

## Advent 2011



*Be filled with light ...*

Mother Abbess led us into Advent with the theme which our Diocese was taking: “Light Bearers”. She also designed a power point presentation on the theme of being the lantern which reaches the dark places of life. The presentation highlighted the darker places of conflict and violence in our world, and used as a background, Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr’s mantra: “May the lantern of my life move gently this night, into all the places where light is needed.” It was a powerful image of the energy of Divine Light working to overcome darkness. Mother quoted Mary Oliver’s poem: “When I am among the trees”, especially emphasizing the lines:

“...to go easy  
to be filled with light  
and to shine.”

This was our work for Advent.

Advent 2011, Christmas and New Year brought to our community an unwelcome flu virus. It was vigorous in the way many of us were left weak and barely coping. Those of us who succumbed early in December were well by Christmas, and up to attending the Vigil and Midnight Mass. After that, it became so debilitating that we went into lock down through the New Year period, praying the hours of the Office privately, and stopping all singing at Eucharist. Eventually, it let go, with a lot of care on our part.

## January

Archbishop Philip Wilson came for his annual retreat, beginning January 4th. On January 9th, we welcomed the Guild of St. Stephen – over 100 Altar Servers attended Mass in our Monastic Church, with the Archbishop presiding.

On January 10th, we had our annual community meeting of appointments, introduced with another audiovisual presentation which exhorted us to a spirit of mindfulness and deep prayer in all our work.



*Mother Mary congratulated Sr Veronica after she won the Dean's Merit List Award*

On January 20th, we celebrated with Sr. Veronica. She had achieved her Degree in the Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong, and had excelled with her assignments. Later she was privileged to receive one of the Dean's "Merit List Awards". Dean's Merit List recognises the top 5% of undergraduate students enrolled in all degrees across the Faculty, and is determined solely on the basis of academic performance. Sr. Veronica's was outstanding. This reception took place on May 15th. Srs. Mechtild and Gertrud represented our community at this Reception.

## February



*Linda Wisaloth entered our community with the blessing her parents*

On February 1st, Linda Wisaloth entered. Her parents, Tricia and Joe accompanied their daughter from Perth to Jamberoo, and in a private ceremony in our Monastic Church, with Mother Abbess, presented their daughter to God in the same spirit which captured the Solemnity of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. This being our Title and our Foundation Day, it was also now especially significant for the Wisaloth family. Bishop Peter Ingham came for Mass on Foundation Day and stayed on afterwards to celebrate. We are always pleased to see our Bishop.

On February 16th, Abbot Bruno Marin, opened our Canonical Visitation. Abbot Bruno was accompanied by Bishop (formerly Abbot) Hugh Gilbert from Scotland. The visitation was of shorter duration this time because of the Abbot's more pressing commitments. Both Visitors departed on February 20th.

Lent began on February 22nd. Mother Abbess used Plato's *Parable of the Cave* to lead us into the Lenten Season where we would be pondering how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened.

This was our challenge for Lent. Enter the cave of the heart, and face the shadows, the negativity, the rash judgments that may be drawing us further into the darkness.

## March



*Barbie Crawford received an 80th birthday blessing from Fr Paul, supported by Sr Mechtild.*

March 19th, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, was an important day for Barbie Crawford, Sr. Mechtild's mother. Since her 80th birthday was coming up, we struck up an early celebration, beginning with the Mass. Fr. Paul gave Barbie and very beautiful birthday blessing, and touched some deep emotions in Barbie and in most of us. There weren't many dry eyes that morning. Afterwards, we cut the cake and talked on about 80 years of life. Born in 1932, Barbie is the same age as the Sydney's Harbour Bridge, so she has a lot of life's experiences to offer to the young. She is a mother, a grandmother and a great-grandmother and her love for her family is tangible. She has laid down her life for them all.

## **April/May**

Easter and the Easter Octave were rich in the splendour of the Church's Liturgy. As always, we were blessed to share Holy Week and Easter with so many of our Oblates and Cottage Guests.

During our annual holidays, renovation work began on our Retreat Cottages. St. Hildegard's Cottage and St. Gertrud's Cottage were renovated internally to create three separate living areas, completely self-sufficient, thus giving guests more opportunity for solitude. The living areas are equivalent to "hermitage" style living, only under the one roof. Separate entrance doors ensure privacy. St. Scholastica's Cottage was re-carpeted and sound-proofed to ensure that residents staying on the ground floor will not be affected by noise on the upper floor. The number of rooms in both St. Lioba's Cottage and St. Scholastica's cottage remain the same.

The Conference Room which was destroyed in July 2011, from the damage caused by gale-force winds, was also finally rebuilt – albeit in a more sturdy style – and was finished for the New Year. It is a beautiful space for prayer.

## June

On Monday June 11th, we entered into a holiday in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. In the afternoon we watched the Royal Barge and Flotilla on the River Thames. We were especially proud of our Australian armed forces and lifesavers!



*Newly baptised Jacob with his proud mother, Gretta, and his great aunt, Sr Mary Claire.*

June 15th saw the arrival of Sr. Mary Claire Johnson's family, complete with a new baby to be baptized on June 16th. Jacob Dudley Barber, son of Gretta Johnson and Dudley Barber, was baptized by Fr. Paul Gurr at the 9.00 a.m. Mass on Saturday, June 16th

Jacob was the perfect baby for the occasion – no tears! He seemed to enter into every moment. Many of us were privileged to write in Jacob's Bible after the ceremony and to share a piece of Christening Cake. The Johnsons know how to do that "family thing" which brings us all together, even down to a sing-along.



*Mother Mary received Sr Hannah's Temporary Vows*

June brought us to Sr. Hannah's Temporary Profession. This took place on the feast of Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More, June 22nd. The cover of her Profession booklet was resplendent with a picture of the Icon of the Annunciation from the triptych of the Incarnation, by the late Earle Backen, a Benedictine Oblate and friend of Sr. Hannah. The icon hangs over the altar in the St. Laurence Chapel, Christ Church, St. Laurence, in Sydney. Fr. Paul Gurr was celebrant at the Mass and Mother Abbess received Sr. Hannah's vows.

On June 23rd, our sisters in Formation attended the Benedictine Studies Day at St. Scholastica's Glebe. Sr. Joanna gave one of the papers. Sr. Therese represented Mother Abbess at the Benedictine Union Meeting over that weekend.

## **July**

For a few days in July, the local Lay Carmelite community gathered in our Retreat Cottages for what they called “A Creative Carmelite Retreat”. Some of the highlights were: bush-walking, Mass at dawn on the mountain-top, dream ‘work-shopping’, banner-making, creative movement and dance, an ‘agape’ meal, and biblical story-telling. All these expressions of prayer united the thirty participants throughout these days. Fr. Paul Gurr coordinated this retreat.

## August



*Michael Casey challenged us to consider issues of formation*

Fr. Michael Casey, ocsso, came to the Abbey for a week in early August. His talks centred on “Formation” in Monastic Life. He addressed issues which are at times all too challenging, such as statistics, both for candidates to Religious and Monastic Life, and numbers of church-goers. He called us to face the “now” of our times, and the way Formation needs to happen in the “now”. He set out to “stir” us, challenge us, and set us thinking seriously. All of this was achieved, and most of us would agree that the days were days of enlightenment.

From August 4th–31st, Sr. Veronica joined with her sister and brother, Linda and Leo Chandler to exhibit their Art and Pottery in the public sector of the Wollongong Art Gallery. The Exhibition was entitled:

*“On a wing & a prayer”*

Contemporary Water colour: Sr. Mary Veronica Chandler

Print Making and Textile: Linda Chandler

Potter: Leo Chandler.

The Exhibition took place at the Wollongong city Gallery, in the Community Access Section.

It was the first time Leo had exhibited his pottery. Linda and Sr. Veronica had exhibited their Art before. Leo lives in Springbrook, Queensland, and Linda lives on the Gold Coast. The Exhibition received warm appreciation from the Organizers and from so many visitors. All three siblings are artistically gifted and say that the gift comes from both sides of their family.

In August, Fr. Paul Gurr, our Chaplain, was invited to spend three weeks with the growing number of young Carmelites in East Timor, of whom there are eleven Novices and about thirty in Simple Vows. The Timorese Carmelites are part of the Australian Carmelite Province so his visit was partly to continue the building up of fraternity between East Timor and Australia. In addition, he spent a lot of time, (especially with the Novices who were musically gifted), teaching chanting as a way of praying the Divine Office and as a tool of Meditation.



## September

Our Augustinian brothers (spiritual brothers to us) came on September 24th, for a week's retreat. They joined us in prayer and at Eucharist each day, and we were able to see the fruits of our prayer for vocations to the Augustinian Congregation. Years ago, Fr. Pat Fahey asked Mother Benedicta Philips (during her lifetime), if we would take on seriously praying for vocations to their congregation. Now we are overjoyed to see the faces of so many men eager to serve God in the tradition of St. Augustine.

## **October**

Our own Annual Retreat was held from October 14th until 21st. Mother Abbess gave a reflection each night at Compline, on aspects of Desert Spirituality: solitude, detachment, waiting, spiritual warfare, Tears, Passions/Healing, and Sabbath. The last reflection, “Becoming all flame” led into the main characteristics of our monastic living, and the call to renew our commitment to monastic life once again. The retreat concluded with Eucharist and Renewal of Vows.

## **December**

As our Newsletter is published this year, our new *Abbey Shop* is in the process of completion. Sisters are working hard to stock the shelves with books, gifts, cards and candles. It is a beautiful structure, in a beautiful setting. We hope you can visit the abbey and see the completed project.

