



Australian Circle Newsletter

Missionary
Franciscan
Sisters

Welcome from Catherine



Dear Sisters and friends,

"We were really not ready – but we started anyway!" Some weeks ago I was speaking with Sr .Crea Gallagher about her experience of being one of the founding Sisters of Mt Alvernia College at Kedron in Brisbane. The first Sisters: Superior Sr M Bernadette O'Callaghan, Sr M Patricia (Crea) Gallagher, Sr M Helen, and Sr M Isidore (Carmel) Beirne were not ready but they started anyway and the college has grown and flourished over nearly 6 decades.

That same week I was invited by Dr.Kerrie Tuite,

the current principal, to tour the new, almost completed, buildings that were planned to house the new grade 7 streams that transferred from primary to secondary school this year. The buildings were not quite ready for the start of the school year – but school started anyway! The story continues...

At this time the MFIC Sisters in Australia are finalising the transfer of Mt Alvernia College to Mercy Partners so that the future of the College is assured. We hoped that it would be complete in 2014 but it was not to be. We know that it is the right thing to do, and we know that others will build on the firm foundation built by so many of the Sisters. We know that we will always remain the spiritual "mothers" of the College which is so much a part of the life of the Sisters in Australia. *We are not ready – but we will do it anyway!*

Elizabeth Hayes was a woman of action who was able to respond quickly to needs that presented themselves to her. She was willing to reach out in so many ways to respond to a wide array of needs. We can learn from her example that we do not have to have everything planned and provisioned in advance. What is necessary above all else is to have a heart that recognises the needs of those about us, is moved with compassion for others, and a will to respond wherever it is possible – ready or not!

An Apology. In our August newsletter last year we used an image of a kintsugi bowl for our Chapter gathering.. The image which we downloaded from Google is the original work of [Lakeside Pottery Ceramic School and Studio](http://www.lakesidepottery.com) in Stamford, CT. See www.lakesidepottery.com. We apologise for not seeking permission prior to using this photo, and for not acknowledging their rightful ownership of the image. Blessings,

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Sr. Catherine White

Our Own Poppy Lady



In early May 1915 during WW1 Canadian soldier John McCrae was in an artillery brigade near the Ypres-Yser canal in Belgian Flanders. He was touched by the sight of masses of delicate red field poppies growing during the unusually warm weather wherever the ground had been disturbed, which allowed the poppy seeds to spread. ("The field poppy was also blooming in parts of the Turkish battlefields on the Gallipoli peninsular when the ANZAC and British Forces arrived at the start of the campaign in April 1915." from www.greatwar.co.uk) It's believed that John McCrae composed his now famous poem after the death of a fellow soldier and friend. He himself died of pneumonia three years later in Jan.

1918.

*"In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row.
That mark our place, and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard among the guns below."*



Thanks to an American, Miss Moina Michael, who was deeply moved by this poem, the red poppy has become an international symbol of remembrance of soldiers lost in all wars and of veterans who are too easily forgotten. Sales of red silk poppies went to help all servicemen who needed it for themselves and their families. **Editor** Miriam was also inspired by this same poem and writes, "The first two lines just kept going around and around in my head and I wanted to do something. Then one of the Sisters gave me a magazine which had patterns of poppies to knit and crochet and I thought it would be a good idea to make one for all the Sisters as we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli this Anzac Day, April 25th".

Sr. Miriam Donnelly



Miriam has crocheted and knitted about 40 poppies, and no two are the same! Miriam is always busy and still makes a few poppies each day... when she is not gardening or sewing!!

All the Franciscan Sisters will be given a poppy, as well as the Delamore staff and myself. Miriam has also made poppies to decorate the Samaritan's Anzac Day display.

Mrs. Kitt Lang

See "<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/article/remembrance-poppy.htm>" for more on the Flanders poppy history. **Editor**

Lest we forget



All You Have to Do is Surrender!

