



JOURNEYS

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17 | ISSUE 4 | DECEMBER 2023

JUSTICE

In today's world, it seems it is much easier to find injustice than it is to celebrate justice in action.

Global wealth inequality, conflicts that cause death and destruction on a catastrophic scale, homelessness, and poor health outcomes for the vulnerable and marginalized, the list goes on...

Our indigenous sisters and brothers continue to suffer the injustices endured over the centuries brought again into stark reality because of the recent referendum.

So as Christians, as Catholics, how do we respond? What action are we called to take?

Pope Francis, in quoting a homily that Pope Benedict XVI gave in January 2008, urged all Christians to exercise justice in relationship with others, not condemning or dividing, but with "the mercy of those who welcome by sharing the wounds and frailties of their sisters and brothers so as to lift them up".

In a recent meeting with American jurists, Pope Francis said that there cannot be true social justice amid deep inequality. Guaranteeing justice for all women and men is not possible while a few people control most of the world's wealth and everyone else's right to a dignified life is disregarded.

In living out our value of justice, we cannot ignore the realities of the injustice in the world. However, it is how we as Catholics respond which contrasts us with a society that sees justice through the lens of simply punishing the wrongdoers. We are a peaceful people, we have this gift of peace through Jesus, and so for us – peace is deeply connected with justice.

For Mary Aikenhead Ministries, we say justice is born of love; justice seeks to ensure that all people are treated in accordance with their unique dignity. We see each person's dignity inherent to being human, not something conferred by society or status.

Inspired by Jesus Christ, our ministries seek to challenge oppression and injustice, always giving due priority to those who are poor.

We advocate particularly for those who are vulnerable, marginalized and rendered voiceless, even if it puts us at odds with more powerful voices.

Venerable Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity responded (and respond today) to the injustices in society, particularly in relation to the poor and marginalized, with gospel-based love and action.

As a recent example of the Sisters' continuing to respond to injustice in our society, the Sisters of Charity Foundation web page carries an article on modern slavery in Australia. An excerpt follows: -

"Human trafficking and modern slavery describe situations where people are forced into exploitative situations for someone else's profit or gain. These crimes can be difficult to detect because victims may not speak English, are afraid of retaliation or losing their migration status.

It isn't widely known, but modern slavery and human trafficking are happening in Australia. We all have a part to play in stamping out this horrendous practice – and step one is getting informed."

"My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you"
(John 20:19-21)

JUSTICE

Throughout our health and education ministries there are many examples of the action we are taking every day to respond to injustices in our society, particularly for those who are poor and vulnerable - the compassionate health care we provide for those in prison, the homeless, those with drug and alcohol addictions, those suffering from domestic violence.

There are also numerous social justice programs and activities throughout our education ministries. I believe Venerable Mary Aikenhead would indeed be overjoyed at all that is done throughout our ministries.

So, in response to injustice, we are called to loving action.

Our focus is to build God's Kingdom in whichever way we can, and it is okay to listen to the Spirit working within us as to how that might manifest itself.

Christ gave us the gift of peace. This includes the inner peace of Jesus that we have through the Holy Spirit, known to many of us in the words of, *my peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you* (John 20:19-21), as well as the worldly peace we seek to bring about through acts of love, compassion, and justice.

Justice is seeking to bring about Christ's gift of peace into the world.

Mr Gary Humphrys

Deputy Chair, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

THANKS PETER HOWARD

It was with considerable regret that we recently had to accept the resignation by Peter Howard as a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries (MAM).

Peter became a Trustee in May 2019. However, due to some health matters which required more of his time, Peter reluctantly offered his resignation. It was accepted even more reluctantly.

During his time as Trustee Peter's contribution to MAM was invaluable. Peter Howard has always lived his life by the Gospel Values – Hope, Justice, Love and Service. This has been evident both in his academic life and in his time as a trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

During his time at Australian Catholic University (ACU) Peter was responsible for introducing the Clemente programme to Australia from the USA. This programme offers to those experiencing disadvantage and social isolation the opportunity to study a course in liberal arts subjects, providing opportunities to pursue further tertiary education and realising new possibilities and life choices. The programme helps students break the cycle of poverty, inequality and social injustice.

Peter also worked as Academic Co-ordinator for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Importantly Peter stressed the need to work WITH the students in partnership...

