HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

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Newsletter

Greetings everyone,

We hope you are safe and well. Covid 19 continues to challenge us across the country. We look further afield and our hearts ache for the struggles of so many in countries less wealthy than our own trying to manage this tricky pandemic.

Amidst this uncertainty our work goes on. We are delighted and mightily impressed by the 43 organisations who received funding from us in our 2021 Small Grants Program. We have included a short summary of each of these projects with this newsletter for you to get a sense of the range and depth of community endeavours to care for, to heal and to look after land, waters and country in local regions. A look at the map below (each grant highlighted by a pink dot) indicates the wonderful broad spread of locations this year.

Once again we want to say thank you to you our supporters for your continued generosity which enables this grants program to happen.

As we mentioned in the April newsletter we commenced a new program in March 2021 in Tasmania. We had our official launch on World Environment day, Saturday 5th June 2021, in St. Helens, Tasmania. ***Restoring Nature and Communities*** is a 20-week program of ecological restoration in partnership with North East Bioregional Network (NEBR). This program is giving previously unemployed local community members a wonderful opportunity for employment and training.

We are excited that the University of Tasmania (UTA) is currently undertaking research in the program on the health benefits of eco-restoration – both physical and mental. Congratulations to President Todd Dudley and all who undertake this important work of "caring for our common home" as Pope Francis titled it in his 2015 Encyclical – Laudato Si' . We are delighted to be partnering with them.

We thank the Parker Sub Fund for their support of this program.

Following the official launch in St. Helens Todd Dudley took the group on a site tour of an area of Skyline Tier which is being restored.

Above: Todd Dudley with Frances McShane mss and Lorraine Groves mss. This region of Tasmania is an area where the MSS have undertaken pastoral ministry for many years.

Some of the members of the Hobart Branch of Highways and Byways who attended the launch (l-r) Eva Dunn (Chair), Jill Smith, Mary-Anne Johnson, Chris Smith and Mary Williams

Changing the world one tree at a time

Walker Flat, SA

Kendra Radford wished she and her fellow nature lovers could change the world when they started cleaning up the roadside and public reserves near their homes 25 years ago. The world still has some messy bits, but Kendra and the other members of the Walker Flat & Districts Progress Association have certainly changed their tiny part of South Australia along the Murray River.

For 25 years the volunteers have met every Tuesday morning come rain, hail or shine to plant, water and maintain the trees they have planted. They break up into teams with some people planting and others watering and maintaining established areas. As well, four times a year they clean up rubbish along the road and in the reserves.

Like some of the members, some of the equipment is wearing out. The crew's brushcutter and pole saw have recently been replaced with support from Highways and Byways.

"We recycle anything we can and use it," Kendra said. "One of the ways we raise funds is to have a recycling area on the Council reserve where we store our equipment. It's also where we meet and have morning tea together each week."

There's a role for everyone in the Association including one member who because of multiple sclerosis is unable to manage the gardening but cooks the cakes for morning tea.

The Association works closely with the local council and other community groups. Twice a year Pulteney Grammar School students join work on a stretch of land. The current maintenance project is the old Coach Road and the Marne Mouth. Now used as a walking trail, it was once the overland route for stock and trading coaches in the area.

"With the help of students we are replanting the Marne site to stop erosion and encourage local wildlife," Kendra said.

Recruiting new volunteers after 25 years is a challenge but the group reckons it has a lot to offer including fellowship and regular camping trips to areas they have re-wilded.

Some of the volunteers with the new equipment bought with support from Highways and Byways.

CREATING BEAUTY IN TOUGH TIMES

Weemelah, NSW

The women of Weemelah have had COVID-19 isolation, drought, struggling crops and mice plagues thrown at them recently. So making three pieces of silver jewellery in a weekend was a breeze.

The jewellery-making, was a weekend of joy and relaxation for the six women (pictured) who gathered for the workshop organised by the Weemelah Country Women's Association with support from Highways and Byways.

Weemelah is a small community of less than 200 people in northern NSW, just south of the Queensland border. It's a grain growing area, with a hall, a few houses and a big heart thanks to the CWA.

"We try to find ways to keep people connected through times of isolation and to welcome new people into the community. We encourage people to join in and be part of what the town offers," said branch President Libby McPhee.

Libby organised the workshop and said it was a great escape for the women who also came from the neighbouring township of Mungindi. She said the weekend workshop was important for the mental health of the participants, most thinking they wouldn't be able to make anything. Each woman went home with three pieces of silver jewellery and a skip in her step.

