



# BRIGIDINE

## FOCUS

IRELAND, ENGLAND, WALES, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND  
UNITED STATES, KENYA, CHINA.

CONGREGATIONAL NEWSLETTER  
DECEMBER 2010

Advent - a time of great expectation and new beginnings. When we reflect on the Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, we begin to realise how intensely they were on the lookout for a messiah, for a new beginning in their lives. This came from an acute awareness of the appalling situation in which they lived. They began to anticipate the 'coming of God.' For us, this Advent time gives us the chance to look back at the story of God's people, to reflect on the roots of our faith and the unfolding history of salvation. We too can anticipate the joyful experience of the birth of Jesus and pray for a new birth within ourselves and a new beginning for our world.

As we pen this issue of Focus, New Zealand is coming to terms with the death of the miners at the Pike River, Ireland is facing challenging economic times, and there is an escalation of tension between North and South Korea. There is no need to restate the myriad of threats, disasters, misfortunes and calamities that are hanging over our world. All we have to do is tune into our news bulletins. However much we are affected by constant bad news, we must hold firm to the belief that we are people of the 'Good News.' This is the message that is reiterated in the four weeks of Advent - our great expectation and hope is the birth of 'Emmanuel,' 'God-with-us.'

The 'call of Isaiah' to,

*"Come, let us go to the mountain of God, let us walk in God's ways, let us come together,  
let us hammer out our swords into ploughshares, let us finish with wars..."*

is a call to solidarity, to compassion, to step out of the darkness so that the light of God's love may shine on and through us. It's also a call to be re-awakened to God's light, as Paul says, *"The time has come, the night is almost over, it will be daylight soon. Let us be awake, so that the light is not going to find us asleep..."*

Jesus himself calls on us to "Be prepared" because great things are going to happen! All of which gives us hope, for it is good news of new life, new beginnings. We hope and pray for this new life to come to our fractured world, for surely 'something new' will arise from the ashes of the world's social and economic woes. Those who were attracted to John the Baptist - preparing the way of the Messiah - were people of hope, people who understood their need of God. They were people who found no satisfaction in a world where corruption was endemic and injustices were practised at every level. Just as their world was 'occupied' by these and other forces of materialism, hypocrisy and unbelief, we can say, so is ours.

There are many signs of hope too. From the jubilation of the Chilean miners rescued after 69 days, and the British couple Rachel and Paul Chandler, released after 338 held in captivity by Somali pirates, to a smiling Aung San Suu Kyi, released after seven years of detention, wearing a traditional jacket and a flower in her hair, being greeted by thousands who chanted, cheered and sang their national anthem. When interviewed on CNN, she said the biggest cry in Burma is 'for change!' That same cry for change is not confined to Burma! It is the hope and the desire of many.

During the last week of Advent, we hear more of Mary - our symbol of hope. When we begin to experience the 'God-with-us' and the 'Word made flesh' in us, we will be able to rejoice with her, *"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour."*

As each of us prepares for the 'coming of God' this Christmas, may we join together in that one great prayer for the world: *"Father, may your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."*

With our love and prayers this Advent as we live as people of hope,

*Maureen Patricia Claire*

## Congregational Forum Preparation: Live with Hope...for nothing is impossible with God



In preparation for our Congregational Forum 2011 we are being invited to live with hope even amidst a world that is being torn apart with a sense of despair and hopelessness. We are reminded that 'a key task of hope for us is to discover how much life we can offer with whatever of it we have left.' (p5) This is in contrast to the cry of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4 when he asked the Lord to 'take away my life, I've got to die sometime and it might as well be now'. Poor Elijah felt he couldn't go another inch. However, the Lord provided food for him so that he could get up and face the journey ahead – a journey of forty days and forty nights.

I have spent just forty years as a professed Brigidine Sister. During those years there have been many times when I felt a little like Elijah. There were times when I wondered what I was at and indeed what the Lord was at! Each time I took my sustenance from the prayer and support about me and the still centre of my being where calm reigned. With this in mind I could revive my Hope and travel on. Hope for me is being open to the possibility that things will be better – that even in the darkest moments there is light and hope and growth. When I contemplate on the barrenness of winter I see within the soil all the sleeping possibilities and know that in that darkness they are building up their resources in order to spring into life and beauty in the spring. When we are experiencing darkness it is a call to enter into the stillness and wait in hope. Waiting is never easy and yet if we can stay with the struggle 'hope will spring eternal'. Elijah too had to wait for his God whom he could only find in the stillness. Another source of hope for me has been our own Brigidine story – a story of struggle and pain but never despair. Those who came before us never gave up – they kept on keeping on. Hope and faithfulness are inextricably linked.

When we hope, there is an expectancy within us, the 'not yet' keeps us moving forward. When Mary said 'Yes' to the angel she had no idea what was on the agenda. All of us who are living out our commitments have been giving that daily 'Yes' to the Lord and to all that has been asked from us. Throughout life our hopes may not have come to fruition in the way we planned and yet we never lost Hope. With St. Paul we all have to 'be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to give an account of the hope you have within you' (1 Peter 3:15) and now more than ever we need to be able to move forward in hope.



**Paula Conway Ireland UK Province**

### Nurturing Hope

Hope, the dictionary says is, the 'expectation of something desired'. This phrase has overtones of passivity but I believe hope requires active nurturing or it can wane and die. A few examples come to mind.

Daily we are bombarded by mostly sad and bad news - that is how the media believes it will grab our attention. So, if we want to remain people of hope, we will need to go in search of regular doses of positive news- stories that lift our spirits as we hear how others retained their hope through tough times. The power of a good book is not to be underestimated in restoring hope - do we pass on what has inspired and uplifted us?

In recent times, my brother Rick and I were both diagnosed with lung cancer. We, and all who loved us, hoped desperately for healing and we were both blessed with the best medical care. The outcome would not be ours to determine but I do believe that the prayerful companionship we both experienced sustained us, along with our positive attitude and sense of humour. While Rick's health was not restored, his heart was deeply peaceful and grateful -surely something we all desire when we come to the end of our lives. For my part, I am back into the swing of life, very conscious of the gift of life and all who walked the journey with me.

On a more mundane note, in drought stricken Australia we often hope for rain whereas, when we are in Ireland, we hope it will desist for a day or two! In both cases, we have absolutely no control over the elements. However, in Australia we can install rain tanks and take other water storing measures so we are better able to cope with the dry – thus enabling us to feel more hopeful about preserving our gardens.

Each of us has hopes and desires for ourselves and others. Perhaps one of the ways to sustain those hopes is to find others who share them. During this year I have worked with a small group to prepare a document to encourage our Bishop to

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## Live with Hope...for nothing is impossible with God



appoint lay men and women as Leaders of Parishes without a resident Priest. We could have gone on just wishing this would happen - but such a hope needed a great deal of active nurturing! This weekend the document is being launched- a hope brought to life by the commitment of a passionate and energetic group.

Finally, I experience a profound hopefulness in taking time to be still and attend to the ever-faithful rhythm of the day and of the seasons. The birdsong at dawn, the peace of sunset, the bustling exuberance of spring and the fruitfulness of autumn invite us into the mystery of a Divine Presence sustaining all life.

*There is the music of heaven in all things, but we  
have forgotten how to hear it.*

*Hildegard of Bingen (1098 - 1179)*

**Cecilia Merrigan, Victorian Province**



### **Prayer for the Congregational Forum**

Living God,  
as we enter into this time of the Congregational Forum  
may we sense Your quiet and faithful presence  
holding us and all of creation.  
Keep us grateful for the many blessings we have received  
and humble in acknowledging our limitations and failures.  
In the unfolding of life,  
may we be touched by Your Spirit of Hope,  
and know deep within "that all shall be well."  
Give us listening hearts as we attend to the ways  
we are invited to live with hope.  
As we go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are,  
may the courage and vision of Brigid of Kildare and  
Daniel Delany rekindle our hope.  
May this time renew us  
and challenge us to go on working with others  
to build a world where there is peace, justice  
and equality for all creation.



## *Being and Living in a Time of Crisis*

### **Standing tall against problem of deforestation in Tipperary**

**Irish Independent 10th August 2010**

*Unlike fiction spun into fact, Fogarty's farm is the real woodland deal. Matt Fogarty's tree farm has become one of the finest examples of what woodland owners can create to redress the damage that deforestation has caused.*

**Photo: Matt is the brother of Virgil Fogarty (US Region)**

Good stories can, as time passes, take on a life of their own where the margins of factual truth become blurred. Fiction then becomes legend and is often finally accepted as historical fact. All the best stories of our childhood that spoke of the ancient warriors and the fairy people of Ireland evolved over many thousands of years and, by becoming intermingled with historical reality, great legends emerged that continually entertained and inspired us.

One of the finest examples of a piece of fiction becoming accepted as historical fact was Jean Giono's wonderful book, *The Man Who Planted Trees*. Written in 1953, it told the tale of a French shepherd, Elzéard Bouffier, who each year gathered acorns and beech mast and, by poking holes in the ground with his staff, sowed them as he went about his daily travels across the hillsides and valleys near Provence.

As the years passed, formerly barren landscapes became leafy and once the trees began to grow they were valued and accepted as naturally occurring woodland. Water returned to the region and streams reappeared as the copses and woods grew, restoring the balance of nature and bringing life back to the countryside.

Bouffier then took on a posthumous existence as remarkable as his imaginary real life. Wherever the story was published, in places as far apart as New Zealand, Europe and the United States,



people believed in it. This was long before it became fashionable to plant trees and redress the environmental damage that deforestation has caused throughout the world.

I was reminded of this famous story when visiting Matt Fogarty's tree farm and nursery in Tipperary. Woods and copses are growing there, when before there was open land. Splendid specimens of redwoods and fir stand tall and proud among a multitude of broadleaf species. During a recent open day, Matt took us on a tour through his trees and surprised us with yet more wonderful and previously unseen exotic species among the acres of natives.

He has just planted a further seven acres of oak and, despite having reached a venerable age, has



***'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak***

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many further additions planned. Matt's knowledge and love of trees is legendary and I have sourced many of my own favourite specimens at his nursery in Ballinderry.

The way it all began is on a par with anything in Giono's book as Matt related how, many years ago, he approached his bank manager for money to plant some trees. This was before the current afforestation schemes had emerged and, as much of Matt's planned woodland would not have tied in with Forest Service thinking and was way ahead of its time, grants would probably not have been forthcoming.

