

FCJnews

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FCJ Sisters celebrate 140 years in Australia



CELEBRATING
140 YEARS OF
FCJ MISSION IN
AUSTRALIA

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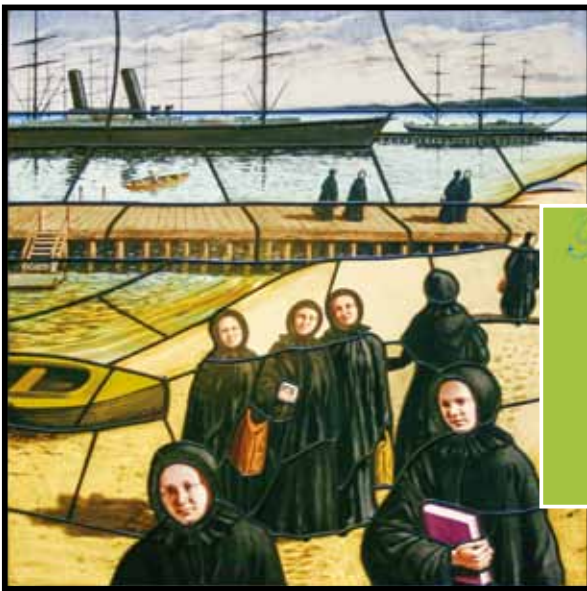
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Pictured left: Stained glass window of FCJ Sisters arrival at Sandridge in 1820.

Celebrating 140 Years of FCJ Mission in Australia

Catholic Education in Australia has been much in our consciousness over the past two years as we have taken part in the bicentenary celebrations of the first Catholic school established at Parramatta in October 1820. Our own FCJ story forms part of this rich tapestry of education: for this wonderful mission and our part in it, we give thanks to God.

The 1872 Education Act (free, compulsory and secular education) put great pressure on the bishops to set up Catholic schools where the children could be educated in the faith. In fact, in 1865 there had been an invitation to Mother Josephine Petit (Superior General of the time) to send sisters to Australia and in 1868 Bishop Sheil of Adelaide asked for ‘seven FCJs for a first class boarding school and day school’.¹

It was in God’s providence that a later invitation of Fr Dalton SJ, the noted Jesuit provincial, was considered anew by Mother Josephine who was assured that Fr Dalton would make available money for the journey, would have a house ready for twelve sisters and could find resources to set up a school for girls who were attending state schools. Mother Josephine writes to her assistant, Mother Stanislaus:

You know how many times we have been asked to send missionaries. We have so far answered negatively and dismissed the idea...but the persistence of these good Fathers makes me afraid to refuse, in case the good Lord really wishes it... If God wants it, we will find the means ...

And when it was clear that God did want it, Mother Josephine writes:

*We should set out with great confidence and without anxiety for the most distant lands...We have always believed that the good Lord would ask this of us; and all our Sisters without exception are ready to set out when it is required, and that with no hope of ever returning.*²

The first twelve FCJ Sisters began their journey from Gravesend (Thames River, London) on 21 April 1820 aboard *The Liguria*, sailing into Hobson’s Bay the morning of 1 June. Passengers moved to smaller boats which took them to Sandridge (Port Melbourne) where they disembarked on to the bank. There the Sisters were met by five Jesuit Fathers and taken by (horse) cabs via St Francis’ church and St Patrick’s cathedral to their new home on Richmond Hill. Crowds of people were waiting for them at the presbytery – a good number of those gathered had been taught by the FCJs in Europe and some even knew our foundress, Marie Madeleine d’Houët. After Benediction and lunch, the Sisters were taken to meet

the children (over 600) and their teachers who had assembled to greet the newly arrived Faithful Companions of Jesus.³ Within twelve days of their arrival, on 12 June 1882, the Melbourne Catholic newspaper reports that the Sisters had opened their high school and free school as well as teaching in the parish school of 400 children. Seven more FCJ Sisters arrived in Melbourne on 27 June 1884; a third group of six arrived on 30 October 1885 and a fourth group of nine arrived on 29 September 1888 – within six years, 34 FCJ Sisters had been missioned to Australia.

