



# Encounters...



Sisters of Charity of Australia

ADVENT 2022

*We Sisters of Charity, seeking God in all things, commit to a culture of encounter and collaboration.*  
28<sup>th</sup> General Chapter Direction Statement, 2021

*Dear Sisters and Friends,*

Welcome to this first edition of "Encounters". It is hoped that with the beginning of each new season, there will be another edition. Our title has come from our 28<sup>th</sup> General Chapter Direction Statement and underpins so much of who we are. We are grateful to all who have responded to our invitation to contribute. Encounters will replace our 2 previous publications: *Keep in Touch* and *Walking with Us*. We hope you enjoy this edition.

*What are you waiting for?????*

Do you ever find yourself asking that question of someone or maybe of yourself?  
As we begin the season of Advent,  
perhaps we can ask ourselves:



*Who am I waiting for? Who are we waiting for?*

During these weeks of Advent we are bombarded with advertisements, a never ending flurry of Carols and large bustling crowds. Some quiet and peace in order to reflect on that question, "Who am I waiting for" seems almost impossible to achieve.

But maybe we can make a conscious effort during these sacred days to stop and ponder the question for our self.

"Who are we waiting for" is a challenge which might best be reflected on in small groups: families, colleagues and communities. Advent invites us to recall Christ's coming as the Word made flesh among us some 2,000 years ago. But do we ever consider that individually and communally we are privileged to see and respond to that same Word made flesh coming into our daily lives as a refugee, a homeless person, a person with mental health issues or a neighbour who is lonely. The many faces of the Word made flesh are with us and around us. As we pause and reflect, let us ask that we make room in our hearts, so that we have eyes to see and hearts of generosity with which to respond.

The third aspect of Advent which the Church encourages us to consider is the promise that Jesus will come again at the end of time.

No matter if we ask what, or who are we waiting for, we have the assurance of the promise of God and the gifts of faith, light and encouragement as we wait together.

May your Advent journey be blessed.

*Laureen*

***In this issue...***

***Welcome; In Memoriam; Care of our Common Home; Women of Church; RSC Companions – Sydney & Melbourne; RSC Ignatian Companions; UNANIMA International; Tasmanian Pilgrimage; Victorian Jubilee Celebrations; An Advent Prayer***

## Care of our Common Home Committee

What does the *Laudato Si* Encyclical, 2015, call us to as Sisters of Charity?

Quite simply we are asked to move from environmental consciousness to ecological conversion in order to save and revive our Planet, Earth.

Our committee since our appointment in September 2021 has met twelve times. Among our achievements we have:

- \* invited our sisters to contribute to ways they care for Earth.
- \* included relevant pieces in our Congregational News.
- \* encouraged our congregation to divest from investments in fossil fuels.
- \* invited our sisters and partners to participate in the International Ignatian Ecological Conference in which our congregation donated a gold sponsorship to participants of poorer countries.
- \* workshopped with Sue Martin from the Jesuit Province, the *Laudato Si* Action platform.
- \* completed a document to go out at a future date.



Members of the Committee L to R: Sisters Elizabeth Dodds, Margaret Guy, Margaret Valentine, Anne Taylor, Kathleen Doohan, Karan Varker

## Women of Church Committee

*We are Ecclesial women who embrace the fullness of our baptismal identity in a wounded and bruising church. We will be courageous and prophetic risk-takers in the search for healing and wholeness with and for the people of God.*

As women of church today we follow in the footsteps of the legion of women who went about the daily business of life, prayerfully impelled by their love for Christ. Today, we RSC Women of Church are “being” church with our friends and co-workers in the parish, the school, the office, the prison, the home, on the streets, in communities and care facilities, or by simply listening to the lonely person we meet along the way. Some may be living out one’s retirement quietly but no less effectively as a “Woman of Church” where we are in this moment of time.

