

Brigidine Focus

A Newsletter of the Brigidine Sisters
Ireland, England, Wales, United States,
Australia, New Zealand, Kenya

(For private circulation)

"Let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are." Phil 3:16

MARCH 2015



United Nations International Year of Light

"Light.

Light.

The visible reminder of Invisible Light."

(T S Eliot)



Message from the Congregational Leadership Team

“Create Circles of Light”

We all know how a good news story lifts the heart and takes us to another place. In recent weeks I have been thinking about who are the light-bearers, rather than doomsday prophets in today's world and a number of stories have caught my eye.

- Rosie Batty, a campaigner against family violence was named Australian of the Year. As a grieving mother she spoke out calmly just hours after her young son's murder and gave voice to many thousands of victims of domestic violence who had until then remained unheard. Her courage and willingness to speak out will make Australia a far better place.
- Two young engineering students from Queensland University of Technology recently spoke to a youth forum about their team's design of a flat-packed kit house to be used in times of natural disasters. Only fifteen used packing cases are needed to build one such house for four people. They have already negotiated with one business company which was disposing of up to three hundred packing cases per week to relieve them of their rubbish.
- In the last few months, a small NGO in Laos has made land safe around a school by clearing it of cluster mines. Children can now walk safely to school.
- Under the leadership of Sr. Carmen Sammut, the Union of International Superiors General is moving into a new phase of comprehensive strategic planning to build greater connections. The example of the international collaborations working against human trafficking, which has grown in strength, can be a model for other initiatives.
- At the recent National Conference of Australian Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) we heard a report of the collaboration between an Australian Sister of Mercy and the Good Shepherd House of Welcome, Cebu in The Philippines. Appreciating the lives of trafficked women and girls as 'sacred texts' has uncovered a depth of understanding of their situations and generated useful pointers to strategies for change.
- The Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project in Victoria runs 'The Family Support Through Teaching English Program'. This was established to provide asylum seeker family groups with personalised in-home assistance in the use of everyday English. It also provides friendship and support to help them settle into their local Australian community. More than twenty new volunteers came to a recent training program, joining the forty plus volunteers already involved.

In simple human ways these people are creating circles of light in what is, at times, a dark world. How we choose to be in the world makes a difference. In a recent talk at a day sponsored by the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW, Lyn Levo, CSJ, offered some insights on how we might be such creators of light. Drawing on the inspiration of a poem by Alan Seale she challenged us to reflect and to act....





Message from the Congregational Leadership Team “Create Circles of Light”

*To be present is an act of creation.
Your presence
How you show up to life
No matter how powerful or subtle,
Impacts what happens in your world,
Just because you are there.*

*How do you choose to show up?
How do you choose to engage the world each day?
How do you choose to make a difference?
How will you create a world that works?*

Some suggestions that Lyn offered to describe such **A World That Works** were:

- recognising that the world is complex and not perfect yet being committed to work *with* one another not against
- being open and committed to hearing different views, knowing that no one has the whole truth
- understanding that everything is connected, all life must be served and no choices made at the expense of others
- attending to feelings and intuitions as powerful ways of knowing in addition to thinking
- being in service of the common good and having a longer vision that might not be realised in one's lifetime
- seeing generativity in living the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection

These ways of being speak of humanising ourselves first so that we can humanise. In this International Year of Light, when we are invited also to ponder what it means to live a consecrated life, these reflections might spur us on to “to become a fire that ignites other fires and lights up the heart” as Pope Benedict XVI challenged us. Attending to these tasks must lead us to respond collaboratively and creatively to the darkness of new forms of dehumanisation, poverty and current threats to all life forms within the ecosystem.

There is no doubt that it was ‘the preferential option for the poor’ that was core to the life and mission of Jesus (Lk 14.18). It was this same option that shaped the life of apostolic religious congregations. Our congregation, like so many others, was born at the threshold of some type of inhumanity: the oppression of the poor and the deprivation of the right to education. Yet, in the response of our Founder and the actions of our founding sisters, there was a vision to bring light where there was darkness. Our life and our priorities for mission today must continue to create circles of light wherever we are.

Louise Bleary

Mary Hattery

Kathleen Butler

Claire Griffin

Congregational Leadership Team



Celebrating Divine Energy Animating Fresh Possibilities This Easter

On Generosity

On our own, we conclude:
there is not enough to go around

we are going to run short
of money
of love
of grades
of publications
of sex
of beer
of members
of years
of life

we should seize the day
seize our goods
seize our neighbour's goods
because there is not enough to go around

and in the midst of our perceived deficit
you come
you come giving bread in the wilderness
you come giving children at the eleventh hour
you come giving homes to exiles
you come giving futures to the shut down
you come giving Easter joy to the dead
you come - fleshed in Jesus

and we watch while
the blind receive their sight
the lame walk
the lepers are cleansed
the deaf hear
the dead are raised
the poor dance and sing

we watch
and we take food we did not grow and
life we did not invent and
future that is gift and gift and gift and
families and neighbours who sustain us
when we did not deserve it.

It dawns on us - later rather than soon -
that you "give food in due season
you open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

By your giving,
break our cycles of imagined scarcity
override our presumed deficits
quiet our anxieties of lack
transform our perceptual field to see
the abundance
mercy upon mercy
blessing upon blessing.

Sink your generosity deep into our lives
that your muchness may expose our false lack
that endlessly receiving we may endlessly give
so that the world may be made Easter new,
without greedy lack, but only wonder,
without coercive need but only love,
without destructive greed but only praise
without aggression and invasiveness...
all things Easter new...
all around us, toward us and
by us

all things Easter new.

Finish your creation, in wonder, love and praise.
Amen.

Walter Brueggemann



"Easter joy and peace to all."



**This
Graced
Moment:**

**Divine
Energy
animating fresh
possibilities**

***Holy Mystery,
Ground of Being,
You are the Divine Energy
within all that is.
You are at the heart of
this moment
beckoning us forward.***

***Stay with us
in our dreaming
and our planning
as we cross the threshold
to the next stage
of the unfolding
Mystery of Life.***

BRIGIDINE LIFE & MISSION UNFOLDING



*“As Earth makes fresh things grow;
as a garden makes seeds spring up,
so will God’s integrity and justice spring forth.”
Isaiah 61:11*

In May 2016, the next Congregational Forum for Brigidine Sisters will be held in Tullow, Co Carlow, Ireland.

In general the **PURPOSES** for our 2016 Congregational Forum are:

- to deepen our understanding of the realities of the whole Congregation and of today’s world in which we live and minister
- to review the 2011 Congregational Forum Directions
- to set Directions for the next period of time
- to discern and choose Congregational leadership.

All Brigidines will be involved in times of prayer, reflection and discernment during the next twelve months as well as the various small and larger group meetings in preparation for this Congregational Forum.

These meetings across all Brigidine Communities will offer opportunities:

- to share reflections about our Congregation, our Church and the world and ask questions like, ‘*What is our call in furthering the mission of God?*’
- to see with new eyes, unearthing and re-imagining our frames of reference
- to explore and deepen the underpinning connections between the 2011 Forum Directions
- to imagine a future that is faithful to our history as women religious and that lays the foundations for creative gifting to a future beyond us.

