



HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

Volume 54 No 1

April 2021

Newsletter

Greetings everyone,

2021 is upon us! We are thankful for the healthy position Australia is in regarding Covid 19. The huge loss of life across many other countries is devastating, and it's a great relief that the vaccination roll outs across the world are starting to show their effectiveness.

The year has begun in our office in a socially distanced way once again, as we comply with the Victorian government's office number ratios. However our business continues unabated, our Board seems busier than ever, our Branches are meeting, our volunteers are volunteering and we are looking forward to new endeavours in 2021.

OUR NEW PARTNERSHIP

In early March 2021 our second partnership program began in north eastern Tasmania, and we are excited to be a partner in this important work.

Restoring Nature and Communities is a 20-week program of ecological restoration and best practice land management in the Break O'Day municipality. Highways and Byways has partnered with North East Bioregional Network who have a long history of successful eco restoration projects in this region. This program is being managed by the President of NE Bioregional Network Todd Dudley, and will employ, train and support four workers who have been unemployed in the region. The first two days work involved a day of pine control at Skyline Tier and some weeding of blackberries in a threatened forest community in the Bay of Fires Conservation Area.

As the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration gets underway, we commit to supporting initiatives which address the aims of this UN declaration - Preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. We will keep you informed as the work progresses.

Our first partnership program was launched one year ago in Roma, south central Queensland. **Seeds of Connection** is a program of community support and connection in partnership with Megan Brown of Soaring Souls Yoga.

2021 has begun as a year of awards for Megan. On Australia Day Megan received the Maranoa Regional Council Andrea Murray Memorial Award for her inclusive services to people of all abilities in the Roma Region. And on 27th February Megan was awarded the Toowoomba Diocese 2020 Social Justice Award. The award acknowledges the significant work Megan has undertaken in respecting the dignity of each person in the community, nurturing community relationships and empowering others. Congratulations to Megan! (Pictured opposite) with Missionary Sisters of Service Beryl Gleeson mss (left) and Mary Cleary mss who travelled from Toowoomba to Roma for the ceremony.



*Demonstration of A Cultural Burn at Jubullum, NSW
(Photo: ABC New England: Jennifer Ingall)*

HEALING THE LAND – HEALING OURSELVES – TOGETHER

Our 2021 Small Grants Program received 65 applications under the above theme. There are many wonderful initiatives amongst them – ranging across programs involving bees, dung beetles, cultural burns, revegetation and restoration programs, healing and caring for country to name a few.

The Projects Committee members, Marnie (our Grants Officer) and I have spent many, many hours assessing the applications. At this stage we will not have the funds to support all those we would wish to, but we are doubling down on our efforts to raise more funds to do so.

We hope you enjoy reading the impressive impacts of small grants into rural communities – thank you for your support in helping this to happen.

Liz McAloon
Executive Officer



WRAPPED IN CARE AND COMPASSION

Cleve, SA

Carmel Baxter likes to think that the quilts the Cleve quilters made, now comfort some of the people who lost everything in 2020 summer bushfires.

The Cleve Country Quilters from the small town on South Australia's Central Eyre Peninsula gathered regularly for weeks and made 10 beautiful quilts for families who had lost everything in the nearby bushfires. Highways and Byways supported the project.



The 20 or so Cleve quilters aged between 25 and 80 gave the completed quilts to the SA Quilters Guild to distribute to people. The women used the remnants from the 'bushfire' quilts to make bib-style clothing protectors for some residents at the local aged care home.

It isn't the first time the Cleve women have come to the rescue. When disaster strikes, the quilters respond in the way they know best, by gathering their supplies, harnessing their good will and heading down to the local RSL hall where they have been given a permanent spot to quilt. They are well set-up with old desks from the local school and chairs from the defunct CWA.

"We do a lot locally. We make quilts for the nursing home, the hospital and we make Christmas placemats for many of the residents. We also make quilts for other charities when we get a request," Carmel said.

Making the ten quilts for bushfire-affected families was a way the local women could respond to a heartbreaking disaster nearby. Though the quilts left Cleve, their making helped build a community spirit.

"Coming together each week and making quilts, usually for someone else, helps build a sense of community. We love sewing and our group really exists to sew and to give quilts away," Carmel said.

"Sometimes we hear back from someone who has received a quilt from us, but we don't expect that because the people receiving our quilts are usually going through great difficulties."

STOP TO SMELL THE FLOWERS

Nubeena, TAS

Nubeena's community garden has had a 'facelift' so that all the locals have a chance to stop and smell, touch, taste and pick the flowers. The DIGnity Garden program is about to start its autumn season of activities at the community garden (pictured right), which is based at the Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House.

DIGNity, a not-for-profit organisation which provides therapeutic gardening programs, was supported by Highways and Byways to make the garden more accessible and dementia friendly with the addition of a sensory garden and an espalier apple orchard. Some DIGnity program participants are from the local aged care home and others are from the community and many have mobility issues.

DIGNity coordinator Hannah Fielder said the planting and redevelopment was done under COVID restrictions last winter and many of the flowers are now in bloom and the flowering herbs ready to be picked. It will be a couple of years before people can enjoy the apple orchard whose branches are trained to grow flat along a path, supported on wire.

The raised garden bed is a show of marigolds, lavender and sages and lots of flowering plants. Hannah said flowers and herbs were selected for their colour, smell and edibility. A feature of the garden is the pizza oven and people involved in the DIGnity program, are invited to make a pizza using produce from the garden.



"We run programs that involve people from the aged care home and from the community. All our activities involve meaningful work and are done together with support," Hannah said.

"The design of the garden means that it is a very welcoming and accessible space for everyone in the community, including children. We really want the activities to be inter-generational rather than running activities just for people with dementia."

GROWTH DURING A SEASON OF CHALLENGES

Wynyard, TAS

Live Well Tasmania volunteers grew more than they anticipated when they began their seedling project with hundreds and hundreds of tiny seeds, soil, and a hothouse.

As well as producing hundreds of tomato, vegetable and herb seedlings for local organisations to plant and grow food, the group developed strong partnerships within the community, despite the pandemic.

LWT strives to build the well being of residents in Wynyard, a small town on the north-west coast of Tasmania. Last winter, with support from Highways and Byways, LWT recruited volunteers to grow seedlings ready for planting during the summer.

There was no shortage of local groups who wanted the seedlings and there were plenty to go around. The project produced more than 100 tomato seedlings and around 30 trays of herb and green vegetable seedling punnets.

The tomato, vegetable and herb seedlings were given to local group, Grow Gather Give to grow and provide produce hampers for local people in need; Wynyard Early Learning Centre for children's lunches and St Brigid's Primary School vegetable garden to grow produce for the local Vinnies food van.

Some seedlings were also swapped with the community at the Live Well seed bank launch.

LWT coordinator Robin Krabbe said the project had added to the food security of many groups that didn't have funds to buy punnets of seedlings, that are often expensive.

Robin has, in recent weeks, tasted some of the produce from the project and knows many locals will be enjoying the fruits of LWT labour. The project also led to the recruitment of volunteers, particularly a local Year 11 student who wanted to gain experience and advance his knowledge in horticultural studies.

Robin said LWT is now running a similar project as a therapeutic activity for people with mental health issues.



MANY PARTS CREATE COMMUNITY

Warwick, QLD

Some people reckon Warwick's community is nurtured through the activities in the local parks and playgrounds and others see it through the dedication of Australia Post posties, keeping locals connected to the wider world. But all the contributors to the Warwick Regional Art Gallery's installation, *Interconnection*, created a picture of what keeps their small town together.

Warwick, in the Queensland Southern Downs, has survived years of devastating drought that crippled many farmers and surrounding communities. The Warwick Artist Group thought the gallery's 30th anniversary was a chance to showcase how the community saw its strengths. They pulled in many groups and individuals who created pieces for the installation, which was shown late last year.

The very design of the *Interconnection* installation highlights the strength of the Warwick community. The local Men's Shed built the 45 boxes that were used to house the various pieces.

Jill Birtwistle from the Warwick Artist Group said the installation was an opportunity for artists and non-artists to express how they saw the community. School children, potters and a group of painters with special needs were among those that contributed to the installation after working closely with Group artists. "We wanted to create a situation where anyone could collaborate and create and not be restricted in how they expressed community," Jill said.

One contributor shared their inspiration: My box is dedicated to the many volunteers who "make a difference" working together tirelessly in our district and community. They are the jewels in our community.



Jill said one of the unexpected outcomes of *Interconnection* has been a renewed interest in the activities of the Warwick Artist Group, which celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2022.



HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS – A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE supports people and communities experiencing hardship and disadvantage, especially in rural Australia.

We do this through our annual grants program and longer term initiatives in small rural communities where we partner with local organisations. Highways and Byways is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission.

Highways and Byways continues the vision and mission of the Missionary Sisters of Service and their founder Father John Wallis.

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MISSIONARY SISTERS OF SERVICE

A mission of love and service into the highways and byways.

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We welcome 2021 with open hearts, minds and arms

Here we are in 2021, having survived what we hope will be the worst of the impact of COVID-19. We continue to pray for all of those individuals and communities gravely impacted by the pandemic. We are conscious of its impact on people's health and families, and the onflow effects of loss of employment and livelihoods, loss of home and shelter, isolation and loneliness, and mental ill health. During this time, we have continued to serve from wherever we are, with whomever we find ourselves. We have been in the presence of those sharing their stories of grief and joy. We've had special encounters while in the medical clinic waiting room, while traveling on public transport and even during a hydrotherapy session.

We continue to keep in touch by phone and zoom, and enjoy the company of people around the kitchen table or in our gardens (Corrie van den Bosch MSS has been spoiling many people with the fruits of her garden!) Some of our women have been busy reading through the many grant applications for our mission entity Highways and Byways – A Community of Service, and we continue to advocate on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and people impacted by human trafficking.

We regularly update the MSS website with our latest news and happenings.

Please do be sure to have a look at www.missionarysisters.org.au/News. We are so pleased by the lively engagement and commentary that takes place online via the MSS Facebook page, www.facebook.com/MissionarySistersServiceAus If you haven't already, please 'Like' the page, spread the word and keep in contact with us via this platform!



EMERGING FUTURES: MSS EMBRACING CHANGE



In Frederick Street, Launceston, Tasmania, an old oak tree grows, planted in the 1800s, in front of what became the home of four pioneering women who risked all to follow the dream of a young Victorian-

born priest, John Wallis. They gathered in front of the old oak tree on 8th July 1944. Theirs would be a mission to reach out to people who were out "beyond". This is a mission which is still evolving today with our community of women.

The oak tree has been a powerful symbol for peoples across the ages. In spite of its often-long life, like all things, its physical life comes to an end, but the spirit of the tree continues to live on forever. This truth is something which we MSS sisters realised quite a few years ago. Like other communities, we no longer saw women coming from many parts of Australia, or overseas, to join us in our life and mission.

This reality called for a new vision and response to the knowledge that our history on earth would be no longer than 100 years. This was no cause for despair but for a creativity to discern the legacy we wished to leave in gratitude for the charism which has been gifted to us.

We set out, particularly from the earlier years of the 2000s until now, to set up new forms of governance, administration, health and aged care, and a mission entity in 2010 which became known as [Highways and Byways: A Community of Service](#), carrying on our vision and mission now and into the future.

We began to explore canonical openings which might be available to us, especially as we knew we no longer had women to elect to leadership from within our community. As we shared our reality with other leaders in the annual Catholic Religious Australia Assemblies, we heard similar concerns being voiced by increasing numbers which painted a picture of a growing awareness that something collectively needed to happen to meet the new challenges many of us were facing.

In the latter part of 2017 Catholic Religious Australia set up the Emerging Futures Committee. We were happy to be invited to join the committee and to be a 'test case'. From the outset, the Emerging Futures Committee became a group of people with vision and commitment. During the past three years, we have continually kept our sisters, and other key people, in touch with the slowly evolving vision and developments regarding Emerging Futures and we look forward to sharing more details with you in the August newsletter. In the meantime, read more about this at www.missionarysisters.org.au/News



MSS gifted with portrait on canvas of Fr John Wallis

We are excited to show off a beautiful new gift that is gracing the wall of our MSS office in Melbourne. Jeff Byrne has been a director of our

Highways and Byways – A Community of Service Board for the past seven years. During this time, we’ve been so grateful to Jeff for his financial and economic insights and advice, and for his business acumen and guidance. Little did we know, however, that he was also a painter! Just before Christmas Jeff popped into our office to present a special gift for us – a personally created oil painting of our founder, Fr John Wallis. You can imagine our surprise (not only at Jeff’s hidden talent), but also of the likeness of the portrait to Fr John.

Jeff has never met Fr John. Rather, he used a photograph from the website to create the portrait. The particular photo he used was taken at Wild Dog Hill near Whyalla, South Australia while on a visit to the Sisters living there during the mid-late 1980s. (Fr John died in 2001.) Jeff completed the piece over a two-week period.

We love seeing Fr John’s kind face looking over us as we work. We’re grateful to Jeff for both his economic, business and financial skills that he brings to the Highways and Byways board and committees, and now, for his beautiful artistic skills! Read the full story at www.missionarysisters.org.au/News

A reminder that Bernadette Wallis MSS’ latest book, *Dear Mother Dear Father: Letters Home From John Corcoran Wallis 1927-1949* is still available for purchase online at the MSS website: www.missionarysisters.org.au

This book contains 100 letters that John Corcoran Wallis wrote to his parents and family from the age of 16, when he first joined the seminary at St Columba’s College, Springwood in 1927. Eighty-eight of the letters were written in the first 10 years, with the others in the 1940s.



Thanks and best wishes to Neville and Therese

The MSS would like to extend a heart felt thank you to Neville and Therese Hunt for their love, friendship and support in the 40+ years that we’ve known them.

Both Neville and Therese have been dear friends to our Sisters, particularly our women based in Toowoomba (they were also quite involved with our sisters in years gone by, in Caloundra, Richmond and Goondiwindi in the south of Queensland).

They became part of the Toowoomba branch of the then John Wallis Foundation when it was set up in late 2011, now Highways and Byways – A Community of Service) with both being



actively involved in the annual John Wallis Memorial Lecture. Therese had also been Secretary of the branch since its inception.

Therese and Neville have recently left Toowoomba and have moved further north to be closer to family.

We will miss them, but know we’ll keep in touch!

Special birthdays within our community of women in 2021

During 2021, four of our women will be celebrating their 90-year-young birthday celebrations. In anticipation and acknowledgement of these wonderful occasions, we wanted to wish each of them a very happy birthday! From top left, clockwise: Julianne Dunn (Melbourne), 29th June
Cecilia Bailey (Toowoomba), 28th July
Carmel Hall (Hobart), 2nd September
Margaret Windsham (Toowoomba), 21st October

We should mention that Betty McManus (Melbourne) celebrated her 90th birthday last year, too, and both Marcia McMahan MSS and Pat Brain MSS turn 80-years-young this year!

We give thanks for each of these women and their many years of friendship, service, love and companionship. Our community of women, and the wider community are all the more richer for knowing and loving you ... and being loved by you!



Save the date! 50-year anniversary celebrations in Whyalla, South Australia

31 March 2021 marks the 50-year anniversary of the foundation of the MSS in the Port Pirie Diocese, South Australia. On this date in 1971, Sisters Frances McShane and Helen Haywood MSS (deceased) arrived in Whyalla. They had stayed with the Good Samaritan Sisters and had moved house many times until 1973, when they made 67 McRitchie Crescent home base. From this place our women worked across the diocese, including communities across the Eyre Peninsula - Minnipa, Ceduna, Cleve, Streaky Bay, Cummins, and the vast areas north of Port Augusta through to Uluru from their base at Coober Pedy. Cheryle Thomson MSS has been involved in the diocese for the past 30 years. Though the anniversary is in March, a special anniversary Mass will be held in Whyalla on 29th May 2021 to mark this occasion. We'll post more information as the event gets closer. For more information you can also email us as mssadmin@missionarysisters.org.au or call (03) 9873 5520.

Vale Margaret Ann Kenny MSS, 1932-2021

Our community of women and our vast network of friends and colleagues from across Australia and beyond are mourning the death of Sister Margaret Ann Kenny MSS, who died in Melbourne on 3rd January 2021. Margaret, aged 88, had been an MSS for 65 years having joined the community in 1956. She had worked and ministered in Melbourne and in rural South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales.

Margaret was particularly well known and loved for her 23 years of service in the Port Pirie Diocese where she was based in Whyalla. Together with other Sisters, Margaret spent many years with the congregation's correspondence school, preparing and correcting religious education lessons for the children living in rural and outback areas of South Australia. She played an important role in The Book Shelf in Whyalla, where she not only sold books and other religious items, but also provided a listening ear to the many who dropped in. She also managed the book shop in Hobart for some years.

Margaret celebrated the Diamond Jubilee (60 years) of her first profession in 2019. At that time, reflecting on her life as MSS, she said, 'I'm so grateful for the welcome, acceptance and love that the people gave us; the way they welcomed us into their families. We developed such wonderful friendships, which remained long after we left places. I'm also grateful for the tremendous support and



companionship of the Sisters within the Congregation, which also remained even after we'd moved onto our different places.' Margaret lived in Sandringham, Victoria, at the time of her death. She has been buried at Springvale Botanical Cemetery in Melbourne. Read more about Margaret and watch a replay of the funeral mass online at: www.missionarysisters.org.au/2021/01/04/vale-margaret-kenny-1932-2021/



Beryl Gleeson MSS counting her blessings each day

At 86 years of age, Beryl Gleeson MSS is “more content now” than she’s ever been. Having entered the Missionary Sisters of Service community in August 1969 at age 34, she says now is a time for enjoying each moment, counting the blessings, and being at ease in “not having to do things”.

Beryl was born in Blackall, central Queensland in 1934. She left school at 15 years and worked in an insurance company, followed by the State Government Stores. There, she met Win Shannon whose sister, Joan, was a Home Missionary Sister of Our Lady (former name of the MSS). Win used to collect donations for the Sisters and Beryl gave sixpence each week.

Beryl thought about joining the Sisters, but her mother didn’t like the idea. She’d also wanted to be a police woman, but the Queensland police force weren’t recruiting at the time.

At 21, Beryl embarked upon “the wonderful experience” of a working holiday in New Zealand with her sister, Iris and 3 other young women. She returned after 10 months, working for three years with Migrant Education, and set off again on a 2-year overseas working trip with her sister.

When she eventually returned, Beryl, 27, was accepted into the Northern Territory Police Force. Feeling a deeper call, however, she resigned after three years and was presented with an opportunity to teach Tiwi girls on Bathurst Island to the north of Darwin.

“This new adventure was the beginning of finding real meaning in my life,” said Beryl. She spent more than three years on Bathurst Island.

While there, Beryl once again felt a deep call to religious life and missionary work. On a visit to Brisbane she saw a photo of one of the Missionary Sisters of Service in their new dress, and thought “that’s it, I’m going to them!” She liked that the community was Australian, they had Missionary in their title, and they were travelling into country areas and reaching out to people wherever they were. Beryl spent two years in formation in Hobart, Tasmania. During this time, she’d travel with another sister visiting families in rural Tasmania.

She spent time in Parkes, NSW where she lived for two years and had many adventures in the outback areas of the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese.

Beryl then returned to Tasmania where she worked in the printing apostolate, printing forms for the correspondence courses in religious education and any other publicity materials. She spent time in Whyalla, South Australia, visiting families in the remote areas and supporting families as their children prepared for the Sacraments.

Beryl’s deepest call to mission has been her work with Aboriginal communities and with refugees.

Looking back, she has worked with Indigenous people for about 20 years and for the past 16 years with refugees in Toowoomba.

Reflecting on her life as MSS, Beryl says, “I am grateful to be enabled to have a fulfilling and enriching life in my twilight years and I’m grateful to all who’ve been part of our journey.”

Read the full story at
www.missionarysisters.org.au/2021/02/14/beryl-gleeson-counting-her-blessings-each-day/