Our FCJ history here in Australia has been intricately connected with the mission of education – especially in the first 90 years or so. Following the first foundation in Richmond, FCJ schools were established in: Hawthorn (1886); Kew (Genazzano 1889); Benalla (1900); Frankston (Stella Maris 1968 – 1979 when it merged with Marianist College to become John Paul College). FCJ Sisters travelled out from their convents to teach in numerous parish primary schools – Richmond, Hawthorn, Kew, Williamstown, Camberwell, Deepdene, Benalla, East Frankston, Seaford and Langwarrin. In 1987 FCJs were missioned to Broome for ministry in education in the Diocese and local Catholic School. Other individual ministries took Sisters to Sydney and Adelaide where they responded to community needs. Back in Victoria, our FCJ ministries extended beyond schools to respond, also, to all kinds of new opportunities in the fields of spiritual accompaniment, healthcare, social and pastoral work amongst others. New FCJ foundations were made in Africa, South America, Asia and Eastern Europe. Our charism is now greatly enriched by our Companions in Mission whose lives influence and witness to this call to ‘widen our circle of love’.⁵

We experience our FCJ life as a blessing and a joy and we want to share it.⁶ We give thanks for all that has been and trust in God’s loving providence for all that lies ahead!

¹ *Twelve Came First: The FCJ Mission to Australia*; Sr Aileen Ryan fcJ; FCJ Society 2010; Page vi

² *Ibid*; Page vii

³ *Ibid*; Pages 38 – 43

⁴ *Ibid*; Page v

⁵ FCJ General Chapter 2019

⁶ *Ibid*



Sr Barbara Brown-Graham fcJ
Provincial Leader Australia

Renewal vows of Sr Cecilia Marip Seng Ja fcJ



PHOTO: Myanmar Community

Pictured left: Sr Cecilia Marip Seng Ja fcJ renewing her vows in Yangon, Myanmar.

It was great joy for us in Yangon, Myanmar, as Sr Cecilia Marip Seng Ja fcJ renewed her vows on 5 December 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic and political situation in Myanmar made it impossible to invite many friends to join the celebration. However, we really thanked God that we were able to invite some friends who live nearby to come and join the Eucharist and renewal of vows face-to-face.

The Holy Eucharist was celebrated in our small chapel with Fr Joseph Aik Maung SJ. The witnesses were Sr Francisca Arti Setiati fcJ (Sisca) and Sr Rosa Udi Seng Yi ISR. It was a simple ceremony, however, modern technology helped us to feel more globally connected and supported by many FCJs and CiMs as they joined us virtually by Zoom or watched the video afterwards.

The experience of being accompanied by God was shown in the hymns Cecilia chose. The hymns were *Power of Your love, I found the treasure and the seed*, a Myanmar hymn. On her journey as a Faithful Companion of Jesus, Cecilia has found her treasure in companionship with Jesus. This has strengthened her vocation as a temporary professed sister in an

uncertain situation in Myanmar. The ups and downs, joys and discouragements of this climate have taught Cecilia to have profound hope and trust in God alone. She has come to know that the power of God's love transcends any circumstance.



The Eucharistic booklet had a beautiful cover picture drawn by Cecilia herself. It is a woman carrying a child on her back. Cecilia explained:

My cover picture was a reflection on encountering God's presence in my life journey in the way God is carrying me, loving me like my grandmother did when I was a little child. I can cry, can rest, and can be happy on God's shoulders as I did on my grandmother's shoulders. That loving caring experience helped me to move on with my religious life, although life is so hard in Myanmar.

The closing hymn was in Myanmar with the title: *The Seed*. This hymn is about our faith, which is like a seed. When the seed drops or is planted on the ground, it seems to disappear to human eyes, but actually it grows and bears flowers and much fruit. It is gradually pruned by nature.

This is similar to when we decide to follow God. People might think that we lose everything for nothing, but we have God's promise for those who follow Him on the narrow path. They will be granted blessings ten-thousand-times in God's Kingdom.

“ May the seed that God has planted in her heart, grow deeper and stronger... ”

That is our prayer and support for Cecilia. May the seed that God has planted in her heart, grow deeper and stronger as she continues to be God's faithful companion in serving the thirst of Jesus in the people today.