"COVID has had the affect of making people retreat into their own places. But CWA is about bringing people together. We have great diversity in our branch, with members ranging in age from 50s to 90. One of the workshop participants was in her 20s," Libby said.

The jewellery made at the workshop, including Libby's pieces made for her three daughters, will be on display at the two-day Mungindi show in August.

AND THE WATER IS RUNNING AGAIN

Stanthorpe, QLD

Jane Muller got used to hearing people talk about gardens being abandoned and trees, growing for generations in a family's backyard, dying because of the drought. The same thing happened to the garden at her workplace, the Granite Belt Support Service Inc. at Stanthorpe in Queensland.

Now, clients at the service are talking about the vegies growing in the raised garden beds, the flowers blooming and the plans for spring plantings. The dams are full and gardens can be tended.

Fourteen residents and workers restored the garden at GBSS, a service centre for people with a disability. During the summer, vegies and strawberries were grown and the food used at the service's regular cooking classes for residents or taken home to their families.

The garden is an opportunity for life skills to be taught with residents learning about food, nutrition, gardening techniques and the seasons. There's also a newly established worm farm on site that is looked after in order to nourish the soil. Importantly, the garden allows residents to get outside in good weather, and share a common purpose.

"Watching the plants grow into vegetables is such a wonderful experience for the residents who have been affected by the terrible drought and the isolation of COVID-19," said Jane, who is the respite & day services coordinator at the service.

"The drought was a worrying time for everyone in Stanthorpe and the surrounding farms because our tanks were dry and we ran out of water. For several months water was trucked into the town, and none of it could be used to keep our gardens growing."

"People would talk about the huge trees in their yards where they had played and climbed as children, dying and needing to be cut down. Drought like this has a real impact on people."

Residents were part of the garden's redevelopment from planning, budgeting, constructing the beds, planning what seeds should be planted, watering the gardens and cooking the produce. The raised beds have been built to accommodate any residents using a wheelchair.

Creating a safe haven for nature to thrive

Carmoo, QLD

Deborah Pergolotti could hardly see the trees for the weeds when her group took over a rainforest property in Carmoo near Mission Beach in Queensland. The property is the home of Frog Safe, an organisation set up to rescue and rehabilitate frog populations from the northern half of Queensland. At the same time the group was confronted with towering walls of bramble and calamus weed that was choking the native vegetation and preventing rehabilitation of the area.

Thanks to support from Highways and Byways, the group's Nourishing the Land project is underway and much of the calamus has been removed, a task unsafe for most volunteers because the brambles and weeds were covered in hard, sharp thorns. Now wildlife and insect food plants to support wildlife, especially the Southern Cassowary, are being planted.

Deborah said Frog Safe's planned improvements on the property, which backs directly onto the Hull River National Park World Heritage listed mangrove area, will support local frog species, provide a chemical-free sanctuary for wildlife and insects, and include beehives and bee food plants to boost declining bee populations.

Frog Safe's work has faced many challenges in the past year with COVID-19 preventing people from volunteering. But they are determined to create a habitat where frogs, wildlife, bees and cassowaries can thrive.

"Our world is under constant stress with destruction from human impact - and the Mission Beach region is no different with significant pressure to build more tourism and residential developments. The introduction of invasive weeds and domestic animals has significantly disadvantaged our local native wildlife. This project may not heal the world, but it will heal our two-acre block of land," Deborah said.

Above: Before the machinery cleared some of the calamus and brambles to allow volunteers (below) to help rehabilitate the area for wildlife, frogs and bees.

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS – A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE supports people and communities experiencing hardship and disadvantage, especially in rural Australia.

We do this through our annual grants program and longer term initiatives in small rural communities where we partner with local organisations.
Highways and Byways is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission.

Highways and Byways continues the vision and mission of the Missionary Sisters of Service and their founder Father John Wallis.

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MISSIONARY SISTERS OF SERVICE

A mission of love and service into the highways and byways.

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2021 – A year of commemorations for the MSS

As we enter the second half of 2021, the cooler months are upon us, and we continue to experience the impact of COVID-19 across Australia. Though there has been continued hardship and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic, the Missionary Sisters of Service (MSS) community has been fortunate to experience moments of great joy, hope and gratitude. This year we marked three special anniversaries: the 50-year anniversary of our foundation in the Port Pirie Diocese; the 20-year anniversary of our founder, Fr John Wallis' death and our 77-year anniversary of foundation. Each of these will be covered in more depth, including many photographs over the following pages.