Peter has had an enduring and constant commitment to the charism of the Sisters of Charity. The love of Christ motivates him and the importance of the ministry to the sick and poor has always been at the forefront of his work as a Trustee of Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

Peter's gentle approach was greatly valued and his advice well listened to. At our Trustee meetings Peter made significant contributions to the discussions, and always ensured we considered "what would Mary Aikenhead and her Sisters have done?" Peter had a great admiration of what the Sisters had achieved in Australia and was intent on the good works continuing.



Peter loves the work of our Ministries and was happiest when he was visiting our Ministries, seeing the work done and speaking with the people there. During stewardship visits Peter would often be the one seeking out the quiet worker, and to use Peter's words, having a "yarn" with them. From that he learnt so much and shared that with all of us.

Peter was always ready to do whatever was asked of him and moreover was always there suggesting areas where he felt he could contribute to our mission.

As many of you would know Peter has a particular interest in the work done by our Ministries with our indigenous brothers and sisters and those in prison. Wherever that work could be expanded Peter was a great supporter.

We are saddened to lose his thoughtful and collegial approach to our Mission and are sorry he was unable to complete his term.

We keep him in our prayers.

Mr Richard Haddock AO

Chair, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

ST COLUMBA'S COLLEGE INAUGURAL INTEGRAL ECOLOGY FORMATION RETREAT

In 2022 I was fortunate to have been one of four females accepted into the Mercy Integral Ecology Fellowship Program. The Fellowship Program was an exciting opportunity that allowed me to engage more fully in my passion for the care of our earth. My involvement as a Fellow provided me with a wealth of knowledge, spiritual nourishment and resources which enabled me to support my College community in its journey towards "greater love for our Creator, each other, and the home we share." (Laudato Si 14)

The experience also inspired me to design an Integral Ecology Formation Retreat for staff of St Columba's College. The retreat encouraged staff to connect with the spiritual and ethical dimensions of nature and encounter a sense of interconnectedness with the natural world. My hope was that this would foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the environment which could lead to more environmentally responsible behaviours and a greater commitment to conservation efforts. Exploring indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge systems was an important part of this experience.

At the conclusion of our 4-day immersion, one participant reflected:

"I returned home yesterday from one of the most impactful Professional Learnings I have attended in a long time."

I had the privilege to spend 4 days on an Integral Ecology Formation that saw me switch off and appreciate, with wonder and awe, our natural environment and the rich history and ecological knowledge of our Indigenous Australians. I was reminded of the immense beauty of our natural environment in Victoria.

I was reminded of the aspects of Catholic Social Teaching and the Laudato Si goals that we can share in our work each day when we see and hear, with wonder, awe and appreciation, the natural world around us.

Traveling with four colleagues enabled connections to build and a shared experience we can bring back to our staff and students. They were a wonderful team to laugh and share this journey with. My cup was refilled each day! This weekend was exactly what I needed right now."