Myanmar Community

“ I can cry, can rest, and can be happy on God's shoulders as I did on my grandmother's shoulders. That loving caring experience helped me to move on with my religious life... ”

A new archivist at Genazzano

After the retirement of Julianne Barlow as Genazzano archivist, Ryna Ordynat was appointed to this position in 2021. The College is 133 years old and the Archive is a rich source of the history and traditions of the school.

Ryna has packed quite a bit into her 31 years. She completed a Bachelor of Arts at Monash University, and followed this with a Masters' degree in Archaeology. Having completed this post graduate degree, Ryna could see that this area offered limited opportunities for employment and was probably not one in which she wished to make a career. So, after working for the National Trust of Victoria, she completed a degree in Museum Studies.

Following this, she enrolled in a PhD and at the time of writing she is about to submit her thesis. Her Doctoral research concerned the lives of British aristocratic women in the C18th and C19th, with a focus on the ways they recorded and documented their lives and interests. These women created 'scrapbooks', which were a precursor to the modern scrapbook. These books reveal parts of the social and cultural history of this period of British life. One such woman, whose life Ryna has explored, is Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire. She had a tumultuous life, and was banished from her home by her husband. In this period of banishment she made a number of these albums for her daughter. Her albums were filled with the ideas and experiences she believed were an important part of her daughter's education. She included postcards and mementoes of the 'Grand Tour' and other educational materials.

Ryna's research shows these albums challenge the narrative that elite women were not involved in the education of their children. Some of these books contain poetry and art as well as the details of their lives. These documents have not received much attention from historians and remain a fertile area for researchers in the future.



Pictured above: Ryna Ordynat in Genazzano College archive room.

the Annals reveal how these sisters were responsible for all aspects of a community life, building and teaching. Ryna says these records reveal how the Sisters were ahead of their time ...

Ryna taught at Monash University in the four years of her PhD and over that time developed her interest in the importance of archival materials. She has worked with the Ukrainian community in Melbourne. Her training in history and museum studies with her knowledge of the Ukrainian language meant that she could read the sources and documents created by this community. She says this work is vital as the Ukrainian diaspora is losing its capacity to read its own language. This community grew as a result of migration of Eastern Europeans during and after World War 11, and before the Russian control of the Eastern Bloc countries.

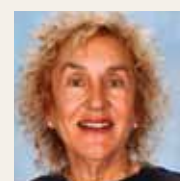
In their Archive she found many fascinating stories of this community, including the events surrounding the delegation of Ukrainians who came to Melbourne as part of the 1956 Olympic Games. One woman who was a staff

member of this delegation, sought asylum in Melbourne. She was hidden by the community and managed to evade the Russian attempts to find her and she was able to settle in Melbourne.

Since coming to Genazzano, Ryna can see how significant the College Archive is, in both its record of girls' education and women's history. The Archive is an important record of the efforts of the early sisters who established the college.

Getting to know the Archive, she has been reading the School Annals, in order to understand the timeline of the history of the school. She says the Annals reveal how these sisters were responsible for all aspects of a community life, building and teaching. Ryna says these records reveal how the Sisters were ahead of their time in the 1890 – 1900s, in terms of community education in Victoria.

It is good to see the work of the Archive being passed on from the capable and committed hands of Julianne Barlow to another highly trained and committed researcher.



Anne McIlroy
Teacher
Genazzano FCJ College

Meet the new principal

Shaun Mason

FCJ College Benalla Victoria

In June 2021, the community of FCJ College Benalla farewelled Ms Joanne Rock after her five fruitful years as Principal. Soon after, Shaun Mason arrived at Benalla to take up the Principal's mantle.

As a regional town, Benalla is familiar territory for Shaun. His childhood and youth were spent in East Gippsland, Victoria, where he was educated by the Salesians at Nagle College, Bairnsdale. His teaching career began at Xavier High School in Albury, NSW, and after ten years he was appointed Deputy Principal Learning and Teaching at Galen Catholic College, Wangaratta. He has also served as the Deputy Principal Learning and Teaching at Catholic College, Wodonga.

Shaun discovered a love of history during his high school years. This led him to Melbourne University to pursue a Bachelor of Arts (Hons), followed by a Graduate Diploma of Education. History became the subject he most enjoyed teaching, along with English and Religious Education:

When I think about it, it is probably because they all involve storytelling and narrative. I like stories, and sharing stories. There is something powerful in teaching through story and encouraging students to become a part of it, or to create their own.