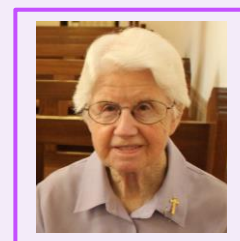
We ask ourselves, “What is it for me to be a Woman of Church today in our frail church, our crying planet, our world in pain as we address not only challenges but the joys and blessings of life. The answer is often simple, expressed in our Chapter Direction Statement, lived out in our encounters each day and also when we remember and farewell our Women of Church at the end of their lives, able to say of each: “a life of grace, strength and dignity, a person of faith, hope and love, a Woman of Church.” Pictured: Committee members Sisters Pauline Staunton, Mary Frances Gould, Helga Neidhart, Anne Taylor, Libbey Byrne



## In Memoriam...



**Sr Dorothy Barden RSC**  
28<sup>th</sup> February 1924-11<sup>th</sup> October 2022  
*“To Jesus Christ only have I given my heart”*



## *Jubilee 2021 and 2022: Celebration at last in Victoria!*

*'It is not what you gather, but what you scatter that tells the kind of life you have lived.'*

Helen Walton.

These words captured the rich and diverse gifts central to the vocations of loving service of each Jubilarian. The readings and prayers highlighted the ways these faith - filled Jubilarians had responded to the call to be a Sister of Charity; selfless and generous service given to an extraordinary breadth of people and places is at the heart of this call. The symbolic distribution by the Jubilarians of gifts of seeds to all those present, captured the steadfast and loving journeys of each sister.

For the Melbourne Companions, it was a delight and privilege to join the Sisters for this wonderful celebration of life and love. Following the liturgy, we shared lunch together. At the heart of the gathering was an energy, joy and gratitude for the Sisters' shared purpose, faithful service and trust in the Providence of God across many years. The Jubilarians' enduring commitment to the Sisters' motto, '*Caritas Christi Urget Nos*' continues to inspire...

Our heartfelt love, prayers and congratulations to, Sisters Maureen Walters (70 yrs), Judith Christy (60 yrs), Catherine Meese (60 yrs), Maureen Delaney (60 yrs), Elizabeth Dodds (60 yrs), Joan Stapleton (50 yrs), Loretta Bani (50 yrs) and Pamela Grime (25 yrs)

– Margaret McKenna,  
RSC Companion and MAM Trustee

Covid has affected our lives in innumerable ways. - Here is an example:

Our Victorian tradition of an annual celebration with our current Jubilarians had to be placed on hold for a few years, until we were able to celebrate with joy on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022 . . . together with our RSC Companions.

We returned to the beautiful setting, that Catholic Ladies College offers, and the warm welcome of Principal Stephanie and her people.

We were able to enjoy again a delicious meal prepared by Sr Elizabeth Costigan's sister, Anne, and her assistants.

But first, there was the uplifting, reflective liturgy, set within the theme of scattering seeds.

We were touched and drawn into the prayers, readings and music...

*All Good Gifts around Us are sent from heaven above (Godspell);*

prayers of Blessing

*Blessed are you woman of the earth, tender woman, woman of strength, woman of passion, woman of wisdom. Blessed are you, faithful woman;*

and the Finale of Kathy Sherman csj:

*Renew in us our passionate quest for the One, who is the purpose of our living.*

We are grateful for this significant experience - a special "now " moment of Jubilee, held in the lovely orchid that each Jubilarian carried home . . . together with the seeds we all received to be planted and held in memory.

Maureen Delaney rsc



A reflection from the liturgy:

### ***Soul's Work is Invisible***

*Ribbons of Grace grow in me streaming freely amidst my working and sleeping.*

*Radiance and mystery mingle, maturing and softening my heart and spirit.*

*Souls' work is invisible germinating, jewelled faithfulness and nimble newness*

*Few words capture the texture of transformation.*

*So how can I tell you of its gift - of its light - of its beauty -*

*Seedlings emerge from darkness I do not see or know*

*Miracle and wonder and goodness resound!*

Kathy J Knipper, ofc.