I'm just coming out of an experience which really brought me to my knees! Just this month I found myself unable to adapt quickly to a new mobile phone. I became angry with myself for not being able to adapt straight away. I was failing miserably each minute I tried and felt so humiliated when I could not manage it. I wanted to throw it miles away when I heard the 'whisper' to calm down and sit awhile and just be quiet. I sat in my quiet place and picked up my Lenten reflections for the day. The heading was 'ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS SURRENDER.' That really burst my balloon! The reflection continued:



'This is less true of us in the first half of our lives as we are still 'building' but it becomes the biggest truth of the second half of life..... Life is not about claiming success or building our own egos but about getting in touch with HELPLESSNESS.' (R. Rolheiser)

Of course, I've known this in my head for a good while now but to really experience myself sitting right in the midst of HELPLESSNESS and POWERLESSNESS is something else altogether. What do I need to do? Somehow I need to welcome it, befriend it – this is my life today, now – and it's O.K to be here. I want to accept this stage and live it fully as an 84 year old.

My 80+ year old Rwandan friend, Phoebe, recognises this I'm sure. Without any common language we somehow both 'know' that my visit to her is not about her speaking English but about a relationship built on acceptance, respect, love and compassion. And my African friends seem to accept me as 'grandma' and support person and our relationship does not depend on me being able to 'do' and 'achieve' much but more on their knowing that I am here for them. Akilan, a Tamil refugee, separated from his family for so long and little hope of a re-union soon is a constant visitor at the back door, reminding me to continue praying and supporting all the initiatives aiming to change our Government's attitude to these refugees among us.

I love teaching English as a second language and nowadays it is easier for me to invite Loo-ee and Polin, my students to our house. I am discovering that opening our house to them symbolises an opening of our hearts and this inclusiveness and hospitality improves relationships no end. They begin to feel part of the family. Also, because of my own frailty I am better able to understand the needs of the members of my 'Ladies Friendship Group' with whom I meet weekly.

I find it hard to really grasp that I am not physically strong anymore and that there are many activities that are beyond me. I've already talked to the trees and bushes in our backyard that a new era is starting. I will try to enjoy them more and not try to control them! I can sit in their shade and at the same time observe my little family of four laying hens who by their behaviour and antics help me to deepen my understanding of the mystery of our connectedness with all things - we have all received our 'being' from the Source of all Life – we are all related!



It's a challenge not to be afraid of my fragility , my powerlessness, helplessness at times. These experiences are great teachers. Richard Rohr prays for humiliations daily because they teach him to travel better 'upwards'! Happy travelling to all!

Sr. Jo Scanlan

Our Unit Dwellers...

... Living in a Unit at Delamore

For the last couple of years I have been living in Unit 76 at Delamore - the place I call home. I really like my unit. Being part of the complex here at Kedron, gives me space but also community. Each day I visit our Sisters in Clare Place two or three times and the Greccio Sisters when possible. I often walk through Greccio on my way to Clare Place and talk to the sisters as I go. They might be getting old but they are out and about doing whatever ministry they can, so it is sometimes difficult to see them. I often see Quentin taking her daily walks and have a chat to her or in her room where she is always most welcoming. Then I meet others in the driveway going to and from Mass. I also go over to St. Francis House every second Thursday and join them for the evening meal and a Gospel Sharing.

The Sisters here and at St. Francis House are so good to me and often drop in for a visit. Many of those from further afield visit me as well. So you see, I have the best of both worlds. I don't feel at all isolated. To all who live at a distance please visit me whenever you come to Kedron to have a coffee and a chat. I would love that. All are welcome! I even have a bed sitter if you wish to stay over-night, though I have to admit it is not as comfortable as a bed!!

I have much gratitude and appreciation to the community for offering me this unit to live in. I couldn't have it better!!



Sr. Margaret Costello



Unit No. 3

Sixty-six years in the convent have seen a lot of changes in religious life, and in my retirement years I've certainly appreciated the experience of living alone in a unit at Delamore.

I love to dabble in art and play the piano, so it's nice to be able to do these things without upsetting anyone. In fact, the neighbours let me know how much they love my music!