A love of learning and a commitment to lifelong learning is more than 'edu-speak' for Shaun. He has been awarded a Masters of Education (Leadership and Administration) from Deakin University and is currently completing postgraduate studies in School Leadership with Harvard University and a Graduate Certificate in Religious Education with Australian Catholic University.

Shaun is married to Naomi and together they have three young children (Eliza 12, Leo 10 and Maeve 7). Sporting interests keep them all busy after school and on weekends, especially the cricket and soccer teams of his children. The family are all Western Bulldogs (Doggies) supporters, so periodic attendance at AFL games in Melbourne is a shared household passion and priority. When the Doggies won their first premiership in 62 years (October 2016), Shaun was lucky enough to be there with his son, Leo.

We had a great day, and I may have shed a tear or two.



Photo: John Russell

Pictured above: Shaun Mason.
Below left: FCJ College Benalla Victoria.

The Mason family benefits from Shaun's interest in cooking, especially during school holidays when there is more time for testing out new dishes.

I love Thai and Vietnamese food, and my warm beef salad is a bit, even with the kids! But if you were to ask them about their favourites, I think they would say they most like my hamburgers, lasagne and chicken wraps.

When asked about what drew him to apply for the Principal's position at FCJ College Benalla, Shaun was unequivocal:

In the first instance, I recognised the opportunity to be a part of a vibrant and grounded community. What I mean is, the people here know their story. Marie Madeleine's charism is alive and thriving at FCJ College. I've no doubt she would be proud of this community and the way they walk in her footsteps. I'm impressed with the quiet, grit and determination of the FCJ sisters, but in my heart, the idea of companionship, and walking with those most in need, is what struck me most about the charism.

Shaun's confidence in the College community is reciprocated. He has quickly established a reputation for collaborative, visionary leadership. May the strong start he has enacted continue to build the College's tradition of excellence and enliven the FCJ values of companionship, gentleness, justice, courage and confidence.

Chris Heffernan
Committee member



Sr Annunciata O'Connor fcJ 16 October 1926 – 21 December 2021



Mary Terese O'Connor, Sr Annunciata, was born in Melbourne on 26 October 1926, the only daughter of John O'Connor and Mary Goble and sister of John and Frank, who pre-deceased her in July 2020.

Pictured above: Mary Terese O'Connor, Sr Annunciata.

The family settled in the new parish of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Deepdene, and the children attended the parish primary school right through to Grade 8.

She had just turned twelve in 1939 when she went to Genazzano in Form 3, then the beginning of secondary school.

At age fifteen, Annunciata had made up her mind to be an FCJ!

She left school in December 1943. The nearest FCJ novitiate was in Canada, so it was not possible for her to enter the Society straight away. She obtained a job in the Public Service in 1944. In early January 1945 permission had been given to open a novitiate at Genazzano and she was ready to enter. There were five postulants that year, one left as a novice and the rest: Joan Duffus, Margaret Mary Kennedy, Kathleen Ride and Annunciata all persevered.

Annunciata and her companions received the habit on the 8 September

1945 and two years later, on 15 August 1947, they made their first vows at Genazzano and less than a month later, set sail for England on 8 September travelling via Cape Town, a journey of six weeks. She describes her first winter in England and first Christmas away from home as very difficult.

Annunciata commenced her Arts Degree in 1948 at University College Dublin where she majored in English and French. During this time, she renewed her vows in 1950 at Poles Convent FCJ in Hertfordshire, England and spent the summer holidays in Switzerland improving her French. She graduated with honours in September 1951 and went immediately to Broadstairs, Kent, for her tertianship before happily returning to Australia.

Annunciata arrived home on Melbourne Cup Day 1952 and went to Vacluse Richmond where the following year she began her teacher training under the tutelage of Mother

Veronica Lardner fcJ. She taught Grade 2 for two years before moving to the senior classes. She made her final vows at Genazzano on 4 September 1953 and remained on the staff at Vacluse for the next 15 years. At various times she taught: Religion, English, Geography, French, Latin, History and Maths and for much of this time she oversaw the junior boarders and sport! Annunciata was loved by her students at Vacluse as evidenced by the many tributes received at her death.

