

# FCJnews

Area of Australia

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Margaret Feely

Julie Chamberlin

Catherine Scott

Mary Udovicic

Beverley O'Hara

Margaret Kennedy

Margaret Mileta

Maria Rosa Papalia

## AUSTRALIAN COMPANIONS IN MISSION

With joy and gratitude to God for the FCJ Sisters in the bicentenary year of the foundation of the society, Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus.

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IN  
MISSION  
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FCJ

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☛ She grew up on the family wheat and sheep farm *Glendaruel* at Tamleugh North, not far from Shepparton. Maureen always felt fortunate to spend her childhood in the great open spaces...☛

## Maureen Ellen Martin fcj

Maureen Ellen Martin was born 23 May 1940 at the Una Hospital in Shepparton, northern Victoria. She was the fourth child born to Bill and Bonnie Martin, with two older sisters, Mary and Claire, and an older brother, Adrian, and younger siblings, Bernadette, John and Kevin, so she ended up being right in the middle of the seven children.

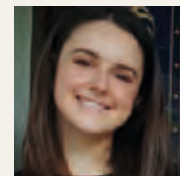
She grew up on the family wheat and sheep farm *Glendaruel* at Tamleugh North, not far from Shepparton. Maureen always felt fortunate to spend her childhood in the great open spaces, and was grateful for growing up in such a happy family home. Her parents provided her with a loving, secure environment and passed on their deep faith, with the family rosary being recited every night after dinner. Like most of her siblings she had red hair. She was small in stature and was given the nickname 'Mo' by her father after American tennis player Maureen Connolly, a famous five-foot tall red-head, who the media dubbed 'lil Mo' – and the name stuck!

She attended the Tamleugh North State School for her primary education, and boarded at the Benalla Convent for her secondary education and she thoroughly enjoyed her time there. Along with the rest of the family she was very musical and played four instruments. Many a 'jam' session was held in the lounge room in the evenings and the weekends. She also loved singing and was a member of a number of choirs over the years. She was a keen sportswoman, playing Basketball,

Tennis and Rounders and every summer evening she would be on the tennis court at the family home. She loved all her family, scattered over five states, and was always very interested in what everyone was doing. With over 120 nephews, nieces, great-nieces and -nephews and even several great-great-nieces and nephews, she made a point of being in touch with them all at least once a year and they were all in her prayers each day. Maureen had many friends spread across the entire globe.

Maureen entered the FCJ Society at Genazzano Convent on 2 February 1957, and her Novitiate began on 9 September that same year. She made her first vows in 1959 in the old Genazzano chapel and in March 1960 she set off for *Stella Maris*, Broadstairs, England, for

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Cover artist: Isabella Udovicic. The cover art was created as a Bi-Centenary Gift to the FCJ Sisters, inspired by Marie Madeleine's delight in gardens and beauty.

a six-month period to polish up her French before commencing studies in French at Fribourg University, Switzerland. Having successfully completed her degree in 1964 she returned to *Stella Maris* for her Tertianship – making her final vows on 25 July, 1965.

Maureen then travelled to the United States to begin a two-year period of teaching in our FCJ schools in New England – at Providence, Rhode Island, and Fitchburg, Massachusetts. These were very formative and exciting years for Maureen as the church and religious life opened up to the changes of the second Vatican Council and our Sisters in the United States and Canada were right in the thick of the changes. Returning to Australia in September 1967 she continued her teaching ministry in Benalla and then at Genazzano, whilst being involved in both boarding schools.

Maureen herself said she had always wanted to be a nurse and, as many of the Sisters had reached a time of life when they needed extra care, it was clear that FCJ nurses were also needed. In 1973 Maureen began her training at Mercy Hospital, East Melbourne, and in 1976 she graduated as a state registered nurse, and helped to set up St Raphael's Home at Genazzano. She became the first Director of Nursing and superior of the small group of FCJs at St Raphael's. She was efficient, caring, conscientious and well organised – fostering a warm, friendly atmosphere among staff with the needs of the residents at the heart of her ministry. Leaving St Raphael's, she was to use her spiritual and pastoral gifts in various ways and places in hospitals and parish ministries. During this time, she undertook studies in Theology and various courses which could assist her in the ministry of vocation accompaniment and the formation of young FCJ Sisters.

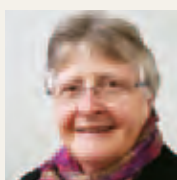
Then began nine years of service to other religious congregations in Victoria through her ministry as

Executive Secretary of Catholic Religious Victoria. So many of those she worked with speak of her great faith and gentleness and the quiet, unassuming way she carried out her ministry. After this, Maureen was appointed as Provincial Bursar for the FCJ Province of Asia–Australia and after another nine years, she joyfully accepted her new mission to go to Paris and become immersed in the French language and culture whilst working on the letters of the foundress of the FCJ Society, Marie Madeleine D'Houët – work done with gentle, unassuming efficiency.