# RSC Companions... Melbourne and Sydney

RSC Companions began in mid-2008 in both Sydney and Melbourne, both groups celebrating fourteen years of graced companionship in 2022...



Melbourne Companions began 2022 by celebrating the life of Sr Liz Costigan; the liturgy reflecting our gratitude and love for Liz. Next, we explored -The Tree of Life and the Four Paths (*The Blessing Seed by Caitlin Matthews*) - with several members poignantly and beautifully sharing their path. In July, Zoom technology enabled Sydney and Melbourne Companions to introduce themselves to each other; and Sr Liz Dodds enriched our understanding of the 'The Common Home'. In October, Companions were privileged to share in the Jubilee celebrations of eight RSC sisters. November will see our year conclude with an Advent liturgy.



Our first "face to face" meeting via Zoom, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2022.



Melbourne Companions and sisters celebrating.

Some Sydney reflections...

I look forward to our meeting as I always feel genuinely transparent, enquiring, deeply reflecting and open to share my feelings.

*I really enjoy coming together with fellow Companions. also watching / reading discussing texts, a few laughs afterwards & always beautiful afternoon teas. Our annual weekend at Shellharbour is very thought-provoking and spiritual in such a beautiful setting.*

A faith-endowed family, caring, compassionate, and loving, these values instilled in most cases by the wonderful Sisters of Charity. My six children also have been taught by them. Deo Gratias for all the RSC's past and present.

*I treasure the Companions meetings as an opportunity for spiritual growth and for opening up about the joys and the struggles of my daily life as a follower of Jesus with a group of trusted friends.*

I feel a great bond of trust as we search together for the God of love.

*Having become a more recent 'Companion' I have participated in 3 gatherings this year, 2022. One session each person selected a page with a Michael Leunig Cartoon on one side and a thoughtful quote on the reverse side. After some time of quiet reflection allowing the image or quote to touch our inner-self we then shared what touched us. What followed was a rich, insightful expansion of our collective spirituality.*



Sydney Companions retreat 2022.

# *"In the Footsteps of the first Sisters of Charity"*

*- Hobart Pilgrimage November 2022*

Our pilgrimage commenced at the statues of the convict women and the little orphan boy Toby at Constitution Dock Hobart. Our Pilgrimage was led by Sr Maria Wheeler. Sister Maria shared her vast knowledge with us with facts, stories and little anecdotes. This provided us with an insight into the ministries of the three sisters who disembarked in Hobart 1847.

The Sisters of Charity was founded by Mary Akenhead as a response to the poverty and deprivation she saw around her in Ireland. The new congregation was created specifically to witness the love of Christ for those most in need.

Thousands of convict women and children were sent to Hobart and their circumstances were dire. Given this mission the three Sisters, Mother John Cahill, Mother de Sales O'Brien and Mother Xavier Williams commenced their work in order to relieve the suffering of the women and children. They focused on the health, education and spiritual needs of those who came into their care.

We were fortunate to visit sites of significance where we shared a reflection led by Sister Maria on the work of the Sisters and the hardships they and the women and children endured.

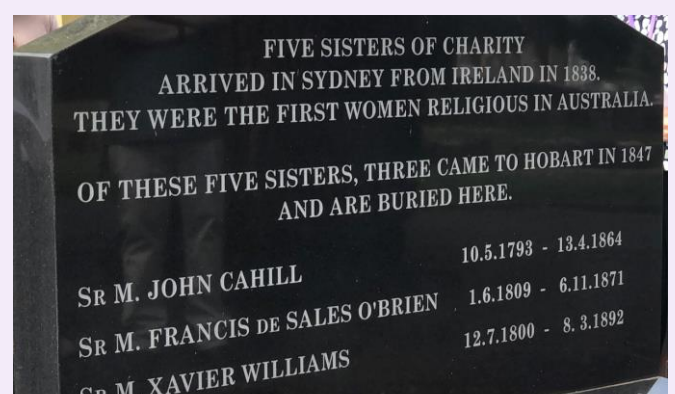
The sites included St Aloysius and Mount Carmel Colleges, The Cascades Female Factory, St Joseph's Church, where we celebrated Mass, the site of the first St Joseph's school and the Graves of the Sisters. The legacy and the memory of Mother Mary Aikenhead and her Sisters are clearly evident in the schools with murals and foundation walks depicting Mary bidding farewell to her Sisters and the arrival and the work of the Sisters in Hobart.