In 1969, Annunciata was sent to Genazzano to take charge of the boarders and was a Form 5 class teacher. She admits these two years were difficult and when she began to feel settled, she was moved back to Vacluse as principal, a position she held for ten years. This was a time of change, for governments were just beginning to recognize the needs of Independent Schools and at the same time there began a gradual

decline in the number of religious in the school. She took all this in her stride and oversaw the demolition of the old concert hall to make way for the provision of a new administration block and much needed facilities for an increased number of lay staff.

In 1980, Annunciata finished her principalship at Vacluse and went to Europe for a well-earned sabbatical. She thoroughly enjoyed this experience. She went to France and loved Paris as well as visiting Lourdes and Lisieux and enjoyed a holiday on Ile d'Yeu. In France, she was afforded the opportunity to drink deeply of the source of her FCJ heritage and to follow in the steps of Marie Madeleine as she made a pilgrimage to significant places in the foundress's life.

She then went to Ireland to study Theology at Maynooth College, a course she found stimulating. She enjoyed revisiting old haunts from student days and discovering long-lost relations in Kerry. Then to England – where she writes:

Having in my young days viewed London from taxi windows between Victoria and Euston Stations how I enjoyed the opportunity now of exploring this fascinating city.

Annunciata returned to Australia in March 1981 and was asked to go to Genazzano as Principal until Sr Margaret Mary Kennedy returned

a smaller, more suitable house built on the Genazzano property. She moved from Genazzano to Benalla as Superior of the community in 1986 and Deputy Principal. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Annunciata became Principal of the college for a term in 1988 until the arrival of the new appointee.

While in Benalla, the community moved to a new residence – she became a champion at moving communities into new houses! Annunciata left Benalla in 1990 and lived in Doncaster, Fairfield and South Melbourne. She enjoyed her time in St Peter & Paul's parish in South Melbourne where she was a pastoral presence in the parish, helping in the Open House kitchen, answering the phone and door in the parish office and chatting to people after Sunday Mass.

During these years in Melbourne, she taught English to various students: refugees, seminarians and ESL to Years 11 and 12 students at Vacluse. She also supervised the English studies of Srs Beta and Wina, two young FCJs from Indonesia who came to Melbourne to enhance their English. She was also the local bursar for the community.

Annunciata had a keen intellect. Her grasp of English grammar, pronunciation and spelling was impeccable. She had a vast knowledge

thrashing of England in the Ashes to make for a good day's cricket. She enjoyed crosswords, sudoku, and other word games and was an avid reader. She thoroughly enjoyed FCJ gatherings and was present on the 8 December 2021 for the FCJ Christmas Party at the Catholic Leadership Centre in East Melbourne.

She loved her family and celebrated her 90th birthday in 2016 with them and us. More recently Sr Barbara took her to Upwey to celebrate John and Bev's 70th wedding anniversary.

Annunciata spent the last year of her life in Mary MacKillop Aged Care, Hawthorn. This was not easy for her but as she had done all her life she went where she was missioned. She was lovely to visit, always pleased to see us and to engage in lively conversation. She remained gracious till her death at Mary MacKillop on the 21 December 2021, aged ninety-five.

Requiescat in pace.



Helen Buckley fcJ
Area Consultor FCJ
Australia

❖ Annunciata had a keen intellect. Her grasp of English grammar, pronunciation and spelling was impeccable. She had a vast knowledge of History and Geography and her Latin stood her in good stead... as she had done all her life she went where she was missioned. ❖

from Paris at the end of the year. She became Deputy Principal and Superior of the local community during which time the decision was made to relocate the community to

of History and Geography and her Latin stood her in good stead. She enjoyed sport and was a loyal supporter of the Hawks. She loved the cricket. There was nothing better than a good





Pictured: (from left to right) Carmen embroidered Marie Madeleine's face on the back of the quilt. Left: Carmen with her quilt. Above: A quilt detail.

A quilt of companionship

Carmen Lye Year 12 Genazzano FCJ College

Carmen Lye (Year 12) has always been interested in the legacy of Marie Madeleine d'Houët. She first entered the Marie Madeleine Religious Writing Competition when she was in Year 6 and was thrilled to receive a Highly Commended for her efforts. Recently, the Marie Madeleine Religious Competition was broadened to include a range of mediums, including artwork, videos and sculptures. In 2021, after a challenging year, Carmen decided to interpret the topic set for Year 11 and 12 through one of her great loves, sewing. The result was a most amazing quilt that she has now donated to Performance Psychology.