Celebrating 50 years of MSS in Port Pirie Diocese

The MSS celebrated the 50-year anniversary of its foundation in the Diocese of Port Pirie with a special Thanksgiving Mass on Saturday 29th May. The Bishop of Port Pirie Diocese, Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS DD celebrated the Mass, which took place at St Teresa's Catholic Church in Whyalla, along with a number of local priests concelebrating.

A number of the Sisters who now live interstate but worked in the diocese over the years attended, including congregational leader, Stancea Vichie MSS, Corrie van den Bosch MSS, Nancy Doyle MSS, Mary Cleary MSS and Cheryle Thomson MSS, who has been serving the Port Pirie Diocese for the past 32 years.

Addressing those gathered, Stancea Vichie MSS expressed her delight in being amongst the people of the diocese again and shared stories of the foundation Sisters being out on the road for a month at a time, meeting families and parish communities to inform them of their presence and ministry. 'We're just so very privileged to have known all of you and to continue to know you. We really don't quite know how to say thank you for everything,' she said.

Stancea acknowledged the work of Cheryle Thomson MSS who is the longest serving MSS in the diocese – she has been pastoral associate at St Teresa's parish in Whyalla since 2002. Though Cheryle's work with the parish has recently ended formally, she will stay on in Whyalla and remain involved in the lives of the people there.

'This is a great moment to thank Cheryle for her wonderful work, her wonderful presence amongst you here, for all of this time,' said Stancea. 'I'm just so happy that we'll still have a presence here.'

Bishop Karol expressed his gratitude to the MSS, both past and present, for their years of service in the diocese. 'Your service can be simply described as a great love and dedication of your entire life to people on the outskirts, and marginalised,' Bishop Karol said. 'On this occasion of the Golden Jubilee, of your dedicated service in our diocese, on behalf of all who have been touched by God's love through your dedicated service, I want to say thanks.'

From left: Sisters Nancy Doyle, Stancea Vichie, Cheryle Thomson, Corrie van den Bosch and Mary Cleary MSS.

From left: Fathers Paul Quirk, Arno Vermeeren, Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS DD, Fathers Jim Monaghan and Brian Matthews.

Cleve Guests: Veronica Travers, Carmel Baxter, Kath and Gerald Travers, Kevin Baxter, Cheryle Thomson MSS and Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS DD.

Emerging Futures Collaborative: An update

In April, we provided some background to the Emerging Futures Collaborative, a response by religious communities in Australia to the changing nature and needs of the communities, particularly as we grow older. At the heart of this venture is the spirit of communion and mission. A company has now been established called Emerging Futures Collaborative. Its purpose is to ensure the provision of services to growing numbers of religious communities across Australia. From 2022, the MSS will receive health, aged-care, business and administrative support services through the Emerging Futures Collaborative. In the spirit of 'moving with the times', and adapting to change with open hearts and minds, we are grateful to be part of this collaborative endeavour.

Commemorating 77 years of MSS and the 20-year anniversary of Fr John Wallis' death

In a great spirit of joy and gratitude, the MSS celebrated 77-years of going out into the highways and byways on 8 July 2021. Following our long-held tradition, we celebrated our Foundation Day, 'Rosary House Day', as it was originally known, with scones and tea.

We gathered in person where possible and gathered for an online morning tea and series of reflections, which saw 45 people participate including many of our Sisters, staff, and members of our mission entity, Highways and Byways – A Community of Service. We gathered from Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Celebratory lunches in the various locations followed.

This year we also mark the 20-year anniversary of the death of our founder, Fr John Wallis. He died on 3 August 2001. Together we reflected on Fr John's life and legacy and how his spirit lives on in the MSS and Highways and Byways – A Community of Service, formerly known as the John Wallis Foundation.

Fr Graeme Howard, a priest based in Tasmania, knew Fr John Wallis from his early years. In his reflection, Fr Graeme remarked on Fr John's courage and perseverance in establishing the MSS, then known as the Home Missionary Sisters of Our Lady.

Fr Graeme acknowledged Fr John's great love of reading, particularly Scripture and he'd encourage the priests to do the same. 'He was really a man of his times and a man of encouragement for us – his reading, his love of the outdoors, his humour, his readiness to talk, and to laugh about life,' he said.

Fr Graeme spoke of the deep impact that Vatican II had on Fr John's priestly ministry. 'His grasp and understanding of the Vatican II Council and the documents was so refreshing and so open,' he said. 'Through all the changes, John's humanity shone through. … He was so open to the spirit of God's love of the people and in the world.'

'There's one aspect of John's life, however, which taught us a lesson as priests and that was his tremendous understanding, recognition and understanding of the dignity and spiritual giftedness of women. There's no doubt this would have come from his wonderful association and spiritual union with his mother. He really led the way in that way. John's spirit has continued to live on through the MSS and the wonderful work of Highways and Byways. … He's been a wonderful gift to Tasmania, a wonderful gift to the people of God.'

