

Archbishop's Message
Archbishop Christopher Prowse

Three Easter Letters

At their recent Plenary, the Bishops of Australia had a full agenda which included the writing of three Easter letters.

First, there is the request that all Australian Catholics on May 24/25 entrust Australia during this COVID-19 pandemic to the Immaculate Heart of Mary under the title of Mary Help of Christians, the patron of our country. I therefore request all of us, in parishes, schools and families, to pray fervently this prayer of entrustment over those days. Thank you.

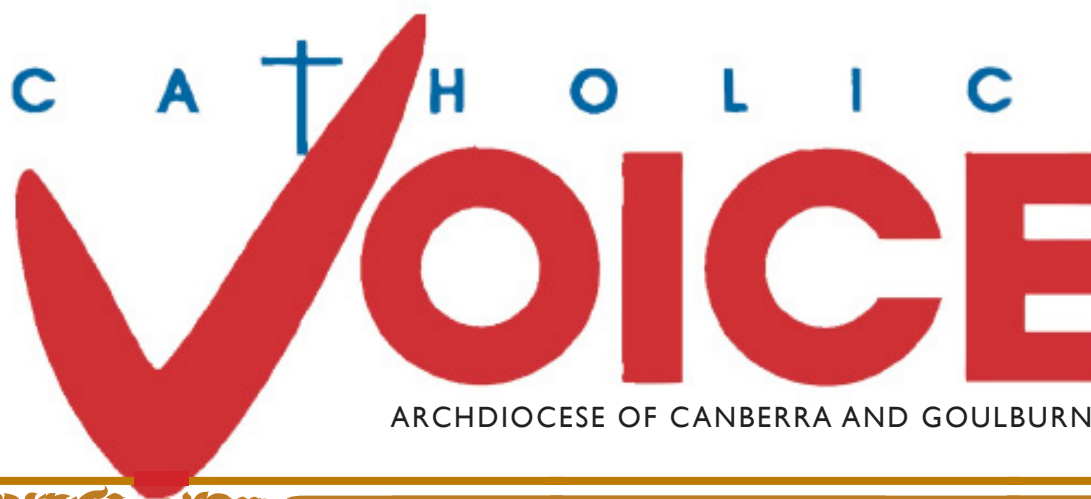
O Immaculate Mary, Help of Christians, Queen of Heaven and Earth, and tender Mother of humanity, at this time when a pandemic threatens all your children we entrust to you our nation, Australia, and all who live in this country. We commit to your intercession all the members of our community, beginning with the weakest ones, from the unborn to the sick, the disabled and the elderly. We commit to you our families, our young and old, and all who are vulnerable, those who are quarantined or anxious. We entrust to your Immaculate Heart those who have lost their livelihood or employment, our pastors and other essential service workers and our leaders at this time. We implore your intercession especially for the protection of doctors and nurses and those who minister to the contagious sick in this crisis.

Reign over us, Mother of God, and teach us how to make the Heart of Jesus reign triumph in us and around us, as it has reigned and triumphed in you! St Joseph, Pray for us.

Secondly, I recently sent to the clergy of our diocese a letter from all the bishops to the priests of Australia. This commemorates the bicentenary of the arrival of the first official chaplains to Australia who lived here and meant our sacraments could finally be freely celebrated.

Thirdly, there is another letter of encouragement to all Australian Catholics during this pandemic. With churches only now slowly opening up, we want you to feel our closeness and thanks for your patience. 'Meeting' online is a good 'Plan B' but no substitute for face-to-face encounters at Mass and other gatherings. Please God, this will return sooner rather than later. I will wait until next week before I send this to you all. I want our greetings to coincide with the great solemnity of Pentecost.

These are simple but sincere gestures by all the bishops to reach out to you in these days of stress yet hope. I do trust you feel our closeness in Christ to you all.



ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN



Imagine young Colleen Beattie farewelling her family in 1950 to cross the Tasman and begin a life of silence and servitude at the Carmelite Monastery in Melbourne. Vatican II swept away much of convent monasticism.

Vale Sr Mary Agnes OCDM.

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SISTER MARY AGNES, OCDM 30.8.1928 - 12.5.2020

British comedies, French magazines and dark chocolate

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

BRITISH comedies, a French magazine in the mail each month and a morsel of dark chocolate – these were the simple joys of Sr Mary Agnes, a dignified woman who died on May 12 at the Carmelite monastery in Red Hill.

Such indulgences were a far cry from the 91-year-old Mother Prioress's early days in the Melbourne convent she joined at 22, where food was sparse, the work hard and the life austere.

"We used to sleep on a pail-lasse which was a thin mattress of straw," Sr Bernadette recalled. "They were dreadful."

"Sr Mary Agnes joined in 1950 when the life was very severe and austere. The sisters would be up at 4.30am and break their fast after Mass with a slice of bread and half a cup of milk.



Sr Bernadette at the convent this week.

"It was a vegetarian diet so the sisters may have had something to eat at 10am and again at 4pm and that was it. It was real physical labour and a lot of the girls found it hard to sleep. They'd be working in the vegetable garden and see a ledge and dream of having a nap."

"It was a life of penance and suffering, as it would have been for St Therese in Lisieux."

The Jansenistic culture was brought to Australia by the French Carmelite nuns but changed when the Founding Superior died.

(Jansenism was a theological movement in the 17th and 18th centuries that emphasized original sin and human depravity. It originated from Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen.)

"Sr Marie Teresa made sure we had decent blankets," Sr Bernadette said. "If you are not well fed and warm you can't pray."

Born as Colleen Beattie in Auckland on August 30, 1928, Sr Mary Agnes was the fourth of five children. Her father John was a returned soldier who died when Colleen was 20.

She did bookkeeping before sailing across the Tasman in 1950 with Moya Ryan to join the Carmelite convent in Melbourne which was founded in 1922.

"I suspect their Kiwi accents would have been a novelty for the sisters when the strict Carmelite Silence was suspended for recreation periods," Sr Bernadette said.

The name Sr Mary Agnes would have been given to Colleen about six months after arriving.

"It signals belonging," Sr

Bernadette said. "You have been accepted by the order and have given yourself to God."

Taking first vows in 1952 and final vows in 1956, Sr Mary Agnes spent the next 18 years at the Kew Monastery before moving to Canberra with five sisters in 1974 to establish a daughter house.

A derelict family home in Red Hill was on the market and looked ideal for a convent, thought the Mother Superior.

Sr Mary Agnes became Prioress in 1997 after Sr Gertrude's death.

With a keen intellect and passion for politics, Sr Mary Agnes relished the close knit community that grew around the Carmel, obvious in their annual fetes and small army of loyal helpers.

"Sr Mary Agnes loved a chuckle and the British comedies Dad's Army, Steptoe and Son and Keeping Up Appearances were favourites," Sr Bernadette said.

"St Therese was her best pal. She subscribed to a monthly Carmelite magazine from Lisieux and used to bring it to evening recreation and translate the articles as she read them to us."

The death of four of her sisters between May 2017 and October 2018 was hard for the Mother Prioress.

"She was very much a mother to us and no mother wants to lose her children," Sr Bernadette said.

On Mother's Day, two days before she died, Sr Mary Agnes chatted to her only living sibling, her 99-year-old sister Joan who lives in Wellington.

That afternoon, Joan's son Pat



Sr Mary Agnes wearing the choir mantle she will be buried in.

Firth died of cancer.

The next day, Sr Mary Agnes was on the phone again, to Pat's wife Mary, offering condolences.

The following day, Sr Mary Agnes died.

She had spent a lovely afternoon with friend Anne Kelly and the sisters had evening prayer in the lounge. After a bit of tea and some television, Sr Bernadette was walking Sr Mary Agnes to her room when she had a fall. She died at about 9.30pm with the sisters surrounding her.

The sisters later said their night prayer in Sr Mary Agnes's bedroom.

While Sr Bernadette cared for the Mother Prioress, that didn't stop some playful teasing.

"I'd tease her and call her darling but she took it in the spirit it was meant, with affection and respect," Sr Bernadette said.

"It's the practical things I will miss, like preparing her breakfast each morning; some bread and butter and vegemite with some coffee and fruit.

"She was a simple woman and would eat what you put before her."

"But she always said a bit of chocolate would fix anything."

A well-spoken nun keen for some good jokes

TWO things were important to Sr Mary Agnes before she died; knowing the fate of Cardinal George Pell and the visit of the relics of St Therese.

"They were the two things keeping her alive," said friend Anne Kelly.

"Sr Mary Agnes was captivated by the Cardinal Pell case and so pleased with the High Court decision. The next day I took in *The Australian* newspaper and read every article at her bedside."

The Mother Prioress had a deep love for St Therese and was delighted to host the relics of the French saint and her parents

Louis and Zelig.

A retired lawyer, Anne and husband Doug, who died in 2015, had lived in Canberra since 1980 but did not know about the Carmel until the early 1990s when her Uncle Arthur in Melbourne urged the pair to visit.

"One of the nuns at the time, Sr Tharsicius, was Uncle Arthur's wife Betty's niece, so sister and I were related," Anne said.

The enterprising nuns soon put Doug and Anne to work, handing them the lucky dip stall at the Carmelite fete before the couple took over the book stall.

"It was an enormous job,"

Anne chuckled. "We cleared our double garage for four months to fill it with books."

Despite a 13-year age difference, Anne and Sr Mary Agnes had much in common including an appetite for politics. They grew up in the same area in New Zealand and shared the same education teacher Miss Knight.

"We were both educated by the Mercy nuns in Auckland; Sr Mary Agnes at St Leo's in Devonport and I was at St Mary's in Ponsonby," Anne said.

"One day Sr Mary Agnes recited an Elizabeth Barrett Browning poem the way Miss Knight would



Close friend Anne Kelly.

have taught us, emphasizing the right words. It was very funny.

"Lately I had been reading her poetry but she wanted something light and asked for some good jokes. She was a lot of fun."

Pragmatic priests for a wicked generation

Australia's Bishops this week sent a letter to priests to mark the 200th anniversary of the first official Catholic chaplains to our shores. This is an edited extract from the letter.

WHILE there had briefly been convict priests or visitors, and occasional celebrations of Mass, it was only with the arrival of Fathers John Joseph Therry and Philip Conolly that there were priests here permanently, and the Mass and other sacraments could be freely celebrated.

Conolly was described as a man "of no small ability and attainments, witty and full of dry humour" who laboured for 14 years among "a wicked and perverse generation", making regular quarterly visits on horseback from Hobart Town to Launceston, George Town and other settlements.

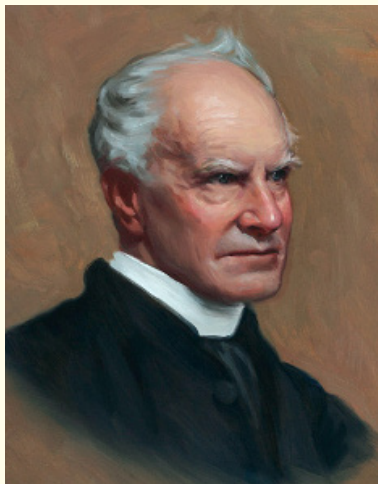
Therry was described as "popular, energetic and restless... articulate and thorough", and proved himself "a far-seeing pastor... a conscientious official... and a pragmatic Irish supporter of the democratic freedoms". He built the first St Mary's in Sydney and many other churches and schools. He travelled unceasingly throughout the country, visiting those in hospitals, gaols and farms, providing the sacraments, counselling and teaching. He was widely loved, if not always by those in authority, connecting well with the Catholic faithful and even those of other churches, and making an early defence of Aboriginal rights. Yet in his own words, his 44 year-long ministry in Australia was "one of incessant labour very often accompanied by painful anxiety".

Together these two, and the many priests who came after them, laid the groundwork for the growth of the Church in Australia.

A very large part of our nation's spiritual and social infrastructure was established by priests, and by the growing numbers of consecrated religious working beside them. Today the Catholic community cares for millions of people through 1300 parishes, 10,000 hospital beds, 20,000 aged care places, 700,000 school desks and countless acts of charitable assistance and pastoral care: a network of faith and love we have inherited due to the leadership of the clergy these two centuries past.

We acknowledge there has been cause for shame in recent years regarding the terrible behaviour of some priests, as there has been for the radical failure of some bishops to supervise them appropriately. Nonetheless, this anniversary gives us cause to remember that most by far have been selflessly devoted to their people and are not rightly tainted by the failures of those few.

If we now appreciate better than ever that bishops and priests



Fr John Therry from Cork, Ireland.



Fr Philip Conolly from Monaghan, Ireland.

are taken from among ordinary men and have many shortcomings, we should celebrate the extraordinary things that, by God's grace, these ordinary men have achieved. And as bishops we commit ourselves to doing all we can to assist in the discernment, formation and ongoing support of good priestly vocations going forward.

Milestones like the present one should be times for recollection, reflection and recommitment. Over the last two centuries, the Church in Australia has experienced adversity and challenges of many sorts; more recently these have included the child sexual abuse crisis, natural disasters and the temporary closure of churches due to pandemic. Yet each time priests have demonstrated their perseverance and pastoral creativity. Each time the Catholic people have signalled their love for their priests and their need for their sanctifying, teaching and leading work. As bishops, we join our voices to theirs and record our gratitude to our priests, for their service to God and his people, and their fraternity with us.

At the Chrism Mass each year, dear brothers, you renew your ordination promises and resolve once again "to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him... to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God in the Holy Eucharist and other liturgical rites, and to discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching". This is a truly noble vocation! On this 200th birthday of the Australian priesthood, we send you our thanks and blessings.

Turning the tables on the journos

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

JOURNALISTS have a quick answer for everything. That's what keen scribes Molly and Ava concluded from their recent internship in a newsroom.

And reporters can face jail for exposing wrong-doing, as the girls learned from speaking to one of Australia's top investigative writers.

"We interviewed Adele Ferguson who said people had stalked her and she had nearly gone to jail for some stories," Molly said.

"It made me realise the impact that reporting can have and how it can get journalists into trouble."

"It was eye-opening," Ava added. "I've never really thought of all the different things a journalist can do and write about."

Year 10 students at St Patrick's Parish School in Cooma, Molly and Ava were among nine students from across the country chosen for the week-long internship with *Australian Catholics*.

As well as interviewing leading journalists, the girls attended writing workshops and sessions on social media and taking photos.

Encouraged by energetic En-



St Patrick's Cooma students Molly (left) and Ava with principal Frances Robertson.

glish teacher Suzanne Stacey, the keen writers will each pen articles for the magazine's Spring issue and are co-writing a piece about Rural Fire Service volunteers.

"The journalists seemed to have a quick answer for everything," Molly said.

"They revealed a lot of detail and behind-the-scenes stuff which was really interesting."

There was mild panic over

looming deadlines but the budding reporters were relieved to learn they had more time to finesse their words.

"We thought we had to write our articles by the end of the week and were worried," Ava said.

"But they are not due until June. It is a long process, just thinking about how you will approach a story. That's another thing about journalism we hadn't realized."

Big-hearted kinder kids at Bombala



WITH a visit to the local aged care home called off, kinder kids at St Joseph's Primary in Bombala delivered artwork to Currawarna residents instead. "We would love to visit you but sadly we are unable," their message read. "We hope St Joey's can visit soon."

Snatching self-care late at night

LIKE most parents juggling work with home schooling, Caroline Weller has found little time for self-care except late at night.

Missing Mass and her Taizé prayer meeting, Caroline has created a resource "A Prayer of Connection and Hope" for people to use.

With the routine of her life changed, Caroline said she needed to discover more peace.

"Work has been understanding but the demands have left me worn out," she said.

"I've found I have little time for self-care except late at night."

Aware that people were missing Taizé music and prayers, Caroline used YouTube music recordings for her prayer resource.

There have been Canberra services for more than 20 years using resources provided by the Taizé



Caroline Weller

Community in France.

"I found the silence a bit daunting at first but I've learned to be gentle with myself and now find peace in the stillness," she said.

• Members of the Canberra Taizé prayer group share some thoughts:

Annemarie Nicol: Taizé is a village in France that is home to a community of monks. In Australia, Taizé is better known for its unique style of prayer, which is gentle and contemplative. I help to organize the Canberra Taizé group monthly prayer and love sharing this beautiful way of being with God.

I went to a gathering of young people in the 1990s in Sydney organized by the Taizé Community. It was the first time I had experienced the prayer and community that is so typical of Taizé and I felt

immediately at home.

A few years later I went travelling through Europe and planned to stay one week in Taizé. In summer the tiny village of Taizé hosts 6000 young people at a time. During my first prayer in the Church of Reconciliation I experienced an overwhelming feeling of joy. The community allowed me to stay longer and life was a beautiful rhythm of prayer and work.

Geoff Driscoll: I was invited to the Taizé service in Canberra some years ago and it was like no other service I had been to before. I truly feel the Spirit leads us. The service is very genuine. The quiet, still peace and gentleness of the service keeps me coming back and there is a real spirit of community.

• For details about Taizé services c.weller@internode.on.net To access the prayer resource go to www.catholicvoice.org.au