



THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF AUSTRALIA

# Keep in Touch

March 2011  
Volume 11  
Number 1

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

## *It never rains but it pours!* *The role of Downs and West Community Support*

As Sister Christine Henry rsc and her small team of volunteers delivered the last of the Christmas hampers to rural families west of Toowoomba, she couldn't help but notice many men, women and children looking pretty washed out after their years of struggle against drought. Days later, many of those families, along with many others, have seen what little they had left washed away by Queensland's floods.

The Downs and West Drought Appeal emerged on 1 May 2007 in response to the need for pastoral care of drought-stricken families in the State's south-west. Our name change to 'Downs and West Community Support' in September 2010 recognised that while the drought had broken, it hadn't rained dollars. Practical support, encouragement and pastoral care would continue to be needed as our families in rural and remote areas worked to get back on their feet. Now it seems prophetic. As Queensland's floodwaters receded in January, they left little more than a muddy mess and a stench behind. Downs and West Community Support's continued ministry will be as important as ever.

Our priorities are to work in collaboration with other support organisations, to provide follow-up support over the coming months, distribute gift packs and household goods, to refer individuals to specialist organisations if required...and to lend a hand wherever possible.

Of course this will happen once the clean-up is done. Meantime the DWCS volunteers and supporters moved fast to organise collections of mops, buckets, gloves, masks and rags for the massive cleanup. With Sister Christine by their side the volunteers were in the thick of all the activity in Brisbane, working with Red Cross at the emergency evacuation centre set up where Country meets City annually – the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds and sandbagging low lying areas of Kangaroo Point and Dock Side. Another group of ladies was busy preparing 600 gift packs for affected families in the Lockyer Valley. These will be ready for distribution in coming months.

At the request of Red Cross, car loads of household items and towels were delivered to the evacuation centres at Helidon and Laidley so families could



Families were often left with the clothes they were standing in, and gift packs from DWCS were gratefully received.



A volunteer helps with the arduous task of cleaning up after Queensland's January floods.

choose what they needed as they moved into temporary accommodation.

Towns like Chinchilla, Dalby, Grantham and Condamine do not have the manpower of Brisbane to get back on their feet, but by His grace, and the generosity of supporters of the Congregation, schools and businesses, Downs and West Community Support will be there for the long haul: listening, supporting and caring.

*Contributed by Madelyn Priddle (Media Liaison – Downs & West Community Support)*

## *Sisters of Charity Archives Update*

The Congregation recently welcomed Ms Denise Corrigan as Archives Manager and Ms Liz Sheridan as Archives Assistant after the retirement of Ms Patricia Jacobsen in 2009.

It has been a busy year already at the Archives. The Congregational Office's move to smaller premises meant that the Archives needed some serious in-house rearranging to accommodate their extra records. A new compactus and extra shelving has been installed to help ease the pressure.

One of Ms Corrigan's first initiatives was to overhaul the exhibition room, located on the site of the first ward of the original St Vincent's Hospital. New text panels were designed by Julie Murray of Medici Graphics.

"It was very time consuming to have to redo captions for a new set of visitors, so I was very pleased to have some permanent panels in place. Also, this previously obscured, beautiful wall, modelled on the Nicholson library wall in the historic 'Tarmons' villa, can now be seen."

The current exhibition, *The Foundation Years*, focuses on the early years from the Sisters arrival in 1838 to the opening of St Vincent's School in 1858. The panels highlight the Sisters' work at the Female Factory, their work for the Cathedral, their presence in Sydney schools, and the opening of St Vincent's Hospital and School. Visitors to the exhibition room are encouraged, but they must make an appointment.

One thing you won't see on display is the hourglass, given by the foundress Mary Aikenhead to the pioneer Sisters in 1838 as it is currently on loan to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. The hourglass was used to make "one hour's prayer" as was the custom then. It is to be included in the Irish in Australia exhibition: *Not just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*, 17 March to 31 July 2011.

An online "blog"\*, *Pioneer Sites*, has also been developed by the Congregational historian, Sr Moira O'Sullivan and the Archives. The blog takes a walk with the Sisters from their arrival in 1838 in Sydney to the building of St Vincent's Hospital in Woolloomooloo in 1857. "We wanted a way for our Sisters and others interested to easily reconnect with their past. We hope to achieve an appreciation, through a visual journey, just how difficult it must have been for Irish Sisters coming to a new land", said Ms Corrigan. Many of the images are sourced from the Mitchell and National Library collections.



The exhibition room with the revealed wall and new text panels.



Sr Anne Crowley, a regular volunteer at the Archives, assists with identifying photographs, sewing calico bags, and polishing our sacred vessels.

