



Missionary Sisters of Service

A MISSION OF LOVE AND SERVICE INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

NEWSLETTER



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80 years of MSS in Australia and beyond

We continue to celebrate the 80-year anniversary of our foundation. Already, we have held several events that have marked this significant year including two book launches of *Graced Beyond Telling: A Soul's Dark Journey* by Corrie van den Bosch MSS, in Melbourne and Hobart.

We look forward to celebrations across the locations where our women live: in Melbourne; Mackay and Toowoomba; Hobart; and Whyalla. Recently, Pat Quinn MSS wrote a beautiful reflection in *Horizons* magazine about our significant milestone and highlighted that in 2024 we also celebrate the 60-year anniversary of foundation of the MSS in the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba.

Pat writes: *In 1964, five sisters left their motherhouse in Tasmania to establish a foundation in this diocese. I, Sr Pat Quinn, was the youngest of the group. Our mission initially was to reach out to isolated families in regional areas and to provide a religious correspondence course for parents to educate their children in the faith. We visited remote parishes on a regular basis. Sr Cecilia Bailey, another of our original group, recalls a story. In her early days in the diocese, she and another sister visited a property far out west. As she stepped out of the car, the mother of the family came out to meet them and threw her arms around Cecilia. She began sobbing. Cecilia simply held her, wondering if some tragedy had happened. When Cecilia asked how she was, the woman said, 'With this drought, my husband has been away for months, cattle droving along the roads to find some feed. I am here with my five little boys, and I have not seen a woman in months'. This story paints a vivid picture of the isolation of some people and of what the visit of our sisters meant to them.*

'The sisters shared the isolation of bush life at the time when communication, if there was any, consisted of a wire strung through the bush and maintained by the families sharing the line. Roads were unreliable, and communication with the outside world was very limited.'

Neville Hunt reflects on his encounter with the MSS Sisters in remote Western Queensland.

Read the full reflections shared by Pat Quinn MSS and Neville Hunt, a long-time friend of our sisters, via our MSS website:

www.missionarysisters.org.au/News

You can also visit the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba website, which features the article in its June 2024 edition of *Horizons* magazine:

www.twb.catholic.org.au



Our MSS in Toowoomba, from left: Mary Cleary, Nancy Doyle, Cecilia Bailey, Pat Quinn and Margaret Windsham. Photo: Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba.

Treasures from the MSS Archives

Work on the MSS archives in Hobart, Tasmania, continues. Both Bernadette Wallis MSS and MSS Assistant Archivist, Julia Walsh, have spent weeks at a time in The Wallis Centre, Hobart, over the past months, going through, sorting, cataloguing and preparing the MSS archives for eventual transport to Melbourne, where they'll find a home as part of the bigger Australian Religious Archive project. More to come on this in due course. Volunteers, Corrie van den Bosch MSS and Mary Williams, too, have been working on projects within the archive to move things along.

Going through the archives gives Bernadette the chance to identify items to share. She has been sending correspondence to our community of women keeping us updated on progress, and to share any special 'treasures' that are unveiled. Bernadette shared that three albums of photos of all the correspondence school children in the early/mid 1950s were found in the archives. 'This was such a special surprise,' says Bernadette. 'It is priceless and the local archive people were in awe of them!'

Bernadette writes: *It seems three or four postulants and novices who worked on the project were Peg Fitzgerald, Joan Shannon and possibly Gemma O'Callaghan. The fruit of their project was an album with photos of the religious Correspondence school students in the 1950s in Tasmania. Two other albums followed.*

The first album was a hand-made, brown paper-covered A3 size book with black pages under the photos. It was possibly made by or helped by Venard Casey MSS, who had previously made and bound hand-made books. Presumably, the parents sent in a photo of each child or children in the family for this purpose and to get to know the students. Beneath each photo on each page was the beautifully written calligraphy or hand printed name of each child or children of the family. Beside each photo was the name of the district, such as Kimberley, Trowutta, Stanley, Forest, Scottsdale, Branxholm, Waddamana, St Helens, Mathinna, Fingal, Campbelltown, Ellendale, Bothwell, Pyengana, Sheffield, Orford, Swansea, Bothwell, Hamilton, Bushy Park, Huonville, Poatina, Wayatinah, Ellendale, and of course, the islands, Flinders Island, Bruny Island and King Island. Names included were Corrie and the Van den Bosch children – 5 of them! Corrie said the photos were their passport photos.

This archive item is about 70 years old. It is a treasure for understanding the social history of rural Tasmania, the work, migrants, cultures, also Catholic history. We have been fortunate that local Tasmanian volunteers, Pat and Christine O'Halloran (Pat originally from Irishtown), have spent nearly 12 months listing the names and places and identifying many of the children as adults today and/or if they have died. We will scan every page of the three albums in the archives for safe keeping.

Congratulations to our sisters in Toowoomba who feature on the front page, who celebrate their 60-year anniversary of foundation in 2024.

This photo shows the MSS Toowoomba foundation group from left: Sisters Fran O'Brien, Cecilia Bailey, Joan Shannon, Pat Quinn and Julianne Dunn.
Photo: MSS Archives



MSS Scholarships, making an impact

As part of our legacy and commitment to the formation and encouragement of pastoral and theological education, particularly for young women, the MSS have been offering annual study scholarships through the University of Divinity, in Melbourne. Geraldine Vytilingam was the inaugural recipient of the 2023 Fr John Wallis Scholarship, which marked Fr John's 90-year anniversary of ordination. With the scholarship funds, Geraldine pursued a Graduate Diploma in Theology in 2023 and this year is completing a Masters in Theological Studies degree.