Nowadays, we are encouraged to establish mixed woodland with many diverse species, but up to 30 years ago the single-species plantation was the order of the day. However, Matt was not to be put off and despite his bank manager's refusal to fund tree planting, he managed to get a loan to buy cattle and grow some barley. With the finance in place, he then bought trees anyway - and the rest is history. Fogarty's tree farm and nursery grew in fame and many farms, gardens, golf courses and hotel grounds found the right specimens and the inspiration of how and where to plant them by consulting with Matt and making use of his services.

He was one of the first to campaign for an increase in the planting of broadleaf species and constantly complained about the lack of 'teenage' oak, ash, beech and other valuable hardwoods in our Irish woodlands. The planting of broadleaves had, to a large degree, ceased in Ireland and most of our deciduous woodland had been felled. Those that remained were mostly at the fringes of old estates or stood as parkland trees, many more than two centuries old. Growing broadleaves in numbers did not really resume to any worthwhile extent until the mid-1990s.

Walnut is one of Matt's favourites and I was astonished at how well some had grown in the 10 years since my last visit to his nursery. I remember returning home at that time with the back of my car filled with walnut saplings, some unusual oak, a few sequoias, and even a dawn redwood, which has grown into a tall and graceful specimen. Surely proof that it is never too late in life to plant trees.

*The Man Who Planted Trees* by Jean Giono is published by the Harvill press, London.

Matt Fogarty can be found among his trees at Fogarty's Tree Farm and Nursery, Ballinderry, Nenagh, Co Tipperary.

**Joe Barry, Irish Independent**



**Planting one of Matt's trees in the grounds of Teach Bhride Tullow, July, 2007**

**Standing:** Bridin Clancy, Pat Guinan (Maria Guinan's sister), Matt Fogarty, Maree Marsh, Elizabeth McDonald, Thomasina Murphy, Maureen Keady, Mary Dalton, Paula Conway, Carmel McEvoy.

**Sitting:** Bernadette Fogarty, Virgil Fogarty and Cyprian Wilson.



## Melbourne Protest Calls for End to Mandatory Detention



Five hundred people joined a protest to end mandatory detention in Melbourne on Sunday 7th November and marched through the city streets demanding justice for refugees. The event was organised by the Refugee Advocacy Network, a coalition of groups formed earlier this year. Over 35 community organisations backed the rally.

Protesters heard from a range of speakers, including parliamentarians, acclaimed Afghan women's rights activist and opponent of the US/NATO occupation Malalai Joya; Gilios, a West Papuan refugee, representatives from the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union and Sister Brigid Arthur from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers' Project.

**Sister Brigid Arthur (right)** described her visits to young Hazaras in the little-known Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation centre and families in the Maribyrnong Detention Centre.

The demand of the rally was "End mandatory detention". It is this policy that is at the heart of the problem with Australia's asylum seeker system. Half measures and tinkering with the regime simply will not do. There are currently almost 5,000 people in detention centres, places that 2010 Australian of the Year, mental health advocate Pat McGorry, describes as "factories for producing mental illness". They are locked up for nothing other than seeking a better life.



**Catherine Kelly with a placard of stark figures**

**Right: March through city streets - Jude Caldwell and Brigid Arthur**



It was important that so many organisations backed the demonstration: this was a clear and broad clear rejection of federal Labor's claims to be moving forward and striking a good balance on asylum seeker policy.

### 'What would you do in their shoes?'

This was the question put by students from Kilbreda College, Mentone. They mimed the arrival of a boatload of asylum seekers, followed by their reception, processing and eventual fate. The action attracted a good deal of attention from the midday crowds, not to mention at least three TV crews ...



**'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak**



## Claire Griffin's Visit to the Philippines

At the end of November, I accompanied a small group of parishioners from St John the Baptist's Parish, Ferntree Gully on a 10 day visit to The Philippines. The travellers were members of their parish Social Justice Group who over the past 5 years have been supporting a Community Based Rehabilitation Program based in the Barretto Parish, 3 – 4 hours drive north of Manila on the island of Luzon. Columban Fr Fintan Murtagh, (at back in purple shirt) who suffers multiple sclerosis, began this program of support for the disabled in the parish some 20 years ago. Today several other parishes within the Diocese of Iba have taken up this program.



**Claire Griffin with Melbourne Columban Partners, Fr Fintan Murtagh, staff and volunteers at Community Based Rehabilitation Program, Barretto Parish, Philippines**

We experienced the hospitality of the Filipino people as we visited them in their homes and witnessed the work of the occupational therapist and the volunteers. Poverty and isolation are everyday experiences for many parents and grandparents, as they cope with their own frailty, unemployment and lack of resources while caring for their partners or children with unfailing dedication. Many have difficulty accessing medication or treatments and all are deeply appreciative of the presence and support of members of the Community Based Rehabilitation Program. While it was

heartbreaking to encounter so many little children suffering mental and physical disabilities, it was heartening to witness the love each seemed to experience in their family and community. It was challenging to hear story after story of the dreams each parent had for their child – to receive a life-changing treatment or surgery which most parents in our communities would take for granted. Their indomitable spirit of love and hope was a lesson for all of us.



**Left:**  
**PREDA CENTRE Jeepney**  
**"Help Stop Child Abuse"**



**Right: Symbol of the wonderful work of**  
**PREDA Centre, Olongapo City**

From there we visited PREDA Centre, established by Columban Fr Shay Cullen 18 years ago. Staff at this centre work for a system of justice that will empower women and children and the poor to protect their rights. They have a special outreach and several programs of therapy and support for young who have suffered sexual abuse and exploitation. They visit jails, local dance bars and brothels to rescue children and provide a safe place where they are offered therapeutic recovery programmes. They also support marginalized producers with development assistance, interest free loans, skilled training and marketing through Fair Trade. In this way PREDA helps hundreds of poor families stay together and make a sustainable living.

The third place that we visited has a special place in my heart – KAZAMA Grameen. The micro-lending agency was founded by Columban Fr Sean Connaughton who is now retired and living in Ireland. It was truly inspiring to see how the young people he trained are carrying on this great work of giving poor people (mainly women) access to funds for livelihood projects. We attended a Branch Meeting in a rural community and a General Assembly of about twenty branches.

***'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak***

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The staff of the Grameen Bank gave us a thorough report of the developments at their agency – stories I will now share with the other parishes at home who support this wonderful venture.

The ten days were full of mixed emotions and raw challenges but each day was also shot through with images and stories of hope. As I return home and prepare to celebrate Christmas and move into a new year, a quote written on the board at PREDA stays with me: “Stand up and go, your faith has saved you” Luke 17:19.

Claire Griffin CLT

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Mary Mooney (far right) and Maree Marsh were among the group of supporters who gathered at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney to farewell the riders for Cycle Against the Traffik.



Carolyn Merry, an ACRATH volunteer in Victoria, and her support team set off from Mary MacKillop Place to ride to Melbourne to spread awareness about slavery and human trafficking in the towns along the tour route and involve as many people as possible in the ongoing fight to eradicate slavery.

Prior to the departure the supporters gathered around Mary MacKillop's tomb to reflect and to ask a special blessing for Carolyn, the support team and a blessing on the bikes! School students from Loreto Kirribilli and Monte Sant Angelo were present as well as people from several organisations concerned with human trafficking and members of religious congregations.



Despite some extreme weather conditions along the road everyone arrived in Melbourne safely and between presentations, numerous newspaper articles and radio programs and regional news the riders did well to raise awareness of human trafficking.

**Doris Testa** joined the group outside Melbourne and cycled the last part of the journey with Carolyn. Doris raised \$700 to combat Trafficking – a great effort. Congratulations Doris!

**Cycle Against The Traffik** was started by Carolyn who has worked for 10 years with Médecins Sans Frontières as a nurse and project manager in Afghanistan, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chechnya, Malaysia and Zimbabwe.





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## Women Religious from Across Australia Discuss Human Trafficking in Canberra

The members of **Australian Catholic Religious Against Human Trafficking - ACRATH** - discussed human trafficking with federal politicians, community leaders, academics, union bosses and foreign embassy staff in Canberra from 22-24 November.

Mary Mooney and Louise Cleary represented the Brigidines at this gathering. Mary writes:

We stayed at The Gathering Place where we were made most welcome by Lorraine, who as host, treated us with real hospitality and warmth during our stay. (Thank you, Lorraine.) The Gathering Place has never looked so good, through the blessings of much rain! Canberra is not quite forty shades of green but there sure are many. It is a picture!

Thanks to Maria Vam Vekenou MP, we were armed with passes that gave us access to the whole of parliament house. Thirteen of us, **(photo below)** set out to lobby and advocate for trafficked/enslaved persons here in



Australia. We were able to see some 67 MPs, Senators or their advisors and officials in relevant government departments. While there, Louise Cleary attended, as delegate, a round table conference on trafficking/enslavement. We have been granted another \$350 000 over three years to continue and extend our work in a number of ways: working towards a federal approach to crimes compensation for victims, TAFE training for trafficked persons, working with unions to address workplace enslavement, extending our website [www.acrath.org.au](http://www.acrath.org.au) and addressing the plight of women trafficked into forced and servile marriages – an emerging phenomenon in Australia.

Louise has acknowledged that in the last few years there have been some excellent changes in the treatment of people who had been trafficked into Australia, particularly in the area of visa reform but there is still a way to go. “We are continuing to seek a better outcome for trafficked women and men, but we also want our leaders to take a really global approach to prevention and to look beyond our shores to see what can be done in the area of prevention. We know poverty is one of the main issues that forces people, particularly women to leave their homes, villages and country to pursue work. In many developed countries this makes them vulnerable to traffickers. So alleviating poverty is a key to the prevention of trafficking.”



At the National Roundtable the government announced another \$1.6 million will be invested in tackling human trafficking including sex and labour exploitation.

“\$1.4 million will be granted to four non-government organisations that each have a track record of delivering results for the victims of this heinous crime. The successful organisations are:

- \* The Anti-Slavery Project (Sydney)
- \* The Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (nationwide)
- \* Project Respect (Collingwood, Melbourne)
- \* The Scarlet Alliance (Surrey Hills, Sydney).

These are the same four organisations that received funding in 2008.