*We invite all our associates, colleagues and co-workers to pray
for us during these coming months of preparation.*



News from Solas Bhride, Kildare

Feile Bride 2015 commenced on January 30th with the official opening of Solas Bhride Centre and Hermitages. What a day of celebration! The following reports from local media capture the atmosphere and the excitement that prevailed throughout the afternoon in the new centre. Kildare Nationalist, February 3rd by Niamh O'Donoghue- *"Fearless powerful women". Those were the words used to describe the Brigidine sisters by singer, Eimear Quinn, who officially opened their new Solas Bhride Centre. Those gathered at the new ecological friendly building, heard how the sisters bravely forged ahead with their plans in the midst of a deep recession. The Eurovision winner launched the business plan back in 2011 and she said she was delighted to return to see the centre come to fruition. Ms Quinn declared: "This is an extraordinary shrine representing the embodiment of the power that Brigid brings us all." Mayor of Kildare, Fiona O'Loughlin added: "I am sure you will all agree that this centre is a wonderful asset for Kildare town, our county and, indeed, our country." She said St. Brigid was a renowned spiritual leader, possessing great fortitude and courage, mirroring the qualities of the sisters such as vision, compassion and persistence. She said the sisters were the heart and soul of Kildare town – developing networks, empowering and inspiring others in the community.*

Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Rita Minehan csb, paid tribute to the design team, the Brigidine sisters for their huge financial contribution and all who made donations. She noted that without any marketing they already had enquiries from the US, Norway, Sweden, Australia and Switzerland. Luka Bloom, long-time friend of the Brigidine Sisters, also performed at the opening. He remarked that upon meeting them he was inspired by St. Brigid – so much so that he lights a candle every day from her flame. "It is no surprise to me that they achieved their dreams," he said. Bishop Nulty and Rev. John Marsden, Dean of St. Brigid's Cathedral, performed the blessing followed by music and refreshments."

The official opening day was the beginning of a Feile Bride programme that listed sixteen events in the week that followed. St. Brigid's day was truly special. From the moment the doors opened people from far and wide began to pour into the centre. The Solas Bhride team held a workshop in the Cill Dara room in the afternoon sharing the customs and traditions of Brigid, weaving the Brigid's cross and concluding in the Brigid room with further sharing on the legacy of Brigid, music, song and poetry. On St. Brigid's night there was a special musical celebration with Highly Strung, a string quartet, and tenors, Owen Lynch and Dave Maguire. Those who were lucky enough to be present experienced a feast of music and song which culminated with a rendering of sacred music which included a special composition of a Prayer of St. Brigid composed and performed for the first time, by tenor Owen Lynch.

Other highlights of the Feile included a ritual at the well on the eve of St. Brigid's Day, Quiet Reflection/Meditation, "Spring Awakening" - an interpretative floral art demonstration, the launching of a national pilgrim path - Brigid's Way from Faughart, Co. Louth to Solas Bhride, Kildare town, the Annual Celtic Heritage Lecture – *"The Unfolding Universe: Glimpses into Mystery"*, by Nellie McLoughlin rsm. Other events were hosted by Kildare Library, Kildare Heritage Centre and an evening on "Brigid, Bees and Brewing" held in Boyles at the Market Square. The weekend included Afri Justice and Peace Conference on Saturday, February 7th entitled, *"Occupy the Imagination"*. Joe Murray, coordinator of Afri said, *"As Afri celebrates its 40th birthday we are delighted that our first public event of this landmark year is Feile Bride. The Brigidines, with whom we have been associated since 1993, are dreamers like Brigid who occupy their dreams to bring them into reality. The new Solas Bhride Conference Centre is a physical example of "imagination occupied" by the Brigidines"*. Speakers at the Conference included Colin Archer, Secretary General of the International Peace Bureau, Bruce Kent, former General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Emanuela Russo, whose area of expertise is Food Sovereignty. Inputs were interwoven with music, song and dance. All Information on www.afri.ie



News from Solas Bhride, Kildare

The Féile concluded on Sunday with a celebration of Eucharist at St. Brigid's Well and an input *"Awaken to the Mystery of being present here"*. This involved exploring ways of listening and responding to the sacred beat of the Divine through the 'New Universe Story' using song, music, poetry and the legend of St. Brigid and the whales.

Feile Bride was a week long celebration which saw over 1,000 people come through the doors of the new Solas Bhride Centre. Hermitages were occupied during the Feile by visitors from the UK and Ireland. The Board of Directors, the Brigidine Sisters and Cairde Bhride are justifiably proud and grateful for what has been accomplished.

Phil O'Shea csb



Luka Bloom & Eimear Quinn



**Brenda Kindregan
& Margaret Walsh**



**The Mayor of Kildare, Fiona
O'Loughlin gathers with others**



**Members of the Board
of Solas Bhride**



**Eimear Quinn
at the Feile Bhride**



**Members of Solas Bhride, the Design
Team and Manley Construction**



Nellie McLaughlin rsm



Karen Ward



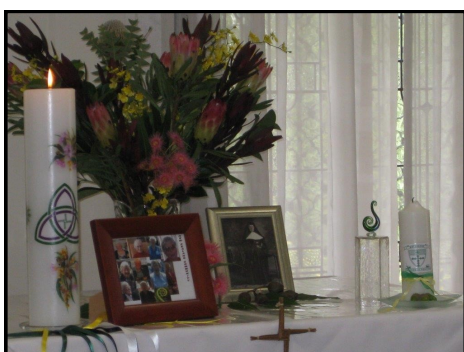
Eucharist at Brigid's Well



St Brigid's Day Celebration in NSW



Maree Marsh csb extinguished the Province Candle marking the end of one leadership and governance structure and the Community's readiness to transition to a new form of leadership and governance



Symbols of the past and the future were placed on the altar



Members of the Brigidine Community Leadership Team in NSW - Ann Harrison, Chanel Sugden, Margaret Daniels and Patricia Buckley

On St Brigid's Day this year, the NSW Community Gathering held a new significance as they formally ritualized the closure of the NSW Province and the inauguration of the NSW New Zealand Community with the move to one level of canonical governance called for at the 2011 Congregational Forum. The ritual expressed thanksgiving for all that has been as well as a spirit of hope as the Community enters a new phase of its history.

Clare Keady csb writes, "Owning that we were indeed on 'holy ground', we reflected on the gifts we have been given and have received in our Province, and, in a moment charged with meaning, extinguished the Province Candle.

A new candle for the newly created Community was ceremoniously lit and we expressed our commitment to this new reality with a new hymn, *My Heart is Ready* (based on Psalm 92)."

At the conclusion of the Ritual, Louise Cleary csb, Congregational Leader and Ann Harrison csb, Member of the Community Leadership Team in NSW, presented Dorothy Costigan csb with gifts from the Leadership Teams in recognition of Dorothy's generous and fruitful years of leadership in many areas of mission and ministry.

