

WEAVINGS

IRELAND // ENGLAND // WALES // UNITED STATES // AUSTRALIA // NEW ZEALAND // KENYA

Ffarwel a diolch*

Farewell and thanks to the Sisters of St Brigid in Denbigh North Wales

The death of Sr Elizabeth (Liz) Kelly in December 2018 marked the conclusion of the fruitful presence of the Brigidine sisters in Wales.

The story began in 1939 when, in response to a request from the Bishop of Menevia to set up a school in Denbigh, a town of some 7,000 in habitants, pioneer sisters Mother Dominic O'Donnell, Superior, Mother Attracta Clowry, Mother Dolores Griffin, Mother Rosario O'Malley and Sr Finian Morrissey, set out from Ireland. The nuns began their work in Denbigh with visitation of homes and instruction of small groups in the Church and the Convent and soon constructed a small building for a school commencing with an enrolment of two girls and a boy. When war broke

out that year 1,000 children were evacuated to Denbigh and pupils numbers increased even though a minority were Catholic.

Despite years of difficulty during which they were subject to discrimination both as Catholics and 'foreigners', other sisters joined the community. Gradually larger premises were required for the school. In 1945 they moved to Plas Yn Green where a boarding school was also opened. In the Irish tradition of encouraging the dramatic arts, public 'pantomimes' were performed by the students and the school grew in reputation. At one time there were thirteen sisters in the Community.

In 1953 Sr Louis took over the leadership of the primary school

in nearby St Asaph and was soon joined by Srs Evangelist and Joseph where they ministered until 1985. The sisters also engaged in what was known as a Travelling Mission providing catechetical instruction and sacramental preparation of children in isolated areas. Their small Bedford Van was known far and wide. Over the years sisters also worked for some time in other parish schools.

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Photo above of Community c 1960's:

Back: Srs Martina Dunne, Bernadine Finn, Elizabeth Kelly, Scholastica Costigan, Beatrice Lakes, Fidelis Lalor

Front: Srs Dolores Griffin, Fidelma O'Brien, Chanel Gough (Mother General), Attracta Clowry, Collette Mooney

*farewell and thank you (in Welsh)

Plenary Council 2020

The Australian Catholic Church is currently preparing for a Plenary Council in 2020. It is the highest formal gathering of all local churches in a country and parishes and other groups have been encouraged to make submissions around the question ***What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?***

Introduction to our Response

The following response from the Victorian Brigidine Sisters emerged after discussion and reflection over two days.

As Brigidine Sisters we have been established in Victoria since 1886 and over the ensuing years we have:

- engaged in primary, secondary, tertiary and theological education including pastoral and parish ministry
- developed Public Juridic Person for the management of our secondary schools and Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project
- continued to work actively for justice through Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, ACRATH and EarthSpirit

Following the conviction of Cardinal Pell (*February 2019*) the issues we raise in this paper are critical for the future of our Church. The community is angry, disillusioned, hurt, and not prepared to be part of a structure led by clericalism where women and lay people are excluded.

We as a Church, have lost credibility and the gospel has no meaning, if the lives of those who preach be they in power or in any position, do not serve the people with dignity, the credibility will never be regained.

We together as the baptised, have an enormous challenge ahead but we do not need to wait for the permission of the institutional Church to act.

We have taken the question: ***What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?*** and responded within the context of our rich Catholic heritage and our ongoing ministry as members of the Catholic Church.

We are grateful for the wisdom of conducting a Plenary Council at this time in the Church's history and we have welcomed the opportunity to respond.

We wish you well in the future steps of this process and we look forward to its ongoing process and the implementation of its findings.

Response From Victorian Brigidine Sisters – 4 March 2019

A Church that Witnesses to Jesus

To truly witness to Jesus and his teaching, the Church structure needs to change: *“See and do as Jesus did”*.