I love the early hours—4.30 or 5am to 7am—being quiet with the Lord.

The unit has a lovely fernery just outside the screen door— a lovely setting for meditation and prayer.

The future is in God's hands as to how long I can stay here but I accept with thanksgiving the joys and happiness I've experienced up to the present.

Sr. Cecilia Norris

Unit No. 7

Last July I moved from my ministry in Coomera where I lived in a unit close to Dream World to one of the MFIC units in our Delamore complex. One of the two bedrooms in the unit I converted to my office and both the office and the side deck look out over Cremourne Road and toward the northern area of Kedron Parish. One of the first things that struck me when I moved in was that the unit, one of the first to be built about 25 years ago, is situated very close to what was once the place of our Franciscan Sisters' novitiate. From the novitiate windows through which we gained a glorious afternoon breeze, we looked out on land that was mainly covered by trees. How things have changed over the years.

Sometimes I sit on the unit's deck and recall how good it is to be back in this Franciscan complex where I joined the Sisters 55 years ago. In 1959 I imagined that little in religious life would change; I had not expected a Vatican II that called religious to update, adapt and renew. While the original historical Delamore house has been saved, including the back wing that was once the Sisters' dining room, the old house is surrounded by attractive units of different sizes, heights and shapes. Instead of a small secondary school on our property, Mt. Alvernia College, we now have huge new buildings that provide education to over 900 young women. Before Vatican II in the early 1960s, I imagined that I would always be part of a reasonably large community of teaching Sisters and I expected to be missioned to PNG within a short



time after my religious profession. Instead over the years as I was sent to teach or administer in schools in Brisbane and the Gold coast, or work for Catholic education offices, the size of community I lived in became smaller and smaller. Then the day came when I was asked to be the Campus Minister in Assisi Catholic College in Coomera and I found myself, with the blessing of obedience, living in a unit reasonably close to the college and the parish church. What do I think of living by myself in a unit? It has the advantage of much peace and quiet for a start while the Kedron scene has the blessing of the Sisters' chapel and the parish church close by. The company of Sisters or lay people is always close at hand.

When visiting Penola Church in recent times, I was impressed by a banner that carried the words of St. Mary MacKillop written back in 1871. It reads, "There where you are, you will find God." What else matters?

Sr Francine Shaw

Unit No. 26

I was born in Kedron in our family home on the corner of Gail and Nieppe Streets just five minutes walk from my unit and I was baptised right there on that very day by Father Griffin, OFM. I started school at St Anthony's and was one of the children who, with Sr M. Agnella, buried the medals under the big tree when she was praying that the Sisters would be able to buy Delamore and make it their permanent home in Kedron which they did. So you see that I have a very early association with Delamore. My family moved away when I was only in my second year of schooling but my parents took with them something that influenced our lives: the Sisters were always remembered by name and we visited them when we came to Brisbane. It seemed natural then, when I wanted to enter a missionary order, to return to Kedron.

I did teach for short periods at St Anthony's and Mt Alvernia but most of my mission and ministry days were spent outside Australia. At times of leave I came "home" once more to Kedron. I spent more than twenty years living with other religious to carry out my ministries and study and I belonged to the Mother of the Word Province but I knew that at some time I would return "home" permanently – to Kedron.

Over the past sixty plus years we, along with other religious, have responded to extraordinary change in our way of life – and Delamore, the Centre of our Institute in Australia, has likewise undergone changes that make it unrecognizable from its original setting. So instead of returning to a "community" of Sisters all living under one roof I have come home finally to Delamore – transformed into a Retirement Community with a large separate Convent on the same property. I live in Unit 26. My unit is very close to Mt Alvernia and as I drive out of Delamore, I pass St Anthony's, so both keep me conscious of the ongoing ministries of FOTH (Franciscans on the Hill). I still feel a connectedness to those ministries which we began and feel called to support them in prayer. From my front porch I can look out over the domed church at Nundah and from my lounge room I enjoy





a view over Kedron and Chermside. The unit is simple but comfortable and I'm grateful to those Sisters in administration who over the years have made provision with different kinds of accommodation for the Sisters who return from active ministry. I don't feel that I live alone! Thirteen Sisters live here at Kedron in different kinds of situations – we are a community within the wider retirement community. Our beautiful chapel is central to the sections still owned and cared for by the Sisters and Mass is said there twice a week. The Sisters also have thoughtfully appointed areas where they are able to gather socially and for special occasions.

I appreciate that Sisters visit, email and ring, imparting news of their ministries to which I can feel connected through love and prayerful support. Visits are especially important. However, at this point in my life I also sincerely value the apartness and the silence which the unit promotes and which are conducive to the more contemplative style of life I enjoy.

Sr. Noela Leamy

Group 61

For the last three years I have worked with a group of volunteers called 'Group 61'. The name of the group is taken from Isaiah 61 ***'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to tell the oppressed the Good News. The Lord has sent me to comfort those who mourn. He sent me to give them flowers in place of sorrow, olive oil in place of tears ... and joyous praise in place of broken hearts.'*** This sums up the group's philosophy.

Group 61 was founded in the year 2000 by a parishioner of the Kedron Parish, John Fox, to befriend those who suffer with mental health issues. From personal experience he understood the need for companionship for these people. So often they live isolated lives and find it difficult to form lasting friendships. The volunteers aim to break the isolation. As volunteers we endeavour to enhance the lives of people living in the community who are affected by mental health issues. We walk beside them on their journey. Each volunteer is matched with a 'friend'. He/She spends a couple of hours each week with that friend and goes out for lunch, a coffee, to a movie or even just a stroll in the park. We leave it up to the friend to decide what he/she would like to do.



Margaret with Coordinator and Administrative Staff of Group 61 relaxing over lunch after a hectic day.

During my three years working with Group 61 I have had two or three friends at a time and have been seeing them each week. I have also assisted the area coordinator with interviews of prospective volunteers and also those who have a mental health issue and would like to meet with a volunteer.

It is gratifying to see how much this weekly outing means to these people. One friend said she wouldn't get out of bed if she didn't have a volunteer from Group 61 to take her out each week. Another lady said 'As soon as people know you have a mental health issue they move away as though it is catching'. How lonely can that be! Another said 'It's so nice to be with someone who is sensible and who I can trust'. And yet another 'I didn't do anything but sit at home until you got me out of the house to do something interesting'. These are just examples of the kind of comments made by these wonderful people who so need a friend.

Of course there are many families who care for a mentally ill person and often have to devote their lives to their care and suffer with them in their pain. Then there are those who were taken from dysfunctional families as children and placed in care. In turn some of these women/men when reaching adulthood have had dysfunctional families and their children are taken from them and so on it goes. This can and sometimes does carry on through the generations. Each generation then experiences being unloved, uncared for and unwanted. So many are estranged from their families and thus have no support from them. Having a mental health issue is a very difficult thing to live with even in a supportive family who often appreciate a Group 61 volunteer's help.

We are all called to be 'bigger than ourselves' and to reach out to those who are dispossessed with generosity and care in one way or another. To be prepared to put our own worries aside and listen to the cares and worries of others and support them in their journey is a privilege and a Christian responsibility. This is what I aim to do in supporting those women who have become my friends through working with Group 61. All have bigger crosses to bear than I have ever had. May they be blest and protected by our generous and loving creator.

Sr. Margaret Costello

Celebrating a Centenary of Catholic Education in Cunnamulla.

One hundred years!! Yes it is 100 years since Catholic education was introduced to the rural and remote community of Cunnamulla in south west Queensland by the Sisters of Mercy. The plans for the celebration involved school, parish and community members attending meetings since late 2014. Now the time has finally arrived and the atmosphere is electric with people gathering from various parts of Australia.

At 6pm on Friday 13th March, (we are not superstitious), the crowds are milling in through the school gates to begin the celebrations by meeting old school friends, former teachers and the people of Cunnamulla. The night begins with an old style annual parish fete with



stalls, a chocolate wheel and some entertainment by the students. The students and teachers chose for their presentation – dances through the ages. We sat and laughed, sang, clapped and tapped our toes through the many old favourites such as the Hokey Pokey, Macarena, Remix through the ages and the Charleston. Then it was time for the children to relax and enjoy rides on the gentle Shetland pony or the more exhausting Jumping Castle. The latter was more exhausting for the adults in supervisory roles.

The Convenor of the Barbeque said that the fete-goers munched their way through 200 steaks, 150 sausages, 225 kebabs, 120 rissoles, two large tubs of salad and 45 loaves. We are a small Catholic community consisting mainly of pensioners however in this ecumenical community there is no need to worry as every person assists when asked.

Saturday 14th March was dedicated to school activities and presentations. Registration commenced at 9am and seemed to go on forever. We met a couple who had driven all the way from Mildura, another came from Denmark in Western Australia; ten Mercy Sisters, Bishop McGuckin, Father Peter, and Father Rod all came. The meet and greet continued through the morning as people chatted over cups of tea as they watched various organised events.

One feature of the festivities was maypole dancing by students coached by a teacher aide who works at Sacred Heart School. Grades 5 and 6 had to be very alert as they moved in a circle, each child holding a coloured ribbon attached to a pole. As they moved around the pole the dancers intertwined their ribbons to make a plait around the pole. To unravel the ribbons the dancers retraced their steps. Many a silent prayer was offered up that the dancers would keep alert and remember under and over at the correct times.

Our resident historian and fashion icon conducted a fashion parade. It began with Paige and Gemma Mills modelling a school uniform from times of yore and culminated in a finale of vintage of wedding gowns which had been begged and borrowed from the women of Cunnamulla...

There were old school yard favourites of marbles and ball games and even a tug-of-war competition.

The Grade 5 and 6 students were the tour guides for visitors interested in photos and memorabilia. These were viewed in the old convent building or the school library. People searched through the old registers of communion, confirmation, marriages and deaths and were overjoyed when they found either their name or that of a close relative.

Souvenirs of this special were on hand to purchase as memory of a great three days. There were tea towels designed by the students, mugs, pens and the memento cards featuring the stained glass windows in the church that were brought out from Ireland around 1914.

A sausage sizzle was held for the visitors. By 2pm all had left the grounds whilst the teachers and their volunteers prepared for the formal dinner. It was white tablecloths and serviettes and white bougainvilleas as decoration for the 460 people who would attend.



The Boutique Hotel generously lent us their chef and he and a former chef turned police officer co-ordinated the serving. The workers, women from the community and high school volunteers hand washed china plates in the school tuckshop. There were 500 slices of ham, 60 chickens, 400 slices of corned silverside, 20 litres of ice-cream and eight slabs of cheesecake!

The Acting Principal entertained the crowd with her rendition of John Denver's song *Coming Home Again*. The Bishop said grace and we were ready to begin. There were some guest speakers. The Director of Toowoomba Catholic Education presented Sacred Heart School with the SPERA award won by the school in 2014. Bernie Holland, the school's first lay principal entertained us with his memories of Cunnamulla and some of its colourful characters. Bishop Robert spoke and finally Cara Haig, the Principal of Sacred Heart delivered a magnificent inspirational speech.

Before the desserts were served the oldest pupil and the youngest cut the cake which was made and iced by an 81 year old lady who had also made the cakes for the 80th and 90 celebrations. This one was exceptional as it displayed the school crest and branches of wattle.

The celebrations continued on Sunday for Mass. The feature banner was 100 in bold, black letters and the handprints of all students to remind them and us that we are here to serve the community. After communion the children delighted the congregation by singing '*If I were a Butterfly*' to a church filled to capacity.