High tea rounded off a memorable afternoon. Our warmest thanks go to all who planned and helped make this a day of much richness.

Clare Keady csb



Sheelah Mogan csb and Elizabeth Hayes csb were among the Brigidines who gathered at Randwick for the Ritual and High Tea



Louise Cleary (Brigidine Congregational Leader) with Kath Dwyer csb and Dorothy Costigan csb at Randwick after the Ritual

For all that has been - THANKS

For all that will be - YES!



Brigidines in New Zealand and New South Wales Celebrate Being One Community



The newly named “Fr. Julian Wagg Gathering Place” in the presbytery was the venue for a memorable event. On a beautiful day we greeted each other and caught up on recent events while we enjoyed time-honoured hospitality - morning tea, prepared for us by two of our St. Bride’s past pupils. Despite the difficulties involved in working from a distance Louise Cleary csb, Ann Harrison csb and Monica Landy csb had melded together creative ideas into a ritual rich in symbolism and meaning. Special attention was paid to the Maori tradition of calling all our ‘ancestors’ on to the sacred ground of our gathering space. This was no ordinary Ritual; it united countries and cultures; Celtic and Maori, past, present and future and it called us to a greater understanding of our concept of ONENESS. It transcended the here and now. We paid tribute to Bishop Delany, honoured our six Irish pioneer Brigidines and recalled the names of the one hundred and twelve Sisters, living and dead, who had founded and taught in our schools and colleges in the North Island. The ritual then focused on the future of what it means to become a single group in the New South Wales/New Zealand Community.

The focal point was beautiful and full of symbolism. Oak leaves taken from the one hundred and fifteen year-old tree planted in St. Bride’s grounds by our pioneer Irish women formed a base. On it rested a Celtic knot, symbol of unity, which significantly had been made in three pieces. These were joined together as one during the ritual. Three ribbons of green, white and gold, fanned out from the knot and proudly bore the names of thirty-eight Irish, twenty-three Australian and forty-eight New Zealand Sisters who had contributed to the growth and spread of the Gospel and the spirit of Daniel Delany and St. Brigid in New Zealand. While “The Song of

Joy” played softly in the background, Maura Phelan csb read aloud the names of the Irish Sisters; Ann Harrison csb recalled the Australian Sisters and finally Anne Phibbs csb placed before us the names of the New Zealand Sisters. Draped across it all, a scarf of many colours added movement to the static display. Six lighted green candles guarding the past, present and future and a tall candle painted with gum leaves, flowers, a fern leaf and frond, stood as silent sentinel, guarding and watch over what had been and was yet to come. We read aloud “A Prayer of Commitment” for the future, moving forward as one.

A colourful plaque with the Prayer of Commitment was then presented to the New Zealand Sisters, a gift from the New South Wales Community. The ceremony ended with the “Hymn to St. Brigid”.

This memorable event ended with a great celebratory meal at the Greytown Pub. Deo Gratias!

Monica Landy csb



Brigidines gathered in New Zealand for their ritual and celebrations on Foundation Day



A faithful friend of Brigidines in New Zealand

In recent months, Pope Francis announced that Archbishop John A. Dew, Wellington, New Zealand was among the new Cardinals.

Archbishop John is known by the Brigidines as a very kind and pastoral leader.

Needless to say, Brigidine Sisters in New Zealand are delighted by this appointment.



Celebrations in Victoria for St Brigid's Day

As we gathered for the celebration of St Brigid's Day at *The Elms* in Caulfield we had much to give thanks for as the Victorian Community. The dawning of the day was saddened with news of Jean Farrington's death earlier in the morning. How fitting that Jean be called home on such a significant day in the lives of our Brigidine community and we remembered with thanks Jean's contribution to our Community.

It is significant that St Brigid's Day has become our first gathering of the wider Community each year and gather we did from far and wide. The atmosphere was one of enjoyment in the company of others and a readiness to recognise the faith-filled journey of our nine Golden Jubilarians, Helen Toohey, Rose Duffy, Anne Boyd, Ursula Nihill, Monica Tuohey, Geraldine Hambling, Michelina Grixti, Michelle Nailon and Gail Ryan.

The Liturgy Group led us in prayer reflecting on the significance of the feast of St Brigid, the blessings we have received and in gratitude for the contribution to our mission by our Jubilarians in their various ministries over a combined 450 years. A walk down memory lane was enjoyed by all as we saw a power point prepared by the Jubilarians from the beginning of their respective journeys to the present. Without doubt their lives have been lived to the full and we continue to be blessed in their active engagement in such diverse works and ministries. As the afternoon continued we enjoyed an impromptu rendition of some of their creative musical endeavours from novitiate days.

No Community Gathering just happens and we are grateful to the sisters in the Hospitality and Liturgy Groups for their generosity, creativity and time in bringing together the Community in such a great celebration of our shared life and commitment. A great way to start another year!

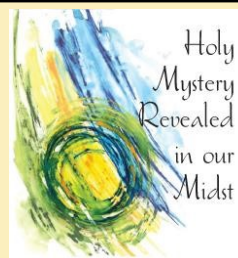
Margaret Fyfe csb



A prayer of blessing for the nine Golden Jubilarians is led by Margaret Hill csb, Community Leader during the St Brigid's Day Gathering in Victoria



***God of all blessings,
source of all life,
giver of all grace,
we thank you for the gift of life:
for each day of living
and for each moment of giving
that enrich our lives,
and for the love of our families,
friends and Sisters
without which there would be no life.***



*Holy
Mystery
Revealed
in our
Midst*



Brigidines and Associates Celebrate St Brigid's Day in San Antonio

When God creates, God's spirit hovers over the chaos - over the darkness. And the first thing God does is to create light. God brings light out of darkness, the very first thing. Have you ever been in the midst of chaos and darkness and wished someone would bring light to you? When you're in chaos you're in the very place where God brings light. Our world seems to be in a place right now that is dipped in darkness and confusion and needs light. And we can be sure that God's creativity will continue to bring forth that light.

Today we stand on that cross-border day. It's the day halfway between the equinox and the solstice. At the solstice we celebrated the coming of Christ and today at that cross-border day we celebrate many things. We celebrate Candlemas - the blessing of the candles with the deep hope that they will last until the coming of the light of Spring. (There are six more weeks till Spring in North America.) We also celebrate the Presentation of the Lord. The day when that light that was born in December finally now is being given in the form of a child to the public - the church. It's the light that's slowly glowing. Six months from now that next cross-border day in August is the Feast of the Transfiguration. So the year is balanced between that first showing forth of the light to the world and the fullness of the light in Jesus transfigured. In some cultures - as in Ireland and others, that is the time to burn the stubbles so that the burning would fertilize the fields for the planting that would come later. A time for burning what is left over from the old for the sake of the future growth.

We also celebrate Brigid, of course and in two ways - Brigid as Flame and Brigid as Light. Brigid is always associated with the bringing of light or with the coming of Spring and with bonfires. The world needs our light and we know that the light will come because that is what God does - God always brings light.