Our Pilgrimage group Included Sisters Margaret Sapsford and Libbey Byrne and MAM Trustees Professor Michael Drew and Margaret McKenna. The rest of us came from all areas of the "jigsaw" of Services.

We were very grateful to be given time to reflect on the work of the sisters who arrived in Hobart and for the work continued by the Sisters of Charity over many years. It was also an opportunity to take time from our busy lives for personal reflection on our relations with family, friends, colleagues and the community.

It was a privilege to be given this opportunity and many thanks to Mary Aikenhead Ministries, the Sisters of Charity, Sister Maria for her leadership and insights and to Angela Thomas from MAM who organised everything so beautifully.

Judi McCabe





## UNANIMA International

Sr Suzette Clark writes: Recently, I attended the UNANIMA International (UI) Board Meeting in New York, the first face-to-face Meeting since COVID.

UNANIMA International is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working to bring the voices of Women and Children to the United Nations (UN) and the international community. Specific issues include Homeless and Displaced, Migrants and Refugees and the Environment.

One of the riches of UI is its Board being composed of women from various countries. They bring with them the experiences of their Congregations working at the grass roots level. UI has 22 members - female Religious Congregations, with 23,000 women who are present in 85 countries.

Staff in New York engage in international advocacy, while UI members work at the local level, collaborating with local communities. This combination of advocacy at the UN and grassroots experience enables good things to happen. In early 2020, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, at the 58th Commission for Social Development, Homelessness was discussed as part of the priority theme "Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for all to Address Homelessness" and a definition for Homelessness was accepted. UI staff had submitted proposals, supported by research and the stories contributed by members.

A highlight of the Board Meeting was a recording of the presentation of the International Woman of Courage Award 2021. The recipient was Maria Jose Cavalcante of the land settlement Flor do Bosque in the State of Alagoas, Brazil. She is, in her words, a local peasant, who struggles for the right of women to land and for toxic free agriculture. Visit UNANIMA International at: <https://unanima-international.org/>



UNANIMA Board at Thomas Berry Place, New York.

## RSC Ignatian Companions

In response to requests from sisters who had taken part in an earlier series of Ignatian conversations, we have returned to our monthly Saturday morning gatherings, this time by Zoom, thereby enabling several to join us from interstate.

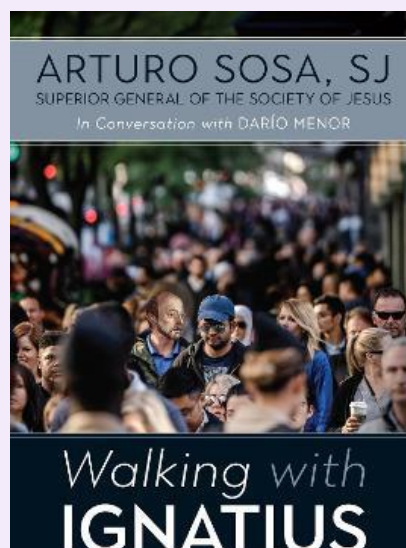
During the Ignatian Year, May 2021 to July 2022, sixteen of us shared our thoughts and prayers on the central theme set by Fr General Arturo SJ, commemorating the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conversion of St Ignatius, "the cannonball moment", in 1521. We drew on key sources such as the Autobiography and the Spiritual Exercises, supplemented by fabulous online videos provided from the Curia in Rome, and other Jesuit provinces. A regular feature were the short clips featuring Ignatian men and women sharing "My Cannonball Moment".