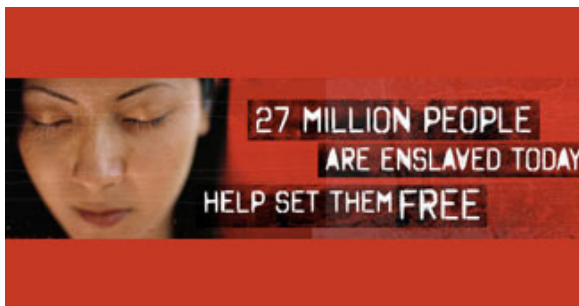
The important changes the Government has made is enabling more victims to get support and the investment will help to bring a new level of community awareness to this international problem.

While in Canberra, ACRATH delegation focused on four key areas:

- \* The prevention of trafficking and specifically achieving the Millennium Development Goals and raising Official Development Assistance funding 0.5 % of Gross Domestic Product by 2015-16 (the extent of the government’s commitment at this time)
- \* That people trafficked into Australia be able to access financial compensation for the crime committed against them in Australia.
- \* That people trafficked into Australia will have safe and supportive accommodation as they wait to contribute to prosecutions and as they begin their long journey of healing.
- \* That labour trafficking into Australia has become a matter of grave concern, for example in the construction, mining, fruit picking and vegetable growing industries.



ACRATH would also like the Australia government to commit to promoting Fairtrade products where it has influence, for example within the Australian Parliament House and the food and clothing supplied to Australian Armed Forces in its procurement contracts to ensure that trafficked or exploited labour is not used, particularly in developing countries and conflict areas.



**God of Justice,**

**our words cannot express what our minds can barely comprehend and our hearts feel,  
when we hear of women, men and children deceived and transported to unknown places for forced  
labour and sexual exploitation because of poverty, human greed and profit.  
Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry that their dignity and rights are being transgressed  
through threats, deception and force.**

**We are troubled by the exploitation of children throughout the world.**

**We cry against the degrading practice of trafficking and pray for it to end.**

**Strengthen the fragile-spirit and broken-hearted.**

**Give us wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with trafficked people, that together we will find ways  
to the freedom that is your gift to us and to all people. Amen.**

*‘Enlarge the site of your tent...’ in the shelter of the oak*



## Ireland/UK Province

### A Corporate Action for Ecological Justice

The sisters of the province have discerned over a long period of time as to how we might engage with a corporate action for ecological justice.

After much personal reflection and group sharing it was decided that the issue of water was vitally important. There was also the awareness among us that the United Nations has proclaimed 2005-2015 **‘The International Decade of Action-Water for Life.’**

Some sisters researched possible projects and presented these at a recent province gathering.

The project that received most support was to co-fund with **‘Self-Help Africa’** the sinking of a well to provide piped water in Rongai Division, Kenya. This Laois project aims at providing a clean mains water supply to more than 4,000 households in the that area.

**‘Self Help Africa’** has its Irish office in Portlaoise, Laois which is close to many of our Brigidine houses.

The Province has now contributed 4000 euro. Our contribution, along with other fundraising events and grants received, has now enabled the project to begin early in the New Year.



Alongside this we hope to raise a further 1000 euro from the individual contributions of the sisters over the coming months. Each one has made a commitment to take some action personally e.g. not to buy bottled water etc.

**‘Self Help Africa’** is a development agency that has been working for the past 25 years to improve the lives of some of rural Africa’s poorest communities. They have been working in Kenya for close on 15 years, promoting integrated development programmes that are designed to enable communities to produce enough food, earn a sustainable living and have better access to social services such as healthcare, sanitation, clean water and education.



For more information see [www.selfhelpafrica.net](http://www.selfhelpafrica.net)

**Eileen Deegan Ireland/UK Province**

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## Canonization of St. Mary of the Cross

### A Reflection

The thought of being present at the Canonisation of Mary MacKillop never entered my mind. The invitation to our diocese came “out of the blue” from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne. It was clear that we could not deprive our students of the opportunity to participate in this historic event, hence I was asked to represent our office, as well as to accompany



12 students to Rome, together with another teacher. We then joined up with a very large group from the Melbourne Colleges and a group of 13 students from the Sandhurst diocese. Some of the students were from Brigidine schools. We held formation activities as one large group as well as in our own diocesan groups.

It seemed no time at all before we were seated in St Peter's Square experiencing the reverence, peace and joy of the Canonisation ceremony. At last, this great Australian religious woman was being given by the universal Church, the public recognition that was her due. Her familiar portrait, in the form of a beautiful banner, swayed gently in the warm autumn air. She felt close to us, relaxed in pose, elbow resting on a table.

**Rose Duffy with the students from Sale Diocese, Victoria**

Afterwards, there was an eruption of joy from the students after the long religious ceremony in a language foreign to them. All felt that it was a privilege to be among the many thousands of Australians celebrating in that famous square.

The next day many of those Australians participated in a Mass of Thanksgiving in the basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls. At its conclusion, the challenging question was put by Sr Anne Derwin rsj Congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph: “What difference will the canonisation make to your life”?

On our final night in Rome after a visit to a silent, darkened St Peter's Square, the students and I were challenged by another woman, this one trying to sleep on the cold stones of a Roman street, a newspaper over her face, no protection beneath her. What response would Mary have given? What difference did her canonisation make to our response?

**Rose Duffy Victorian Province**

### *Excerpts from the Homily by Cardinal George Pell on the occasion of the Mass of Thanksgiving*

Mary MacKillop was canonized at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI as Saint Mary of the Cross, the first Australian-born saint in the two thousand year history of the Catholic Church. We are delighted and grateful.

The Australia of today which welcomes this canonization is very different from the separate British colonies where Mary spent most of her life before the Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901. In most ways Australia is now a better society, due to the wisdom and hard work of our predecessors, women and men like Sister Mary. The Australia which was and is Protestant or irreligious has made room for Catholics and we are grateful for this too.

Major General Lachlan Macquarie came to the colony of New South Wales as governor 200 years ago in 1810 to restore order after the New South Wales Corps, the “Rum Corps”, had overthrown William Bligh the previous governor. It was then only twenty two years since the First Fleet had arrived in 1788, comprising about 1000 convicts and soldiers. Many of the convicts were Irish Catholics, who were flogged if they did not attend the Protestant service on Sunday and had no freedom to practise their religion. Their numbers and sometimes their demeanour made officialdom uneasy.



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Macquarie as the first public champion to the outside world of what he called Australia, not New Holland or even New South Wales was determined to change a convict colony into a free society, the beginnings of a nation and he built fine buildings, founded new towns, crossed the Blue Mountains, encouraged education for Europeans and for the aborigines also. But most importantly he insisted that reformed convicts, the emancipists should be accepted into society and he encouraged their children and the children of the free settlers.

Mary MacKillop was born in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy in 1842, the child of free settlers, some decades after Macquarie and before the discovery of gold turned the colony upside down, bringing hundreds of thousands of immigrants seeking their fortune. Mary exploited the openness of society which Macquarie encouraged, struggled to spread education and battled quietly and effectively to combat the Catholic versus Protestant antagonisms, the sectarianism which waxed and waned until the middle of the twentieth century. She however suffered more from her fellow Catholics than from outsiders.



**Statue of Mary MacKillop in Mary MacKillop Plaza Adelaide, South Australia**

Saint Mary worked to give poor Catholics the capacity to exploit their opportunities, to avail themselves of the consequences of the widespread Australian conviction, which Macquarie favoured, that everyone had a right to a “fair go”. Many young Australians when she opened her first school in Penola in 1866 did not want to go to school and their parents were not too disturbed by this. Mary wanted them to know the three “rs” of reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic but she also wanted them to know of God’s love for them and for “the Word of Christ, in all its richness, to find a home” in them.

We thank God today for the contribution of all the women religious to the Catholic story ‘Down-under’, not merely the hundreds of young Australian and Irish women who joined the sisters of St. Joseph, but all the religious who have labored for our benefit, served with ‘generosity and humility, gentleness and patience’ to bring goodness and Godliness into the empty spaces of our vast continent.

Mary’s life was centered on God. She wrote “I want with all my heart to be what God wants me to be”, to do only God’s will and never to stand in God’s way. Whatever she did, she did in the name of God. It was this faith which motivated her service and motivated the many women who joined her. “Faith”, she explained “is the first essential if we are to cope with life’s difficulties.”

Mary did not like suffering and did not go looking for trouble. Her title “Mary of the Cross” was for her a happy one, which acknowledged the afflictions of daily life. She claimed ruefully “the little crosses of everyday life are harder to bear than the thumping big ones”. But she was given a number of thumping big crosses.

She was excommunicated by Bishop Sheil, a foolish and arrogant man, who let himself be misled by priestly lies. She was slandered, saw her sisters divided, suffered unjustly in a second enquiry and had to endure the estrangement, despite her best efforts, of the co-founder Father Julian Tenison Woods.

Pius IX was pope from 1846-1878, the longest reign in history, surpassing even the twenty-five years traditionally assigned to St. Peter. During this period the Church was often under ferocious ideological attack and lost political control of the Papal States through military action. The Pope was strict and not much given to conciliation, calling the First Vatican Council which defined Papal infallibility. But he presided over a period of remarkable expansion and renewal in Catholic life and devotion, which occurred also in Australia. The Sisters of St. Joseph were only one of a number of new religious orders from the nineteenth century which flourished.

Pope Pius IX recognized that the finger of God was upon the young, once excommunicated, Sister Mary of the Cross. He understood her faith, idealism and potential. He supported her and we have benefited immensely.

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In these circumstances, we recognize her most remarkable virtue which was the capacity to forgive. She made her own Paul's instructions to the Colossians which we have heard today: "The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same".

St. Mary of the Cross was kind and commonsensical. She told her sisters to expect crosses and realize that "we also give them" and encouraged them to have patience with their own failures, to bear with the faulty "as you hope God will bear with you". She regularly dispensed good Christian advice.

We thank God for the life, wisdom and contribution of St. Mary of the Cross. We are grateful that she was not eccentric, not religiously exotic. We warm to her advice, are encouraged by her perseverance in sickness and adversity. Her faith and moral goodness are heroic, but not in a way which is off putting or surreal. She does not deter us from struggling to follow her.

From the earliest days of European settlement Christianity and its Catholic component has been one of the most important rivers watering and nourishing Australian life. In yesterday's Papal ceremony the universal Church put its seal on the outstanding Catholic contributor in Australian history. By its approval majority Australia now acknowledges that Godliness, Christian virtue and Catholic service have a well deserved place in the pantheon of Australian achievements.