During the online gathering there was time for small group discussions and further sharing about Fr John's life and legacy on the MSS. Pat Quinn MSS said, 'I was always very touched by Fr John's vision and his focus on flexibility and adaptation. I'm sure that he's been well and truly with us in this moment of transition in our history.'

We also acknowledged and remembered that in the 20 years since Fr John Wallis' death, 15 MSS have passed away. They included: Sisters Margaret Kenny, Doreen Jones, Paul Coad, Imelda McMahon, Genevieve Ng, Maria Kavanagh, Joan Shannon, Barbara Hateley, Mary O'Connor, Agnes Ryan, Edith Moore, Monica Franklin, Delphine O'Shea, Alice Fox and Margaret Rogers.

Following the online reflection, those who could gather, celebrated Foundation Day with a celebratory lunch. In Melbourne, nine MSS gathered with staff, members of various committee members and board members of Highways and Byways - A Community of Service, as well members of the Highways and Byways regional group.

Read the full story and see many more photos at: www.missionarysisters.org.au/News
A reminder that we also have the MSS Facebook page, which we regularly update with latest news and photographs. Follow and 'Like' us at: www.facebook.com/MissionarySistersServiceAus

Top: The Melbourne gathering for MSS' Foundation Day. Second row, from left: Liz McAloon, Fiona Basile, Andrea Butler and Ellen Smiddy; Pat Kelly MSS, Paul Jackson and Rob Giebels; Michael and Judy Cain, Marcia McMahon MSS, Bryan Cain. Bottom left: Joan Donohue, Margaret Casey and Corrie van den Bosch MSS; Melbourne MSS with the anniversary cake.

Photography courtesy Fiona Basile

Celebrating special milestone birthdays among the MSS

Cecilia Bailey MSS celebrates her 90th birthday on 28th July. Now based in Toowoomba, Queensland, Cecilia was born in Melbourne in 1931 and grew up in Deepdene, in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. She joined the MSS aged 24, in 1955.
In her earlier years, Cecilia worked in the Correspondence school, based in Hobart, Tasmania. In 1964, at the invitation of Bishop Brennan, Cecilia and four sisters came to Toowoomba, Queensland, to undertake ministry in the rural areas of the Diocese. Cecilia was appointed Formation Director in 1969 and later became Congregational Leader. In this role, she visited the sisters in NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. Now retired, Cecilia continues to enjoy life in Toowoomba.

MSS portrait photos courtesy Fiona Basile

Marcia McMahon MSS celebrates her 80th birthday on 11th November. Marcia joined the MSS in 1963, aged 21. Her early years were spent in Tasmania, followed by Toowoomba. She had a special love for working in the congregation's Correspondence School. Marcia returned to Tasmania, visiting many parishes along the east coast and north west coast. Her time in the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese was particularly special, visiting outback areas and parishes. In latter years Marcia went to Sydney, followed by Melbourne where she joined Inter Church Trade and Industry Chaplaincy. In Melbourne, Marcia keeps involved with parish life and keeping abreast with world and local news.

Pat Brain MSS celebrated her 80th birthday on 3rd February. Born in Hobart in 1941, Pat grew up in Strahan on Tasmania's west coast. She joined the MSS in 1962, aged 21. Having had a teaching background, Pat used her skills to assist parents to educate their children in faith. During her mission years, she lived and worked in Tasmania, South Australia, western New South Wales and briefly in Queensland. Pat has always had a heart for volunteering engaging in a variety projects. She currently lives in Melbourne and faithfully writes the thank you letters to all who donate to Highways and Byways – A Community of Service.

Vale Carmel Hall MSS, 1931 - 2021

It is with deep sadness that we inform you of the death of Carmel Hall MSS in Hobart, Tasmania on 16th July. In her last hours, Carmel was surrounded by family, community members and friends.
'It is a remarkable gift that Carmel died on her Feast day, Our Lady of Mt Carmel. This would bring her enormous joy,' said Stancea Vichie, congregational leader of the MSS. 'Carmel almost made it to her 90th birthday on 2nd September. She was so bright when I said goodbye to her in Hobart last Tuesday.'
We are especially conscious of Sisters Frances McShane and Lorraine Groves MSS at this time, who spent many of these past years living next door to Carmel in Claremont, a suburb of Hobart, Tasmania, before Carmel's recent move to Fairway Rise Aged Care in Hobart.
Thank you for your thoughts and prayer at this time.