At the close of the liturgy we moved around to the front of the school office for the unveiling of the Sisters of Mercy Memorial Plaque. One hundred and one Sisters had taught at Sacred Heart. We are truly blessed. The ten Sisters who attended the celebrations crowded around to see their names. We now have a permanent reminder of the Sisters' time in Cunnamulla.

We moved into the quadrangle for a morning tea and after some time of sharing we sadly farewelled each other remembering to:-

"Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, embrace the future with hope."

Sr. Maureen Andrews

FSA National Conference in Melbourne

Franciscan Schools Australia (FSA) held its 5th National Conference in Melbourne from 11th to 13th March. Sr Joanne Schatzlein OSF from Milwaukee, Wisconsin was the Key Note Speaker. It will be 10 years in November since FSA was established. The theme of this Conference was "Clare of Assisi: Example for the World". The three key note talks were: Clare Gazes into her Mirror; Clare: Mirror of Christ to All and Clare Light Bearer for our World Today.

There were 126 participants from 24 schools and colleges, including 4 MFIC's; 4 OFM's; 2 FMM's; 3 OFM Conv. and 1 OSC. Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv. was the celebrant at the Conference Eucharist. The Conference commenced with an Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony and Pauline as Coordinator of FSA was presented with an Aboriginal Message Stick. There was a short prayer liturgy before every session



focusing on Mantras from the words of St Clare from the CD's "Love Holding Love" by Andre Cirino. A large candle was lit each time and a prayer card given to participants with a picture of Clare and the words of the particular mantra.

There was a wonderful spirit at the Conference, each Franciscan School shared how they develop a Franciscan Ethos in

their school. Franciscan Religious were delighted that the Franciscan story is continuing to be spread to teachers, parents and students in our schools even though we no longer personally administer these schools.

Sr. Pauline Robinson

E.H. Corner.....Snippets

In 1876 when Elizabeth Hayes was travelling through Chicago on her way to Montreal to gain French Canadians who would join her Belle Prairie Mission, she met 33 year old Angelica Switz Chaffee. She asked to become a postulant and along with four others received the Franciscan habit in Belle Prairie Convent in August the same year. Angelica was given the religious name of Sr. Mary of the Angels. She had worked with a Chicago printing company so besides helping Elizabeth Hayes in the printery, she often accompanied her leader on travels, was her secretary, and after Elizabeth's death succeeded her as Mother General and editor of the *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*.



Late last year an American relative of Angelica, Tom Davey, found my thesis on Elizabeth Hayes on web-site and spied the references to Mother Chaffee's 'Memories'. Tom provided us with a copy of a letter written by Mother Chaffee to her niece Hattie Chaffee on 24th August 1898. Enclosed with the letter, clearly signed by 'Sr M. of the Angels osf', was the photo below of which she wrote; 'I find myself able to satisfy your desire for my picture. The old Sister sitting down is your Aunt. The black children around me are from Egypt & Africa whom through the goodness of God I have brought over for Christian education.'

Another part of the handwritten letter which Tom scanned for us reads, 'I visited Egypt myself this Spring, in fact I am but only over a month returned and went to the Holy Land. We could not but go to Jerusalem & Bethlehem to venerate the places of Our Dear Lord's birth & Passion & Burial. We went to Emmaus also, the city where He appeared towards evening to two of his Apostles. Please God I shall return to Egypt some time in October to the Oasis of Fayoum in the Libian desert where we will have a missioning work.'

Tom Davey asked for a copy of the 'Memories'. Instead through the help of Sr Veronica who checked our archives in Rome, we were able to send him, as an attachment, a 17 page typed copy of the hand-written diary of his 'old Aunt Annie' written in 1881-82. Chaffee's diary includes first-hand details of experiences that she shared with Elizabeth Hayes, including facts about the *Annals*, and she used them when writing her 'Memories of Elizabeth Hayes', around 1912. (If you would like a copy of Chaffee's diary let me know psshaw@mficaust.org.au If you wish to cross reference Chaffee's 1898 letter see pp. 260-61 of *Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist*.)

Sr. M. Francine Shaw