



Keep in Touch

Special
Gathering
Edition

A newsletter for Sisters of Charity, their families and friends, and supporters of our Congregation.



Touching our past
Embracing our present
Imagining our future

This special edition of Keep in Touch

celebrates two events from the recent Gathering of the Sisters of Charity held at Parramatta and the Hills District.

On Saturday July 23rd over 120 Sisters journeyed to the site of The Female Factory, Parramatta. This provided an opportunity for Sisters to literally touch their past in a morning of reflection, performance and prayer, culminating in the unveiling of a historic marker proclaiming the site as sacred to the Sisters.

On Sunday July 24th a Eucharistic Celebration of Thanksgiving was conducted at St Patrick's Cathedral. Sisters were joined by family, friends and supporters at this most joyous event.

The next edition of KIT will be published soon returning with Congregational news, views and feature articles.



[Top] Sisters at the remaining wall of The Female Factory, Parramatta. [Left] Reflection Time [Right] Sister Elizabeth Dodds accepts a copy of the page that will be placed in the "Book of Memory" from Bishop Kevin Manning.



Top Left: A glimpse into the past. Looking through the remaining wall into the former site of the Female Factory. Directions to the site are on Page 6

Centre Left: Folk Historian and Singer Margaret Walters prepares for her performance. Margaret selected two authentic songs from the 1830's: "The Female Transport" and "Botany Bay Transport". The latter refers to woes of the Female Factory inmates in its lyrics.

Bottom Left: Sister St Jude ensured the event proceeded smoothly, and on-time. Here she indicates the yet-to-be unveiled historic marker wrapped in the Congregational colours of blue and gold. The marker was installed with the kind permission of the Sydney West Area Health Service, and nestles appropriately in the centre of the remaining wall.

Top and Centre Right: Students from St Vincent's College perform "Looking Forward - Looking Back", an interpretation of the Sisters journey from Ireland and their immediate connection with the Female Factory women. The performance was written and directed by Ms Gemma Rygate, head of Drama at St Vincent's College.

An extract: Overhead, they beheld for the first time the matchless Australian sky, which, on that summer morning, was lit up by the rising sun in countless tints and hues of purple and gold, shedding a soft roseate flow over the magnificent view. Australia had, indeed, robed herself in her richest garb to welcome that noble band of priests and nuns who were to land on her shores. Had they not sacrificed home, friends and all that their hearts had cherished, and had they not braved the perils of the wide ocean in order to devote their lives to the uplifting of these thousands of poor despised ones who had been cast upon her care? Oh, how the Guardian Angels of those poor outcasts must have praised and thanked the good God for His loving gift on that happy day.

Bottom Right: The Congregational Archives kindly allowed several items carried by the first Sisters to be displayed, including the Black Crucifix. Mary Aikenhead wanted the Sisters to have an appropriate depiction of Jesus when they encountered the Aboriginal peoples.