\* A blog is a form of website that is interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments. Information is arranged in reverse chronological order, and allows a conversation to build between visitors.

The term blog is a blend of web and log. Ed.

You can reach the blog at this address:

<http://pioneersites.wordpress.com>



## *Jubilees*

### SR MARY COOKE - DIAMOND JUBILEE

Sr Mary Cooke celebrated 60 years of Religious profession on the actual date, 29th January 2011 with her Bexley Community.

Bishop James Foley and Bishop David Cremin presided at the Eucharist during which Sr Annette Cunliffe rsc, the Congregational Leader, presented Mary with a Papal Blessing. A lovely morning tea was shared afterwards, and many stories and memories were shared.



Sister Mary about to cut her beautifully decorated Jubilee cake



Sister Judith with her Papal Blessing

### SR JUDITH CHRISTY - GOLDEN JUBILEE

On 2nd February 2011 Sister Judith Christy celebrated her Golden Jubilee of Religious profession with a simple Eucharist and dinner with her Faith Nurturing Community. The actual date of the Jubilee was 14th January.

Sister Judith's celebration was held in the community units at Essendon and Sister Annette Cunliffe rsc, Congregational Leader, was able to attend and present Judith with a Papal Blessing. Sisters Teresita Marcelo and Gaye Reynolds also shared the occasion. Father Bill Attard, the Parish Priest of Essendon, presided at the Eucharist and joined the community at the meal afterwards.

### SR COLLEEN NOONAN - GOLDEN JUBILEE

"Every Golden Jubilee has a birthday ground.

A moment in time and space.

When it is a sacred event.

Coming forth with spontaneity, creativity, joy and gratitude."

Such could describe the occasion of Sister Colleen Noonan's Golden Jubilee Celebrations held on 14th January 2011. The organisation required creativity as there is no altar in the small chapel at Paddington, nor is there a large function room.

Rose Holman rsc with the members of her Faith Nurturing Community devised strategies to overcome every obstacle. A table from Rose's unit was adorned by her in a very attractive manner in preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist. Virginia Wilkinson rsc produced a beautiful Mass kit from the College. Talented in flower arrangement, Rose decorated two large vases of golden roses of every hue and were set beside the altar. In pride of place on the altar was a large golden jubilee candle, embossed with the Congregational Crest. *(Continues page 6)*



Sister Colleen Noonan alongside her golden roses.

# *The Annals of the Sisters of Charity in Australia*

*This is the third instalment of De Lacy's annals. Part Two was published in the October 2010 KIT*

A school was opened by the Sisters May 1st 1839 - for the instruction of Girls, in Reading, Writing & Work, also, an Infant School for children of both Sexes under 7 years, but afterward it was found expedient to receive Boys of a more advanced age for a time to accommodate [sic] the Parents of Catholic children as there was no Catholic School Master in the town of Paramatta. The names of Near 300 children were entered on the books of the School, but the attendance never exceeded 70 and the Sisters found a great obstacle to their advancement in a knowledge of the Christian Doctrine, caused by their irregular attendance owing to the apathy & want of Religious principles in the Parents, reckless of their own salvation & neglectful of their christian duties they valued not the inestimable benefit their offspring would derive from a virtuous education. Such was the Ignorance of the children of Paramatta that from the arrival of the Sisters to the present date October 11th 1840 - only 23 - were permitted to make their first communion.

On the 3rd of October Miss Elizabeth Fisher a native of England, and convert to our holy Faith entered the Novitiate. On the 26th of the same month, the Revd Mother [M.De Sales O'Brien], Sister Mary John Cahil and Sister Mary Baptist De Lacy left Paramatta for Sydney to open the Mission there. They were accompanied by Doctor Ullathorne and after three hours pleasant sail on board the Steamer arrived at the Episcopal Residence.

Doctor Polding had for some time wished to make arrangements which would admit of his leaving the Colony for England, he felt that if he went his return could not necessarily be sooner than three years, it was a long time him to be absent from his people, but strong and urgent motives influenced his final decision.

On the 16th of November he sailed for New Zealand, and he was accompanied by Doctor Ullathorne and the Rev. H Gregory. Deep and sincere was the universal feeling of regret which pervaded all ranks at their departure; crowds came to receive the blessing of the good Bishop, and Sydney was on that day a scene worthy of the Ages of Faith - of Catholic Faith!

At 11 o'clock the flock who was soon to lose their Beloved Shepherd assembled in the Cathedral of St Mary's to offer up their fervent supplications to the Throne of Heaven, for the preservation of those Dear and Venerated Friends just going to depart from them.