The question for Year 11 and 12 was: *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?*

Carmen reflected on those words 'better' and 'together'. She readily declares how she struggled in 2021 more than she had ever struggled before but that at her weakest point the Genazzano community 'stepped up.' With this 'amazing community' surrounding her, Carmen felt she was able to understand the word 'better'. She decided to make a quilt made of squares that reflected those people who companioned her in 2021. She asked each person to reflect on what made them feel better then sourced material that was sometimes literal and at other times metaphorical. As Carmen says, '81 squares of cotton later I was left with a queen-sized flag of gratitude and togetherness.'

This quilt became a labour of love, but Carmen was always conscious of connecting it to the topic and to the legacy of Marie Madeleine d'Houët. Through this process she shed many tears, often sitting with the unfinished quilt wrapped around her shoulders. Carmen says, 'It felt like a hug overflowing with compassion, surrounded by reminders of positivity and love. I never intended to develop such a connection with this project, but it has become one of the most important things I have done this year.'

When asked about the connection to the life of Marie Madeleine, Carmen reflects on her own challenges with mental health issues and sees a similar struggle. She muses 'Marie Madeleine d'Houët has always been a strong representation of someone who has battled with her own issues, turning to her community and the value of good companionship. She fought post-partum depression, as well as the loss of her husband, and her level of

selflessness and drive was unfathomable. I understand wholeheartedly her story of how healing gratitude and companionship can be.' Carmen embroidered on the back of the quilt the face of Marie Madeleine as a reminder of the how the companionship and togetherness the foundress exercised in her life permeates the ethos of Genazzano eras later.

Carmen was humbly grateful to be aware of Marie Madeleine's legacy and how this legacy has been embodied in the Gen community. The quilt, and the people on the quilt, helped Carmen to re-imagine herself and rediscover her many passions. Carmen states quite emphatically what she wants to happen with the quilt. 'I want my quilt to be used in the Performance Psychology space to symbolically provide to others the comfort that has been given to me by all the people represented on it. And to pass on the care and gentleness, the love and compassion, and quite literally the warmth that I have seen exist within our school and in our community – in Marie Madeleine d'Houët's community.'



Mary Fahey
Religious Education
Co-Ordinator 7-12
Genazzano FCJ College



Photo: Maggie Power

“As a deeply spiritual person, Mary Philomena delighted in all the beauties of nature. She loved the gentle drift of the seasons she experienced in Europe, although that environment never replaced her enchantment with the Australian bush.”

Mother Mary Philomena Douglas

Kathleen Douglas, (1897–1958) known in religious life as Mother Mary Philomena, was born at Richmond, Melbourne on 10 August 1897. She was the youngest of the four surviving children of George Douglas and Kathleen Maud Egan. Her father was a jeweller and watchmaker and initially the family lived close to his shop in Richmond. Although her father was not a Catholic, he agreed to have his children educated at St Ignatius' Primary School, Richmond, before the three girls attended the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) Vaucluse Convent. Kathleen lived within walking distance of one of her childhood friends, Kathleen King, and that bond saw them united in their desire to embrace a vocation with the FCJ Sisters.

While Kathleen King entered religious life with her parents' blessing, to be known as Mother Euphemia fčj, George Douglas strongly opposed his gifted daughter's calling to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. Mindful of her adored father's opposition, Kathleen delayed her decision to become a religious until after she had undertaken teacher training at Loreto, Albert Park. She then consolidated her practical skills over seven years at St Ignatius' before finally entering the Novitiate at Genazzano FCJ College, Kew, in September 1922.¹

After receiving the religious habit at Genazzano, as Sr Mary Philomena she sailed for Europe via Canada with Mother Mary Fitzgerald who had been her Novice Mistress. Mary Philomena then joined the novitiate at Upton Hall,

Wirral, Merseyside and made her vows there on 15 August 1925. Three years later, she renewed her vows at Sainte Anne d'Auray in Brittany, the fourth house opened by the Venerable Marie Madeleine D'Houët. Mary Philomena was the last Australian to be professed there, a fact of which she was inordinately proud. After a further three years she made her final vows at Uccle, Belgium.²

As a deeply spiritual person, Mary Philomena delighted in all the beauties of nature. She loved the gentle drift of the seasons she experienced in Europe, although that environment never replaced her enchantment with the Australian bush. Before she entered religious life, Kathleen had relished visits to her sister, who lived at Belgrave. After such visits, she would return

with arms full of wildflowers and gum leaves to decorate the chapel. She also delighted in animals. She adored horses and dogs, especially Bing and Cobber who belonged to the community. Additionally, the calls and plumage of birds held a real fascination for her.³

Apart from her spiritual yearning, Mary Philomena was driven by her profound intellectual curiosity. While in Europe, she seized the opportunity to study at the National University Dublin, where she obtained first Class Honours in both English and French. During the holidays, she undertook further courses at the Sorbonne in Paris and joined FCJ communities at Broadstairs UK, and in Belgium.

On returning to Australia in 1931, she spent time at Benalla, before taking up an appointment in 1932 as Mistress in Charge of Studies and Boarders at Genazzano.⁴ It was during her time as Boarding Mistress, that students came to appreciate the breadth of Mary Philomena's scholarship. As was the custom, boarders had their outward correspondence censored. Naturally, the girls detested this practice as an invasion of their privacy. One student,

Continued next page

*Mother Mary Philomena Douglas
continued*

whose parents were living in Japan, penned her letter in Japanese, no doubt thinking quite smugly that her letter would escape the censor. When her letter was returned after the routine scrutiny, she must have been shocked to see the Japanese spelling and sentence structure appropriately corrected.⁵

This began a long period of Mother Mary Philomena's most fruitful apostolate as a rigorous educator and visionary leader. Not only was she highly educated and passionate about education for women, she was young and energetic. Under her direction the school became more disciplined, more ordered, more like other Catholic schools. Her teaching favoured English in the higher classes, and her own love of literature nurtured a similar passion in her students. She had the poise and knowledge to animate the prose and poetry she regularly read to her classes and she was prepared to stimulate contrary viewpoints among her students. High standards were expected of them and she was rarely disappointed.⁶

Her own love of literature was evident in her creative writing. She was a regular contributor of stories to a Catholic school paper called *The Children's World*. It was a bimonthly publication and, in spite of her heavy workload, Mary Philomena's contributions flowed regularly over the 1940s and 1950s. Her stories were often stimulated by famous quotations from literature and her imagination cleverly wove these into the material she crafted. In 1937, Fr Beovich, Inspector of Catholic Schools in Melbourne, described *The Children's World* as a considerable help to teachers and children in uniting Catholic culture with literature.⁷

By 1944, her inspired teaching and formidable administrative skills had made Mary Philomena the logical successor to Mother Gerda Prytz. Accordingly, she became Superior of the Society and Principal of Genazzano. Undaunted



❖ Mother Mary Philomena's vibrant contribution to the school ensured that one of the houses is fittingly named *Douglas House* ... her own rigorous intellect, is stamped in the sustained academic excellence that Genazzano FCJ College inspires in its staff and students. ❖

by the responsibility or workload, over the next fourteen years Mother Mary Philomena began to implement change and growth that would bring Genazzano to the fore as an esteemed academic institution. Her friendship with Julia Flynn, who was the first female to be appointed Chief Inspector of Education from 1936–1943, cemented her academic aspirations for the school. In 1945 she applied for, and received, permission for Genazzano to set its own Intermediate Examination. When the same permission was granted for the Leaving Examination in 1948, Genazzano was classified as an 'A' school.⁸

Later, with the establishment of Commonwealth Scholarships, she encouraged the introduction of Matriculation subjects. Without fanfare, she was opening up a world for intelligent young women, where a rigorous education became a desired right of passage. As a consequence,

enrolments grew. More students demanded increased space and it was fortuitous that a property adjacent to the school, Grange Hill, came up for sale under her tenure. The property was quickly purchased and was immediately put to use in establishing a Junior School as a separate entity.