This canonization is an occasion for Catholic rejoicing and an occasion too for Australians to rejoice in a job well done. St. Mary of the Cross is one of us, a child of the free and open society that Macquarie created, who made use of all the opportunities that such a society gives to bring God's love and help to others. Her voice is an Australian voice, the voice of a great woman all Australians can recognize as one of their own. But her example and teachings - about forgiveness, about resisting hardness of heart, and about working to overcome evil, refusing to be disheartened or defeated by it - speak to women and men well beyond our shores and in all ages. Australia is not a perfect place, but the blessings God has bestowed upon us have been blessings in abundance.

**Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney**

### **Pope Benedict XVI Visits Britain**

It was a chilly September morning as I prepared to take the 6.20am train from Windsor to Twickenham to join 300 religious sisters, brothers and priests from various teaching orders, at Saint Mary's University Chapel at Strawberry Hill in South West London. One sister from each Order had been invited to hear Pope Benedict XVI address us.

As I listened to the morning news I heard that five men had been arrested in London for plotting to harm Pope Benedict. This was a 'no-confidence booster' as one set out! Before his arrival in UK, there was a great deal of negative feeling around regarding the visit. I must admit I shared some of that, as well as a certain fear for the safety of the Pope himself and his entourage.

However, recent coverage of his rousing reception in Scotland and his wonderful response enthused me and I began to look forward to the event. As it happened his English welcome was equally as warm and huge numbers turned out to greet him wherever he went. His visit to the UK was a tremendous success and surpassed the most optimistic expectations. As Emma Clancy commented in her article in *The Universe*, the following week "*The man formerly called 'God's Rottweiler' by many in the media, was more like 'God's Kitten' as he charmed his way amongst the people. The secular press were proved wrong. We could not have asked for more from the Pope on his visit*"

Our parishioners, especially the Filipino and African communities, spread their enthusiasm and I believe some of this rubbed off on me. They took their children to Hyde Park on Saturday morning and were happy to wait for six hours, believing it was an opportunity not to be missed, even for their small babies. What faith!

I arrived at Strawberry Hill bright and early around 8.00am. On entering the college grounds I was checked out by security, received my wrist band and got the 'all-clear.' I joined a handful of sisters and clergy who had already gathered outside Saint Mary's chapel.



There was an air of joyful expectancy and excitement around as people relaxed and chatted freely. We were led eventually into the chapel and of course being an 'early bird' I got a front seat with a great view – hence my appearance on TV and thirty seconds of celebrity status for Brigidines!

**Norah Doyle (right) as seen on TV**



Before the Pope's arrival we sang Morning Prayer – Taize chants included - in the setting of the beautiful chapel adorned with stained glass windows by Gabriel Loire, master glazier of Chartres. The strong vibrant colours glistened in the morning sunlight, revealing an abstract ensemble based on the mysteries of the Rosary.

What a wonderful moment it was when the Pope came into the chapel. To maintain the meditative atmosphere, no photos were allowed and we could not even look backwards to view him - a temptation with which we all had to struggle! When I did see him, I was surprised how small he was in stature. I thought he was rather frail but he is entitled to be so at 83 years. He walked very slowly and reverently. He came across as being very gentle with a wonderful smile that lit up his face. After a short prayer and a welcome from Sister Thérèse Browne,

Congregational Leader of Sisters of Charity of St Paul Apostle, representing the Conference of Religious in England and Wales, he spoke of his deep appreciation of the 'outstanding contribution' made by religious orders to education in UK. He had a particular word of appreciation for those whose task it was to ensure that Catholic schools provide a safe environment for children and young people. He told us that as a young boy he was taught by "English Ladies" and of course that drew a smile from the congregation. He was referring to the IBVM - Mary Ward Sisters.



I felt quite awe struck in his presence. There he was successor to Saint Peter and the leader of our Church. Surely we were on Holy Ground. For the UK Catholic community it has been a welcome and a needy shot in the arm especially for young people and the clergy. He didn't pull any punches when he delivered a clear message in each address, focussing largely on the right of the Church to have its voice heard in the public square. That message exuded not just clarity but hope and joy. He concluded by praying with us and giving us his blessing after gifts were exchanged.

I feel that the UK Catholic community not only gave the Holy Father a warm reception, but also demonstrated publicly that the Church remains both vibrant and eloquent and that the ancient Christian foundations of these islands have not been in any way diminished in recent times. I felt honoured to represent Brigidines on this special occasion.

**Norah Doyle, Ireland/UK Province**

## Graceful Ageing at Brigidine House

**A joyful, beautiful place is how the Sisters and residents of Brigidine House, a residential aged care community in Sydney's east, describe their home.**

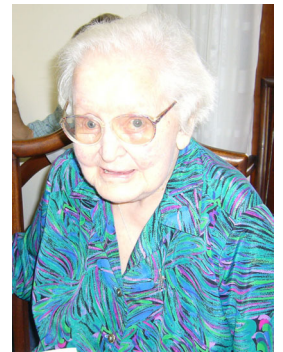
*Reprinted from Pathways, Catholic Religious Australia*



For just over 100 years, Brigidine House was the convent of the Brigidine Sisters. With many of the Sisters ageing, during 2004 the Brigidines formed a partnership with Catholic Healthcare to provide aged care accommodation on the site for their Sisters and other older members of the community. After major renovations to transform the heritage building into accredited low care accommodation for 30 residents, the convent was renamed Brigidine House to reflect its new role.

At the official opening in 2005, Sister Mary Singer, then 92, who had spent many years living at the convent, said a seed must die to have something new.

Five years later, Sister Mary is one of eleven Brigidine Sisters living at Brigidine House. She shares her home with fifteen older women and four Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart, who transferred there when Karlaminda at Kensington closed.



On the day I visited, a group of sisters and residents gathered in one of the community's sitting rooms for a cup of tea, a chat and to knit. Others joined together in the community room for a morning of poetry with Susan Brown, the Recreational Activities Officer.

In between recitals of poems by Tennyson, Wordsworth and others, Sisters and residents shared their views on life at Brigidine House. Sister Margaret Lentaigne, a Sister of the Sacred Heart, says for her it means freedom and caring.

"It's a beautiful place and I feel very much at home here. We have these lovely reflections, wonderful activities and a bus for outings and shopping." Kath Rowland, who moved to Brigidine House when Justinian House closed in 2007, says she made a good choice. "We have Mass in the chapel every day except Thursday, good food, staff and friends who help and care."

Kath is a member of the community's knitting club which meets every Tuesday afternoon. While they knit, Hinda Mellick, a fellow resident teaches the group French phrases. "If anything is happening in the world from Melbourne Cup to Bastille Day or Remembrance Day we do something here," says Hinda. "And those activities create lots of happy hours. Our manager Christine is wonderful. Her door is always open and if you have a complaint she doesn't oppose you; she listens."



**Residents Mary Anderson, Pat Donlan and Sacred Heart Sisters Margaret Lentaigne and Gretchan Kelly**

Hinda says leaving one's home and moving into an aged care facility is a big step. You try to escape the truth of old age but the reality of the situation sets in when you feel older every day. "When I became aware of my needs Brigidine House attracted my attention. The presence of the Sisters, their peaceful, truthful lives sets the tone of understanding and tolerance."

**'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak**



For Brigidine Sister, Patricia Keating, 96, her home is a joyous place. “It is fulfilling and accepting. There is a certain amount of completeness here. People come here at the end of their life but there is no moping. There is acceptance of the other and where the other is at. There is a feeling that you belong and a feeling that each member of staff knows who you are and joyfully and generously tries to support you.”

**Brigidine Residents Eileen Creagh, Patricia Keating and Nance McFadden**



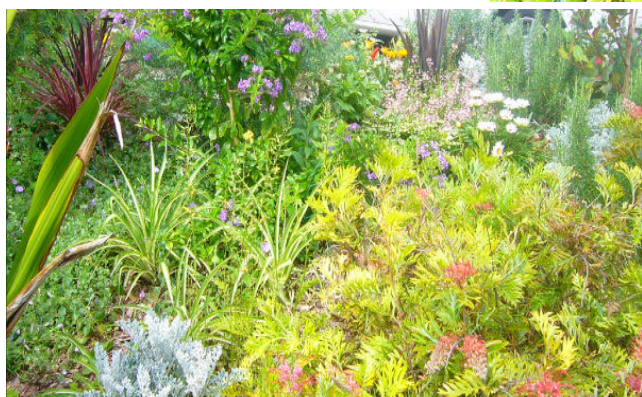
Sister Zita Barron, who came to live at Brigidine House in April this year, says she is the happiest she has ever been in her life living there. “It’s such a beautiful place. At the community’s recent accreditation from the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency in which they were rated very highly, the staff member conducting the process said, “Brigidine House was redolent with love and spirituality.”.

Sister Faye Kenny, whose role is to support the Brigidines living at the house, says people comment that you can feel the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the place when you walk in. While there have been a few hiccups along the way, Sister Faye says Brigidine House has been a wonderful solution for the Sisters and for the residents.

“We have a wonderful manager in Christine Fletcher; she’s heaven-sent, and Catholic Healthcare is very supportive of this place. A cross-section of people live here - the Sisters, some Catholic residents and some not. But they all get on very well and are very kind to one another.”

### **Restoration of the garden outside the dining room**

Theresa Boyle and Naomi Turner have painstakingly renewed the garden outside the dining room at Brigidine House. The garden is dedicated to the memory of Pius O’Brien, or “Pi” as she was affectionately known. Apart from her love of the garden at Randwick, the magnificent rose garden in front of the former convent in Cowra continues to be known as “Pi’s Garden.”





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## News from the U.S. Region

### New Archbishop for San Antonio



On a balmy autumn evening in Southwest Texas, Lay-Leaders of the City, Catholics, Clerics, Rabbis, Imams, Protestant and Evangelical Ministers gathered to “Welcome” the sixth Archbishop of San Antonio.

**Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller** chose the symbolic and geographic center of the city for the outdoor evening Vespers: Main Plaza and San Fernando Cathedral. More than two thousand gathered for their first glimpse of our new Archbishop.