After the Divine Mysteries were celebrated the Organ intoned the Benedictus, and Doctor Ullathorne read the Service suited for the occasion, after which the Holy Prelate descended the steps of the Altar where he had been for some time in prayer, passed through the Aisle of the church and front door, followed by his clergymen, the gentlemen & citizens.

It was an affecting sight to see the little children who were too young to walk in the procession which attended the Bishop to the shore, sitting in groups on the way he was to pass waiting to see one glimpse of him 'Whose ready smile a parent's warmth exprest'.

The Sisters of Charity had been for some weeks residing in the Bishop's house previous to his departure and assisted in the preparations for the voyage<sup>1</sup>, it was arranged that they were to continue to occupy it until his return.

As circumstances did not admit the strict observance of Community life, the Sisters had to yield in many particulars to the one grand object which each member of our Institute should always have in view 'To the greater glory of God'.<sup>2</sup> Sydney presented to their Zealous wishes a vast field for doing good. The General Hospital, Benevolent Asylum<sup>3</sup> and the Schools, the latter though conducted by persons evidently inclined to promote by every means in their power the improvement of the children were without any system, a number of children crowded together in the different Catholic School rooms of Sydney<sup>4</sup> without order or method, many of whom spend the greater part of the day in play or worse in acquiring habits of listless indolence for want of their time being usefully and pleasingly occupied, for youth always acquire habits of application (there may be a few exceptions) when some months in a well regulated school.

In a few weeks the schools were in tolerable order, in Castlereagh Street two schools were obliged to be kept in the same room. Yet from the arrangement and system observed tho' the exercises differed in each they were conducted with the utmost regularity.

In the Hospital the Sisters often witnessed the effects of Divine Grace exemplified in many of those poor creatures whose infirmities obliged them to seek an Asylum within its walls, visited by the chastening hand a Merciful Providence with sentiments of deep contrition for their past wanderings they sought in the sacrament of reconciliation a balm to heal the broken spirit. Many converts were also made to our Holy Faith.



# Australia written by M. John Baptist De Lacy

The Benevolent Asylum was visited by the SS every third day, the objects of this charitable institution comprises the old infirm & those persons of both Sexes who from circumstances may be destitute of the means of subsistence.

On the 25th of March 1841 the Feast of the Annunciation of our Blessed Lady, Miss Fisher was clothed in the Habit of the Religious Sisters of Charity and received the holy veil from the hands of the Vicar General, the Very Revd Francis Murphy, the ceremony took place in the Chapel of the Noviciate House Paramatta, and was quite private.

On the 6th of October 1841 - the Head Superior Mrs O'Brien nominated Sister Mary Baptist De Lacy Rectress of the Convent of St Mary's Paramatta and Mistress of Novices.

On the 18th of the same month, Sister M. Augustine [Bridget Marum] was admitted to Holy Profession, the ceremony took place in the private Chapel of the Episcopal Residence, Woolloomulloo [sic] Sydney.

On the 1st of November 1842 - the Revd Mother [M. De Sales O'Brien] with the Sisters returned to Paramatta, as the Bishop was expected about the end of the year in Sydney, and as no arrangement had been made for their permanent residence there, they waited his return to have the Mission established on a firm basis.

Much good still remained to be done, much good had been done, but circumstances obliged them to contrary their Zealous wishes. Great numbers had emigrated from their native shores to seek subsistence [sic] in a foreign land, a Home was opened in Sydney to receive them on their landing where they received a Shelter and support until provided with situations which would enable them to obtain a livelihood.<sup>5</sup>

The Sisters constantly visited the Home to look after the Female Emigrants who arrived there to instruct - console - and advise them, also to administer to them Medicine etc etc. Many was the tale of woe, and blighted Hope which proved that ardent expectations (evidently not to be realised) prompted many to quit their country & their Friends, some from the effects of the Voyage were obliged to go into the Hospital after their landing, while others who had engaged as servants from the heat of the climate & hard work sunk into a premature grave.

The increase of our Holy Faith in this Colony has been very rapid for the last four years. Yet it was sad to reflect on the fatal effects of Intemperance. This destructive vice seemed to lay waste the ripening fruits of Christ's vineyard in this Colony, the Zealous Pastors of the Church with accord exerted all the energetic

powers of their Eloquence and example to check the baneful practice of indulging in intoxicating liquors. To animate their people to the observance of Temperance, 14 of them have taken the pledge within the last twelve months.

Previous to the SS of Charity leaving Sydney they formed a Juvenile Teetotal Society. Mrs O'Brien the Head Superior and Mrs Cahil took the pledge with children October 28th.