Although motivated by an educational imperative, Mary Philomena never lost sight of her duty to the Society. After a wartime hiatus, it gave her great joy to re-open the novitiate in Australia in 1945. She began with five postulants and numbers grew over the next decade. She put the highest ideals before these young women and by constant encouragement urged them on to further efforts. 'She was very honest and very fair, had high ideals, didn't like any sort of scheming, she liked you to be straight,' said one of her former novices.⁹ Her spiritual life was paramount. She lived according to



Pictured above: Mother Mary Philomena Douglas. Left: Genazzano FCJ College.

the teachings of the Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët and constantly spoke of them to her students and novices. In 1948, she accompanied the Mother Vicar, Dorothy Meagher, as a delegate to the Chapter in the UK. This was followed by residence at Broadstairs for a period of eighteen months, after which revitalized, she returned to Genazzano in 1952.

Mother Mary Philomena carried herself with an air of authority. She commanded attention when she spoke. She was thin and erect in addressing the full assembly of girls who sat in expectant and electric silence.¹⁰ Yet while she perhaps appeared at times aloof, she remained committed to the welfare of her charges, both novices and students. One of her former students recalled that; 'Mother Philomena Douglas was the greatest influence in our school life. She was a purist, a first-class teacher of Language and Literature, a dedicated and very private person, except in classes, where she opened up to us her love of literature and made us love and know it too. Many girls have regretted that though they admired and respected her, they never really knew or talked to her.'¹¹

When she was terminally ill in the Mercy Hospital in 1958, Mary Philomena was surrounded by flowers, letters and cards, all expressing loving wishes of concern for her wellbeing and recovery. She was amazed at such an effusive display of generosity and kindness. Humble to the end, she could not believe that so many people had expressed such overt affection for her. She was the last of her immediate family. Her father had long since passed away and her mother, two sisters and brother had all died within the previous few years. Mother Mary Philomena Douglas entered eternal life on 2 August, at the Mercy Hospital, Melbourne, just a week before her 61st birthday.

Her death prompted considerable expressions of grief and prayer from both students and religious societies around Melbourne. A Good Shepherd sister wrote on the occasion of Mother Mary Philomena Douglas' passing, that, 'There are many things I recall about Mother, her kindness, justice, patience, her buoyancy. But above all else it was her spirit of prayer, her awareness of God. In those days I could not define it, but in the light of my years of experience in religion, that is what it was. Both Agnes and I have often discussed this "certain atmosphere" about Genazzano, and I really feel that, about you all, there was that loving spirit of true love of God and each other. And then, of course, it spilled over into the school.'¹²

Mother Mary Philomena's vibrant contribution to the school ensured that one of the houses is fittingly named *Douglas House*. Of greater note, is that the hallmark of her own rigorous intellect, is stamped in the sustained academic excellence that Genazzano FCJ College inspires in its staff and students.



Carol Rosenhain.

END NOTES

- ¹ Mother Euphemia King fcJ. *Personal recollections*. FCJ Archives. (Richmond 1986.)
- ² Sr Aileen Ryan fcJ. (ed) *Some stories of valiant women. FCJ Sisters who lived in Australia since 1882*. (FCJ Archives Richmond, Victoria.) NDP.
- ³ Mother Euphemia King fcJ. Ibid.
- ⁴ Sr Aileen Ryan fcJ. (ed) Ibid.
- ⁵ Sr Maria Bell fcJ. (ed) *And the Spirit Lingers*. (Melbourne, Brown, Prior and Anderson. 1988.) p44.
- ⁶ Sr M Clare O'Connor fcJ. *The Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus in Australia*. (Melbourne. HH Stephenson. 1982) p172.
- ⁷ Ibid. p184.
- ⁸ Ibid. p172.
- ⁹ Sr Aileen Ryan fcJ. (ed) Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Sr Clare O'Connor fcJ. (ed) Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid. p157.
- ¹² Sr Aileen Ryan fcJ. Ibid.

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Photo: Rbrechko/Wikimedia

¶ Loving God,
 We pray for the people of Ukraine, for all those suffering and afraid,
 that you will be close to them and protect them.
 We pray for world leaders, for compassion, strength and wisdom to
 guide their choices.
 We pray for the world that in this moment of crisis, we may reach
 out in solidarity to our brothers and sisters in need.
 May we walk in Your ways so that peace and justice become a reality
 for the people of Ukraine and for all the world.
 In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen. ¶

Prayer composed by CAFOD, UK.

Pictured above: St Michael's golden-domed cathedral, KYIV, Ukraine

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