The second theme is about creation. In the Genesis reading, notice that God calls forth the light and then God calls forth the day and the night, then dry land and the seas. Then something changes. God says, "Let there be vegetation." Then the earth brought forth vegetation. It doesn't say, "Let there be daffodils and there were." It says, "Let the earth bring forth - and there were." Then it says, "Let the seas bring forth all the swimming things and the birds." God says, "Let the earth bring forth." God shares divine creativity with the creation itself.

Understanding how God works and how we understand the scientific world come together in Pope Francis' writing. Francis says that understanding creation leads to "joyful praise of the Creator". There's something about studying creation - just knowing about daffodils and wheat and where grapes come from and where water comes from and that every single thing is made from stardust. It is a spiritual tradition - "The heavens are telling the glory of God" and it brings forth joy. What we learn both from theology and science is that God continues to create. The first person of the Trinity - God the Father, creates and blesses continually.

But the creativity that's being called for now is not for the earth to bring forth new species or for the oceans to bring forth new fish. It is for us to turn chaos into light - to bring our own light into the darkness now. So the question becomes - Where is the chaos in you? Personally? In the world around you? In your ministry? Where's the chaos in you that you can bring God's light to? On this feast today we celebrate light coming into the world as a celebration associated with bonfires. What bonfires do you need? What bonfires that will burn the chaff and let old hurts go away - old grudges, old injuries, old fears? Or perhaps it's not that at all. Maybe it's the light that will just help you grow what you already are and give it that energy so that you can shine brightly as if you were the bonfire itself. It's the cross-border day - the day when we're waiting for the light to come. We anticipate the blessing of God through the light - and through the creation and thru each of you as you renew your vows and commitments. Our hearts know that God will bring forth the light through you - our minds know it too. And what I hope is that you know that you are the light that God calls forth.

**2015 St. Brigid's Day Reflection given by
Linda Gibler, OP in San Antonio, Texas**



Sr Linda and Virgil csb enjoying St. Brigid's Day



News about Kildare Ministries

The twelve month anniversary of the launch of Kildare Ministries will soon be upon us. Much has happened since March 2014 and the commitment, vitality and activity of the colleges and community works continue to inspire those at the governance level to do our best with the trust placed in us by the Brigidine and Presentation Congregations. The ministries are located across four states of Australia. In spite of this distance, there have been opportunities for Trustees and ministry leaders to hold their meetings in various ministry settings and experience the hospitality and energy at the local level. These visits provide ways to appreciate and understand the challenges and the joys of the individual ministries.

In October 2014, the newly renovated Brigidine Ministry Centre at Albert Park housing the offices for Kildare Ministries, along with Brigidine Asylum Seekers and ACRATH, provided a wonderful space for the Trustees to host the inaugural meeting of the Members' Council, Principals of Colleges, Managers of Community Works and the Chairs of Boards and Stewardship Councils. The day began in the graced and sacred space of the traditions and histories of Brigidine and Presentation Sisters and, in the telling of the journey, we heard something of each ministry and its significance in the development of Kildare Ministries.

The remainder of the day addressed questions that the participants posed before the meeting. Significant and thoughtful questions fell into the categories of vision, relationships, formation, governance and finance. At the end of the meeting each of the participants was commissioned by the Trustees with a plaque (pictured opposite) that captured a significant prayer from the launch earlier in the year.



The feedback from the day was very positive and it would seem that all enjoyed the opportunity to gather, to get to know each other and to share a meal but also to learn more about the work of Kildare Ministries and how each ministry contributes to this great enterprise.

Some feedback comments include:-

*A sense of togetherness was fortified today;
The table discussions helped to identify a
common identity through each ministry;
Essential to talk to each leader individually and
to learn about each ministry;
Looking forward to the future and how it might
unfold. It was enormously worthwhile to
connect with others;*

As we begin this second year of Kildare Ministries we look forward to furthering the connections and understandings across all levels of Kildare Ministries. In September this year, a pilgrimage to Ireland will take place, celebrating the 'rich harvest of memory, spirit and dream' of the Brigidine and Presentation traditions that underpin the spirituality, vision and mission of Kildare Ministries.



We ask you to keep all in Kildare Ministries in prayer as we strive to provide in all our endeavours "a story to enter, a language to speak, a group to which to belong, a way to pray, a work to undertake, a face of God to see." (Claude Marechal)

Maree Marsh csb
Co-Chair of Kildare Ministries

On 5-7 March 2015 the board members of UNANIMA International (UI) met in New York for the first meeting of the year. This was followed by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59 Beijing +20) with its events, large and small, from 8-20 March. In the meantime, Co-Ordinator Michele Morek OSU kept members informed of special points of note which reflect the core interests of UI as expressed in its International Mission Statement:

To work for peace and human dignity in response to the needs of our world by service to the members of the participating congregations to the United Nations and to other NGOs (non-governmental organisations) through collaboration and education regarding

- Women and children, particularly the economically poor
- Immigrants and refugees
- The welfare of the planet.

With these in mind, Brigidine women are proud of their association with other congregations in UI and celebrate the following information and its significance, as often we encounter despair, cruelty and destruction - and little compassion - in our global context.

In 2013 UI chose **Nely Rodriquez** as their **Woman of Courage**. Nely received the award because of her action and advocacy for farm workers in Florida who, when the tomato season was underway, were short-changed in every respect by their employers and the produce buyers. Nely belongs to **the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)**, and now this same Coalition has received the Presidential Medal for its extraordinary efforts in combatting modern day slavery at the White House Forum on Human Trafficking on 30 January 2015. The award was presented by US Secretary, John Kerry who said at the presentation: "This is an extraordinary accomplishment and reminds all of us not just of the work we have to do, but that dedicated individuals, like those here with us today from the Coalition, can strike out against injustice, break down barriers and make a world of difference". We congratulate CIW on this achievement and marvel at the foresight of "the inner circle" of UI who nominated, then chose Nely as the UI Woman of Courage 2013.

Another announcement deserving of our attention is NGO CSW/NY's choice of the **2015 Woman of Distinction Awardee, Ruchira Gupta, from India**. Ruchira is founder of *Apne Aap Women Worldwide*, an anti-sex trafficking organisation in India that empowers more than 20,000 low-caste girls and women and their family members affected by prostitution. She received the Clinton Global Citizen Award for giving a voice to the voiceless and for tenaciously standing by girls and women in brothels in India and Bihar. For over 25 years she has worked to end sex trafficking by emphasizing the link between trafficking and prostitution laws and lobbying policy makers to shift blame from victims to perpetrators. She often confronts the police and local authorities demanding justice and respect for the girls and women who are caught in prostitution because of poverty, lack of educational opportunities and "inheriting" the role of prostitute, a common path for girls.



Both Ruchira Gupta and CIW stand "as beacons of hope for the many more workers who are trapped in poverty and exploitation at the bottom" (John Kerry 2015). As the year begins we support UI and its directions with our awareness and interest, by bringing issues to our prayer and through living the UI attitudes and mandate in everyday encounters, wherever we live.

