



Missionary Sisters of Service

A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

NEWSLETTER



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Celebrating 80 years of the Missionary Sisters of Service

It is with great joy that we commemorate and celebrate the 80-year anniversary of our foundation in 2024. Though we say this often, it does bear repeating—we have so much to be thankful for, with much of that gratitude extending to so many of you across our ancient land who've

been part of this journey with us. We have been both formed and transformed by the land and the people we've encountered along the way. Though we officially recognise our foundation story from 8 July 1944, when the first four women came together to form a new community, our origins really stem back to 1932.

In 1932, a young man of 23 years, originally from country Victoria was ordained a priest to the Hobart Archdiocese—Fr John Wallis. In 1933, he was sent on mission to the remote Bruny Island, off the southeast coast of Tasmania, to visit families, many of whom had not seen a priest for many months. While visiting the Hawkins family, mother of four young children, Kit Hawkins asked Fr John: 'Father, why can't we have sisters coming here like in the towns and cities? Doesn't anyone care about us people in the bush?' This question set off a chain reaction of events in the life of Fr John, who set about creating a community of women 11 years later, to do just that. This community of women would set out into the highways and byways of our vast land, visiting people who were often on the margins and forgotten. Over the years, we have worked in every state but Western Australia. And as our mission evolved and diversified, many of us moved to more urban areas. Recognising the changing nature and circumstances of our community of women, we established our mission entity, The John Wallis Foundation nearly 14 years ago, which is now known as *Highways and Byways—Healing the Land, Healing Ourselves, Together*. We are so excited by the work of our Highways and Byways team, as they carry on our vision and mission of reaching out to those on the margins through their small grants and program partnerships. Again, who would have thought 80 years ago, we'd be where we are today.

Today, we have 20 sisters living in Australia: one in Mackay, Queensland; five in Toowoomba, Queensland; eleven in Melbourne, Victoria; one in Port Pirie, South Australia; and two in Hobart, Tasmania. Throughout 2024, we will be celebrating this momentous milestone in our various locations. In Melbourne, we officially kick started the anniversary celebrations with the launch of Corrie van den Bosch MSS's new book, *Graced Beyond Telling* in mid-February (Corrie will host another book launch in Hobart, Tasmania on Saturday 13 April at St Francis Xavier Church hall, South Hobart, at 2.30pm). Also in Melbourne, we'll celebrate the anniversary on Sunday 7 July at the 10.30am Eucharist at St Thomas the Apostle Parish in Blackburn followed by lunch in the school hall. In Toowoomba, the anniversary will be celebrated on 14 July at St Anthony's Church, at the 2pm Eucharist, followed by afternoon tea. In Hobart, we'll mark the anniversary at the 11am Eucharist at St Francis Xavier's Church, South Hobart, followed by lunch in the hall. We also look forward to our Bruny Island, Tasmania pilgrimage, set for November 2024. For more information about all our MSS 80-year anniversary events, refer to our website – www.missionarysisters.org.au – in the News section.



Tasman Island – a special place for the MSS. Pat Quinn MSS shares some reflections

At the age of 84, I find myself reflecting on an exciting and satisfying life's journey. As our local sisters in Toowoomba age, I appreciate the bonds formed through a lifetime of pursuing a common vision. From our many years travelling to remote places, we share memories of challenging roads, interesting characters we met, frightening experiences and happy encounters. When I heard of the recent circumnavigating of Tasman Island, I recalled the journeys I made there and our colourful description of accessing the lighthouse families on top.

I was with different sisters on each trip, and we were all terrified, but accepted the challenge. The lighthouse keepers on this island would have possibly been the most remote in Australia. Tasman Island is 980 feet high and was the highest operating lighthouse in Australia, manned by three families until 1977 when it was automated.

Reaching the island meant taking a ride on a fishing boat delivering supplies. Accessing the lighthouse was another matter! Given the wild weather, it was never possible to use helicopter. The ocean was too rough to have a jetty for boats. Access was by way of a flying fox basket hanging from a cable linking a rock in the sea to a landing (90 feet up the cliff!) We jumped from the fishing boat into a dinghy, then into the flying fox. On arriving at the 90-foot landing, we were told to lie side-by-side flat on a trolley that was drawn by a cable up to the top. We had no safety belts and began the trip horizontally. Soon we were vertical as the trolley climbed the cliff face, 900 feet to the top. It was a spectacular view, but we were terrified! And committed!

That same pioneering spirit in our sisters when visiting Tasman Island, drove our missionary work throughout Australia. We were brave and resilient women (as were the families and their children who lived on top of Tasman Island!)

Now in our final years, we all still have that common spirit and history together. I am full of gratitude for such a life.



The December 1967 edition of *Highways and Byways*, where Pat Quinn MSS (then known as Sr Margaret Mary) tells the full Tasman Island mission story. Photo courtesy Bernadette Wallis.



Stancea Vichie MSS and Geraldine Vytilingam. Photo courtesy Chris Kapa, University of Divinity, School of Indigenous Studies.

Profound Experience at Historic Indigenous Theological Conference

The University of Divinity recently hosted a historic four-day journey at the 'Raising Our Tribal Voice for Justice: An Indigenous Theological Revolution' conference. Congregational leader, Stancea Vichie MSS, Bernadette Wallis MSS and Geraldine Vytilingam, the recipient of the 2023-2024 Fr John Wallis Scholarship attended.

Held on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, this event brought Indigenous Church leaders and theologians together on a national platform, where they delved into the Indigenous theological perspective of spirituality, colonisation, justice repatriation, and ecology. The role of Australia's Churches was also examined. 'This was a deeply profound experience,' said Bernadette Wallis.

MSS Archiving Volunteer, Mary Williams, reflects on a recent visit to Tasman Island

What a great privilege and joy it was, to recently travel with Bernadette Wallis MSS, and Julia Walsh, Assistant Archivist for the MSS, on a trip to the iconic Tasman Island. Bernadette had suitably prepped us on the drive to the Tasman Peninsula by playing a recording of Pat Quinn MSS's recounting of that initial journey.

Embarking from Eaglehawk Neck with Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, a truly appropriate name, our approach to the island was southward along the coast. We were captivated by the rugged sea cliffs and caves, and the variety of bird life, seals and seaweeds. Meanwhile, the movement of both the water and the boat was a small physical reminder, albeit a very comfortable one comparatively, of just the start of that epic journey that our brave sisters had experienced many years before.

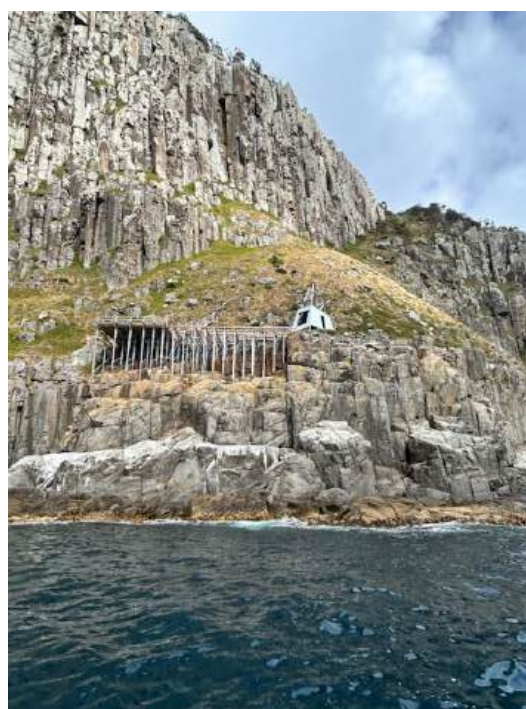
As we rounded the final headland to our destination, there before us was the towering, imposing, majestic, and as we drew nearer, very intimidating Tasman Island. As we approached ever closer, the small rock island, about the size of a quarter tennis court, where the base of the flying fox had been anchored, became apparent. We could still see evidence of that now removed structure. As we passed through the passage between the rocks and the landing on the island, I was able to truly appreciate the precariousness of the situation described by Pat, of the bobbing dinghy, the swinging basket and their no doubt ungainly, uncomfortable and scary scramble to get safely into the basket. What courageous women they were to follow through, seeing the actual reality of what they had to endure to get to the top.

We continued out into the main waterway between the island and the mainland and then turned back, this time approaching the island from the northwest. From this direction the haulage, with its acute angle and starkness became very apparent. Again, trying to experience the sisters' journey to the top through Pat's eyes, gave me that queasy, pit-of-the-stomach sensation. The physical and mental struggle of the situation they were in on the trolley, of standing up/lying down, on hard boards, at a 45° angle, with no restraint, nothing to hang on to, totally exposed and only a narrow footboard for support, is hard for me to get my head around. Then to learn when they reached the top, that the trolley had been known to come off the rails... and they still had to make the return journey! Words fail me to imagine the myriad of thoughts that must have been going through their heads at that point, yet they calmly went about their task of visiting with the Ruston family.

In this instance, their efforts to fulfil their ministry, were definitely over and above – no pun intended. But, as an outsider looking in, I have learnt that giving all is part of the charism of the MSS. Thank you ladies. You have enriched beyond measure, the lives of so many.



Julia Walsh and Mary Williams.
Photo courtesy Bernadette Wallis MSS.



The landing from which the trolley travelled to the top of Tasman Island.
Photo courtesy Mary Williams.

Stay up to date with MSS news and contact details

For more information and news about the Missionary Sisters of Service, we encourage you to visit our website: www.missionarysisters.org.au particularly the News section (follow the tabs at the top of the website) For any enquiries, email: coordinator@missionarysisters.org.au

Corrie van den Bosch MSS launches new book, *Graced Beyond Telling – A Soul's Dark Journey*

In a spirit of great joy and anticipation, Corrie van den Bosch MSS (pictured right) launched her new book, *Graced Beyond Telling – A Soul's Dark Journey* in Melbourne on 15 February 2024. More than 100 guests attended the launch at St Thomas the Apostle school and parish hall in Blackburn, which included many of the Melbourne-based MSS, friends from the Victorian Bushwalking Club, her many prayer and reading group friends, former work colleagues, members of the MSS Stewardship Council and members of her family, to name a few!

Prof Gabrielle McMullen AM (below right) officially launched the book, providing some key reflections on Corrie's insightful, raw and moving writing. Taking to the podium, Corrie then shared with those gathered something of what writing this book had done for her, of how she came to take up journal writing which she says, 'has been such a powerful means of coming to understand my inner life.' She also spoke of the presence of God, working unrecognised through the messiness and brokenness of her life. It is a story that many readers have since shared with Corrie, resonates with them.

'Only in retrospect did I begin to recognise it. And now, reading those journals years later, I kept being astonished at how clearly God was present and working,' Corrie reflects. When Corrie concluded, several questions were asked from among those gathered, which gave Corrie the chance to share reflections on the changes happening in our times, and how these affect the way we think of God and our role in the Church and world. The evening concluded with a blessing by Corrie, and refreshments for those gathered. Read more and see more photos on the MSS website:

www.missionarysisters.org.au/news



Clockwise from top left: Corrie enjoys a selfie with book fans and friends; Over 100 people attended the book launch; Corrie greets a friend in the audience; Liz McAloon, former executive director of The John Wallis Foundation/ Highways and Byways and Sr Veronica Hoey SGS. Photos courtesy Fiona Basile.