Born in Central Mexico, he is the oldest of fifteen children, he is a member of the missionaries of the Holy Spirit, and for the past seven years ministered as one of the Auxiliary Bishops of Chicago. At 53, he is now the nation’s youngest Archbishop. There was a palpable energy and air of excitement when we heard him speak of his eagerness to learn from people, hear their stories and partner in collaboration. He portrayed himself as an image of one who is deeply prayerful, an advocate for unity, a believer that faith cannot be separated from social justice causes and outreach, particularly to the poor and marginalized. In his bilingual homily he stated. “Love is at the heart of the good news,” he proclaimed, “but we must live that love, not merely pronounce it correctly. We are to love as Jesus loved without limit, without exception, being willing to lay down our lives for one another.” He noted, “there is a desire among you to work to the common good.”

The following day, the people gathered from as far away as Ireland, Canada, Mexico and Chile to those from around all areas of the United States at St. Mark the Evangelist Church to celebrate Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller’s installation. Among those who officially welcomed him on this occasion was Mary Teresa Cullen who did so on behalf of the Religious of the Archdiocese. Once again he echoed the stated vision and theme he desires to embrace as Archbishop of the Archdiocese. It was a rich experience to attend this ceremony and hear the Archbishop’s proclamation once again: “to speak, shout out against injustices with confidence, without fear, and to proclaim the principles of the church, the reign of love, without forgetting that it is also a reign of justice.”

On the eve of this Advent Season with its theme: "Hope in the Midst of Darkness" we Brigidines congratulate Archbishop Gustavo and wish him every blessing. We are confident he will shepherd the "People of God" in this area into a future full of hope.

**The Dream Act – University Students across Texas** this week joined San Antonio students in a Hunger Strike aimed at pressuring our U. S. Senator, Kay Bailey Hutchison to vote for the passage of the Dream Act in the Congress of the United States. This legislation would provide a path to citizenship for students and young people brought to this country illegally as children (before the age of 16). The University of Texas at San Antonio students organized the Hunger Strike. Today, November 29th, the hunger striking students have entered the 20th day of their fast in a perilous last resort effort to win passage of the legislation. There is a great concern that our Senator stated she will not support the current bill because it “goes far beyond the intended group of children who grew up in the United States and attended primary and secondary schools here.”

Religious sisters across the nation and specifically in San Antonio are pressuring Washington to set aside party politics and bring about a voice of reason, compassion and moral persuasion to the debate. This issue is supported by 70% of the American people and it would be unconscionable for the legislative minority to obstruct such action. The lives of tens of thousands of Texans are at stake. The Dream Act is expected to come to a vote in the United States Senate in the very near future. The Brigidines of the United States Region are lending their voice and influence where possible to this needed legislation. **We ask you to join us in prayer that the Dream Act be speedily passed.**





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## Associate Co-Leadership in US Region

We have been looking at some areas of our Region into the future. One area is that of the Brigidine Associates and its leadership that will ensure the vitality of the Associates into the future. We believe that this is a good time to think about calling forth more leadership from among the Associates.

We propose that each small group call forth an Associate member who would be co-leader along with the Brigidine leader. This person would be responsible, along with the sister, for the life of the group – planning and scheduling meetings, communicating with group members and representing the group to the Core Team.

We also hope to have an overall Co-Leader for the larger group, the overall group, of Associates.

## New Zealand News

### Golden Jubilee of Holy Family School, Porirua

Trish Hanaray and Anne Phibbs attended the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Holy Family School held from Friday 29<sup>th</sup> October to Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October. The Jubilee was well-attended with one man having travelled from Germany for the occasion. There was a wonderful buzz of conversation for the whole weekend as ex-students, present staff and friends mingled and talked about their school days.

The original staff of Holy Family was Michael Henry (Principal) Mary Teresa Bourke, Columba Lynch and Majella Grant and many were the stories told of them over the weekend. Those present expressed their appreciation of the education they had received from the Brigidine Sisters.



Holy Family School was founded to cater for the sudden influx of families into the Porirua Basin during the 1950s. The small village of Porirua grew rapidly to accommodate the flood of new immigrants who came to New Zealand to meet the labour shortage. Originally the immigrants were from England, Ireland, Scotland, Poland and the Netherlands. Many Catholic Samoan families settled in Porirua in the late 1950s and these were followed by people from the Tokelau Islands and the Cook Islands. Most recent groups are from Kiribati and Burma. All make up the rich tapestry that is the Holy Family Parish and Holy Family School.



Sr Trish, the last Brigidine Principal of Holy Family School, was asked to unveil a commemorative plaque and Anne, representing the Brigidines, was asked to cut the cake at the dinner. She invited Karl Vasau, the present principal, to cut the cake with her as the symbol of both the past and the future.

**Re-union of St Bride's Old Girls, Masterton:** Srs Frances, Cyprian, Trish, Maura, Joan, Monica, Helena and Anne all attended the St Bride's Re-union in Masterton on the weekend of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of November as guests of the St Bride's Old Girls' Association. A lovely dinner was held in the Masterton Club and an AGM was held the following morning. Anne was asked to give a short talk about the New Zealand Sisters and anyone who has had any association with St Bride's was asked after, especially Brigid Sheil, Brigid Fleming and Suzanne Grant.

## A Safe Haven at Ryder Cheshire Melbourne Victoria

Congratulations to Jane Gorey (Victorian Province) on the production this very moving book, telling twelve individual stories of support and connection at the Ryder Cheshire Home. Jane and narrative therapist, Sandra Foster, gathered and edited the stories.



The beautiful cover is a photo of a 3 dimensional embroidered and framed hanging, created by Jane.

Ryder Cheshire Victoria caters for residents with a wide range of serious medical conditions – the largest single group is cancer patients attending the Peter MacCallum Hospital for therapy. Another major group is kidney dialysis patients at the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre. Epilepsy patients and carers of brain-damaged accident victims are regular residents. The Foundation is non-denominational and non-discriminatory and no applicant is refused residence provided that she or he can walk unaided and not in need of nursing care within the home.

A number of Brigidines attended the launch and met most of those whose stories of support have been told in 'A Safe Haven'. Congratulations Jane!

**Maree Marsh, Kathleen Woodruff, Jacinta Rice,  
Helen Toohey, Jane Gorey and Reba Woodwiss**



## Shoreham Property, Victoria



It is over a year since we had our picnic and symbolic tree planting on the Shoreham land. All 10 trees are thriving, the frogs are croaking in the dam and a mob of kangaroos was recently seen grazing on the land.

In consultation with the Presentation Sisters about the revegetation of their property in Balnarring, it became obvious that the involvement of local people was vital to carry on any long term work on the land and it was also essential to have a staged plan indicating where the plantings might be most beneficial in terms of the contours and other features.

Christopher Long, a Maryborough past pupil who is now retired and lives in Seaford and Pauline D' Astoli, a Killester past pupil who has a property in Merricks have agreed to be part of a Management Committee and Anne Boyd will be the Brigidine member for the initial stages. IKG Artscape have been engaged to draw up the planting plan for the next 5 years and when this is done the Management Committee will begin to organize planting days to which all will be invited.



Suggestions about a name for the property included many for some connection with the indigenous people of the area but it has proved difficult to obtain options from the Bunurong people. The next most popular choice was a connection with our tradition, so the land will be known as Brigid's Paddock (Paddock being the birth place of Daniel as well as a good old Aussie term).

The idea of a Carbon Club was floated as a means of providing ongoing finance for the purchase of tools and tune stock for planting. Many positive responses were received and some sisters have already made their annual contribution. We will focus on this again early in 2011.

**Anne Boyd, Victorian Province**



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## Jubilee Celebrations Victoria

Celebration of Laserian Kaye's Diamond Jubilee, 13th November

Congratulations and thanks Laserian, for being an 'Advent person' to so many!



We also congratulate nine Golden Jubilarians in the Victorian Province who will celebrate their jubilee with the Province on 18th December: *Loretta Brennan, Margaret Cassidy, Veronica Joyce, Rosemary Kerlin, Deidre Malone, Barbara May, Alexia Riddington, John Spurr and Aileen Vear.*



# Congratulations

# We remember with love

*"Truly, I have set my soul in silence and peace.  
As a child rests in its mother's arms, even so my soul."*

*Psalm 130:3-4*

## **Maureen Hoult 27th June 1925 - 10th September 2010**

Welcome to you all, friends and family of Maureen Teresa Hoult – Sr Maureen, previously known as Mother Christopher. A special welcome to those who have travelled long distances to be here.

Maureen left detailed written instructions regarding today – and she firmly wrote “I want nothing sad at my funeral,” and “It’s to be a joyful thanksgiving”. We have tried to honour her every request. Our entrance hymn *Hail Mary: Gentle Woman* was a must for the service. To make sure she had included 5 copies of the words, two of them in her own handwriting. And it is clear that this hymn to Our Lady, who was a special friend of Maureen’s, is a good description of Maureen herself who definitely was a ‘gentle woman, quiet light’.

Born in Patea 85 years ago Maureen was the third of 9 living children. When she was 18 she and her friend Meryl Wilson (Sr Cyprian) separately made their arrangements to go to Randwick to become part of the Brigidine family. They travelled to Australia by flying boat and returned to New Zealand by ship in an extremely rough crossing of the Tasman three years later. Sr Maureen’s first community was in Pahiatua where she remained for three years before her move to Carterton in 1950.



On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1954 Maureen (then known as Sr Christopher) and Sr Margaret Scanlan pioneered the birth of St Teresa’s School in Featherston in a single room of the old auction mart. This called for great courage and faith because the conditions were very difficult. For example on the first day 43 children arrived but the desks and blackboards had not arrived. The two Sisters travelled to Featherston each day from Carterton with rostered parents picking them up and transporting them. Within two weeks, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1954, a decision was made to purchase a car for the use of the Sisters. Permission to drive had to be obtained from Superiors overseas who sent advice on the safe arrangement of the driver’s veil as well as the acceptable circumstances and times for use of the car. So in order to fulfil her mission of teaching Sr Christopher, (Maureen) became the first Brigidine to possess a driver’s licence. It was wonderful that last year we were able to take Sr Maureen to a special celebration at St Teresa’s, Featherston, where the students re-enacted the history of the school with a hilarious scene of the two Sisters learning to drive. A very special welcome to the students who have come here today from St Teresa’s.