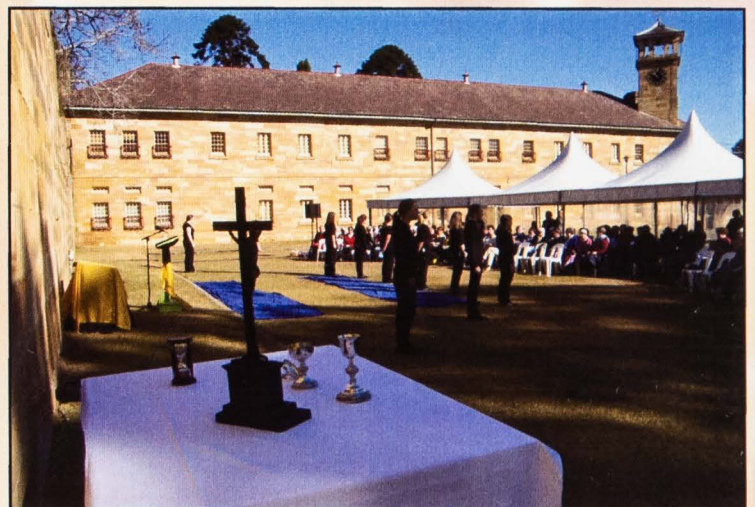
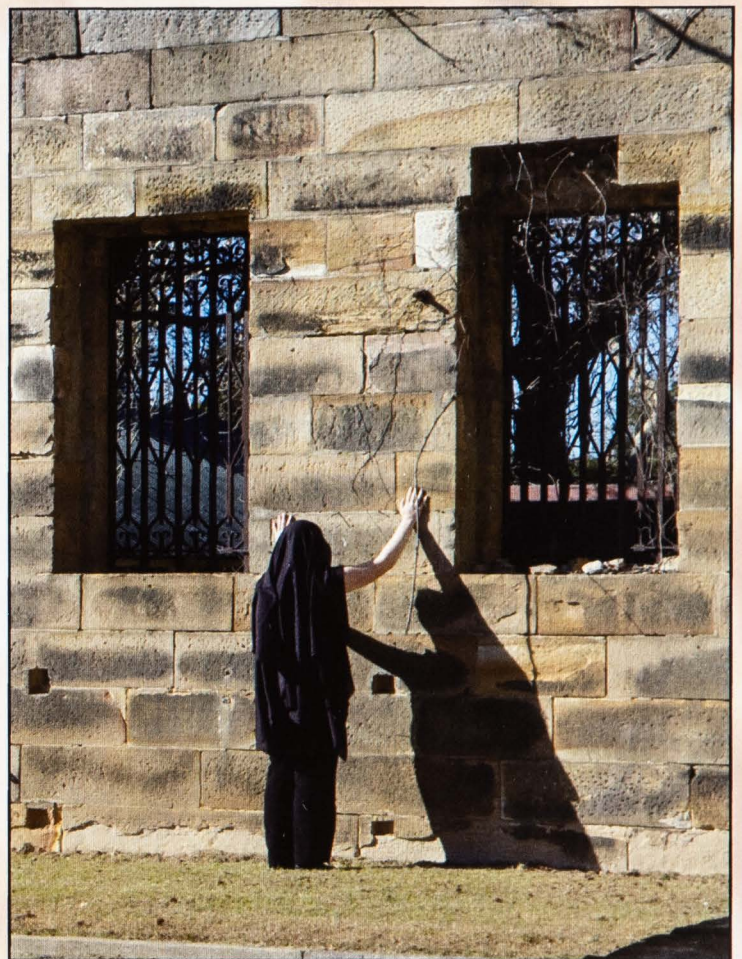
On the Shores of sorrow and guilt

We toiled,
 An old-world life grafted
 To an ancient, timeless land.
 Alien but true
 We went to the edge of things
 Jagged, dark, disjointed,
 Boundary walkers
 Women robed in hope for the faceless ones.

And all the while
 A new life,
 A new myth,
 Lay dormant
 Locked in a landscape
 That speaks of mystery
 And those *first ages*,
 A now place,
 A now time
 When the Spirit breathes anew
 The black shell is broken
 Hope rises on the air
 Unfettered,
 Bearing life,
 Like spring rain in a red desert.

Our new women journey on
 To an undiscovered country
 Where the Poor still reside
 And Love must be found
 And Grace is always found.

This poem was the concluding segment of the Student's performance, and was written for the occasion by Christina Pechey, Head of English at St Vincent's College, Potts Point.



This is an extract from the presentation made by Patricia Jacobsen, Archivist-in-Charge of the Sisters of Charity.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

Today, I would like to try to conjure up for you a vision of what the Sisters found here when they first arrived in Parramatta, Australia's second oldest township. It was here in November 1788 that Governor Arthur Phillip established a military fort and convict settlement for the purpose of growing food for the colony. The land chosen by Phillip for the settlement formed part of the country occupied by the Burramattagal Clan of the Dharug Aboriginal people.

In January 1839, Parramatta was no longer a raw, frontier settlement, but it was still, as the Historian, Carol Liston, described it, a Convict and Garrison Town, which was defined by its Government institutions, e.g., the Military Barracks and Commissariat, the Male Convict Barracks and Lumber Yard, the Female Orphan School and, of course, the Female Factory. By then, supplies and passengers were transported from Sydney by river craft or along the first Parramatta Road. There were roads in Parramatta but they certainly were not of an all-weather standard and it is very unlikely that there was much in the way of public transport. In all probability, the Sisters walked between their Convent and their various work places.

Parramatta was also a Vice-Regal town where the colonial governors maintained a residence and spent considerable time overseeing government business in Parramatta. That was convenient for the Sisters, who were able to successfully negotiate with Governor Sir George Gipps for improved working conditions for the convict women.

WHO WERE THE FEMALE CONVICTS?

Between 1788 and 1840, 12,500 female convicts arrived in New South Wales and many of them spent some time in the Female Factory at Parramatta. Those women had all been sentenced under the English Penal Code to

transportation for various crimes, but they were certainly not all hardened criminals. Therein lay a problem. In an attempt to prevent the corruption of the lesser offenders, the women were divided into three classes. There were women awaiting assignment as servants or who had been returned by their masters as unsatisfactory; pregnant women and nursing mothers, who could keep their children until aged 3-4 years when they were sent off to orphanages; and women who were under local court sentences for re-offending in the colony. Their duties and conditions varied according to the class in which they were placed. The re-offenders had few privileges and were sentenced to harsh labour, e.g., breaking up stones for road works. Although not entirely deserved, the women had earned an appalling reputation by January 1839.

WHY "FACTORY"?

Colonial Administrations were responsible for providing shelter for the female convicts until such time as they were employed or married. In the meantime, they were required to defray some of the costs of their upkeep by cooking, laundry and producing products required in the Colony. Hence, the word, "Factory". The first Factory over the Gaol had provided insufficient accommodation for the women, who sought shelter wherever and however they could in Parramatta. They were, indeed, a problem.

In 1818 Governor Lachlan Macquarie, decided to erect a building large enough to enclose the convict women until such time as they were assigned as domestic servants to married persons, or were married themselves. Macquarie resumed 105 acres that had been granted by Governor King to Governor Bligh and allocated 4 acres for a factory site. He commissioned Francis Greenway (the emancipist Colonial Architect) to design a building large enough to accommodate up to 172 women to be surrounded by a high stone wall and a moat. The three-storey building was opened in 1821 and included dormitories and dining rooms. In addition, a hospital and work rooms for carding, spinning, weaving, etc. were provided. Greenway's building was rather grand for a Female Factory and impractical. For example, he failed to provide washing and ablutions facilities, which had to be built later as skillions (lean-to's) against this remaining wall. Within a couple of years, it proved inadequate for the numbers of women requiring shelter and overcrowding became a constant problem, as did the need to provide penitentiary accommodation for serious offenders. In 1823 Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane arranged for the erection of a Penitentiary Building to provide 62 cells and in 1838 Governor Gipps built another 72 small isolation cells, where serious offenders were confined on bread and water for various periods.



Patricia Jacobson presented a historical perspective of the Female Factory.



Sisters Maureen, Josephine, Laureen, Nola, Margaret and Elizabeth presenting "Touch The Wall. Feel the Story" based on the courage of the First Sisters and how they might challenge us today.

I am Sr M Baptist de Lacy. As a twenty-one year old I heard of Bishop Polding's appointment to New Holland and Van Dieman's Land. I asked if he was going to set up a community of Sisters of Charity there, and, if so, would I be able to join them. I trained as a nurse. I prepared for this mission. My heart was in it from its beginnings.

I SAY TO YOU –

Be faithful to your foundational call and to those who are with you in community. Be aware of your Sisters and their ministries. Support, encourage, know each other more and far more deeply. Help each other to live our motto: Caritas Christi urget nos!

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.

I am Sr M. John Cahill. I longed "to accompany the wretched men", as they travelled as convicts, "so as to begin on board, what their imprisonment made difficult". I volunteered for the Australian mission, and I became the first superior of the young community, as we struggled through the wild seas, and then through the challenges of the tough, hostile, uncertain colony and its society.

I SAY TO YOU –

Continue this foundational call to those, who are poor and are in prison. Walk with those, who are imprisoned today – asylum seekers (refugee claimants), and victims caught in the trafficking of women - anyone who is imprisoned by our Australian system as well as those, who are the most vulnerable today... the mentally ill, those seeking a right to a home, the displaced, our earth crying out for sustainability.

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.

I am Sr M Lawrence Cator. I volunteered for the Australian mission, and I struggled with its stormy passage, and

the commitment it demanded.

I SAY TO YOU –

I am real. I struggled with this commitment, as do you – at least at times. I am the other voice . . . the voice that disturbs. . . the voice of doubt. Continue with the foundational call to trust God's providence and care. Listen, trust, and walk forward with confidence into the future. I did and so will you. "There are many mansions in my Father's house".

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.

I am Sr M. Francis de Sales O'Brien. I, too, volunteered for the Australian mission as a nursing sister. I, too, struggled with life in the colony, the church, the community. Through it all, the cry of the people in their poverty and suffering called me onward.

I SAY TO YOU –

Be there for those, who cannot speak. Be voices on behalf of the voiceless. Stand in solidarity with them. Be women of courage and compassion – even when the cost is high.

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.

I am Sr M Xavier Williams. I came to this land as a novice, frail, yet full of hope. I travelled stormy seas, leaving behind family and friends, as I listened to the voices of people calling in their need.

I SAY TO YOU –

Continue the foundational call to "let go!" New pathways must be taken. Refuse to be held back by your own frailty and limitations. Encourage those, who are treading new pathways. Support and encourage those, who are walking with you in new ways of ministry and community. I say again: "Trust your God. Let go!"

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.

I am Sr Mary Augustine Aikenhead. The Australian Mission was my vision and dream. I wanted to go with the first five, but I couldn't, because I was crippled. I had a vision, in which I could not participate directly.

I SAY TO YOU –

Live out my dream, my vision. You are my dearly loved daughters. Thank you for your trust in Providence and for your undaunted and unflagging spirit.

Hold on to mission; embrace mission; imagine mission.

TOUCH THE WALL.FEEL THE STORY.



The response to our Leaders' call to "touch the past, embrace the present and imagine our future" was strongly evident.

Top Left: There was spontaneous joy and connection between the Students and the Sisters as they presented gifts of a small piece of sandstone cut from the same mother-stone as the historical marker, along with a copy of Christina Pechey's poem.

Centre Left: Sister Margaret Costigan with the Black Crucifix and Challis brought to Australia on the "Francis Spaight"

Bottom Left: A perfect day of winter sunshine and, other than the occasional bird, a blessed silence. Sisters spent a time of reflection simply touching the wall, with some inspired to place their written thoughts between the sandstone blocks.

A video of this event, and highlights of the Eucharistic Celebration is being prepared.

The Historic Marker plaque reads:

In Honour

This remaining wall of the Female Factory is sacred heritage for the Sisters of Charity of Australia.

It is here that the first five Sisters ministered to the women convicts with commitment and dedication from 1838 until the Factory's closure in 1849.

Unveiled by Sister Elizabeth Dodds rsc, Congregational Leader, Sisters of Charity of Australia, at the Congregational Gathering July 23, 2005.

This historic marker has been installed with the kind permission of the Western Area Health Service



Margaret Costigan



Directions to the Female Factory Site: The site is not marked on directories, but lies within the Cumberland Hospital precinct north of the Dorothy Parker Centre. UBD Map 191, B:14. Enter from Fleet Street. The remaining wall is adjacent to the NSW Institute of Psychiatry, with unrestricted access and ample parking. The site is a 20 minute walk from Parramatta Station.



On Sunday July 24th a Eucharistic Celebration of Thanksgiving was held at St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta. The Celebrant was the Most Rev. Bishop Kevin Manning, assisted by Co-Celebrants Bishop Bernard O'Grady, Very Rev. Paul Slyney, Rev. Kevin Walsh, Rev. Robert Fuller, Rev. John O'Connor and Rev. Mario Zammit.

The Cathedral was overflowing with Sisters, their family and friends, the principals and staff from of our Colleges, and executives and board members from our Health Services.

Sister Linda Ferrington warmly welcomed everyone including the St Patrick's parishioners who had kindly invited us into their Cathedral. Ms Anna Kliebert led the St Patrick's Cathedral Choir, augmented with the voices of some of our more musical Sisters. "Gather Us In" and "We Are Many Parts" were two of the Hymns that resonated throughout St Patrick's in harmony with the magnificent pipe organ.

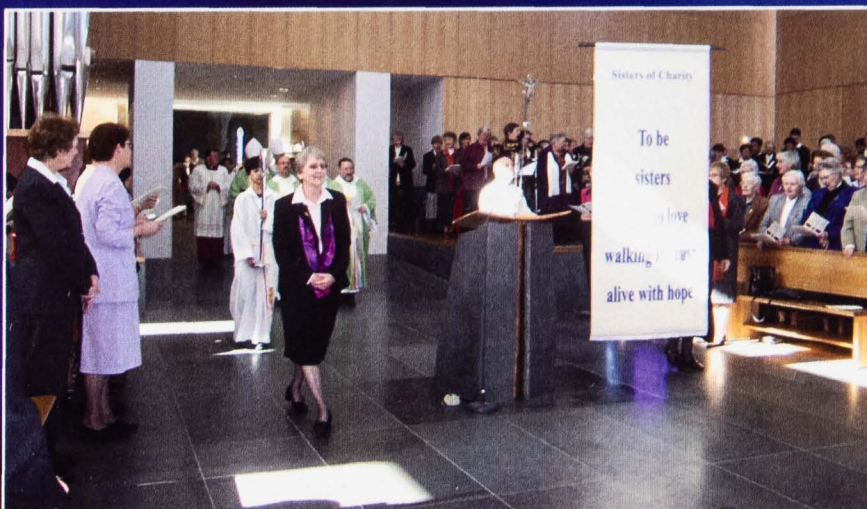
Bishop Kevin reminded us in his thoughtful homily of how the First Sisters provided pews for prisoners when they attended Mass. In the 19th Century parishioners would have to pay for their pews, making this an impossible task for those domicile in the nearby Parramatta prison. Bishop Kevin provided many examples of how, from the day they arrived at the Female Factory, the Sisters had become an integral part of the Church's activities in and around Parramatta.

Sister Angela Burke read "The Deer's Cry" as the Thanksgiving. The author, Shaun Davey, may have anticipated the collective mood and ambience of the Cathedral, particularly in his first stanza: [continues page 8]

Top: Sister Elizabeth leads the opening procession. The Congregational Banner proclaims "To be Sisters called to love, walking in trust, alive with hope".

Centre: Sister Elizabeth receiving a copy of the page that will be placed in St Patrick's Book of Memories.

Bottom: Bishop Kevin's homily recounted the work of the First Five Sisters.



*I arise today
Through the strength of Heaven
Light of sun
Radiance of moon
Splendour of fire
Speed of lightning
Swiftness of wind
Depth of the sea
Stability of earth
Firmness of rock.*

In her prayer, Sister Elizabeth “thanked God for the many blessings that have been given to us throughout our journey of 167 years in our country, Australia.” She also thanked Bishop Kevin and Bishop Bernard for their ongoing friendship, and support of the Congregation. Sister Elizabeth concluded her prayer with these words: “To all of you who are among us today who are the positive deviants, in our society and in our Congregation, we ask God’s providence to be with you. I express my deep gratitude to our Sisters. These women who have carried forth with me and with all of us the Mission and deep charism of our Foundress, Mary Aikenhead.”

One of the most memorable moments of the service was Bishop Kevin presenting Sister Elizabeth with a copy of the page that was added to St Patrick’s Book of Memory. The Book traces the history of the Parramatta Diocese, with the text on the page recognising the contribution of the Sisters of Charity. The Book is displayed in St Patrick’s Chapel.

Top: Sister Elizabeth asked all Sisters who were present to stand and be recognised during her prayer of thanks.

Centre: Sister Una McAllister and Sister Joyce Mary Buckman prepare the offertory gifts.

Bottom: Four Congregational Leaders attended the Thanksgiving. *[from left]* Sister Elizabeth, Sister Helen Clarke [1990-1996], Sister Mary Maguire [1984-1990] and Sister Annette Cunliffe [1996-2002].



Keep In Touch is published by the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Australia. 1/75 Grafton Street, Bondi Junction, NSW 2022. Please address all correspondence to Mr James Griffiths. Email James.Griffiths@rscoffice.com
Special thanks to **Sister Margaret Fitzgerald** and **Mrs Heidi Victoria** for photography. Editorial and Layout by **BWS&A**