The time has come for a new culture of humility, not power and prestige; of accountability and transparency. The Church must be open to the real needs of people and respond with justice, love and respect.

The vision of Pope Francis is a gift to the Church at this time and points to the way of being “Church” in the footsteps of Jesus. Pope Francis exemplifies this in his own life and in his writings. Church leaders such as Bishop Vincent Long also provide directions for change and reasons to hope. *“It is for the sake of a healthier Church that all the baptised participate in its functioning and bring their gifts to bear on its growth”*

(Bishop Vincent Long's address to Concerned Catholics of Canberra and Goulburn 11th September 2018).

This will mean new structures for shared responsibility in governance.

The Church must truly be a synodal Church that listens and learns; that is accountable and transparent. It must be inclusive of all people: in the diverse ways in which we live our values, keep our promises and respond to the needs of our society. In Church we are to be a voice for one another.

A Church that is Inclusive and Welcomes All

Such a Church is a place and an experience where all feel welcomed and at home. It is a place where they feel safe and valued. They know that they are part of

“It is for the sake of a healthier Church that all the baptised participate in its functioning and bring their gifts to bear on its growth”

Bishop Vincent Long



a community and have something to give to it and receive from it. Its members include the divorced and remarried; those who are LGBTIQ; those “on the edge” of society and young people. Such a Church is inclusive in its structures, appointments and language. In this as a people of God we work together in goodwill.

A Church that is Alive in the World

“The Church will be authentic, only if it is active about the mess and crises of the world”. The Church must be active and vocal on both local and global issues e.g. the results of climate change. It must revisit the Encyclicals as these carry the vision of Jesus in today’s world e.g. *Rerum Novarum* 1891; *Gaudium et Spes* 1965; *Laudato ‘Si* 2015.

The Church must be an outward, visible, inclusive Church, involved in the real lives of real people e.g. the homeless; those with gender related issues; those on the margins; those struggling to live the reality of family life.

A Church that forms its Clerical and Lay Leaders to Lead in the Way of Jesus

Servant leadership, “to be gracious ‘foot-washers’” is the model of leadership given to us by Pope Francis, however current seminary formation is not shaping servant leaders. Rather, it fosters clericalism, elitism and a power imbalance that gives rise to separation and division: a “them and us” mentality. Consideration is not always given to all the baptised, each of whom has their own particular role in the Church. Formation should focus on pastoral service and social justice. To be meaningful today seminary formation should be non-monastic but deeply imbedded in the lives of people now. It is also essential that future leaders grow in understanding of Australian culture with its own particular religious history.

The priesthood and diaconate need to be inclusive of married men and of women. Greater numbers of laywomen and men must also be involved in leading the formation process. Formation is essential for lay as well as clerical leaders, so that they, too, can gain greater confidence and skills. Such formation should be on-going, lifelong and compulsory.

A Church where Women are included in Leadership

Women must have a far greater role of leadership in the Church. One comment from our group discussion stated clearly: *“Unless women are engaged in real decision-making, the Church will be dead in another generation”.*

A Church whose Liturgy, Rituals and Sacramental Life bring Meaning, Hope

For many people, the present liturgical worship is outdated, irrelevant and without meaning. There is a need to re-tell the sacramental story in words and actions that give meaning, hope and joy. In this context, the use of Third Rite of Reconciliation should be encouraged, as it is relevant, meaningful and inclusive.

Likewise, we endorse that lay ministers be empowered to offer the Sacrament of Anointing when requested.

Revision of the liturgy is required so that families feel included. All should feel welcome without judgment. The liturgy must be inclusive in its language, rituals and sacramental practices. Using the language of the people in its local context, will help them to deepen their experience of scripture and theological reflection. The Eucharistic story should be retold in ways that give meaning to people today. The language is too wordy and the celebration is too long; the language should be simpler and inclusive.

Rose Duffy csb

What's Happening In New Zealand?

