Vincent's Hospital Convent, Toowoomba, QLD, 2008
(L-R) Sr Robyn Wheeler, Sr Anne, Sr Sesarina Bau, Sr Benigna O'Donovan, Sr Leo Jones and Sr Maria Carmel Cullen, St Vincent's Hospital Convent, Darlinghurst, NSW, ca 1970

*"To love Thee
and to be loved by Thee"*



Sr Cate O'Brien

Sr Cate O'Brien celebrated her Golden Jubilee on January 27.

*'My God
is faithful'*



Above, from left:

Sr Cate O'Brien
Sr Cate O'Brien (Principal),
Marion Primary School,
Horsley Park, NSW, 1982
(L-R) Sr Cate O'Brien
and Sr Leone Wittmack,
Ossima, Papua New Guinea, ca 1992

Words of remembrance

Sr Elizabeth Costigan

November 16, 1936 – November 26, 2021

**Mass of Christian Burial
at St Theresa's Essendon VIC
on Monday, December 6, 2021.**

Her personal motto:

*'He must increase,
I must decrease'* – John 3: 30



Sr Elizabeth Costigan

Where to begin? Imagine if you will, a rich tapestry, with colourful textured threads woven into a beautiful work of art. The weaving of the tapestry takes time, patience, skill, and trust! Each of us is a thread. We are grateful to be a part of the rich tapestry of her life.

The first thread for me was picked out more than 60 years ago when Liz taught me, known in those days as Sr M. St Michael.

It was her first teaching appointment after her novitiate training in Sydney. We did in later years laugh about how, according to her recollections, she had to wing it a bit.

I didn't mind her winging it as to me she was a wonderful, caring teacher.

In my little girl eyes, there was something special about this Sister and our connection has endured and grown over all these decades. We have shared pain, joy searching, frustration and deep spirituality, along with many laughs.

Today in the Gospel we will hear Liz's motto proclaimed, *He must increase, I must decrease.*

I'm sure that, be you family, Sister of Charity, friend, colleague, companion, or acquaintance, you will have experienced this motto brought to life in her.

God was her deep centre, the one whom she brought to life in her selflessness, in the way she companioned and in her essence as a Sister of Charity.

Let me share some of the threads which are significant for me.

The thread of Liz's family

We are grateful to Anne and Barry for their words and special family memories.

The thread of our Congregation

As a much-loved member of our Congregation, Liz was missioned to a variety of roles. For many years, she was assigned to several primary schools in both Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra.

These roles were as teacher, executive member, parent liaison, and Principal including here at St Therese's at one time.

The threads from these times in her life would often re-appear and bring her great joy.

Liz was asked to take on the responsibility for training our novices and this she did for three years.

Guided by her motto, *He must increase I must decrease*, Liz gave herself to this role with her trademark generosity, fidelity, and prayerfulness.

These were not easy years for Liz, but her faith was strong, and she was grateful that God was able to work through her.

The thread of parish and pastoral life

She ministered at Northcote and at Corpus Christi parish Glenroy as pastoral associate with Fr Ray Deal, whom Liz admired and supported until his death.

She loved her work in the parish and at this time her pastoral and interpersonal skills grew even more as she immersed herself into the life of the parish community, once again focussed on God must increase, and she must decrease.

The thread of Spiritual Direction/Companion

Liz was a local community leader at various times and was elected to our Congregational Leadership in 1996.

At the end of 2002 when Liz concluded her time on our Council, Liz did a year of renewal at



Heart of Life Centre where she completed her training as a Spiritual Director, a ministry she loved and exercised until very recently when she moved into the Mononia convent at Fitzroy.

Liz loved her ministry and involvement with the Companions here in Melbourne. She would often refer to her gatherings and

the support she received from the group and was so impressed with the level of your trust and sharing. You gave her great joy, thank you!

The thread of Catholic Ladies College

Another hugely significant role for Liz was her time at Catholic Ladies College Eltham where she used her natural networking

From top:

(L-R) Sr Elizabeth Costigan, Sr Libbey Byrne and Sr Patricia Regan, St Vincent's Convent, Potts Point, NSW, 1982

(L-R) Sr Margaret Sapsford and Sr Elizabeth Costigan, Holy Trinity Primary School, Curtin, ACT, 1975

Continued on page 12 →

Words of remembrance

Sr Elizabeth Costigan

From page 11



(L-R) Sr Marion Corless, Sr Kathleen Munce, Sr Colleen Jackson, Sr Mary Claver Stringer and Sr Elizabeth Costigan, Novitiate, St John's Convent, Auburn, NSW, 1982

The thread of your special relationship with Liz

Please just take a moment to identify, hold, and appreciate the thread of your special relationship with Liz.

I think that Liz has some special words of encouragement and support for us contained in the reading from Philippians this morning. St Paul wrote them, but just imagine Liz speaking to them this morning:

"My prayer is that your love and gratitude may overflow, more and more with deepening understanding and full insight, so that you can always recognise what is best."

Thank you so much Liz.
Rest in peace!

- Lauren Dixon rsc
Congregational Leader

capacity to develop relationships of support and encouragement with the students, staff and executive, parents, and the wider college community.

As a proud ex-student of CLC, I think Liz would be pleased with the CLC tapestry threads which are so well represented here today.

The Thread of Friendship

Liz made friends easily with her warmth and graciousness. Thus, she had lots of friends in many places.

Each person was special to Liz who never forgot a birthday or significant occasion.

The thread of Liz's Social Life

Liz loved going out for coffee. It gave her the opportunity to catch up with lots and lots of people, many of you being present today!

In recent months that became less available to her and the lockdowns last year and this, denied her the opportunity to socialize in this way. However, she did love catching up on the phone and this kept her connected in some small way.



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of Australia

Keep in Touch Magazine is a quarterly newsletter for Sisters of Charity, their families, friends, and supporters.

Published by the Congregational Office of the Sisters of Charity of Australia

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