Maureen first came to the Porirua Basin in 1959 when she was again called upon to be a pioneer as she joined eight other Sisters squeezed into an ordinary-sized house in Titahi Bay. The following year, 1960, she was part of the first community in the Convent in Mungavin Avenue, Porirua East and apart from a few years in Masterton and Johnsonville has been in Porirua ever since. She taught at Holy Family School, Porirua, and St Pius X School in Titahi Bay before becoming bursar to our large community of Sisters. Twenty-two years ago Srs Margaret, Maureen and I moved to Ranui Heights where Maureen spent many very happy years in spite of the severe illnesses she suffered and overcame. I said earlier that Maureen was a gentle woman but she was a woman of strength as well when you consider all that she came through, including the huge sacrifice of having to give up driving. She was, however, inventive in managing to get around and I especially thank David Greening who took her to Mass every Saturday evening for many years.

Maureen’s great love was her family and she kept in frequent touch with her brothers and sisters. Her local nieces and nephews gave her great joy by always making Maureen a part of their family birthdays and celebrations and these occasions were highlights in her life. She really loved her grand-nieces and grand-nephews and was extremely proud of all her nieces

*‘Enlarge the site of your tent...’ in the shelter of the oak*



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and nephews. It would have been a great delight to her to know that Richard has made the journey from London to be here today.

While Mary, Mother of Christ, was Maureen's great friend, I think that St Brigid was definitely her model. Like St Brigid she appreciated the simple things of nature – enjoying the birds on our back lawn, enjoying the garden in its different seasons, enjoying the stray cats that somehow became part of our household and being fascinated by the annual migration of the godwits.

Again, like St Brigid, Maureen was truly hospitable and loved nothing better than having a crowd of people in the house. She liked to observe rather than participate but she genuinely loved having visitors. Most of all Maureen resembled St Brigid in giving everything away. Very few gifts given to Maureen stayed with her as she felt she didn't need them and passed them on to others. She had a great simplicity of living and was extremely grateful for anything done for her.

Maureen was a gentle woman leading a quiet life but it's amazing how much she knew about our neighbours and parishioners, and it's also amazing how many people have asked after her since she left Porirua in October of last year. We are very grateful to the Manager and staff of St Joseph's Home of Compassion for what truly has been compassionate and loving care of Maureen. She has been very happy in the Rest Home here and enjoyed the companionship of the other residents. My personal thanks to Sr Trish Hanarary who has been a very loyal and loving carer to Sr Maureen during this final year of her life.

Maureen was a woman of patient endurance and a woman of hope and in her folder she had left this lovely piece written by Evelyn Underhill. It speaks of Maureen's admiration for the godwits but more importantly of her hope and trust in God.

“Migration is not an easy or a pleasant thing for a tiny bird to face. It must turn deliberately from solid land, from food, shelter, a certain measure of security, and fly across an ocean unfriendly to its life, destitute of everything it needs. We make much of the heroism and endurance of our airmen and explorers. Perhaps some day man will rival the adventurous hope of the willow wren (*and I might also mention the godwits*); an ounce and a half of living courage, launching out with amazing confidence to a prospect of storms, hardship, exhaustion – perhaps starvation and death. Careful minds would hardly think the risk was worth tasking. But the tiny bird, before conditions force it – not driven by fear, but drawn by Hope – commits itself with perfect confidence to that infinite ocean of air; where all familiar landmarks will vanish, and if its strength fails it must be lost. And the bird's hope is justified. There IS summer at the other end of the perilous journey. The scrap of valiant life obeys a true instinct, when it launches itself on the air. It is urged from within towards a goal it can attain; and may reckon the suffering of the moment not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed.”

Farewell, Maureen, faithful companion, faithful family member, faithful Brigidine.

At the beginning of her funeral Mass symbols of Maureen's life were placed on her coffin. These symbols included her original driver's licence dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1954.

**Anne Phibbs, New Zealand Region**

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## Margaret Kavanagh, 13th July 1930 - 18th September 2010

I alone know the plans I have for you  
plans for peace and not disaster  
plans to bring about a future full of hope (Jer. 29:11)

These words from Jeremiah were quoted by Sister Margaret Kavanagh (Eithne) two days before she died. We had been praying together and I was reflecting on some lines of Scripture that might comfort her at the time. She quoted these lines of Jeremiah and told me that they meant a lot to her. It was appropriate then that this reading was one of those chosen to be read at her funeral Mass.

Yes, it was God alone that knew the plans he had for Margaret as she took the first steps away from Paulstown, her family and friends to enter with the Brigidine Sisters in Tullow on the 8th December 1947. Margaret had been at school with the Brigidines in Paulstown along with her sisters Maura (Sister Martha) and Anna. Margaret often told me about those times and of one instance where her Mother sent her on an errand to a nearby farm and she was confronted by a dog – she took flight on her bicycle! However, there was no taking flight when she decided at the age of 17 years to leave her home and family and dedicate herself to Religious Life. Like all of us who took those steps, she had no idea what the future held but she took the risk placing her hope in the Lord. She did dream of a future full of hope and she wanted to live out that dream in either Australia or New Zealand. It was the year of the ‘big snow’ when she entered and there is no doubt that she and her companions experienced the loneliness of leaving home and the harshness of such a winter at the Novitiate in Tullow – probably not even the luxury of a hot water bottle to comfort her!

In 1951 Margaret, then Sister Eithne, along with her companion Sister Mildred Morrissey set sail for Australia. Margaret began life in Randwick where she spent five years. During this past summer, when Maree was here with us in Tullow, she visited with Margaret at Glendale Nursing Home and there Margaret recounted to her, how on that first assignment, she had to cook for 100 boarders and 50 sisters in Community with little or no knowledge of cooking. However, she managed to do so and I am sure she did it with all the dedication she could muster. Having somewhat settled in Randwick Margaret must have been a little taken aback, when five years later, she was asked to go to New Zealand with just a day’s notice to pack her bags. Again, Margaret saw this as part of God’s plan and in 1956 she set off to New Zealand. During her time there, she ministered in Johnsonville, Pahiatua, Carterton and Porirua East. It was there that she discovered, or was discovered to have a gift for working with children. She told me how she was told by an Inspector that she was a ‘born teacher’ and of how she loved to tell the children the Gospel Stories. No doubt many of the Sisters in Australia and New Zealand who lived or worked with Margaret will testify to her gentleness and her willingness to lend a hand whenever or wherever it was needed. Many have already done so by e-mail or letter as they remembered the life and death of Margaret.

Recently Margaret told me of a very special meeting she had with Father Peyton- the Rosary Priest - while she was in New Zealand. She was very unwell and confined to bed with back trouble. She heard that Father Peyton was visiting the local Church. She got up and made her way there. As he was entering the Church he noticed her and asked her to stay back later as he would like to meet her. He told her how he had noticed a shining light around her soul, that she would experience healing, and that she would certainly go to Heaven. As she told the story she was reliving that moment once again.

Margaret was a great storyteller and on my many visits to her at Glendale, I was transported back in time and place to Australia and New Zealand and of course to her early years as a child. Margaret could paint pictures with words and had a wonderful memory. All of us who lived and worked with Margaret could probably say the same. Right up until the night before her death Margaret was telling stories and remembering past times.

In 1970 Margaret once again took up roots and returned to her native Ireland. I came to know Margaret during those first years in Abbeylisk when I was a ‘young nun’ and she was working with the Boarders along with many other duties of care. Margaret was always a friendly presence to the Boarders and they called her the ‘little nun’. In 1978 Margaret was transferred to Denbigh in Wales where she was appointed Matron to the Boarders. It was meant to be a one year appointment but she was there for two years. She once told me that this was not an easy mission for her but I am sure she had a great influence on the girls she cared for. All this time Margaret was suffering pain and discomfort from her back. In





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1980 Margaret moved to Mountrath for a number of years where once again she took on the role of caring particularly for the older sisters and was a familiar presence down town as she went for messages. In this way Margaret met with and befriended many people with whom she often kept up contact. Margaret then returned to Tullow where she was now with her sister Martha and her beloved Vianney. They were like the three Musketeers, always there for one another right up to the end. At this time Parkinson's disease was catching up with Margaret but she never allowed it to stop her doing what she wanted to. However, the time came when it got the better of her and little by little she had to let go. This letting go brought with it the pain and loss of her independence but she tried to be brave and to do all she could for herself with the wonderful help, care and support of Sister Agnes, Martha her sister, and all her Brigidine Sisters in Tullow.

In April 2009 when it was felt that Margaret needed more professional help she took up residence at Glendale Nursing Home in Tullow where Sister Conleth Kelly was already a resident. This was a very difficult move for Margaret and she struggled with the loss of her Community as well as the loss of independence that she was experiencing. She was supported at this time by the many visits and prayers of those who came to her. She received the Eucharist each morning from either Sister Agnes, or myself, and this was always a special time for her. Sisters Martha and Vianney came to be with her on a regular basis and she always looked forward to the visits. At times Margaret came down to be with the Community for an afternoon. In January of this year Margaret had to endure the death of her beloved sister Anna. Thankfully, she was well enough to accompany Martha to the wake and removal of Anna's remains to the Church. When Sister Conleth died in March of this year it brought more sorrow to Margaret but she kept going and kept faith with her God.

Margaret was able to be out in her wheelchair up to July. She loved to watch the ducks at Glendale. However, the highlight of the year for Margaret was her Jubilee celebration on the 9th of July as well as the celebration of her 80th birthday on the 13th July. Our Health Care Co-ordinator, Una Coughlin, ensured that all went smoothly. Many Brigidines joined with Margaret in celebrating 60 years of Religious Life on the 9th July 2010. It was so good that she was able to be with us in Teach Bhride for the celebration.

The last and greatest hurdle Margaret had to cross was when she got a bad chest infection and had to be hospitalized. It was decided then that Margaret was no longer able to swallow her food safely and peg feeding was initiated. Once again, Margaret had to let go – let go of her favourite cup of tea and her enjoyment of food. It was so difficult for her and she struggled with that loss, as well as having to be dependent for all her needs. For all of us who accompanied Margaret during those last six weeks it was heartbreaking too, but as time went on, she became more serene in herself and even began to look well. She could no longer receive the Eucharist but we prayed with her and shared in many ways by breaking the Word of God. Margaret was very alert and also very grateful for the many visits and the support that she received from all who called to visit.

When on Saturday the 18th we got word that Margaret had died, it came as a shock to us. However, we were so happy to know that Nicola – an Indian Nurse who had already endeared herself to Conleth – was on duty that night and had been to see Margaret at different times throughout the night. At one of those times Margaret asked Nicola for a cup of tea and her Rosary Beads and told her that she would pray for her. Nicola could not oblige with the tea but ensured that Margaret had her beads which she was so attached to. Early that morning Nicola called in and noticed that all was not well – she took Margaret in her arms and having looked up at her, Margaret died peacefully. We are so grateful that Margaret's suffering wasn't prolonged and she is now at home with God, her parents and her beloved sister Anna who died in January of this year and of course all her Brigidine Sisters whom she loved so well.