Ms Brigitte McDonald

Deputy Principal, St Columba's College

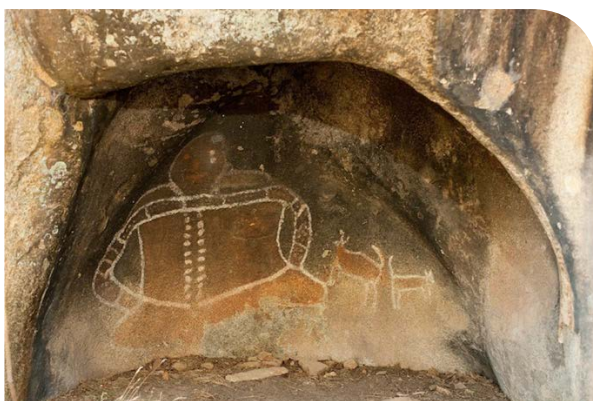


Tower Hill, Warrnambool

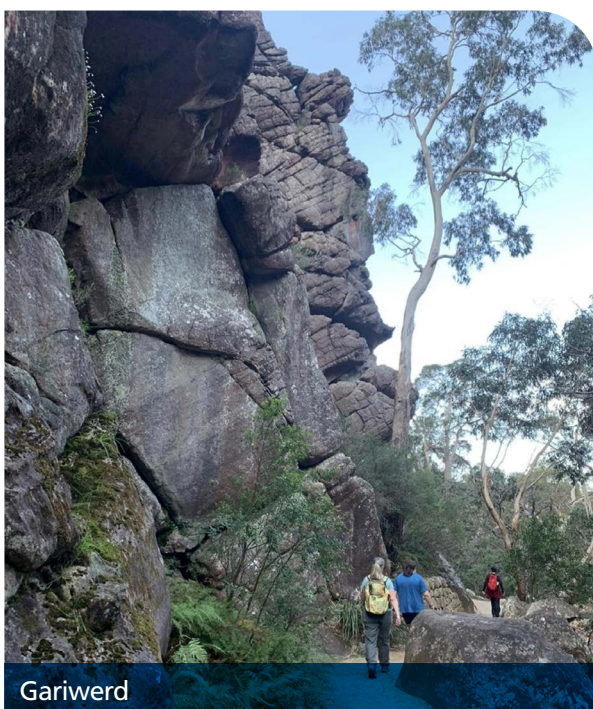
L to R: Ngaire Brown, Rita Grima, Sandra Boicos, Kate Macpherson



Warrnambool



Bunjil Shelter, Gariwerd



Gariwerd

ST VINCENT'S PRIVATE HOSPITAL, ST VINCENT'S CARE - KANGAROO POINT OCTOBER 2023

The heart of the building is the Chapel, a sacred space shared by St Vincent's Private Hospital and St Vincent's Aged Care, Kangaroo Point. This was one of the many insights gained when on a stewardship visit recently when Professor Michael Drew accompanied me on my first visit to a facility of St Vincent's Health Australia.

Lisa Eastment, Executive Manager Mission, was on hand to take us on a tour (Photo right). We heard from Lisa and saw the story of the Sisters of Charity on the walls and in the artwork, and met some of the staff, including the kind and gentle women who provide Pastoral Care support to patients and their families.

We were also given a small insight into what the pain management nurses wear while in theatre. It was explained that the different colours of the protective gear represented different weights. While we had it on for five minutes, the nurses wear it for up to 12 hours for a full surgical list ... incredible! (middle photo)

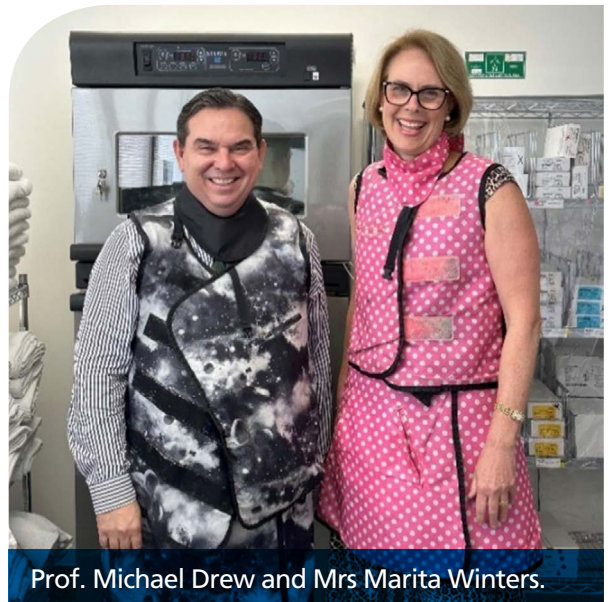
When we went across to Aged Care we were welcomed by a whole team, led by Lincoln Hopper and Troy Tornabene. Local identities Sr Clare Nolan and Sr Deirdre Hickey were also present. (bottom photo)

One of the highlights of the visit for me was standing on the 4th floor of Care Services hearing about the project to transform that space into a palliative care ward for prisoners who will receive the very best of care from the St Vincent's team and a dignified end when it comes. A great initiative consistent with the spirit of Mary Aikenhead.

[Mrs Marita Winters](#)
CEO, Mary Aikenhead Ministries



Ms Lisa Eastment pictured with Mrs Marita Winters, community nurses Amanda & Alicea, and Prof. Michael Drew.



Prof. Michael Drew and Mrs Marita Winters.



