

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.”

Therese Spruhan, Catholic Religious Australia

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.”