When the Ignatian Year concluded, some of us agreed to continue; we base our conversations on the book *Walking with Ignatius*, by Fr Arturo. We are taking a break over Christmas and will return on Saturday 11 February 2023.

Margaret Beirne RSC



*Painting in Mary Aikenhead's room of St Ignatius' vision at La Storta*



*Can you see Ignatius in the crowd?*

# *An Advent Prayer*



Our call to mission:

***We, Sisters of Charity, seeking God in all things,  
commit to a culture of encounter and collaboration***

Our call to reflect:

*The litany below, begins with the song Litany of the Word by Bernadette Farrell and the words that follow from the prophet Isaiah and Christopher Page invite us to remember the encounters and collaborations of our life and mission in 2022, some of which is told in these pages.*

*We wait in hope of the realisation of Christ's presence among us, impelled by the love of Christ, in peace, unity and love for all creation, as we continue to pray, work and live to bring this to reality.*

## LITANY OF THE WORD

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tprf4CfkG\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tprf4CfkG_g)



Word of justice, Alleluia, Come to dwell here, Maranatha!  
Word of mercy, Alleluia, Live among us. Maranatha!  
Word of power, Alleluia, Live within us. Maranatha!  
Word of freedom, Alleluia, Save your people. Maranatha!  
Word of healing, Alleluia, Heal our sorrow. Maranatha!  
Word of comfort, Alleluia, Bring us hope now. Maranatha!  
Word of gladness, Alleluia, Fill our hearts now. Maranatha!  
Word of wisdom, Alleluia, Come renew us. Maranatha!  
Word we long for, Alleluia, Word we thirst for. Maranatha!

Key of David, Alleluia, Son of Mary, Maranatha!  
Promised Saviour, Alleluia, True Messiah, Maranatha!  
Cry of prophets, Alleluia, Hope of ages, Maranatha!  
Light of nations, Alleluia, Light in darkness, Maranatha!  
Risen Saviour, Alleluia, Lord of glory, Maranatha!  
You we long for, Alleluia, You we thirst for, Maranatha!  
Here among us, Alleluia, Living in us, Maranatha!

**Bernadette Farrell**

*ONE LICENSE, License No. A-642410*

Word of God in scripture and our living:

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together. (Is 40: 4-5)

## Our call to respond:

For the work of UNANIMA, Talitha Kum, ACRATH, JRS and JSS,  
for equal dignity of all in our Church

... Word of justice, come!

For those who seek Australia as home  
and those who have perished in the attempt

... Word of mercy, come!



For women and child victims of violence and dispossession

... Word of power, come!

For detainees, those suffering mental health issues and addictions

... Word of freedom, come!

For all who are on the streets, alone in aged care facilities or lonely

... Word of comfort, come!

For the cry of earth, Indigenous Australians and all who are forgotten

... Word of healing, come!

For times of jubilee, companionship, celebration and connectedness

... Word of gladness, come!



For pilgrim journeys into our own hearts and places of history,  
those in whose footsteps we follow,

... Word of wisdom, come!

With open hearts, listening ears and generosity of spirit

... Word we long and thirst for, come!

Spirit of Mary Aikenhead and Ignatius of Loyola, Here among us, come!

We pray:

*Advent asks me to think seriously about how I am waiting. When I wait with surrender, my heart opens to receive the gift of love whose birth we prepare to celebrate this Advent season.* (Christopher Page, [In a Spacious Place Blog](#))

God here among us, open our minds and hearts to all that is around us, among us and waiting with us for our response. May your love lead us ever onward in faith and hope in our call to mission. Amen.



*We pay our respect to the traditional custodians of all the lands upon which we live and work, Gadigal People of the Eora nation, Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung People, part of the Kulin nations, Larrakia People of the Larrakia region, Turrbal and Jagera People of Meanjin nation, Palawa People of Nipuluna nation, Wadawarrung and Dja Dja Wurrung people. We pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging. We commit to walking and learning together.*