**Paula Conway, Ireland UK Province**

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## Mary Lacey 1st July 1928 - 25th September 2010

Last year in preparation for Mary's celebration of her Diamond Jubilee of Religious Profession as a Brigidine, I spent a few days with her in Beechworth sharing memories and recalling special events and loved ones. Little did I dream, just a year later, that I would be privileged to share aspects of Mary's journey as we gather today to celebrate her life and death.

Where did it all begin?

Mary was born in Bendigo on July 1, 1928 to her loving parents Patrick (Pat) and Ellen (Nell) Lacey and was a very, very welcome gift for her eleven year old brother, Leo. The family moved to Kyabram when Mary was 18 months old; this simple event was to result in Mary's family and my family becoming life-long friends, and, for my part, I cannot remember a time when Mary did not feature in my life. With so many others, I will treasure her memory and her kindly advice and wisdom along the way.

Mary has always had a remarkable memory. One of her earliest memories was when she was about 4 and she attended a Fancy Dress in the Kyabram theatre. She was dressed in a costume made of paper strips and she sang

‘When it's Spring time in the Rockies’

She said it was her first and last solo but many years later Brigidines would remember Mary entertaining us with many amusing ditties during the holidays or at other province gatherings. Mary really knew how to enjoy herself and loved to find any excuse for a party.



Mary's memory of family life was a very happy one. Her parents were very involved in parish and community life and their home was a place where all were welcome. Mary always had a great love of music, a love that was nurtured and encouraged in a home where there were songs around the piano, often accompanied by a member of the family on his/her musical instrument. I remember, along with many other Kyabram children, being envious of Mary because her family owned a pianola. It was indeed a highlight to be invited to play a tune on it.

In 1933, aged 5, it was time for Mary to leave the scene of the pianola and go off to school. She commenced her education at St Augustine's School and again, an ordinary event such as this was to be the beginning of an association which would culminate many years later in Mary becoming a Brigidine.

Mary recalled that a memory she had in her primary school years was of her brother, Leo, often going away on a train. At this time Leo would have been completing his secondary education at Kilmore to be followed by his training at Werribee where he studied for the priesthood. Mary felt these separations very deeply and often took the morning off school to recover. The night before Leo was to leave on what Mary called the ‘bad train’ he would take her out to look at the stars. Pointing up to the sky he would say: “Mary, you look up at the stars each night and I'll do the same and I'll be home before you can say ‘Jack Robinson’”. Leo and Mary were inseparable so his early death at 61 in 1979 would have been a continuing heartache for her. But Mary continued to look up at the stars!

Mary completed the merit Certificate in 1941 and continued her secondary education at St Joseph's College, Echuca. These years as a weekly boarder were a very important time for her and she commented on the lasting influence the Brigidines had on her and the great friendships that were formed with school mates. During the sharing of memories at the Vigil Liturgy it was evident from the stories related that these friendships had blossomed into life-long relationships.

Mary left St Joseph's to take up teaching but, being only 16 ½, she was too young to go to Teachers' College so she spent the first year at Cohuna tutored by the Infant Mistress and other teachers. The second year, still too young for Teachers' College, she did a 2 weeks rural school training and then took up the running of the Fernihurst State School. The total enrolment was just 7 pupils, but, as Mary recounted, it was still a big challenge catering for the one pupil in each grade! Fernihurst was in a very remote area on the edge of the Mallee. There was Mass there once every 3 months and, nothing daunted, Mary rode her bike to attend. As well as practising her faith she probably kept very fit as a consequence.

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***‘Enlarge the site of your tent...’ in the shelter of the oak***



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Teachers' College was to be the next step in her journey but, during the year at Fernihurst, Mary had returned to thinking about Religious Life so, in September, she resigned in order to spend some time at home with her parents before entering the Brigidine Novitiate on St Brigid's Day 1 February, 1947. Mary made her First Profession on September 1, 1949 and took up her first teaching ministry at St Augustine's School in Maryborough. Between this first appointment and her final one to Beechworth in 1996 Mary was a member of the following communities - Springvale, Mentone, Kyabram (2), Malvern, Wangaratta (2), Clayton, Echuca, Bonbeach, Ararat and Albert Park and Windsor (England). Mary's ministry spanned 61 years. She spent 41 years in 8 country communities and 18 years in 7 city communities. Mary often spoke of her 2 years in Windsor as a very rich and broadening experience. Above all she treasured the opportunity she had to meet and share life and ministry with our Brigidines in Ireland, England and Wales.

These are a couple of memories that stood out for Mary during her many years of teaching.

In the 1950s many migrants came to Australia. In the late 50s Mary was principal at St Joseph's Primary School, Springvale. There were 520 students so that meant an average of 100 students per classroom. Hard to conceive compared with the regulations re numbers to a class today. In stark contrast Mary remembered her next appointment in 1959 to Kyabram. She and Sr Augustine were to be the Founding Sisters for St Patrick's Primary School in Tongala. Mary said she thought she was getting a preview of heaven when she realised that from 520 pupils she was now gifted with just 60!

One of Mary's stories from this time is particularly touching, bringing out as it does the lovely simplicity of a child and the graciousness and understanding of both Augustine and Mary. The setting was the day after the School Sports. A small boy arrived in Mary's classroom. On asking what he required he said Sr Augustine told me to tell you that my father said: "I wan like a wocket in the welay!"

Mary, as many would know, never lost her kindly sense of humour and quick wit and her ability to put people at their ease. Mary was an excellent teacher and educator but she had many other strings to her bow. Mary completed her training as a Librarian in the late '70s and with Joyce Windridge set up the Library in St Joseph's College, Echuca, with the assistance of a Government grant.

Mary held many leadership roles both at local and province levels. Mary will always be remembered for the amount she contributed to the re-designing of many of our communities and to the researching into alternative accommodation as we began the movement out of a number of our bigger convents in the late 70s. It seems very fitting that Mary, for a number of years, herself enjoyed the comfort and beauty of the refurbished Beechworth Convent.

For many years Mary and her close friend, Gerardus, had a dream and that was to set up a prayer house in the country. In 1991 their dream was realised when they took up residence at 15 Shadforth St, Wangaratta. Many of us will remember visiting there for quiet times and retreats and recall with gratitude the gracious hospitality we received. This contemplative community continued until 1995 with Mary moving into the Beechworth community at the beginning of 1996. She listed her ministry as 'carer and parish involvement' and in 2008 she included an entry which read 'now retired'. Over the past 2 years Mary may have retired from some activities but she certainly did not stop being a gentle presence in the parish with a readiness to lend a listening ear and to assist in all sorts of ways to make people feel welcome and appreciated.

Beechworth has been home for Mary for the past 15 years and she loved being here with every fibre of her being. She loved living amongst so much natural beauty; most of all she loved living with you the Beechworth people and sharing everyday life with you. The beautiful farewell she received when she moved to Corpus Christi Aged Care in May is testimony to the great love and respect in which she was held.

Mary's time in Corpus Christi was very short and although experiencing very poor health she continued to reach out to many of the residents and staff who had cared for her so lovingly. Speaking to one of the residents the day after Mary died she commented:

"Once you met Mary you knew you had come in contact with a very special person."

Yes, Mary was a very special woman, valiant and faith-filled and we are all going to miss her very much. She faced her death with her characteristic acceptance and serenity and we can now rejoice in the knowledge that she is at home with the God she loved and served so well.

Mary, loved and loving, may your gentle soul rest in peace.

**Maria Guinan, Victorian Province**

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## Judith Hodge 20 December 1928 - 11th October 2010

Catherine Mary Hodge was born in Island Bay in 1928 but was brought up in Johnsonville. She is one of the four children of Frederick Martin Victor Hodge (known as Vic) of good Westport stock, and a wonderful little Scottish lady, Margaret Veronica Hodge nee Devon. Young Catherine attended St Brigid's school, Johnsonville, where she was taught by Sr Margaret Mary who instilled in her a life-long love of literature and poetry, and by Sr Clement, who taught her maths – perhaps a little less successfully! It was here, too, that her faith was nurtured.

Catherine had interesting and eventful teenage years, much of her active social life centring around this Johnsonville parish, then ruled by Father Clem Evans. She was a bright, vivacious, talented young woman with a very good singing voice which she used for the glory of God. After she left school Catherine worked in the Drama Department in Broadcasting. I believe she was twice engaged to be married but in the end her decision was to become a Brigidine Sister. She entered the Convent at Randwick, Sydney, on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1954 not long after her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. There are many tales told of her novitiate experiences but perhaps the most memorable is when she had the duty of ringing the wake-up bell at 6.00 am, awoke to see one hand of the clock on 6 and the other on 12 so rang the bell vigorously at 12.30 am bringing all the professed sisters and novices out of their beds.



Following her profession as a Brigidine Sister in 1956 Judith returned to the community at Johnsonville. In those days the big Convent on the hill was bulging at the seams and on 9 February 1958 Sr Judith was among the band of 8 pioneer Sisters who left Johnsonville and went to Titahi Bay. The Sisters had a mission (teaching) and a community, but had nowhere to live. They were offered the temporary use of a weekend house and gratefully squeezed into a two bed-roomed house using the lounge and even the porch for bedrooms. Fortunately they were young and able to laugh at many of their problems.

Not only were the convents full, but so were the schools, so each Sister was needed for the teaching apostolate. This meant that there was no time out for training and Judith, like the rest of us, studied for her Teaching Certificate in the evenings and weekends, doing several subjects a year until it was completed. We have often joked about her passing her Physical Education and science papers, but she certainly had no trouble with music as she was a gifted singer. Had it been a different time I'm sure Judith would have had the opportunity of University study because she was very intelligent, but she made up for this in later life by joining the University of the Third Age.

By 1960 Judith was back in the Johnsonville community and she returned here three more times, as teacher, as Principal and eventually as Superior in 1969. Father Fitgibbon spoke so well last night of her kindness to him during those years and of how she built up St Brigid's into the fine school it is today. She had many positions of responsibility within the Congregation both as Principal and as Superior.