¶ Maureen was a beautiful woman of God with a deep spirituality and an enormous love of life and of others. With fidelity and joy she lived her call to be a faithful companion of Jesus ready to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary and the other companions and to bring the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to others. ¶

She returned home to Australia at the beginning of 2019 and soon took up voluntary ministry in pastoral care at St Catherine's Home in Balwyn. It was a particular joy to the FCJ Sisters in care that she should be there with them. With all her experience she was a wonderful support to the chaplaincy and pastoral care teams. At this time, her own health deteriorated. The diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease was made and the disease proceeded rapidly. Her FCJ community at Fairfield – supported by Vicki Serle and Margaret MacIsaac – and the MND outreach team took wonderful care of her and this enabled her to stay at home right up until the end of April this year. Her courage was evident and her presence in the community was a precious gift to each one. When she knew that she needed more care than she was able to receive at home she moved to the Little Sisters of the Poor at Northcote where she received the beautiful and all-embracing care from Mother Shanti, Sr Winifred and the community of Sisters, who surrounded her with love, care and prayer. On the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord at 8.10pm, Maureen died peacefully, quickly, and unexpectedly, with those she loved near to her and accompanied by Fr Sims and the community of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Maureen was a beautiful woman of God with a deep spirituality and an enormous love of life and of others. With fidelity and joy she lived her call to be a faithful companion of Jesus, ready to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary and the other companions and to bring the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to others.



Barbara Brown-Graham fcJ



## Companions in Mission (CiM)

Mary Udovicic has recently taken on the position of Area Coordinator of Companions in Mission (CiM), taking over from Mrs Pat Fitzgerald. Pat held this role for 10 years. She says how 'very grateful she is to Pat for her encouragement and support in this, her first year in the role'. Mary is aware that she is following in great footsteps; Pat, Sr Catherine Flynn fcJ and Sr Bonnie Mosser fcJ were all instrumental in establishing and developing Australian CiM.

As a teacher of Art and Religious Education, Mary continued to be involved in outreach activities run by the parish, including setting up a program to train students to be lectors and special ministers in the local parishes. After 18 years working in the same school, Mary started looking for new challenges. As part of her role as Head of Faith and Mission, Mary attended a Conference for Religious Education Coordinators. Here she was introduced to the charisma of the FCJ Sisters and the life and work of their foundress, Marie-Madeleine D'Houët. Mary was immediately attracted to the spirituality of the order and the idea of 'courage and confidence, to find God in all things, to find God everywhere and in everyone'.

Unusually for Mary, she initially held back, but then decided to explore the charisma further by attending an ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) event at Genazzano FCJ College. 'I was terribly nervous as I entered the Madeleine Centre and was convinced I was going to be told that my name was not on the guest list, but it was there, followed by my suburb of Sunshine.' Mary took her seat and soon felt right at home. She was moved deeply by the stories of those who spoke and in particular the words of Sr Maryrose Dennehy fcJ. Mary felt called to this charisma because its 'threads linked so strongly to our reality'. The following year in 2012, Mary was overjoyed to gain



Mary Udovicic next to one of her own works, *Cape Schanck*, charcoal on paper.

### Mary speaks of the great support each CiM provides...

employment at Genazzano FCJ College. During this time Mary met more FCJ Sisters like Sr Anne Morrison fcJ, who shared her experiences so genuinely and lovingly about her work in Bolivia, and Sr Denise Mulcahy fcJ, who shared her detailed work with ACRATH passionately yet so humbly. She was extremely inspired to meet these women who were at the coalface of working to meet the needs of others and the most vulnerable. Mary met many more FCJ Sisters and in all Sisters, she could see and feel the gentle companionship they model: a true living reflection of the women at the foot of the Cross.

Mary's friendship with Sr Maryrose fcJ grew and she was invited to attend Sr Joan Cartlidge's weekly meditation group. This led to a deeper form of spirituality and a love of the *Examen*. Mary says, 'the meditation sessions brought together all aspects of our lives. Life was not just about the activity in which we engage each day, it is also about our relationships, our leisure time, our times of reflection and prayer'. Mary was invited by Sr Maryrose fcJ to become a CiM, but Mary took another 12 months to say yes.

Mary participated in CiM formation for 18 months led by Sr Mary O'Shannessy fcJ and Mrs Shirley Yao.

Mary says that 'both Sr Mary and Shirley were wonderful faith-filled mentors who guided, and many times challenged, her through the formation'. Mary was commissioned as a CiM in 2018. In 2019 Mary and her husband Frank were extremely privileged to attend the FCJ Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Marie Madeleine in France. This pilgrimage, Mary says, 'I will remember for the rest of my life, it brought to life for me the FCJ story and charisma'.

In January 2021 Sr Barbara Brown-Graham fcJ asked Mary to consider being the Area Coordinator of the Companions in Mission. Mary was encouraged to take on this role by Frank, who after accompanying her on the FCJ Pilgrimage in France was similarly inspired, encouraged by the life and work of Marie Madeleine. Frank even offered to help with administrative duties! Mary says she is 'extremely grateful to Sr Barbara fcJ for her encouragement, wisdom and counsel'.

There are three CiM groups in Australia and each is blessed to have an FCJ Sister accompanying the group. Each group meets every few months, with each member taking turns to run the meeting. Topics for discussion in the CiM groups cover a wide and eclectic range of subjects, from *Laudato si'*, science and religion, to the liturgical season, the particular challenges to companionship provided by Covid-19, Ignatian Spirituality, prayer and much more.

**GROUP A**

Anna Alfarano  
 Bernadette Duffy  
 Pat Fitzgerald  
 Susan Ind  
 Margaret Miletta  
 Catherine Scott  
 Danielle Maugueret  
 Shirley Yau – *Local Coordinator*  
 Sr Maureen Merlo fcJ  
 – *FCJ CiM Coordinator*

**GROUP B**

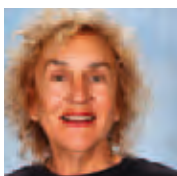
Ann Rennie  
 Julie Chamberlin  
 Margaret Cosgrave  
 Peter Cosgrave  
 Margaret Feely  
 Margaret Kennedy  
 Rosa Solowiej  
 Geraldine Peck  
 Eve Provan  
 Damian Whelan  
 Pat Fitzgerald – *Local Coordinator*  
 Sr Anne Morrison fcJ  
 – *FCJ CiM Coordinator*

**GROUP C**

Marie-Louise Thornton-Smith  
 Maria Rosa Papalia  
 – *Local Coordinator*  
 Nerissa Pato  
 Mary Udovicic  
 Sr Mary O'Shannessy fcJ  
 – *FCJ CiM Coordinator*

Mary speaks of the great support each CiM provides for each member, gently journeying with each other as they live the challenges and joys of life. Marie Madeleine's vision and inspiration were borne out of her own difficulties and the struggles of those around her, and the suffering of France during the turmoil of the 19th century. Today, the Companions in Mission seek to emulate her example in the companionship they offer to those around them.

Anne McIlroy



*Blessed  
 Meditations  
 on a Life of  
 Small Wonders*

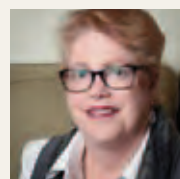
By Ann Rennie

In a world blighted by Covid and frequently ravaged by flood, fire and famine, it is easy for one to succumb to despair and nihilism. Yet all such feelings are exorcised as we share Ann Rennie's faith-filled journey of joy and hope in her recent publication *Blessed*. With lexicological mastery in a selection of exquisitely written vignettes, Ann shares her travels through both a physical and a spiritual landscape.

While her devout Catholic childhood has laid the foundation for a positive framework in her life, there is nothing holier than thou about Ann. Her zest for living, combined with her extensive travels and diverse life experiences, make for an enriched and broadminded pilgrim. Bathed in maturity and humility, her kaleidoscopic eye and acute ear capture life's sublime moments that are so often elicited by the simple and mundane.

For Ann a mere drop of water provokes a transformative reflection which becomes, 'The giver of life and the baptismal drenching of initiation and welcome. It is the salty sweat of the brow and the warm wading pool of the womb. It is the vast oceans and small ponds and rivers and trickles and tributaries that feed the earth'. Ann's courageous and exuberant personality constantly seeks the road less travelled to encourage us all to embrace the joys of living in the moment. Everything is a part of the grand design and Ann's eloquent and lyrical prose seduces the reader into feeling equally blessed to experience this time called life.

*Blessed* can be purchased from Laneway Press Melbourne by contacting Regina Lane on 0450 053 815 or from Readings, Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn (03) 9819 1917.



Carol Rosenhain

Ann's courageous and exuberant personality constantly seeks the road less travelled to encourage us all to embrace the joys of living in the moment.

## Mother Gerda Prytz fcj

Violet Gerda Prytz was the seventh child of Victor and Margaret Prytz (nee O'Brien) and was born on 8 April 1881, in Horsham, northern Victoria.

Victor Prytz had arrived in Australia in 1868 from Sweden under the instruction of his father, Magnus, an editor and insurance agent. This voyage to the colonies was to establish the family business and ensure global connections between Victor and his four brothers who were variously engaged in employment in Spain, France, the United States of America and Indonesia. The brothers were to act in the capacity of Swedish consuls. History has it that the Prytz family had associations with the Swedish royal family and there was a morganatic marriage in the family's back story. (A morganatic marriage denotes a marriage in which neither the spouse of lower rank, nor any children, have any claim to the possessions or title of the spouse of higher rank.)

Margaret was born in 1847 of Irish descent and family lore has it that they were descendants of Brian Boru. Her father, Patrick, was a publican and brewer. He arrived in the Port Phillip District in 1842, not long after the founding of Melbourne. He built the mansion *Kinkora* in the street of the same name in Hawthorn, the naming being a tribute to Brian Boru's castle in County Clare.

How Victor and Margaret met is unknown, but Victor converted from Lutheranism to marry Margaret at St Joseph's in Hawthorn on 1 April 1872. They lived in Hawthorn until Victor was promoted to bank manager in Horsham in 1877 where Violet was born four years later. She had three sisters, Hildegarde, Ebba and Margare-Helene. There were also four boys, Victor, Ernest Francis, Ernest Patrick and Arthur. The family returned to Melbourne in 1883 and lived in St Kilda, then moved to South Melbourne and finally South Yarra. Archbishop Thomas Carr arranged for the boys to be educated at Xavier College in Kew and the girls to move from Presentation Convent Windsor to Genazzano Convent, also in Kew, so that the continuation of their education in the Catholic faith could be ensured after the death of their devout mother, Margaret.



Above: Mother Gerda in her best hat before she entered the convent.

The register at Genazzano reveals that Violet, accompanied by her sisters Hilda, Rita and Ebba, arrived at Mr Long's house as boarders in February 1891. The girls were still grieving the loss of their mother. Violet came under the profound and enduring influence of Mother Stansilaus Stock, the first principal of Genazzano, an acclaimed educator and a prayerful woman. The Prytz girls went for long meandering walks in the pastures in Kew, played ball games and hopscotch and took delight in instructing the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, who had been arriving in the colony since 1882, on the native fauna, especially the local birdlife. On a drizzly Easter Monday that same year, the boarders moved into the new convent designed by acclaimed architect William Wilkinson Wardell. Wardell had designed Melbourne's esteemed St Patrick's Cathedral, as well as St Mary's in Sydney, among an array of public buildings, and had been a protégée of Auguste Pugin who had

championed the Gothic revival in the middle of the 19th century. It has long been noted that Wardell, a convert to Catholicism, designed his ecclesiastical buildings for the glory of God.

Initially, Genazzano was not well-furnished and the girls wore their hats in the refectory to protect them from the summer heat. The girls gardened and sold snails to raise money for an altar in the Junior Study. It appears that Australian students were not as keen to be at their books as their European counterparts. The teaching staff was of varying calibre at this time before formal education studies and training were mandated. However, there was much fondness between the girls and the FCJ Sisters and this would grow into a life-long affection.

While Violet and her sisters were boarding at Genazzano, their father married again. The two families never lived together, although it appears they were on visiting terms with each other later in their lives. Violet and her sisters spent holidays at school or in the care of her mother's family, the O'Briens.

Violet and another student, Bessie Burke, were the first two Genazzano students to sit for public examinations. In 1896 they sat for the Trinity College of Music examinations and passed. Mother Gerda, as Violet was later known after her religious profession, recorded the fact that her school days were full of fun, especially under the tutelage of *Mere* Hedwige, who encouraged the students to use their dramatic gifts.

Violet's best friend at school was May Toole and she confided in May that it was her desire to enter the convent after completing her secondary education. This was to be on Genazzano Day, 26 April 1901. She was the first student of the school to enter the consecrated life as a Faithful Companion of Jesus. Violet's decision to become a postulant was a significant rite of passage and she was accompanied by several priests and Archbishop Carr to the chapel at Genazzano for her ceremonial entrance into the religious life. She wore a dress

of white brocade, the bodice trimmed with lace sprays of lily of the valley. A beautiful Limerick lace veil, worked by one of the sisters for the occasion, was made to a design including shamrock, wattle, wheat and wine. As a bride of Christ, Violet retired from the chapel and later returned in her newly received habit. The Archbishop blessed her and announced that her name in religion would be Sr Gerda. There was a celebration, not unlike a wedding breakfast, with a cake consisting of three tiers supported on pillars with the Swedish and Australian coats of arms and various shields with the letters FCJ and AMDG (*Ad majoram Dei gloriam* (Latin), meaning *For the greater glory of God*) decorating it.

In 1902, Sr Gerda set sail on the *Annam* from the port of Melbourne to make her novitiate at St Anne d'Auray in Brittany, France. Together with Sr Mary Claude from Richmond, she arrived at Rue de la Santé, Paris, on 22 April 1902 to be greeted by Mother Zoe Girot. After a few weeks' rest, she proceeded to the novitiate and as one who had a life-long interest in craft and needlework she turned her hand to *broderie anglaise*. This was quite an accomplishment for the young Sister, who had been told that, as an Australian, she was there to be civilised! The FCJs had been mindful of the increasing anti-clericalism in France and the foreign novices were expeditiously moved to the recently opened novitiate at Upton Hall near Liverpool in England.

Sr Gerda made her final vows at Midnight Mass on 25 December 1903 and immediately became Mother Gerda, the title of mother being a reminder that she would always act as a mother to the children in her care. Later, the period for vows and renewal of vows was changed by canon law to a three-year period, followed by another three-year period, before the final vows were professed. Mother Gerda returned to Australia in 1904 and although not physically robust, she applied for her teacher's certificate and was granted



Above: The sideboard with motifs of flora and fauna and fine carving in wood by Mother Gerda in the present-day Genazzano Boardroom.

this because she had been employed prior to the Education Act. She was registered as a primary and secondary teacher in 1906 and took lessons in reading, needlework, art and music.

Woodwork classes were introduced in the school in 1908 and Mother Gerda found herself to be particularly adept at this craft. The sideboard in the present-day Genazzano Boardroom would grace any gallery with its motifs of flora and fauna and its fine carving in wood. As well as her facility with her hands, Mother Gerda was a fine orator and trained many Genazzano girls in the art of public speaking. She spoke well, clearly and concisely. Before the days of formal and credentialled teacher training, she trained herself to teach. Her subjects included Religious Knowledge, English, French, Geography, Needlework and Latin up to Year 10. Beautiful smocked frocks were the results of patience and pin-tucking. Poetry recitation was *de rigueur* in English classes and no student remained uninvolved in performance or activities. Mother Gerda was also renowned for her dramatic skills and recitations, which engendered much laughter among her audiences when she inhabited a character or put on an accent. She was a star turn in the St Patrick's Night concerts.

Genazzano Old Girls' Association was created in 1911, making it today

the oldest female alumnae society in the country. Mother Gerda was always on board to prepare flowers for Genazzano Day. She was able to use her artistic giftedness to create beautiful floral creations as centre-pieces and decorative colour for these happy gatherings.

As a teacher, Mother Gerda believed in the importance of encouragement. Regardless of academic ability, each student was to try their best and there was no room for half-hearted measures in anything. She was renowned for her punctuality to classes and over time developed the habit of rattling her rosary beads to warn the girls of her imminent arrival. In those days of sterner punishment, Mother Gerda knew when it was appropriate to give lines or order marks or deny privileges so that a student would tame her miscreant ways. She also knew when to turn a compassionate blind eye, especially if she knew of home-life difficulties. Today we call this pastoral care. Mother Gerda knew and cared for all those she taught and her discipline was just, rather than mandatory.

Mother Gerda was a keen correspondent and kept up with family, friends and past pupils, regaling them about the big events at the school. She

*Continued next page*

*Mother Gerda Prytz fcJ continued*

was also known to send other letters of appeal. Of particular note was her keen desire to ensure the *Alliance Française* prospered. To this end she wrote letters in French to urge past pupils to continue attending the institute to improve their fluency in that language.

### ↳ ...this first Australian FCJ Sister, whose influence was profound and lasting. ↴

In 1920, Mother Gerda was given unusual and compassionate permission to visit her father, who was a semi-invalid due to a leg injury sustained in a fall. In the same year she became Mistress of Studies at Genazzano. This role encompassed the study programmes for students, the staff teaching loads and the timetable. She knew each staff member's capability and ensured that they worked to their potential in explicating the curriculum for their students. She knew those teachers who needed assistance with classroom management and those students who could assist in teaching their peers. Elocution, ballroom dancing, tennis coaching, geometrical drawing, dressmaking and commercial studies were extra-curricular offerings, besides the formal curriculum including History, French, German, Latin, Italian and Mathematics. Musical soirees were held and a History of Art course offered to those who needed 'extra culture'.

Never in the complete rudeness of health, Mother Gerda was able to visit Brussels in 1932, happy to be given a sabbatical and a change of scenery at the then FCJ headquarters. After some respite, she took up further part-time teaching at Poles FCJ Convent in Hertfordshire and had the opportunity, rare for many in those pre-Vatican II days, of visiting the other FCJ establishments in Ireland and seeing the place where the original Kinkora Castle had stood.

Mother Gerda returned to Australia in 1935 and for the next 15 years was in charge of studies at FCJ College,

Benalla. Again, her maxim to students was to do their best in every endeavour. She encouraged staff to keep abreast of modern trends and research in education. Teachers were to become familiar with the Montessori Method, Cuisenaire rods for teaching numeracy and Reading in Colour to help with literacy.

In 1958, she was formally appointed as Mistress of Studies again at Genazzano. She continued on with her fair and robust discipline and because of her diminutive height, it was known that she often stood a step or two above the student if she had to administer an admonition. She had little time for students who were 'passively good' as she felt that this indicated a lack of character. If necessary, she dealt with recalcitrance with kindness. Her many years of teaching girls gave her a good understanding of what really made them tick.

She had heard all the excuses before!

In 1965, at the age of 83, Mother Gerda finally retired from active teaching. As a woman who liked routine and regularity she always enjoyed a siesta after lunch and did not like her timetable changed. However, if visitors arrived, she was the epitome of courtesy and charity and always interested in what was going on in the lives of those she loved. She accepted without fuss the change of title from Mother to Sister as part of religious congregations' post-Vatican II movement with the times.

Over the course of her time at Genazzano, she was renowned as a good fundraiser and was not afraid to ask for bequests or other philanthropic giving for the school and its programmes. In 1974, the new Genazzano chapel was completed and one of the beautiful stained-glass windows was gifted to the school by the Prytz family in tribute to Sr Gerda and her long and loving service.

In 1977, Sr Gerda moved into St Raphael's, the FCJ Nursing Home on site in Kew, with its own little chapel and suitable care for the elderly Sisters living there. Sr Gerda had a particularity for some things and those who delivered her supper tray had to ensure it consisted of biscuits including 'four Clix, two gingers, two dinner mints' and was placed in the same position each night. This was in keeping with her tidy mind and her liking for order and routine. Throughout her lifetime, she was also renowned for being 'thorough'.

Towards the end of her life Sr Gerda was confined to bed. She began to wait to meet the Lord, ready and with her life satisfied with simplicity. Prior to her death she was able to sort through her treasures. She gave back to her nephew all the postcards he had ever sent her from his many overseas travels. During these last days her family visited her faithfully, giving comfort and tribute to this valiant woman who had lived a good life for others, whilst overcoming her own lack of good health. Sr Gerda kept her *Vade Mecum* (Latin for *Go with me*, a term for a compact guidebook for deep pockets), tattered through long and constant use, beside her bed so that she could continue her lifelong practice of nightly prayer.

Sr Gerda Prytz died on 20 May 1979 in her 99th year and in the 77th year of her religious profession. Her life was lived in faithful companionship to Jesus, her family, her religious Sisters and all those who were taught, encouraged or influenced by her. The Gerda House at Genazzano continues to honour the memory of this first Australian FCJ Sister, whose influence was profound and lasting on generations of girls who attended Genazzano and FCJ College Benalla.

Adapted by Ann Rennie from *Only the Best is Good Enough for God*, written by Sr Anthony Buckley fcJ, typed and edited by Elizabeth von Leven fcJ and checked by Sr Clare O'Connor fcJ.



## Final Vows of Sr Caecilia Pirenangingtyas fcJ (Sr Tyas) Yogyakarta Indonesia



Photo: Thomasmuentzer de.wikipedia CC

On the weekend of 11–12 June we had the immense joy of celebrating Tyas' final vows. It was such a joy to see Tyas make forever her vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as a Faithful Companion of Jesus.

On 11 June, the evening before her vows ceremony, we gathered in Soropadan House for a prayer of thanksgiving for Tyas' life and vocation. It was a happy occasion. Tyas was filled with delight. The prayer was lovely and the meal that followed was delicious. It was a fitting introduction to the day ahead.

Tyas' final vows took place at 10am on Saturday 12 June 2021. Despite the limitations placed on us by Covid restrictions we were able to make it a wonderful day. Both solemn and joyful, it was beautiful in every way. It was an intimate affair with 60 people present. Tyas' family members were extremely happy to be present as were we FCJs, delighted to be celebrating a final vows ceremony. The singing was led by a small choir of five persons plus

an organist. The choir sang beautifully – they could have been a group of 50 persons! Tyas was radiant, it was clear she was ready for everything she was committing herself to. The celebrant was from Ende, where Tyas is on mission. Fr Joseph Aurelius Woi Bule knows the FCJs well and he made the whole ceremony an extremely personal occasion. It was deeply touching to witness the moment when Tyas made her vows, she clearly meant every word she said. Sr Afra, the Area Leader for Asia, received the vows, which were formally witnessed by Srs Irene and Clare. Due to Covid it was necessary that the lunch that followed the vows was served in boxes. This did not limit our enjoyment of the occasion. As we gathered in small groups to eat, we were able to relax and spend some quality time together.

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Later that day, the FCJs gathered in Soropadan for a celebration supper. It was good to be with Tyas as she read the cards and greetings she had received and to look back on the day and enjoy all that had happened.



Clare Hand fcJ

# Living with a Pandemic

*From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence and famine; from battle and murder and from sudden death, Good Lord, deliver us. The Litany.*

Science and the modern pop-a-pill culture make most of us complacent about maintaining good health. As a consequence, Covid-19 has shocked us all at our vulnerability to an unimaginable global pandemic. With the death toll reaching nearly five million, the closure of national borders and the decimation of national economies, we have all been forced to confront a very different world from that to which we were accustomed. Yet history tells us that our once-in-a-century event is not uncommon, and that the human response to such a catastrophe has remarkable parallels in the past.

An interesting and prescient example can be seen in the experience of a small English village to the Bubonic Plague in 1665. As the plague had ravaged London throughout that year, the transmission of the disease to this tiny village of Eyam in the Peak District of Northern England is attributed to a travelling cloth merchant who had brought his wares northwards. Potent carriers, rat-infested fleas, were embedded in the cloth, which, when unravelled, spread to new hosts: the merchant and his client, the village tailor. Within days the traveller, the tailor and the rest of his household were dead. That was the start of the plague that ravaged the village for the next 14 months. But, it went no further than Eyam!

Encouraged and inspired by the vicar, William Mompesson, the villagers agreed to quarantine themselves within the town and not venture beyond a ring of rocks; a *cordon sanitaire*. Meat and grain brought from the neighbouring villages were left by the wall and, in exchange, the villagers left coins in bowls of vinegar in the belief that the liquid cleansed the contagion. Additionally, the villagers were discouraged from mixing, and in fact church services were held in the open, presumably with a measure of social distancing.

Meanwhile, within the village untold suffering continued for more than a year. The pestilence was rife and people had to

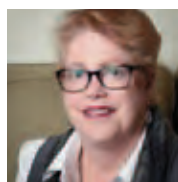


Photo: rustyruith1959 via flickr cc

Pictured above: Eyam Hall Gardens, Eyam Plague Village. Inside the walled garden at the rear of the hall. Outside the white painted gate are Plague Cottages, where the first victim died in 1665, followed by people in neighbouring properties. The gate also leads into the churchyard of St Lawrence's church, its bell tower can be seen at the opposite side of the wall.

bury their own dead. In August 1666 Elizabeth Hancock lost her husband and six of her own children, all within eight days. People from the neighbouring village of Stony Middleton watched in anguish as she buried them. The quarantine of Eyam lasted 14 months and by the time the outbreak was over and the last death was recorded in November 1666, more than 75 per cent of the population had perished. Of the original 344 villagers, only 90 survived and more than 70 families were completely wiped out.

Yet, amid this terror the villagers stayed the course. Their commitment to Mompesson's leadership and their faith that salvation would prevail ensured that this communal sacrifice probably saved the entire north of England from the plague. Devoid of any scientific knowledge, it is evident that Mompesson's methods were both inspired and visionary. Although there is no recorded account about how individual villagers sustained heart and soul amid monumental grief and isolation, the finer features universal to the human condition must have prevailed. Courage, community, resilience and above all, faith that the scourge would soon pass must have bolstered them during those long, dark days.



Carol Rosenhain

In spite of our access to media and electronic communication, our forbearance during our own pandemic has been just as remarkable as is evident in the shared experiences of Emma O'Brien and Julie Chamberlin opposite.

## Better Together

The Year 12 motto for 2021 is 'Better Together'. How has the legacy of companionship from Marie Madeleine d'Houët, which is embodied in this motto, been witnessed in your life in the Genazzano community this year? How have you been a 'companion'?

While the words 'Better Together' were probably chosen in anticipation of a year spent together in the classroom, free from Covid, they have still resonated with the Gen community well into Lockdown 6.0. Companionship from my friends, family and wider community has been vital for me to combat the boredom, sadness and lack of motivation while stuck at home.

📌 ... lockdown has brought our community together, ... when we are together, even virtually, we flourish. 📌

Marie Madeleine and the FCJ Sisters gave so much companionship and love to the people who had need of it, and thought lastly of themselves. A similar selfless compassion has been on display during and between lockdowns this year. From Year-Level challenges organised by Mr Ansell to Mrs Wholley's themed colour days to Genconnect prayer comments, the Gen community has come together to support everyone despite the challenges.

For me personally, companionship has also been evident in my home life. We have dinner as a family every

night, which due to the co-curricular commitments of four children is rarely possible during the term! We organise large and chaotic Zoom calls and Kahoots with grandparents and cousins. My friends and I have reached out and scheduled Zooms or met up for walks in the cross-section of our 5km zones.

In so many ways, lockdown has brought our community together, and proven the Year 12 theme that when we are together, even virtually, we flourish. So thank you to my family, friends, teachers and Gen community, who have made every day of Lockdown 6.0 just that little bit happier.

Emma O'Brien (Year 11 Genazzano)

## Australians living through Covid-19

In contrast to the people of Eyam and Mompesson's leadership in England in 1665, Australians living through the 2020–2021 Covid-19 pandemic knew what was happening around the world and in every Australian State as television beamed into our homes the latest news.

Elaborate equipment and skilled presenters explained the data for the previous 24 hours, including the numbers of those who had been

hospitalised or died. As the situation changed we were informed about the numbers of vaccinations per day and other relevant situations.

Many of us put the television on at breakfast time to get all this information and know how the pandemic was spreading across Victoria and the country. We studied the map of Melbourne to find the unfamiliar suburbs mentioned in the reports the numbers of new cases and deaths.

We listened to the Premier and the experts at the daily presentations and were entertained by the journalists asking probing questions for future media coverage.

By the end we were exhausted and proceeded to do something more productive till lunchtime. All this information was then shared or checked for accuracy with a relative or friend who rang in to see if we were still safe from the dreaded virus and not breaking the rules. That was important, not breaking the rules.

There were some new issues to consider like Hotel Quarantine for returning travellers. Our churches were closed for Sunday Mass, and numbers were limited for funerals and wedding services. However, technology provided us with the opportunity to attend these events, as well as meetings and webinars, and to connect with friends and loved ones, longing for the time when we could gather safely once again.

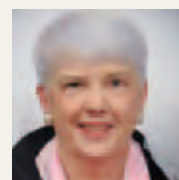
Julie Chamberlin

## Cake scholars say *thank you*

On Sunday 24 October a group of FCJ Sisters and FCJ Companions in Mission held a meeting which included the viewing of a film made by Sr Paola Terroni fcJ and a group of graduates in The Philippines who were given a scholarship to go to the University to gain a qualification. These scholarships were funded through the proceeds made from the sale of the Christmas cakes between 2000 and 2019 and which many FCJ Readers bought and enjoyed.

If you would like to view this film (12 minutes) the address is:  
<https://youtu.be/B1RF-YHaMvU>

Enjoy!



Julie Chamberlin

## Discerning the Gold in Human Experience

By Christine Anderson fcJ

Congratulations to Sr Christine Anderson fcJ on the publication of her book *Discerning the Gold in Human Experience: Leadership, Faith and Organizations*.



Christine founded Faith and Praxis for Global Leadership in Rome, Italy and Craighead Institute of Life and Faith in Glasgow, Scotland. As an experienced facilitator and organizational consultant, Christine has worked in many countries of the world, including Australia. Her passion is the integration of Life and Faith, and she is constantly developing methodologies for groups to address this area of life.

Sr Christine explains:

‘This book takes the form of a series of experiential methodologies. I have journeyed with many African, Asian, Oceanian and European colleagues and participants for the last thirty years. My focus now is to share the methodologies and processes with these peoples who have enriched my learning, my thinking, and my faith. I hope that, in doing so, the readers will be inspired to reflect on their own experiences and discover the treasures within themselves’.

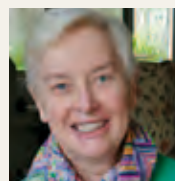
When asked what she wants readers to take away from the book, Christine answers:

‘The courage to ask their own questions. The belief that they have the resources within themselves to fulfil their dreams and to respond to some of the complex questions of today’.

‘My passion has always been to find a way to integrate life experience and faith, values and beliefs – seeing them as one human story and avoiding the fragmentation wrought upon us today by so many complex systems. Throughout all this work, the desire was to work professionally, deeply, and effectively with people who come from different values and beliefs in areas struggling for development and wholeness.’

*Discerning the Gold in Human Experience* is available in Australia from Angus and Robertson Booksellers.

For more information check the book's info page including a table of contents. <https://discerning-the-gold.webnode.it>



Helen Buckley fcJ

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