Kathleen Butler csb
(Board member of UNANIMA International)



Rekindling Light and Life for the World

Marist Youth Festival: During January, Brigid Arthur csb was a presenter at the Marist Youth Festival, held at the Australian Technology Park, Eveleigh, New South Wales. Brigid, pictured here with Erica Pegorer, Executive Officer of Kildare Ministries and a member of the Marist Education Council, shared her commitment to offering hospitality to asylum seekers and refugees as well as to young people engaged in learning.



Congratulations to our Brigidine Centenarian - Sr. Mary Singer (Sydney)

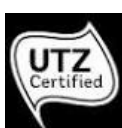
Brigidine Centenarian who was "Magic" in the Classroom

We congratulate Sr. Mary Singer csb on the occasion of her 100th birthday on 15th January. Mary's niece, Lyn, many of her Brigidine Sisters and the staff at St Joseph's Aged Care Facility, Kensington NSW were with Mary for Mass on the day and a special afternoon tea. Mary's many gifts included flowers and cards from her Brigidine Sisters, Christine Fletcher, the Manager of Brigidine House, Randwick, family, friends and ex-students. One of her ex-students wrote: "Mary, I have so much for which to thank you. You were by far the most dynamic teacher I had in all my school days. You had a magic in the classroom that brought English, French and History lessons alive! I feel I am an old lady now and I have four grandchildren. My hope for them is that they will have the unforgettable experience of having a teacher like you." Many other ex-students thanked Mary for her strength and gentleness, her inspiration and compassion, her vibrant attitude to life. We wish Mary every blessing!

Medal of the Order of Australia: On Australia Day, 26 January, Sr. Pat Nagle csb from Sydney was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her many years of outstanding service to Catholic Education and the Church in Australia. A Brigidine since 1947, Sr. Pat has been a long-time member of the Holy Family Parish Maroubra Parish Council. From 2000, she has also worked as a volunteer supervisor and teacher at St Aidan's Primary School, Maroubra after fifty years of full time teaching in Brigidine Primary Schools at Randwick, NSW, Subiaco, Dickson, Coonamble, Indooroopilly, and Cooma, Loving congratulations to Pat on her well-deserved honour.



Congratulations to Sr. Pat Nagle csb on her award



All Brigidines, associates and colleagues are invited to make this a "Slavery Free Easter": Over a third of the cocoa that makes the world's chocolate comes from the Ivory Coast, Africa. Cocoa harvesting in these areas is backbreaking and hazardous work. The shocking reality is that much of this work is done by children. Despite improvements in the chocolate industry, human trafficking remains an ongoing problem. Due to the hidden and illegal nature of human trafficking, gathering statistics on the scale of the problem is difficult. This Easter, demand 'slavery free chocolate' as one way of taking action to stop the use of human slavery in chocolate production. (Look for these labels of certification.)



Collaboration between Brigidines, Other Congregations and NGOs in Anti-trafficking Work in UK & Ireland

Rita Minehan csb has been a volunteer for over a decade, working as a counsellor with Ruhama - the NGO which works in Ireland with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Ruhama recently paid tribute to Rita as she re-locates to Kildare to devote her time to the work of Solas Bhríde Centre and Hermitages. *"We bid farewell to Rita,"* said Ruhama CEO, *"and we show our gratitude to her for the work she has done with us over the years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her unwavering dedication to the women with whom we work."*

Photo Right : Tara Brown, Volunteer Manager, Rita Minehan csb and Sarah Benson, CEO.



Kevin Hyland with Theresa Helm and Patricia Mulhall csb from TRAC UK

Theresa Helm and Patricia Mulhall csb from TRAC UK met with Kevin Hyland, the newly appointed Commissioner for the UK Modern Slavery Bill at a recent meeting chaired in London by Bishop Patrick Lynch.

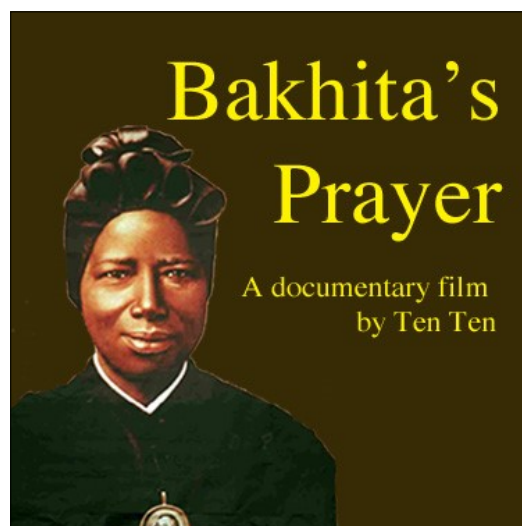
Kevin spoke of the outstanding work carried out by religious and faith-based groups in their anti-slavery and anti-trafficking. The new Modern Slavery Bill going through the UK parliament, for which Kevin is the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, is being hailed as some of the best legislation ever. Even the Vatican has given praise to it!

TRAC-UK www.traconline.org.uk which represents seventeen congregations of sisters in the UK, hopes this will be an effective Bill in eliminating the practice of slavery and human trafficking, not just in the UK but also around the world.

Ten Ten Theatre Company in London, premièred a specially commissioned film by Cardinal Nichols, on the life of *Saint Josephine Bakhita and Human Trafficking*, on her feast day Sunday 8 February, 2015. This was the first day marked by Pope Francis as a day of international prayer for victims of human trafficking. The twenty-six minute documentary film follows a group of nineteen year old sixth form students from Sacred Heart School in Hammersmith, West London, on a quest to understand the issue of Modern Slavery and what they can do to stop it.

Patricia Mulhall csb features in the film as she speaks to the students on Saint Bakhita and the issues related to human trafficking and how they can help to educate others so as to take action to stop its practice.

The full video was made available to individuals, congregations, parishes and schools throughout UK for Lent. A contribution was made from the Brigidine Common Project Fund to Ten Ten Theatre Company to assist in the production of this documentary.



A two minute preview of the film is available on www.tententheatre.co.uk/bakhitasprayer.

Patricia Mulhall csb



ACRATH - Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking of Humans

At the end of February, the forty-nine ACRATH members who gathered in Melbourne for their annual National Conference celebrated the work of ACRATH over the last ten years.

Three of the founding members of ACRATH, Margaret Ngrsj, Tania De Jong rgs and Louise Cleary csb, were present at the conference and shared their memories of the beginnings of ACRATH. They reflected on the small informal beginnings of ACRATH and the passion that energised them to work against human trafficking.

They recalled events such as preparing a statement for submission at the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2006, receiving government funding in 2008, successful advocacy initiatives with government and effective collaboration with government and non-government agencies. The contribution of another founding member of ACRATH, Pauline Coll sgs, was acknowledged. ACRATH is now active in most territories and states of Australia and has a significant number of international connections. The atmosphere at the conference indicated that today's members are fired with compassion for those who are trafficked and a determination to work against this modern day form of slavery. During the celebrations, an anniversary cake was cut by the founding members each of whom is still an active ACRATH member.



ACRATH members toasting the past, present and future work of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans.



Brigidine Sisters Louise Cleary, Maree Marsh and Claire Griffin are members of ACRATH. They attended the recent National Gathering at Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe.



"All of us are called [by God] to be free, all are called to be sons and daughters, and each, according to his or her own responsibilities, is called to combat modern forms of enslavement."

Pope Francis at his first Mass of 2015 at St. Peter's Basilica.



A Report about An Advent Retreat in Tullow

During Advent, last December, a number of Brigidines in Ireland and the United Kingdom held a weekend retreat at Teach Bhride, Tullow. The retreat focussed on mindfulness - a way of contemplation which has its roots in Buddhist meditation and echoes in eastern and western traditions including the Celtic tradition. It also has strong parallels within Christian contemplation.

We recalled that mindfulness is about learning to direct our attention to our experience as it unfolds, in a sustained way, on purpose, in the present moment rather than living in our heads, in the past or in the future. During the retreat weekend we were invited to be alert to the presence of the One who is always present though invisible.

Prayer in the Moment:

Martina Lehane, our retreat guide for the weekend, led us through a variety of practices to help us be attentive to the present moment and to the psychological patterns and blocks that prevent us from being present to ourselves. She drew on stories to integrate and discern how the themes in the stories might be a catalyst for our own story, thus leading us into a discernment of the habits and patterns that are part of our daily life.

We reflected on how we can see in our stories 'epiphany moments', moments of awareness which can be life-changing. We can come to know God in those moments. These are mystical moments that live on in us like an underground stream. Examples of such moments might be an experience in nature when beauty is sensed, a celebratory occasion, times of inspiration or consolation. These are such precious moments to be savoured and to discern what God is communicating through them. We rest in God, in the deep well of the Divine Presence. We were reminded that we don't need to be constantly 'going back with the bucket', for our 'centre of gravity' becomes more and more found in these moments. They are like clouds by day and fire by night, moments to be savoured and shared so that they may nourish us again. They can strengthen us in times of desolation as we remember and give thanks.

The time spent together at the Advent retreat invited us to live knowing each day is a new day that we have never lived before. Each breath is a new breath we have never breathed before. We need to reignite the "burning bush" moments in our lives and allow experiences of time alone in quiet - "cell moments," to teach us in these days of sensory overload.

The lyrics of Liam Lawton's song, "*There's A Place*" became a mantra for our remembering:

*"There's a time to remember,
a time to recall,
The trials and the triumphs,
the fears and the falls.
There's a time to be grateful
for moments so blessed,
the jewels of our memories
where love is our guest."*



A special word of thanks to all who made this Advent retreat such a time of blessing for those who attended. In particular, thanks to the planning committee and to Carmel McEvoy csb and her staff at Teach Bhride for their warm hospitality and practical support.

Angela Phelan csb

THANKS

To Patricia Mulhall and our
Community secretaries who have
collated and distributed the 2015
Brigidine Congregation Address
Book

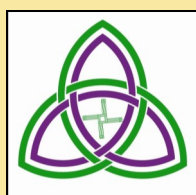


Sharing of Gifts in A Variety of Ways

Brigidine Common Project Fund

One aspect of our Congregation's commitment to displaced persons and to Planet Earth is the continuation of the Brigidine Common Project Fund. **This fund, to which each Brigidine Community contributes, offers support to small and major initiatives which focus on supporting displaced people or on Earth-centred projects.**

Applications for support for such projects are now being invited.



Funding Parameters

- * \$500 - \$7000 -Australia and New Zealand
- * \$300 - \$4500 -USA
- * €300 - €4500 -Ireland/UK

Application forms can be obtained from any member of the Congregational Leadership Team or by contacting the Brigidine Office, 52 Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park 3206



Brigid Links: Australia and Ireland through Music

Helen Woosnam (Sr. Eugenie McGrath's sister) and her husband, Clive visited Ireland last year with the Sydney Welsh Choir, of which Clive is president and Helen a key member. The choir sang with the Dublin Welsh Male Voice Choir in a concert in St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare. During the concert Clive presented a tapestry of St Brigid to Srs. Phil O'Shea and Mary and Rita Minehan for Solas Bhride. The very fine tapestry was created by Helen and Eugenie's eldest sister, Joan, who is 91 and is known for her extraordinary artistry with needle and thread. An atmosphere of Celtic heritage, music and the harmony of the two choirs made this a fitting occasion to present the tapestry to the Solas Bhride team.



Brigidine Place - Pahiatua

Brigidine Place was blessed and opened on Sunday 1st February 2015 (The feast of St Brigid) by Bishop Charles Drennan, in Thanks giving and memory of the Sisters of St. Brigid who served this Parish and School for over 100 years.

On St Brigid's Day Bishop Charles Drennan, of Palmerston North, blessed and officially opened *Brigidine Place* in Pahiatua. On the site where the Sisters once lived, pensioner housing is being built for parishioners of

St Brigid's Parish. Bishop Charles blessed the site and a plaque which commemorates the Brigidines who lived and worked in Pahiatua.

Anne Phibbs csb

About 900 years ago Hildegard of Bingen wrote:

"There is no creature that does not have a radiance, be it greenness or seed, blossom or beauty. It could not be creation without it. If God had not the power to thus empower, the light to thus enlighten, where, then, would all creation be?"





- Biodiversity is a vital asset in **global and local economics**. Biodiversity directly supports major economic activity and jobs in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, pharmaceuticals, paper and cosmetics, horticulture, construction and biotechnology.
- **Food production** depends on biodiversity and the services provided by eco-systems. The thousands of different crop varieties and animal breeds are founded in the rich genetic pool of species. Biodiversity is also the basis for soil fertility, pollination, pest control and all aspects important for producing the world's food.
- **Clean and secure supplies of water** also depend on biodiversity. Ecosystems function as natural water infrastructure, costing less than technological solutions. Forests protect water supplies, wetlands regulate floods, and healthy soils increase water and nutrients availability for crops.
- Biodiversity is the basis for **sustainable livelihoods**. Benefits of diversity are especially important to poor and vulnerable groups. To many, the goods and services derived from biodiversity directly constitute social safety nets and can mean the difference between misery and well-being.

- **Traditional knowledge** associated with biodiversity is also important and has value not only to those who depend on it for their daily lives but to modern industry and agriculture as well.
- Biodiversity is the cornerstone of the work, belief systems and basic survival of many **women**. Accounting for women's knowledge and role in biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use can ensure their full participation and thus contribute to sustainable development.
- Biodiversity plays a major role in **mitigating climate change** by contributing to long-term sequestration of carbon. Biodiversity also underpins ecosystem resilience and plays a crucial role as part of disaster risk reduction and peace-building strategies. Forests, wetlands and mangroves play a crucial role in reducing the impacts of extreme events such as droughts, floods and tsunamis.
- Even the environments of **our cities** are linked to and affected by biodiversity. Ecosystem-based solutions to water provision and to urban water run-off, climate control and other challenges can both protect biodiversity and be cost effective. Green areas in cities reduce the incidence of violence, enhance human health and wellbeing, and strengthen communities.
- Biodiversity is essential for **achieving sustainable development and global priorities** including the eradication of poverty.