The 2024 MSS Scholarship in honour of our 80th anniversary of foundation was awarded earlier this year to Monique Saywell. This scholarship, which focuses on women and ecological studies, has enabled Monique to undertake a Masters in Theological Studies over two years through Yarra Theological Union at Box Hill, Victoria and University of Divinity in Adelaide, SA. The purpose of this scholarship is to support theological education and pastoral leadership in Australia that is consonant with the vision of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' encyclical on 'care for our common home'. Reflecting on her studies, Monique says, 'Diving deep back into study in this first semester has been a whirlwind of rediscovering God's goodness and the interconnectedness that we all share. It has left me deeply inspired and willing for more. It has granted me the opportunity to carve out space to personally wonder in God's presence and be curious to where this may all lead in the space of pastoral leadership.'

The MSS are excited to announce that the next in its scholarship series will go to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and will commemorate the 7th anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, honouring the call for Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling. This scholarship will be awarded in late 2024.

Celebrating 100 years of Catholic Deaf Community

In May, members of the Deaf community gathered at the John Pierce Centre (JPC) to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Deaf Association in Victoria. The day provided an opportunity to remember the long history of the Catholic Deaf community and to share some research.



Together with Gail Finn, who is Deaf and who worked at the JPC for many years, Bernadette Wallis MSS, who also in times past worked at the JPC and is a CODA (child of Deaf adults) gave a presentation at the celebration. The first part of their presentation focussed on the first two meetings of the Catholic Deaf Association in 1924 and 1925. Bernadette says, 'I'm delighted that through research with another CODA, Michael Wilson, we've identified a deaf woman, the first secretary of the Catholic Deaf Association.

'Her name was Annie Holcroft, a leader and part of the community for many years. She shares a personal connection with both of our families. She was a close friend of Michael's mother, and we noted his grandfather was elected chair at the meeting in 1925. Annie knew my aunt, Marie Fulton, very well. Marie cared for Annie's photo album when Annie was dying. And when Marie died, still having the album, my cousin sent it to me saying, "you'll know what to do with this".' Bernadette presented the photo album to the JPC Archives.

Fr John Wallis had three deaf siblings who were involved in the Catholic Deaf Association in Melbourne. He always had an interest and pastoral concern for Deaf people. The Wallis family originally lived at Homewood, near Yea and Seymour districts in Victoria. On 28 July (after the Highways and Byways Walk-Run-Ride event on 27 July), the parish of Yea will acknowledge our 80th anniversary at the Sunday Mass followed by morning tea. The photo above shows Fr Wallis' nieces and nephew (Bernadette's cousins): Loretta Wallis, Chris Wallis, Bernadette Wallis MSS, Pauline Holloway, Karen Wallis and Kathleen Fulton.

Pat Brain MSS, a heart full of gratitude

Pat Brain was born in Hobart and grew up in Strahan on Tasmania's west coast. She first encountered the Missionary Sisters of Service, then known as the Home Missionary Sisters of Our Lady, as a child. Sisters Vianney and Joseph were visiting Strahan, and instructing the children in Religious Education, of which Pat was part. In 1948, she received her First Holy Communion and made her First Reconciliation. Along with her sister, Jen and brother, Ray, she began the correspondence lessons with the sisters. She enjoyed receiving, completing and sending off the lessons, regularly. She can recall those occasions when the sisters would visit her family, and other families in the parish. And so started the long, and lasting connection with the MSS.

Pat attended Sacred Heart College in Hobart for secondary school, and then went to Teacher's College in Launceston. She later taught in Dover and Sorell, Tasmania.

Throughout this time, Pat kept in touch with the sisters. They were regular visitors to her family's home 'whenever in the area'. In fact, Pat announced her intention to become a Home Missionary Sister of Our Lady, in the presence of her mother, brother and two of the MSS Sisters who were visiting the family home at the time—Sr Joseph and Sr Winifred. With her parents' blessing, Pat joined the MSS in 1962, aged 21 years old.

Pat says, 'I joined because I wanted to help the young children who weren't able to get to Catholic schools and receive a Catholic education. I knew that the sisters did this work. They visited families wherever they went, and they helped the children. So, I just knew I was drawn to that.'

With her teaching background, Pat used her skills to assist many children and families to learn more about the Catholic faith throughout her mission years. She has done extensive training of catechists, providing prayer days to women in country areas, as well as visiting families. As an MSS, she has lived and worked in Tasmania, western New South Wales, and briefly in Queensland and South Australia.

Pat has always had a heart for volunteering. In her later years, she taught English to migrants on a voluntary basis in Melbourne for 13 years, she was a volunteer helping elderly residents living in nursing homes for a couple of years and was a guide at the Melbourne Zoo for 13 years. She loved this volunteering work given her love and passion for the environment and care for creation.

Pat also volunteered at a house for women with Aids for three years, at the Kildara Centre with the Brigidine Sisters for several years, and faithfully wrote the thank you letters to all who donated money to the MSS's mission entity—first, known as The John Wallis Foundation, and later, as Highways and Byways: Healing the Land, Healing Ourselves, Together. 'People do appreciate getting personally handwritten notes thanking them,' she says.

Pat currently lives in Melbourne and is a valuable member of her local community. She is well-known for her gentle presence and warm hospitality. When reflecting on what she's grateful for, Pat says, 'I think I'm most grateful for my parents, and all my family—my brothers and sisters, all my nieces and nephews, my great-nieces and nephews. I'm grateful to our sisters, and Fr John especially for beginning the order, and those who instructed me in the early days.

'I'm grateful for the work I've been able to do and the encouragement I've received from people wherever I've worked. Fr John always said, "In all things, gratitude. Be grateful. When you've got nothing else, be grateful".' Words that Pat has taken to heart!