On the following Christmas Day the Reverend N.J. Coffey, Rector of Paramatta & Chaplain to the Factory, after a most impressive discourse, which he addressed to the Inmates of that Institution, administered the Pledge to Mrs De Lacy and Mrs Williams SS of Charity and afterwards to three Hundred of the Women.

Sixteen children from the Factory made their first Communion on the same day in the Church of Paramatta, and were entertained by the Nuns at the School House, who provided for them a plentiful Dinner of Roast Beef and Plum pudding.<sup>6</sup>

## Footnotes:

- 1 From a comparison with a letter of M. John Cahill in Hobart, it is obvious that assisting in preparations for the voyage meant sewing and mending shirts and other items of clothing for the clergy.
- 2 It is unfortunate that De Lacy is so vague here about the ways in which the Sisters had to yield in strict observance.
- 3 According to the plaque at Paddington, it may have been where the Archives Centre is at the Rocks now.
- 4 Sister Catherine O Carrigan has established those visited by the Sisters.
- 5 This would have been the achievement of Caroline Chisholm. The Sisters chose her in 1846 to chaperone one of the five who was to return to Ireland.
- 6 There was evidently no effort to adapt to the Australian climate in the choice of food.

## *Sister Colleen Noonan's Jubilee (Continued)*

The foyer was decorated by Pauline Staunton rsc and was welcoming for the visitors. Present for the celebration were Colleen's brother, niece, grand niece, nephews, Bishop Murphy's sister Kath Scott and her husband Jack. Sisters living at Paddington were also present.

Always pro-active, Colleen had prepared a thanksgiving liturgy for the celebration of the Eucharist by the Most Reverend Bishop Michael Malone of the Maitland/Newcastle Diocese.

Sister Libbey Byrne rsc was MC and welcomed all to the celebrations. The various encounters with Colleen were outlined by Libbey as she spoke of her presence as a Sister of Charity, and a presence that transformed her on her life's journey.

The Bishop was creative in his homily, producing a toy felt donkey modelled on the donkey in the film Shreck. He outlined the role of the donkey in different cultures and aligned it with the various ministries performed by Colleen. He also spoke of Colleen's dedication to the Church, her Congregation and the generosity in assisting those in need and especially the handicapped, despite her own health problems. The Bishop invited the Sisters to contribute to the homily as her family and friends knew her in a special manner.

It was mentioned by a Sister that the hymns chosen by Colleen demonstrated her constant striving to live out her motto: "Hidden with Christ in God".

The Sisters, family and friends gave examples of her spirituality, talents, her generous joyous spirit, love of life and a belief in working together, and a readiness to assist always. Her friend Kath expressed deep gratitude for her kindness and Colleen's friendship towards her.

The reflections of all present marked significant, challenges, opportunities, growth, joy, contributions that has been significant in her life as a Sister of Charity during the last fifty years.

Colleen renewed her vows, and at the conclusion of the Eucharist, Libbey aptly summed up the celebration and presented Colleen with the Papal Blessing.

Colleen expressed gratitude for her life as a Sister, as well as for the presence of the Bishop, family and friends. After the celebration all proceeded to a quiet restaurant at the South Sydney Leagues Club, where a very delicious three course meal was enjoyed by all. After the meal, all returned to Colleen's Paddington unit for more refreshments and further celebrations.



Colleen Jackson rsc with Georgia, aged 7, who is gradually reclaiming her childhood after being trapped with her parents in the family car for over two hours, as the fire raged, stories high, around them.



Colleen's farewell – with some of the bushfire team



The temporary building on a paddock in Kinglake where Colleen has worked with other psychologists, social workers, GP s and community workers.



## Two Years On: *The Legacy of the Victorian Bushfires*



A sign that welcomes visitors to Kinglake a statement of hope and resilience



With John and Bonny who saved John's life by leading him to safety through flames and darkness.



Bowl of hope from the second anniversary memorial



Symbolic images from the second anniversary memorial

Australia, and indeed the global community, has been beset by a series of major environmental and human tragedies over recent years. Two years ago, on 7th February 2009, the Black Saturday bushfires ravaged large areas of Victoria, including the communities of the beautiful Kinglake Ranges in the heart of the Murrindindi Shire. On Black Saturday, in Murrindindi alone, 106 people perished, 1397 homes were destroyed and 40% of the Shire burned, including enough rural fencing to stretch from Melbourne to Perth. Lives and properties were devastated. And they continue to suffer the ravages of those fires. People from the cities often ask 'are they back to normal yet?' – a question that variously hurts, enrages, saddens and further isolates those whose lives can, and will, never be the same again. The physical environment, previously so lush and beautiful, is still blackened and forever changed. Faces in streets tell the stories of loved ones and friends (not one or two, but for many, dozens) who perished that day, of friends and family moved away because they cannot bear the pain of constant memories, and the ongoing struggle to rebuild homes (many - too many - are still living in sheds and caravans). The stress is immense and inescapable.