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“Biological diversity is being lost at a rate unequalled since the appearance of modern ecosystems more than 40 million years ago. A quarter of all mammals are threatened with extinction and nearly 70% of the world’s fish stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted.” (Royal Society)

- **What action by us does this call for?**



St Joseph's College Echuca

On Monday 15 December, 2014 an Official Opening and Blessing of the new Oak Centre was held at St Joseph's College, Echuca.

This Centre includes an Allied Health Trade Skills Centre, a full sized basketball court, a music centre, open plan learning spaces and a covered outdoor learning area. One of the College's students was successful in naming the building from a competition that was conducted within the college. The Centre resides near the big oak tree within the front yard.

The Opening of the Centre was held in conjunction with the Students' Awards Evening, and commenced with the opportunity for guests to enjoy a tour of the new building. The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP, Member for Murray, conducted the official opening. The Oak Centre, Classrooms and Gymnasium Project was partly funded by the Australian Government under the Capital Grants Program and the St. Joseph's College Community. The Trade Skills Centre and Allied Health Project were provided by the Australian Government.

The pioneer Brigidine Sisters who arrived in Echuca from Ireland in 1886 could hardly have believed the ways in which the initial seeds of education they planted there would grow into the amazing ways in which young people are being educated in 2015. However, their legacy lives on. What rich legacy will we leave for future generations?



A GOOD FRIDAY PRAYER

O Holy One,
be with us in this dark hour
as we face our collective shadow.

We do not do the things that make for peace
but rather
the things that lead to violence.
We are slow to shed our ignorance and
quick to justify our foolishness.

Our planet joins our lament.
The lost souls of extinct animals, and those
soon to be gone forever,
cry out this day with the Christ:
"Why have you forsaken me?"



The poor, the left-behinds, the humble,
living in ghettos from Rio de Janeiro to
Calcutta to Port-au-Prince,
to forgotten places of our own nations,
cry this day, along with the Christ:
"Why have you forsaken me?"

May this story break our hearts,
our minds, and our spirits wide open,
that we might hear Spirit's cry:
"Why have you forsaken me?"

Help us to die with the Christ
that we might also be raised with Him,
and with all creation,
and discover our true nature,
one with your own breaking heart. Amen.

Bruce Sanguin, *If Darwin Prayed.*



Mary Barnes

1930 - 2014

Mary, who was the eldest of the four children of Cecil and Louise Barnes was born in the Victorian town of Rainbow where she attended her first years of schooling. She then boarded at St Brigid's, Horsham where she first met the Brigidine Sisters. After her initial teacher training and a few years teaching in Government schools around Victoria, Mary entered the Brigidine Novitiate in 1955 at the age of twenty-four. She was professed on 14 December 1957. As a Brigidine, Mary taught in a number of primary schools in the city and in rural Victoria, carrying out the duties of Principal while being a classroom teacher in the latter years. Then she moved into secondary, again teaching in the city and the country. After retiring from teaching, Mary spent ten years putting her accounting and business skills into practice at the Catholic Development Fund. While these are some of the things that Mary did, they do not tell who she was: a person full of life and energy, an intelligent person who could talk on any topic, a teacher who would take students off the beaten track to experience and learn that little bit more. Mary who took a great interest in the four Aboriginal girls from Santa Teresa Mission, who boarded at Beechworth in the 1970s. This interest continued after they returned to the Mission.

After her retirement, Mary stayed at Albert Park where she welcomed many visitors, especially Brigidines from overseas and interstate, and loved driving them around, for work or pleasure. She also supported with interest and kindness many refugees and asylum seekers as they passed through or lived at Albert Park. Mary was a born teacher and continued teaching long after she left the classroom. In her retirement, she used to help VCE students from non-English speaking backgrounds with their English assignments and tutored Indonesian Carmelite seminarians in their studies. This ministry led to her visiting some of these former students in Indonesia, a trip that was a highlight for Mary. Earlier trips had taken her to Europe and to New Zealand.

Mary loved beauty in nature and had learnt from her grandmother the names of flowers, shrubs and trees. We would often go for a drive, to investigate some exhibition or event that she had heard or read about. So we could end up in Walhalla, or at Tesselaar's Tulip Farm, or Ballarat for the Begonia Festival, Carlton for the Flower and Garden Show, the Gallery for some special exhibition and many places in between. Sometimes, it would be to visit a friend for a birthday or special occasion. For these Mary would always have chosen the perfect gift for the person and for the occasion. And always beautifully wrapped. Mary was not a particularly demonstrative sort of person, but she made good friends along the way and once a friend, always a friend. There was freshness about Mary. There was no pretence. You knew where you stood with her and you knew what she thought and how she felt about things.

In 2011, Mary moved to St Brigid's Community in Malvern. In 2012, as her health continued to fail and she needed more professional support, Mary moved to the Corpus Christi Aged Care Facility in Clayton, where she received great care. Even though she was not well, every now and then she would surprise you with a smile or a word of recognition. Even in her last week with us, Mary seemed to indicate that she was aware of our presence with her. Mary, we thank you all that you have done and been to each of us in your unique way. We rejoice that you continue live on in God, whom you loved and served so faithfully and are reunited with your parents, your brother, John, and all who have gone before you.

May the deep peace of Christ, the light of the world, enfold you forever.

Lia Commadeur csb



Anna Creagh csb

1937 - 2015

How did Anna become such a valiant woman as imaged in the Scriptures? She often talked about the deep faith of her Mum and Dad, Katie and Thomas Creagh in Ballybuggy Co. Laois. There she learned to welcome the will of God and to find God through nature. She often spoke about being the “filling in the sandwich” as the middle child of nine children. So Margaret, Teresa, Kathleen, Patrick and Sean we have you and your deceased sisters Moire, Lizzie and Breda to thank for helping to shape Anna into a deeply human and single minded woman, a negotiator, a fun loving rogue, a trickster, a dreamer, an adventurer and a hard worker. Anna was also renowned for being able to light up a room with her presence and start a party at the drop of a hat!

The driving passion in Anna’s life was her trust in God, and her belief in the innate goodness of each person. With this passion Anna chose to live out her baptismal call as a Brigidine Sister. Throughout the ups and downs of life Anna’s **anchor** was God as she set about trying to make heaven on earth. She had a passion for the possible as she rolled up her sleeves, got stuck in and planned, organized, cajoled, encouraged and empowered others to do things. She was a true leader always doing herself out of a job. “No” wasn’t a word in Anna’s vocabulary. We all found ourselves included in many of her projects to make life a little better, a little more bearable and meaningful. This spirit of tenacity, of spotting a need and answering that need summed up Anna’s life of service. Her touch remains in a number of groups and projects in the Meadowbrook community. Her compassion and outreach to people lives on. Her helping to create a quiet prayer space for young people in the community school to come home to themselves and God is another aspect of her rich legacy.

Throughout her life Anna was an educator with a great capacity to see and believe in the potential of each child or adult. Whether teaching in Tullow, Killinarden, Wisconsin, San Antonio or Tach Asis in Kenya, Anna had a breadth of vision that transformed lives. She never confined herself to academics or the classroom as she focused on the flourishing of the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Anna’s “can do” approach to life had her coaching camogie teams, producing musicals, spearheading environmental and justice action groups, parenting and bereavement groups, setting up homework clubs for travelers, and developing community projects in building classrooms and clinics in Kenya. She had a passion for encouraging young parents to pass on their faith to their children through the Communion and Confirmation programs. We, as Brigidines also tapped into Anna’s many gifts through her work as a novice mistress and later as Provincial Leader. Fruits of her vision, compassion, determination and innovative leadership continue to live on today. Anna worked tirelessly behind the scenes and with others to help bring to birth the Solas Bhride project at Kildare. She was a woman of courage who worked dauntlessly for what she believed in. She could spot what needed to be done and get it done and all the while doing even the most mundane things became fun and important because of how she valued the person doing the work more than the work itself. She wiggled her way into people’s hearts and lives as a trusted friend and confidante becoming a sister to all in the true sense. Anna was a woman of resilience, compassion, strength and enthusiasm. She was a truly beautiful and faith filled woman; a woman who worked hard and enjoyed life to the full. As a woman rooted in God, her family and the Brigidine way of life she became the sister that we, the Church and the world needed. She remained faithful to the movement inwards to find her God and in the movement outwards bringing God to others by being herself and by passionately witnessing to the power of God in and through her humanity. May we also live into the wisdom of our humanity by allowing “God be God in us!” As we do this let’s not forget the fun-loving woman renowned for coffee ‘*a la Anna*’ with a little drop of something to warm our hearts and tickle our imaginations! Anna made living “happily ever after” credible. Anna, may God bless and keep you until we meet again in the heart of God.

Ar dheis De go raibh a n-anam dilis.

Theresa Kilmurray csb



Jean Farrington csb

1925 - 2015

Jean was born and grew up in England, the first daughter to Horace and Daisy Easterbrook. It was while attending Ballet Rambert, the major ballet school in London that she met her husband, Michael with whom she had a son, Tim and two daughters, Alison and Sarah. She and Michael moved to Australia with three young children. Life was far from easy as they began to establish themselves in their new country. After Michael's sudden death, Jean went on to provide for and raise her children as a sole parent. Over time, Jean became drawn to the Catholic faith and came to know Brigidine Sisters Margaret Underwood and Mary Quirk in the Bonbeach Community at that time. She eventually converted to Catholicism and decided to build on her scriptural background by studying for a Bachelor of Theology. She worked at the local Opportunity Shop, helped provide home care for those who were housebound, became a catechist and regularly took Communion to sick parishioners in Chelsea parish. She also took an interest in archaeology and travelled to the Middle East to visit an actual dig.

We would all understand the enormous decision Jean took as she left home, with the blessing of her children, and joined the Brigidine Community. While her initiation and formation was shaped to honour her maturity, life experiences and prior studies, it was still a massive change for Jean as she came to live in communities with people who had already been Brigidine for many years and where she was no longer organising her own life. Jean deserves great praise for the ways in which she adapted and took on the Brigidine way of life while maintaining connections with her children, their partners and her grandchildren.

Jean was a quiet, contemplative woman whose spirituality was based on her love of the Scriptures. Over the years, Jean also developed a deep love of the Eucharist. She was prayerful and reflective and had a deep love of nature. After she had been for a walk she would speak of the beautiful plants or blossoms she had seen or the bird songs she had heard. Jean especially loved the sea and walking along the beach, which she said originated from her home close to the sea in England.

During her years as a Brigidine, Jean was involved in the ministry of pastoral care of the sick. She spent time with the Missionary Sisters of Charity, with Calvary Health Care at the Bethlehem Hospice, at the Ryder Cheshire Homes and then for the past twelve years as part of the Pastoral Care Team at Monash Medical Centre, Clayton. Jean drew strength and life from each one with whom she sat and listened, responding to each according to their needs. She often said that her own journey of living with cancer gave her insight into others and gave her inspiration to keep going.

The Brigidine motto of 'Strength and Gentleness' were strong characteristics of Jean's—she was truly a strong and gentle woman throughout her whole life.

I conclude with Jean's own words - *"My life experience has been an incredible journey with many twists and turns. As I look back over the years, I do so with gratitude for the gift of my life and the wonder of it all. Thank you to you all for being part of my life, for supporting and loving me throughout my journey and especially for travelling this final path to the God who has loved me so much."*

Angela Ryan csb



Maura Phelan csb

1921 - 2015

Having heard the proclamation of God's word let us now reflect on its meaning in the life of Sr Maura Bridget Phelan, and as a consequence let us ponder on its influence in the pilgrimage of our own lives. The church uses the word celebration so often and in so many ways and situations. We celebrate this Rite of Christian Funeral today for Maura. Yet in human terms we would question the word celebration, especially when we gather in sorrow as we prepare to farewell her by offering the most eloquent testimony for a believer, 'the celebration of the Eucharist'.

And so this day is a day of celebration and rejoicing for we celebrate 94 years of a rich and fulfilled life. Selfishly we would have loved to have Maura still with us, but perhaps one of her sayings to us today could have been; "no sense of worrying about what you cannot have." Maura, we know, was gifted with faith, blessed with grace, with a wit and wisdom from her Irish ancestry that enabled her the privilege to live not only a long life but a FULL life.

From our knowledge and lived life we know that there are three deep human experiences that are to be treasured in life - to be chosen in love; to be given responsibility; to be trusted. All three, I believe, depend on faith. Today we gather to farewell a woman of faith who was chosen in love by God – firstly in Baptism and through the other sacraments of initiation, then in responding to the gift of the call to religious life. She was a trusted servant of God who followed this path on her call to holiness as a teacher and a living witness to faith in terms of the charism of the Sisters of the Brigidine Congregation. Those who have known her as a confrere, a teacher, and a friend, parishioner, know of the challenge that must have been hers from the Church she pledged her loyalty to those many years ago, to the changed church that she had to live in post the Second Vatican Council. One thread linking her to that change was faithfulness. - not blind loyalty but faithfulness.

Maura experienced leaving her family and her country for a distant land; leaving home and its people, her family. Everything about that new home, those early days of teaching, with its poverty of spirit, its humbling call to another appointment, the sword of discernment and even the anguish of loss to finding again, anew. She was forged, tempered, tested and refined through her covenant call.

Almighty God trusted her with a joyous faith, in all seasons, the trust to leave like Abraham her home and land of birth for another work in God's kingdom. She was entrusted with opening minds and hearts to the knowledge and love of God, that awe and wonderment that is especially given to us when we were children. Her example of faithfulness is surely something that we can identify with and desire to imitate. Maura, may you know the joy that comes at dawn to the faithful sentinel on finishing a round of duty.

From the homily given by Fr Julian Wagg at Maura's funeral.