15th March 2019 was the day New Zealand lost its innocence. It began as a day of hope with thousands of students rallying for action against climate change. It turned into a massacre of innocent Muslims who were at prayer. The 51st victim died of his wounds a few days ago and the country is still in mourning. The outpouring of love and compassion for our Muslim people continues so the gunman (who is never named) failed because his hate generated so much love. We are immensely proud of our Prime Minister for her dignity, leadership and compassion and proud, too, of the people of New Zealand. The Sisters here greatly appreciate the e-mails, phone-calls and other messages we received from all parts of the Congregation. Thank you for your love and concern.

Overwhelming kindness

THE Opotiki community has rallied around Verna McDonnell since learning of the vandalism of her mobility scooter.

Following the delivery of her new wheels on Friday, she thanks all those who have contributed whether financially or through kind words ...

LAST Friday, I was quietly given a brand-new scooter - a bright, shiny yellow one. How can I thank the people of Opotiki for such a gift.

Your reaction to the vandalism was totally unexpected and I am overwhelmed by your kindness, your words of sympathy and for the replacement of things that were stolen.

I am told that with the yellow I could go into New World and get lost in the banana section. I'll remember that next time I have a craving for bananas.

For myself, I could get lost in a field of daisies - with a good book.

I notice that the baskets in front and back of the scooter are very big and with a cushion in each I am sure they would be very comfortable. So if anyone is looking for transport ... We mightn't get very far, but I'm sure we'd



Sr Clothilde, who lives in Opotiki, had her mobility-scooter vandalised. The people of Opotiki were incensed and money poured into the local dealer who presented Clothilde with a brand-new, yellow machine which was fully paid for. Clothilde, known as Verna in her hometown, sent a letter of thanks to the paper which became a front-page article.

Sr Cyprian was a subject of a powerful drama put on by the youth of Challenge 2000 on ANZAC Day. The drama was the true story of Tom Mahoney, of Johnsonville, who served on the Western Front and hoped his sons would never go to war. However both sons fought in Italy where Larry was killed, aged 21, and his brother lost an eye in the same action. Merle Wilson (Sr Cyprian) and Larry were in the same class at St Brigid's School in Johnsonville and the families were friends. The description of Sr Cyprian in the newspaper is: "She too has served her community as a teacher, pastoral worker and companion to many in need.... Sr Cyprian was thanked for her service by the young people who also made a commitment to do their bit to be peacemakers and to serve others."



At left, Ella Gaudie of Challenge 2000 who played the young Merle Wilson, now Sister Cyprian and a Brigidine Sister still living in Johnsonville

Anne is grateful to Kathleen Butler who made the trip to New Zealand to appraise archival materials held here. Kathleen, who chairs the Archives Task Force, worked solidly organising papers into appropriate archival groups - but we did take time out to visit the Fisherman's Table.

Anne Phibbs csb



Brigidine book launch

The Brigidine Sisters in Ireland, America, Australia and New Zealand, 1807-1922 by Ann Power was published in November 2018 by Four Courts Press and launched at Carlow College the site of the Brigidine Congregational Archives in Ireland.

This book places the story of the Brigidines in the socio-economic context of the years in which the Congregation was founded and grew and it offers detailed pen pictures of many of the sisters.

In reviewing the book, Professor Tom O'Donoghue from the Graduate school of Education at the University of Western Sydney, reflects on histories of Religious Institutes and writes that ***'this particular volume by Ann Power . . . is by far the best of its type I have read over the last decade.'***

Whilst critiquing the Brigidines' intention to educate both rich and poor, Professor O'Donoghue also asserts that:

The account throughout of the growth and spread of the order is excellent. It is lengthy but never boring. It is written in a most engaging style, with no ambiguities



Brigidine Convent, Denbigh.

Continued from cover page...

In 1981 Sr Liz Kelly succeeded Sr Dolores as headteacher. In 1999, to ensure its future, Brigidine Convent school changed from being an Independent school to a government Grant Maintained School and Liz remained as headteacher until 2004. The school was named St. Brigid's.