In 1984, when Judith was the Regional Co-ordinator, she was a member of the Porirua East community of around 23 Sisters. She and two other Sisters expressed a wish to experiment with an unstructured type of Religious Life in a small community. The Onslow parish was happy to have the Brigidines there, as ordinary parishioners, so the three went house-hunting.

There is a description of their house-hunting in the annals and I quote:

"The first house had a delightful, uninterrupted view of the harbour and Judith had to be literally pulled away from the window to face the realities ... it was unfurnished; it was on the very edge of the parish; it was too expensive."

While living in Ngaio, Judith continued her work at Viard College where she was full-time co-ordinator of the Language Extension Unit. She was a definite asset on the staff, and her intelligence and bright personality ensured many an interesting



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conversation in the staff-room. During this time Sr Judith instructed a young refugee, Cheng Huor, in the Catholic faith and was amazed at his reactions as he heard the story of our salvation for the first time.

In July 1989 Judith attended a General Chapter of the Brigidine Congregation in Ireland. One of the participants at that Chapter e-mailed a few days ago from Ireland: “My vivid memory of Judith was at the ’89 Chapter in Dublin when she was Regional Superior. She was vivacious and creative with all her ideas – and of course was glamorous and kept herself so well”. I think we’d all agree with that description. After the Chapter Judith visited Scotland and saw the place where her mother had lived as a child and met some of her mother’s school friends. She described this as the experience of a lifetime.

Judith retired from her teaching position at Viard College at the end of 1989 thus ending a 34 year spell of teaching – a wonderful contribution to the mission of the Church and to New Zealand society.

After Ngaio there were to be three more moves of residence for Judith – to Khandallah, to Karori and finally to Apartment 247 at Metlifecare Coastal Villas, Paraparaumu. She wished to be in Paraparaumu to be close to her sister, Pat, and brother-in-law, Patrick, and until a week ago her lovely serviced apartment was just right for her. Her family meant a great deal to her and on my last visit to Judith she spent the time telling me how wonderful her nieces are. It was a great pleasure to her, too, that the children of her brother Richard were all in touch this year.

My own contact with Judith came through meeting her in a taxi in 1960. She was the first Brigidine I had ever met and I was amazed to find a Sister so full of personality. For the past two years, Sr Trish Hanaray and I have been responsible for Judith’s welfare and have been very frequent visitors both to Karori and to Paraparaumu as well as speaking to Judith by phone every day.

Attempting to describe Sr Judith is a bit like describing Maria in the Sound of Music – how do you catch a cloud and pin it down? How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand? Because there were so many Judiths – the strong, capable, decisive Sr Judith who could quite easily run a school, the worrier who lived ahead of time and looked at problems long before they ever came; the bright, cheerful, vivacious Judith and the deep thinker; the believer and the sceptic, the carefree and the troubled. This whole package was the Judith we loved.

I really hope that St Brigid’s vision of Heaven as a great party is true as it would suit Judith very well. This is Saint Brigid’s vision of a heavenly community in which all created beings were joined in joy:

I would wish a great lake of ale for the King of Kings;  
I would wish the family of heaven to be drinking it throughout life and time.  
I would wish the men of Heaven in my own house;  
I would wish vessels of peace to be given to them.  
I would wish joy to be in their drinking;  
I would wish Jesu to be here among them;  
I would wish the three Marys of great name;  
I would wish the people of heaven from every side.  
I would wish to be a rent-payer to the Prince the way if I was in trouble he would give me a good blessing.

May Judith receive her good blessing from the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings and may she be accompanied to the party by Brigid and the three Marys.

**Anne Phibbs New Zealand Region**

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## Majella Thomas 1st March 1924 to 18th October 2010

We've come here today to celebrate the life of Shirley Monica Thomas known to most of us here as Majella and to commend her spirit to her God.

Majella was the daughter of George and Dorothy Thomas of Mordialloc and the loving sister of George, Kenneth, Valda, Pat and sister-in-law, Nancy—all of whom have predeceased her. Her youngest brother Warren is with us today and we extend our special sympathy to you, Warren. Maj was also the loving aunt and grand-aunt to a wonderful group of nieces and nephews and their children who all loved her dearly. Lastly but not least she was loving sister to all her Brigidine Sisters.

Majella was born 86 years ago in Northcote but was brought up in Mordialloc in what became a great old house opposite St Brigid's primary school. Rumour has it that she was a good friend of the then Parish priest, Father English. When she confided in him that she wanted to become a missionary sister, he said, "What's wrong with the Brigidines, join them?" And she did, on the 8th of September, 1954, together with Maria Guinan, Barbara Sykes and myself—here today—and two other novitiate companions, Kathleen Desmond and Pat Riley.



Majella was a good bit older than the rest of us but that didn't prevent her getting into quite a bit of conflict with the mistress of Novices....Maj had a very definite stubborn streak and a will of her own at a time when you were not supposed to have them - not unlike the then mistress of novices really!

She also had some lovable qualities, not least a wonderful sense of humour which saw the incongruous in so much of our day to day lives and which was often directed against herself. When it all became too much she would collapse into laughter and there are some semi-horrific memories of this happening at the most solemn moments of our life.

When Majella became a Brigidine she was already an experienced primary teacher. I remember admiring the quality of the teaching aids she produced and also her beautiful handwriting. In fact, last evening we were looking at her wonderful book of lesson plans when she was in teacher training back in 1944. She was very artistic as well as being very meticulous in whatever she put her hand to - a quality that was both exasperating and endearing. Not everyone would know that she was both an excellent dressmaker and an excellent cook. There was only one snag! When Majella cooked you were never too sure what hour the meal would finally arrive on the table. I remember once it took as long to make the sauce as it did to produce the rest of the meal. Meeting deadlines was not Maj's top virtue!

After Novitiate, she was assigned to the Springvale community. For the next 10 years, she taught in Brigidine primary schools in Clayton, Springvale and Mordialloc - those were the days when primary class numbers were around the 100 mark. She also taught in our secondary schools in Hawthorn and Ararat.

In 1968, she became principal of St Mary's, East Malvern. By 1975 she had acquired a Diploma in librarianship and this opened up for her a parallel career in education. From 1975 until she retired in 2003 at the ripe old age of 79, Maj undertook various positions in the libraries of Marian, West Sunshine and Killester, Springvale where she was especially loved and appreciated and even cosseted by the whole library staff. It is a great mark of theirs and other staff members' affection for her that when she retired to the Presentation Sisters nursing home, she was regularly visited by her Killester Colleagues.

During the 1970's, Maj spent two years caring for her mother. This was a duty of love. Family (as we have heard from Tina) has always meant a great deal to her and she to them. She felt very much the deaths not only of her parents but of her very special Auntie Vera, her lovely sisters, Valda and Pat and her big brother George. She has remained close to Warren and she has become the very special aunt of her nieces and nephews. Maj had a great capacity to listen without making judgements and then in her slow, measured way to offer a small gem of advice or comfort. The quotation on the front of her mass book today captures something of that relationship with her family and Brigidine sisters as well as her own with her God. In a spirit of faith we believe she is already enjoying a few reunions.



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One of Maj's great delights was reading - she loved detective yarns and thrillers but she also appreciated great literature. She was a bit of a film buff, enjoyed TV and had an extensive general knowledge. For much of her life she was an armchair traveller but alone or together with some of her Brigidine sisters she made some memorable expeditions to Alice Springs, Western Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand and a little closer to home - Ararat. She was one of those people whose car is an extension of themselves. So, it was a very painful realization for her when she understood that she could no longer drive. In her latter years she lost most of her eye-sight and a lot of mobility - two very big afflictions for someone who loved so much to read and travel.

All her life, Maj had indifferent health which made her not unfamiliar with the inside of more than one hospital. She was also a bit of an expert on accidents and how to do them. It would probably be easier to count the unbroken bones in her body than those she had broken. Her most recent operation was for a broken hip sadly, those who met up with her again late last week said they saw quite a change in her-that some of her usual spark had gone - it was as though at last she was just a bit too tired to go on.

Well, as we know, Maj left us very unexpectedly last Monday - we have become so very used to her response when asked how she was. With a bit of a twinkle in her eye she would say: 'Oh, Poorly', and my response often was "well as long as you're not 'proper poorly' you're ok". Last Monday Maj was 'proper poorly'.

Her leaving us, fittingly, had a certain drama about it - in the middle of the ordinary and expected the unexpected happened and we are all still a bit shocked. Maj was a good woman, without malice, a person of great integrity, faithful and loyal to family, friends and her Brigidine community. I cannot recall her ever saying a bad word about anyone.

In September this year, Pope Benedict xvi declared John Henry Newman to be Blessed. In his sermon the Pope reminded us that Newman believed that God has assigned specific tasks to each one of us and these tasks are uniquely our own. In reflecting on this belief, Newman said:

"I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. God has not created me for nothing. I shall do good, I shall do God's work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place ....if I do but keep God's commandments and serve God in my calling".

These words have a resonance in Majella's life - she was uniquely her own person; she did not seek to be anyone but herself; she kept the commandments and served God in her calling. May she now rest in peace.

**Catherine Kelly Victorian Province**

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## **2011 JUBILARIANS**

### **IRELAND**

#### **Diamond**

Concepta McDonnell	26 / 7 / 2011
Brid Richardson	26 / 7 / 2011
Kathleen Campion	28 / 8 / 2011

#### **Golden**

Kay Mulhall	10 / 4 / 2011
Elizabeth Kelly	14 / 6 / 2011
Angela Phelan	28 / 8 / 2011
Mary Slattery	28 / 8 / 2011

### **USA REGION**

#### **Diamond**

Virgil Fogarty	28 / 8 / 2011
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### **NSW PROVINCE**

Monna Cowburn	8 / 9 / 2011
Clare Riley	8 / 9 / 2011

### **NEW ZEALAND REGION**

#### **Diamond**

Monica Landy	8 / 9 / 2011
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### **VICTORIA**

#### **Platinum**

Canisia Larkin	8 / 9 / 2011
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#### **Diamond**

Eleanor Quinn	24 / 2 / 2011
Philippa Considine	1 / 9 / 2011
Marie Feiss	1 / 9 / 2011
Elizabeth Hennessy	1 / 9 / 2011
Brigida Nailon	1 / 9 / 2011
Mary O'Brien	1 / 9 / 2011
Marie O'Kelly	1 / 9 / 2011

#### **Golden**

Maree Holt	16 / 12 / 2011
Mary Quirk	16 / 12 / 2011

# *Congratulations*

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*'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak*