



JOURNEYS

NEWSLETTER

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LOVE

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:35

Venerable Mary Aikenhead lived a life of demonstrable love of others.

An exploration of her life shows she was raised in a network of loving relationships, broader than a traditional family and founded on faith. Only a woman deeply nurtured by the love of God and the belief of others could have become the superior of a proposed new order at the age of 24.

Yet as she experienced the success of the new order and the growing works of the 'walking nuns', she also suffered greatly – the death of her father at age 14, the death of her mother when she was 22, permanently and painfully invalided at the age of 44. Her leadership of the mission, her dedication to resolving the challenges of the new congregation and the ever-expanding works, continued until her death at the age of 71. Her life was a demonstration of heroic virtue.

"Serve God with a great heart and a willing mind."
Venerable Mary Aikenhead

There is no mistaking that her life, her faith, and her vision were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

She was living proof of what Jesus asks of us in John 13:35. The sisters, energised and inspired by Mary Aikenhead, and now all of us in the works of Mary Aikenhead Ministries, seek to continue this discipleship. From our founding Theological Statement, the love of Christ is the inspiration for all those who work within the mission to bring about God's reign of justice for all, especially the poor and marginalised. Love for one another should be the distinctive sign that we are followers of Jesus.

The mission we are called to live is placed in daily life, in the expression of God's love in the small realities of how we treat each other, our attitude to work and family. If we approach every day with charity as our starting point, we will give generously of ourselves in all we do and bring to life the Gospels. We do not need to make the point; we need to live it.

"Christ's love is urging us." 2 Cor 5:14

Venerable Mary Aikenhead was given the title Servant of God in 1921 at the opening of the "cause" of her Sainthood and declared Venerable by Pope Francis on 18 March 2015.

We all know that Mary Aikenhead should be recognised as a saint - but the paperwork says otherwise. We need to find and record favours granted through the intercession of Mary Aikenhead. The fact of all the works, all the good and all the people touched by what she started and brought to life as she lived the love of Christ is not enough. It is our turn to show our love and give back to the cause that gives us all so much.

Please pray in her name and ask others to do so in a specific cause. If you want to know more, have a request or know of a favour granted please contact Elizabeth Dodds rsc via email (elizabeth.dodds@rscsisters.com.au). General information can be obtained by [visiting the website](#).

May you all know that whatever your role, service provided with love and generosity is appreciated by those around you and in all parts of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. Together we give the gift of God to the world.

Ms Penelope Wright
Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

"Let us each be faithful in accomplishing our respective duties towards Him, our neighbour and ourselves." Venerable Mary Aikenhead

FAREWELL LAUREEN DIXON RSC

It is with sadness we lose Sr Laureen as a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries but with great joy that she is the new Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity of Australia. Sr Laureen Dixon was appointed a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries on 1 May 2019 but completed her term on 15 March 2021, having been elected as the new Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity of Australia at the General Chapter in March 2021.

For those who may not know Sr Laureen's background she was educated by the Sisters of Charity at St Thomas' Lewisham and Bethlehem College Ashfield. She gained her teaching qualifications at the Catholic Teachers College North Sydney prior to joining the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Australia in 1971, responding to the call of ministry of leadership and service. Sr Laureen holds a Master of Pastoral Studies and a Master of Theology. She has a special interest in Pastoral Theology and has held numerous roles over the years including;

- Chair of the Mary Aikenhead Ministries Mission & Formation Committee,
- Parish Coordinator at Our Lady of the Rosary Kensington (NSW),
- Member of the Congregational Council of the Sisters of Charity of Australia,
- Director on the Board of the Sisters of Charity Foundation Ltd, St Vincent's College, the Congregation's Advisory Finance Committee, Sisters of Charity Community Care Ltd, and
- Member of the Heritage Centre Development Committee.

Sr Laureen was engaged in the preparation of the Petition sent to the Vatican for the creation of the new Public Juridic Person, Mary Aikenhead Ministries. She



played an integral role as Project Manager responsible for the coordination and oversight of the various task groups established by the Sisters of Charity to set up Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

As a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries Sr Laureen was inspirational. She always ensured the vision and charism of the Sisters of Charity was her priority in our ministries but also recognised that we are now operating in a different environment to when the ministries were first established. She kept the Trustees true to our mission and her wisdom will be greatly missed. We wish Sr Laureen well in this new Chapter as Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity of Australia.

Mr Richard Haddock AO
Chair, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

BRINGING VENERABLE MARY AIKENHEAD TO THE WORLD: THE "CAUSE"

Renewed energy and prayer are needed for the canonisation of Venerable Mary Aikenhead. We, of course, know and believe that Mary Aikenhead is a saint. However, there are official Vatican processes to be followed to have her declared a saint for the universal Church. The canonisation process is lengthy and difficult. We refer to this process as the "Cause". The Cause passes through four stages: Servant of God; Venerable; Blessed and finally Saint.

Mary Aikenhead was declared Venerable by Pope Francis on March 18, 2015. It was a day of great rejoicing for those who had worked so hard for many years to have her Cause passed through the Vatican office referred to as the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Sister Josephine McDonald RSC, now deceased, had worked assiduously for years as Vice-Postulator, to bring about this wonderful occasion.

Many throughout the world are now working diligently to have Mary Aikenhead declared Blessed.

There is a network of Cause Contact sisters in Australia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi and United States. I am the Cause Contact sister for Australia and I meet regularly via zoom with the other sisters.

To assist this process, we can encourage more favours to be granted through the intercession of Venerable Mary Aikenhead. Requests or favours granted can be communicated to myself via email:

elizabeth.dodds@rscsisters.com.au.

Prayer cards are also available through this email.

Let us have this great and holy woman whose name we honour in our ministries declared Blessed. Let us also celebrate her life as each March 18th comes around.

Elizabeth Dodds rsc
Sisters of Charity of Australia

MINISTRY CHAPLAINS AND WHAT THEY DO

CONVERSATIONS WITH FRs DARRYL MACKIE, MICHAEL COONEY AND ZAHER MHANNA



Fr Darryl Mackie



Fr Michael Cooney



Fr Zaher Mhanna

*"Behold the one who comes holding their Light,
And another, another, then another
To ease my pain, by shining their Light on me."
(Peter Howard)*

A sharing of the thoughts from Chaplains who walk amongst us in the hospitals to come to know more of what they do 'from the heart' and 'with the grace of God'.

On being a Chaplain

Chaplaincy is a privileged and honorable role entering into people's lives at a vulnerable time. 'It is a sacred presence where I can enter into peoples' lives and, thus, it makes this hospital 'a sacred location'. There is a sacredness in being present with people especially at their most vulnerable time of life. My office is purposefully outside so I'm available to people and I can meet them where they are at in their lives. People often feel more comfortable knowing you are a priest – even if they are not Catholic. The presence of a priest, as chaplain, makes a difference. Indeed, it is a presence of the Church in the 'sacredness of encounter' that means much to many. It is a prayerful presence in words and acts of love. (Fr Darryl, currently Mission Integration Manager at St Vincent's Private Hospital Sydney)

It is a presence where you throw or sow the seeds of listening, compassion, kindness and love just by being there. Kindness, smiles and actions of love are free. Fr Michael agrees and adds 'courtesy, gentleness and allowing people the freedom to set the agenda, being available and listening to the silences'. He also believes it important 'to have a certain sense of humour and a gift to be empathetic in getting underneath what people are saying'.

At Fitzroy the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care is one body in Christ – we all work together like arms and legs. The encounter with others should be pastoral with the sacraments present and available when needed (Fr Zaher.) On one occasion a mum was in a coma. I gave the sacraments and the grace and love through the sacraments were for mum, son and daughter.

I've learnt so much being here in Sydney. The importance of a cross on the forehead as a symbol of being claimed, of being part of a family, a connection to the Cross and Jesus. Jesus gathered people around the table, and He is still doing it. We are so lucky to have Him – Jesus draws people in and people are drawn to St Vincent's.

Fr Michael has had two stints at Toowoomba 1982/1986 and 2016/2021. He has seen many changes across these years. He serves at St Vincent's, the Base Hospital and St Vincent's Aged Care (Lourdes). At all locations he 'enjoys being an instrument of Christ and the values of the Gospel'. He believes a chaplain has to have 'the gift of being a good listener and working on those listening skills. It is so important to not pressure patients in what they may say but rather let them set the agenda'.

It can be a difficult presence with or without words to stay and sit. Presence is a prayer in itself – standing for God, representing the church – you are not there as an isolated presence. A Chaplain needs dignity as it is a solemn and serious vocation with an appropriate light heartedness when called upon. (Fr Michael) He sees intuition as another gift as you can pick up the vibes. 'It takes experience to listen to what is being said and what is not and picking up the facial experiences of how interested people may be'.

Fr Zaher clearly states that St Vincent's is his family here in Australia having originally come from Syria. I love Australia, which respects all religions. He has experienced and suffered through civil war in his home country and the sadness of sickness and loss in his own family. He has found a happiness in serving as Chaplain in Fitzroy. 'If we haven't suffered it is hard to understand others as they suffer. Sometimes I feel down and the patients cheer me up. I find answers to many questions in the patients shared stories'.

I never miss any call on my pager and people say 'thanks for calling back so quickly'. Haha! I tell the pager we are like a team! However, it is a struggle from Sunday to Thursday, 24 hrs a day and I don't go far from the hospital on those days.

MINISTRY CHAPLAINS AND WHAT THEY DO

I share my story with staff and they share with me, as colleagues, their personal lives and concerns. Sometimes I share a meal and we share trust. I have been here at St Vincent's for four years (2017-2021). We love and support one another. We build friendship. We have to work as one team. Sometimes it is hard to be genuine in my culture but now I am a different person to four years ago. I feel comfortable here and I am very thankful to my St Vincent's family.

COVID-19 has been very difficult at Fitzroy as the hospital never closed its doors. I anointed many patients suffering from COVID and used Zoom for family to see their parents, grandparents and each other. The virus is a very different experience to war. You don't know where it is and you don't know if you will catch it. Everyone is so brave!

Looking after one's self

Well I'm a people person. I love movies. In fact, my parents owned the GRETA theatre in the Hunter. I have a good group of friends, the encounters with staff keep you real and I am blessed with my journey with the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and community of La Perouse. (Fr Darryl)

Fr Michael admits it's hard work being a Chaplain and 'you need time away and other interests for your own well-being. It really has its hard side, emotionally'.

Joy of Chaplaincy

The joys are being part of the hospital life – ups, downs and walking the journey alongside committed and loving health professionals. There are checks and balances in the trust given, affirmation from staff as well as challenges. It's being a part of the lives of patients, families and staff. I believe in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus as it is our story. I see the suffering but I also see the hope that we will meet again. I bring humanity and sincerity in my role as Chaplain and 'yes I am human!' so I struggle sometimes when instances arise that remind me of my own family. (Fr Darryl/Fr Michael)

There are times when patients and their families send cards to say 'thanks'. 'I remember them and the cards are warmly received'. (Fr Zaher)

In a regional city, such as Toowoomba, a joy for Fr Michael is the people you re-meet from other parishes and places you have been across the Diocese. You are a Chaplain to all, and it is through being friendly and hospitable you get to know people and in turn they love and support you.

Challenges of Chaplaincy

I live in the world of the church and the world of the hospital. There are times when inclusion has its challenges, but we are people of God. Fr Zaher gives us the challenge that we need to know others across the Health Ministry and their culture much more deeply than, perhaps, we do.

The world is changing and we are not called as much by families for the Last Rites. Though staff will quietly ask patients if they would like to see a priest and if they reply 'yes' the staff will seek me out.

A palliative care specialist once asked me, 'Can you go and see this lady?' I did and she and I just talked about food. 'The mango sorbet is so good here but I'm sick of the family being here all the time. I just want some space'. I talked with the family, she had her space and she died peacefully two days later. (Fr Darryl)

Fr Michael finds the silences challenging. 'I need self-discipline in those times. I need to cultivate and nourish silence – the prayer of listening to what God is saying to me and the patient. Never pressuring – giving the patient the right to speak'.

Staff supporting

It's a great joy when I walk about and I'm called Fr Darryl as I feel recognised as part of the hospital family. I'm grateful when asking for favours, everyone is so supportive to my ministry.

The Holy Spirit's guidance

In working in an intense environment you have to be prepared for the unexpected in responding to whatever is on hand. I have to listen to the Holy Spirit in realising when it is time for a break when I feel a little burnt out and my Spirit needs nourishment. (Fr Michael)

'Pentecost focuses on being an advocate of truth, being true to myself and the Ministry to which I have been called. It is not what you wear rather it is the truth of your heart that people will fall in love with. There are times the Spirit guides me in being an advocate for both staff and patients'. (Fr Darryl)

Fr Zaher came to Australia from Syria as a refugee. His belief is that 'as one door closed, the Holy Spirit opened another'. Now each morning I ask the Holy Spirit, 'Where would you like me to go? Who do you want me to see? Who would help me today?' My mum died at 69 years of age and the family was so angry and I did not sleep as I could not be with her. I do believe in providence with a hand behind me guiding me to help others and for this reason I am in Fitzroy. Once I visited a patient in St Vincent's Private Hospital and she 'just wanted to talk'. We are still friends. The Holy Spirit teaches me to be happy, to be grateful.

The presence of Venerable Mary Aikenhead

Mary Aikenhead's focus was on service for the poor NOT 'to' or 'of'. I think she would always be asking in the moment, 'Where is God in this encounter?' With Mary, the Sisters are very intuitive in finding work for the poor and vulnerable. Though the focus of the hospital is on health it is not only for the sick. (Fr Darryl)

'As we continue the Sister's Mission and the Gospel's Word through the Holy Spirit, we don't know how many people are working in healthcare because of Mary Aikenhead'. (Fr Zaher)

Fr Michael is certainly aware of Mary Aikenhead but not so directly day to day. He saw this question as 'maybe a call for me to be more familiar with her'.

The evolving role of Chaplaincy

Gospel values will never change. I do believe that more lay people will become involved. There is a need for ongoing education of chaplaincy, being FORMED through daily review. (Fr Michael)

Each of us needs to be convinced of God in her/his life. A vocation to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed is now even more important in this secular world. The chaplain needs to attend inter-disciplinary meetings promoting the role, identity and scope of the Chaplain's service. Church hospitals need to be deeply committed in the values of Catholic healthcare and to encourage staff in education and spirituality. People may be well trained medically but perhaps not so much in their spirituality. (Fr Michael)

General staff may not know who you are and you can't take it for granted that they know the role of a Chaplain. Previously, the rules were more clearly defined. People are not as formally religious as before. The Christian values are still there with social justice and the environment now more important than ever before. There will need to be adult education programs addressing such change across Catholic hospitals and care. (Fr Michael)

'Chaplaincy is now very different after four years. In July 2017, I commenced as a Chaplain but now I'm in Chaplaincy, never saying 'no' to anyone...I sit down, share and talk with all' (Fr Zaher). There will probably be less presence of the priest Chaplain in years to come with perhaps a move towards a short time presence on an as needs basis. It raises the importance of the lay ministry of Pastoral Care.

Summary Thoughts

It is so important to appreciate the sacredness of people's actions and of the hospital itself as a sacred location. It is a place of both preaching and living the Word. There are miracles of love that happen every day in our hospitals. Indeed, I have received more people into the Church here, in the hospital, than I did in Parishes.

As Fr Michael would say, 'we are all witnesses of God to others'. In one way, we are all Chaplains in the way we enter people's lives with the light we each bring to share with patients, families and one another across St Vincent's Health following in the footsteps of Venerable Mary Aikenhead'.

Assoc. Prof. Peter Howard
Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

VISIT TO ST VINCENT'S PRIVATE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL GRIFFITH

On a recent touring holiday in New South Wales, I had the opportunity to visit St Vincent's Private Community Hospital Griffith (SVPCHG). The pride which all the staff have in their hospital was obvious and most especially in the pride of General Manager Ms Gabrielle Wood who gave us a tour of the facility.

The hospital had a crucial role last year in supporting the community through the pandemic when they worked in conjunction with the Griffith Base Hospital to conduct non-elective surgery and critical care while the Base Hospital stayed in readiness for any influx of COVID patients.

The two well planned palliative care rooms which have a family room and bathroom attached are a most challenging and rewarding area of SVPCHG and a particular area where our faith tradition and charism of caring for the vulnerable is in action in a manner not available elsewhere in this regional city. Similarly, the inclusion of a teaching area for medical students from the University of Wollongong provides an opportunity for our values to be included in their pre-service training.

SVPCHG is a facility of which we can all be proud.



Ms Gabrielle Wood, General Manager and Director of Clinical Services with Ms Janet Freeman, Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

Ms Janet Freeman
Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

ST VINCENT'S PRIVATE HOSPITAL TOOWOOMBA

CENTENARY FOUNDATION DAY CELEBRATION

On Saturday 22 May 2021 Bishop Robert McGuckin, Ms Kathryn Mckeefry, Dr Mark Copland and Ms Suzie Byrnes joined Mary Aikenhead Ministries Trustees Gary Humphrys and Michael E. Drew, PhD at the Thanksgiving Mass marking 100 years since laying the Foundation Stone at St Vincent's Private Hospital Toowoomba.

This day celebrates the legacy of the Sisters of Charity and all staff and volunteers who have made a contribution over the years.

The Sisters of Charity have such a great historical account, [click here to read more](#).

The Trustees wish to extend their heartfelt thanks to the staff and volunteers that continue the tradition of care by the Sisters of Charity Australia to the Darling Downs region.



Ms Suzie Byrnes - Business Development Manager,
Dr Mark Copland - Mission Executive,
Ms Kathryn Mckeefry - Chief Executive Officer
with MAM Trustees Prof. Michael Drew and
Mr Gary Humphrys



Staff and volunteers at St Vincent's Private Hospital Toowoomba. An incredible service ranging from five to forty years!

PARKLEA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

ST VINCENT'S CORRECTIONAL HEALTH

In the midst of a flourishing suburb with manicured gardens and stately residences, there is the sign 'Parklea Correctional Centre'. Beyond that sign and the walls there are in excess of 1,000 men in custody.

The 'good news' for the men on the 'inside' is the presence of the warm and welcoming faces of the nurses and doctors of St Vincent's Correctional Health.

Highly regarded among both the prison sector and the inmate community, they have a reputation for facing daily challenges and feel rewarded as they minister to the sick inmates.

St Vincent's Correctional Health is known for the provision of holistic care, supported by specialists at St Vincent's Hospital via sophisticated telehealth technology.

The amazing staff reflect God's love to the men through the healing ministry of Jesus. Behind the walls, the incarcerated men with health issues experience daily care and compassion in a sometimes drab and hostile environment.

On Thursday 27 May, I joined with the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries and Staff, where we were welcomed and accompanied on a visit to the Clinic by Mr Paul Baker the Governor of the Centre and A/Prof Anthony Schembri AM CEO of St Vincent's Hospital.

During the Liturgy in the Correctional Centre Chapel, Anthony announced that the Clinic would be named after Sr M. Lawrence Cater, one of our first five



Sisters to come to Australia. That there are no photos of Lawrence Cater is symbolic of the many 'faceless women and men' whose lives have not gone well but who are given excellent health care to assist them through the rigors of prison life when ill. Noted is the absence of photographs of the visitors. Phones and cameras are contraband and not permitted in the prison, how appropriate that we visitors are 'faceless' also.

Huge congratulations to A/Prof Anthony Schembri AM and the dedicated doctors, nurses and ancillary staff of St Vincent's Correctional Health who ensure that behind prison walls Mary Aikenhead's love for prison ministry continues. She would be so proud of these dedicated women and men who she would acknowledge as 'her colleagues' as they continue the 'mission of Jesus'. St Vincent's Correctional Health ensures that 'prison ministry is alive and well'.

[Pauline Staunton rsc](#)
Sisters of Charity of Australia



A REFLECTION...

PARKLEA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

A magpie flew across the bright clear blue sky as we walked along the bare concrete pathway surrounded by mesh... **hope**.

In Facility Six as we were shown through, a man in green sat in an interview room crying with a phone to his ear... **compassion**.

On leaving, a young mum carrying her newborn baby no more than a few weeks old and her friend walked past us on their way to the Visitors Centre to visit Dad perhaps for the first time... **love**.

Three men in their isolation in Reception, one banging on the enclosure, another sitting with his thoughts etched on his face and another looking and checking us out as he passed his time.

We had visited a justice centre, a Correctional Centre... and as Sr Pauline Staunton commented quietly, 'They just keep building'.

There are about 1,200 inmates and upon release about 75% have a place or home to go to (Governor). My maths suggests that is about 300 men who have nowhere to go. Across a year the Governor said about 7,000 men pass through Parklea that would mean that about 1,750 may not have a place to call home on the outside...a frightful figure if true. As Sr and I commented... 'so often voiceless people'.

In simple terms, there are three stages of transition.... in, through and out of. It was good to stand and chat with Matt Keaney (Director of Mission & Inclusive Health) for 10 mins before I left - such a good man. We talked of transition from gaol and a Committee he is on in trying to seek answers to a person's transition away from and beyond gaol. I'm sure it's part of an ongoing conversation for St Vincent's welfare and community health. Happy to be informed more and offer to assist in any way.

It has been a year since my last visit to Parklea on a day that was not as calm in context as last Thursday morning. Having seen the relative calmness and knowing the potential volatility there is always integrity and excellence evident in all the St Vincent's Cater Centre staff do in bringing care, kindness and gentleness to others.

We continue to be blessed by both those we serve and those we journey with across all Ministries, as evident with the Correctional Health staff of the Cater Centre.

In Formation and Mission.

Blessings across these days.

[Assoc. Prof. Peter Howard](#)
Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries





DAILY COMMUNITY PRAYER
FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF VENERABLE MARY
AIKENHEAD

*Compassionate and bountiful God,
if it be Your will,*

*we ask You to enable us to promote the
holiness of Mary Aikenhead.*

*We ask for the grace to continue to
make her love of Christ and of the
poor known throughout the world.*

*Grant that we may be encouraged by
the Church to offer her public honour
as one of Your saints.*

*We ask this in the name of Jesus,
Your son.*

Amen



**MARY
AIKENHEAD
MINISTRIES**

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