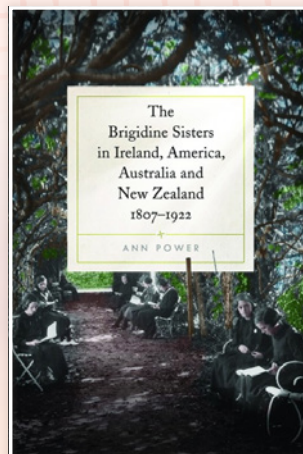
In 1990, the sisters: Dolores, Rosario, Louis, Kathleen, Margaret Joseph and Elizabeth Kelly moved out of the school premises to a new convent at Bron Castell and a new mission of parish ministry and ecumenical outreach flourished. Sr. Bernadette Foley held the post of Executive Director of Catholic Schools in the diocese of Menevia for 15 years and Sr Elizabeth Cleary

presenting themselves at any stage. It is all based on an outstanding set of primary sources obtained from a very large number of archives.

He concludes his review expressing the opinion that:

more works like that of Power are badly needed in order to facilitate engagement in a more secular approach to the history of Catholic religious teaching orders and to go beyond accepting notions that their numbers increased because so many women felt 'called by God'. In particular, such works could help us to explore why such 'calling was not widespread prior to the advent of the convent movement dominated by active' orders.

Copies of the book are available online and there is a copy available in each area of the Congregation.



Denbigh pioneers

became a valued spiritual director and member of St. Bueno's Jesuit Retreat Centre. In 2002, in the words of Sr. Margaret Walsh "the Denbigh parish was waking up to a new way of life and the work of the spirit could be seen actively influencing the lives and doings of church members'. So Srs. Louis and Kathleen felt free to retire to their homeland and were fondly farewelled. Sr. Elizabeth Cleary continued her work as a spiritual director from Bron Castell until her return to Ireland in 2008.

Until her death last year Sr Liz Kelly kept alive the Brigidine flame in Denbigh through her work as chaplain and counsellor, but we can be sure that innumerable acorns have taken root from this branch of the oak and the spirit of Brigid will flourish in the hearts of many for years to come.



Stain glass window at St Brigid's School

Spirit of St Brigid

Emerald is a rural town 300 kms west of the Queensland coast.

There is extensive coal mining in the area as well as crops of cotton and wheat. When Michael Roach, the first Principal of the new St Brigid's Primary School contacted the Brigidines to find someone who could help him instil the spirit of Brigid in this new school. Sr Janette Marsh was asked to do this and she has done so with great success. "Michael has taken on the spirit of Brigid with great understanding and appreciation. His enthusiasm is infectious with staff, pupils & parents", said Janette.

The co-ed school, opened in 2014, has grown from 67 to 280 students, spanning Prep. to Year 6 with a Kindergarten on site. The school buildings have been designed in the shape of Brigid's Cross with the library at the centre. and a specially designed Brigid's Cross erected at the entrance. There is a Brigid's cross above each doorway. The school, spread over large grounds, was designed to have a rural feel.



Janette Marsh csb presenting an award

"It's about loving your surroundings as much as people", says the Principal.

Janette attended the Blessing & Opening of the school and also the 3 extensions since. She reflects: "I was very impressed by the School song, sung with great voice, which depicts the charism of Brigid, and illustrates so well how the school has adopted all that she envisioned". At the Annual Prize Giving Janette presents a trophy to the student, of whatever age, who most depicts the spirit of Brigid.

One 10 year old boy visited Ireland for a sports event and pleaded with

his parents to take him to Kildare to see where Brigid lived. He brought back a Brigid's Cross which takes pride of place in the library.

The website describes the school's motto, "Gentleness and Strength" as a variation of the Brigidine Sisters' motto. It goes on to read "This spirit encourages our whole school community to act with gentleness but with strength in what we know to be right".

It would be no exaggeration to say that Brigid's spirit permeates school life and is truly alive in the staff & students of St Brigid's, Emerald, Qld.

Anita Murray csb and Janette Marsh csb



Members of the St Brigid School and parish community in Emerald

An Update from the Pacific Calling Partnerships

Even though the Brigidine Congregational Project money is assisting in the training of young Kiribati people to advocate for their country many other Pacific Islands are experiencing the life threatening impacts of climate change.

Recently PCP Patron, Cardinal Ribat from PNG said: It really is the biggest issue for us. We cannot keep quiet about it. We have to come out with it," he said, noting that the "king tides, king waves" and rough winds "belting" the island nation are already forcing many people from their homes.

Papua New Guinea is also among the nations considered most at risk for the effects of climate change. For several years the country has been affected by rising sea levels and changes in temperature, rainfall patterns and the frequency of tropical storms. According to the Australian Government's 2011 Pacific Climate Change Science Program report, temperatures in the capital city of Port Moresby have increased since at a rate of 0.11 degrees Celsius per decade since 1950, causing sea levels to rise at a rate of 7mm per year since 1993. Coconut farms – the country's primary agricultural product – have so far been most heavily affected. Cardinal Ribat concludes For those who doubt the effects of climate change or think that it's a myth, his response would be to "come and see" if they "really want to be sure about what is happening."

As many Brigidines have spent many significant years in PNG, Cardinal Ribat's words might motivate us to do all we can to limit our impact on increasing carbon levels and to live within the limits of Earth's life giving rhythms.

A recently released film simply titled 2040, an innovative feature documentary, directed and produced by Australian Damon Gameau is well worth seeing in this context. Gameau embarks on a journey to explore what the future could look like by the year 2040 if we simply embraced the best solutions already available to us to improve our planet and shifted them rapidly into the mainstream. Structured as a visual letter to his 4-year-old daughter, Damon blends traditional documentary with dramatized sequences and high-end visual effects to create a vision of how these solutions could regenerate the world for future generations.

"[Climate change] really is the biggest issue for us. We cannot keep quiet about it. We have to come out with it."

Cardinal Ribat, PNG



Top and middle: St Brigid's School building in Emerald featuring the St Brigid's Cross.

Above: The Spirit of St Brigid award recipient for 2019.

Justice in action through Advocacy



2. St. Luke's Parish has been involved in the **Habit for Humanity** program for many years. This year's Young Adult Group with Imelda as Director, participated in the Parish's Habit for Humanity Build. This is the 18th home built with parish participation from St. Luke's.

4. Interfaith Welcome Coalition

Backpacks for refugees and asylum seekers is a program supported by many parishes to welcome refugees as they move to other areas of the country. It is part of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition's effort which Agnes and Carol Maloney-Reyes (associate) assist each week. Here a group of young adults assist in this effort.



Mary Teresa Cullen csb



1. The Socially Responsible Investment Coalition (SRIC) **Gathering** was supported by the US Area Brigidines again this year. We were glad Cathy could join us as well as some collaborators. We hosted a distinguished group of panel speakers on the program, "Housing Justice; a Dream or Reality". SRIC, formed in San Antonio, in 1982 addresses the human rights issues we face in creating peace and justice through corporate responsibility.



3. Darkness to Light

Agnes, Daniela (daughter of Dr. Giselda who was a Caritas Volunteer in Xalapa, Mexico), Teresa, Mary T., Keith (representing the San Antonio Gaelic Athletic Association) took part in the Darkness to Light 5k walk in aid of Solace to support suicide prevention efforts.

5. Corazon Ministries

This year this group is celebrating 20 years of serving the homeless and marginalized in San Antonio at Travis Park United Methodist Church downtown. Teresa and Mary T. attended their 3rd Annual (Love and Justice in Action Dinner).