Black Saturday left its imprint not just on the lives of adults, but also on the little people - adolescents and small children. Many are creating a life that is bearable and reflective of gradual recovery towards a 'new normal'. For others - too many - the present is still marked by intense grief and severe posttraumatic stress.

For the last 19 months I have had the privilege of ministering in Kinglake as a provider of specialist trauma and psychological services through Mitchell Community Health Service. In collaboration with other psychologists, social workers, GP's and community workers, we have immersed ourselves in the needs of the community, providing care for the men, women and children who still suffer from the terrible and indelible impact of terrifying threat to life, unbearable grief and the profoundly stressful struggle to survive. This ministry, for me, has entailed hundreds of counselling sessions with adults and tiny people, group gatherings for young mums, parenting after bushfire groups, as well as support of the professional community through professional supervision and professional development programs.

At the end of February I conclude this ministry in Kinglake. I have come to know many, many people well, personally and/or professionally. Some I have met only in passing over coffee or in the street. Others I have never met, but I feel I've come to know just a little, as I've driven each day past the various stages of their rebuilding their properties and their lives. I cannot adequately convey what a profound privilege it has been to serve in a post-disaster community. I have been inspired, challenged, and changed for having been on the Kinglake Range. I look with admiration at people's courage and determination, and the strength of human spirit evidenced over and over again. It has been said that, in adversity, we stand either to be totally overwhelmed and defeated, or to be transformed. I salute the 'Kinglake Rangers' choice and struggle for transformation. There are surely many challenges ahead, as such a tragedy leaves an indelible mark. However, it is my wish and prayer for individuals and their families, that in the rebuilding, their persons, their lives and their homes, will be infused with new joys, new optimism and new peace. And I pray that Australians in general can remain open to those who suffer in disasters such as Black Saturday, with the understanding that lives were changed forever. Just as the trees are at long last spouting new growth, so too, I pray, will the lives of the men, women and children who survived Black Saturday, and the disasters that have occurred since.

Colleen Jackson rsc

## FROM THE ARCHIVES...



Our Archives received this image from Sr Carmel Coyle in Queensland. The children are from St Finbarr's, Ashgrove, 1926. It's one of the very few images we have of Sisters teaching outdoors in Australia. It's easy to forget the perils of Queensland living. As we read in the Ashgrove Annals, not long after the school opened for the year, a snake was shot in the garden by Sergeant Wright. The three Sisters in the community at the time, S.M Agnes Fitzgerald, M.M Gerard Ryan, and S.M Albertus Costello, all came down with dengue fever a few months later. One of these Sisters is probably featured in this photo. (Contributed by Denise Corrigan, Congregational Archivist.)

## MELBOURNE COMPANIONS REFLECTION DAYS 2011

All are welcome to join in this year's Reflection Days

Sunday, April 10  
2 pm - 4 pm  
Mercy Place,  
Cade Way, Parkville

Saturday, June 18  
10:30 am - 3 pm  
Currajeen Retreat Centre,  
811 Bridge Inn Road,  
Doreen  
(Bring lunch to share)

Sunday, September 18  
2 pm - 4 pm  
Mercy Place,  
Cade Way, Parkville

Sunday, November 13  
2 pm - 4 pm  
Mercy Place,  
Cade Way, Parkville

Please note that all Reflection Days are on Sundays, except the Saturday Retreat day at Doreen.

Enquiries:

Sr Margaret Dwyer  
03 9325 4639 or  
mobile 0417 548 420



*KEEP IN TOUCH* is published by the Congregational Office of the Sisters of Charity of Australia.  
Level 7, 35 Grafton Street, Bondi Junction, NSW 2022  
Telephone 02 9367 1222 Fax 02 9367 1223 Email [James.Griffiths@rscoffice.com](mailto:James.Griffiths@rscoffice.com)

**PRIVACY STATEMENT** The Sisters of Charity have a privacy policy statement detailing how personal information is managed, pursuant to the Privacy Act 1988 and the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000. People receiving this newsletter via mail will have their names on our database. This list is not used for any other purpose and will not be given to any other organisation. If you would like your name removed from this list, please contact the Congregational Office.