## Oblate News

We held one Retreat for Oblates this year – on the last weekend in September. Three Candidates made commitment as Oblates of our community:

Judith Christine Pickering, of Camperdown, N.S.W who took the Oblate name “Magdalen”.  
Debra Vermeer, of Thornleigh, N.S.W who took the Oblate name “Benedicta”.  
Claire Lanigan, of Sydney, N.S.W who took the Oblate name “Benedict”.

All three Oblates have travelled a long and very sincere journey towards this commitment to our Oblate community.

In addition to the Oblate Retreat, other Retreats have been held for Parish Groups and School Groups. The *Year of Grace* prompted us to hold “One Day Retreats” on the following topics: *Lectio Divina*, Christian Meditation, The Liturgy of the Hours, The Jesus Prayer of the Hesychast Tradition, and Praying with Icons and Religious Art.

Sr. Clare faithfully photocopies the “Pax – With The Gospel For Our Guide”, five times a year, and negotiates with a Sydney Oblate and her husband to package and post this Booklet which is written by the Director of Oblates. This booklet has been distributed to Oblates five times a year for twenty-two years.

## In Memoriam

We remember those who have died since the publication of our last Newsletter:

- November 6th, 2011: Len (Leonard Joseph) Lanigan, father of Oblate Claire (Benedict) Lanigan.
- December 20th, 2011: Raymond “Alan” Leech, Sr. Ancilla’s father.
- January 13th, Lucas Xuereb, son of Oblate Carol Xuereb, and our handyman, Zachary Xuereb.  
Nephew of Oblate Carmen Xuereb.
- February 15: John Harvey
- February 16: Harry Lennox, Jennine’s father. Jennine is well-known to most of our Oblates and guests, even though not a member of our community. She is the worker behind all those beautiful candles.
- March 15: Ron Cashman, brother of Oblate Bob (Anselm) Cashman.
- March 28: Erin (Olive Erin) Lanigan, mother of Oblate Claire (Benedict) Lanigan.
- April 1: Fr. Jim Hines, brother of Oblate Doreen (Adele) O’Sullivan.
- April 24: Ray Reid, husband of Oblate Jean (Julian) Reid
- May 12: Joshua Engelking, Sr. Hildegard’s cousin.
- May 19: Victoria Clotilda Varnakulasingham, Sr. Naomie Ruth’s mother.
- July 30: John Hollier, father of Oblate Marilyn (Magdalen) Caruana
- August 22: Oblate Teresa (Benedict) Pozniak.
- September 7: Hugh Michael “Ozzy” McNamara
- September 15: Oblate Patricia (Mary) Atkins
- October 4: Oblate Ann (Gertrud) Anderson.

## Our Canine Family

No dog will ever replace our beloved Thea, who died on December 19th 2011. Her obituary which appeared on our website, has drawn responses from dog lovers all over the world. One such person has called her own newly- purchased German Shepherd after Thea. Other people who care for the welfare of animals have emailed and sent letters asking for prayer for their own work in Animal Welfare and the RSPCA. Through the “Obituary”, we have made many friends in Australia, England, New Zealand, France and the United States.

We still have Rani, a beautiful Shepherd from the same Kennels as Thea - German Shepherd World at Maroota.



*Sr Mellitus carries Mimi's ashes to her final resting place.*

We were sad to farewell Mimi, one of St Mellitus' two Belgian Shepherds in December. She has joined our other dogs in the pet cemetery where she was interred with the prayers of the community. Brinkley, Mimi's brother, continues to be cared for by Sr Mellitus, and although an elderly 13, is remarkably hale and hearty.

Scallywag is still around protecting all the females in the abbey from the intrusion of anything resembling a male! He is king of the castle in other words! He is now 12.

Little Polly is 2. She is a Tibetan Spaniel. She has graduated to the Church, but will never take the place of Thea. However, she does tend to attract loves and cuddles, scratches and pats. Like most normal dogs would do, she sleeps her way through the Liturgy – the Prayer of Doggie Rest.

This year also saw us “up close and almost personal” with wildlife: two pythons with beautiful coloured skin, and one very elderly, blind and starving possum. The poor old possum was swinging on the rose bushes, and eating blooms in the early evenings. We left fruit for her/him, and Srs. Veronica and Mechtild did their best with a possum box. A representative from *Wires* then came and took the possum away to the Vet. Despite antibiotics and all the best treatment, the possum went to God during the night. When it came to the pythons, some of us were relieved to see them safely in the bag and taken to a new place to be relocated. Others braved a “pat” of the skin. As we approach summer, some of the less friendly snakes are now about, and it is time to be alert.

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*In our country at present, times are hard. Many people are out of work. Many families are on the poverty line. We pray that all those who provide meals and gifts for the homeless and the poor at Christmas time, will have the funds to do so.*

*And we pray for you, our families, our Oblates and our friends, that you will give the gifts of love, kindness, care, presence, music, nature, and all forms of beauty, to one another. These are the Christmas gifts which feed the soul, and see us through because they are God-given.*

*Christmas and New Year's blessings to you.*