Mr Troy Tornabene, Mr Lincoln Hopper, Clare Nolan rsc, Dierdre Hickey rsc, Ms Nicole Devlin, Mr Kirk Farquharson

ST VINCENT'S PRIVATE HOSPITAL MELBOURNE

On 17 October 2023 we visited St Vincent's Private Hospital (SVPHM) in Fitzroy. The visit began in the chapel with introductions and a shared prayer, led by Ms Julie Wain, Mission Integration Leader, and members of the Executive Team.

We learned about their work, the challenges of the private health system at this time and the extraordinary ways the leaders are engaging with staff in the promotion of the mission. We were humbled to hear of the amazing and creative practices that SVPHM staff developed to respond to the particular needs of COVID patients and their families.

It was interesting for us to understand the emergence of different challenges and opportunities post COVID. This was an open, honest, two-way conversation, and at its heart is the call of the Mission. Their commitment to the ongoing formation of staff is a priority.

We were also privileged to visit the building site and see first-hand the development of the hospital and the addition of new and upgraded facilities that will enhance the provision of healthcare for SVPHM. It was obvious throughout the tour that Janine Loader and her team were working very closely with the building team for great outcomes.

[Ms Margaret McKenna](#)
Trustee, Mary Aikenhead Ministries



Back: Mrs Marita Winters, Ms Penelope Wright, Ms Margaret McKenna and Mr Gary Humphrys. Front: Ms Janine Loader (second from left) and Ms Julie Wain (far right)



Patricia Walker rsc, Mr Kevin Dalton, Maryanne Confoy rsc, Ms Janine Loader, A/Prof Patricia O'Rourke, Ms Margaret McKenna at the Topping out of the Fitzroy Redevelopment Tower (17 Nov 2023)

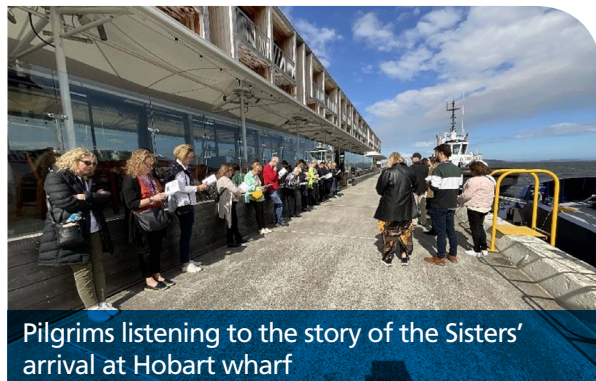
HOBART PILGRIMAGE REFLECTION

"To live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) was the scripture I was contemplating in the plane from Melbourne to Hobart, along with a brief reflection from MAM's 'Voices from the Heart' (October 6 entry). To my surprise, I happened to come across the verse on a prayer card at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, and quoted in St David's Anglican Cathedral bulletin, that same morning as I was wandering the streets of Hobart, before the official beginning of the two-day Hobart Pilgrimage on 2 November 2023. While seeking to nurture a reflective mindset, those sacred words were deepened with meaning and connected with the entire guided pilgrimage.

There were 22 of us who are connected by our health and education ministries and RSC Companions. Guided by our Pilgrimage Leader, Maria Wheeler rsc, we gathered at Hobart Wharf for reflection. The theme was on the arrival of hope on the 'Louisa', when the three courageous Sisters of Charity – Sisters de Sales O'Brien, John Cahill and Xavier Williams – arrived at this location on 20th June 1847. These three Sisters were part of the original group of five Sisters of Charity sent from Ireland by their founder, Mary Aikenhead.

At the wharf we were invited to imagine the scene by closing our eyes, smelling the sea, imagining the waves swelling and listening to the seagulls – and on cue, they gave full voice! A question that resonated with me was: What can I learn from the courage of these three Sisters? Guided by their hearts, they ventured into the unknown, impelled by their faith and dedication to serve those struggling in a penal colony, under very harsh conditions. More than 65,000 convicts landed at Old Wharf. Of these, almost 13,000 were women, together with 2,000 children.

(cont'd over)



Pilgrims listening to the story of the Sisters' arrival at Hobart wharf

HOBART PILGRIMAGE REFLECTION

A deeply touching and sobering experience was spending time reflecting on the four sculptures, representing three convict women and a young boy named Toby. These sculptures collectively are called 'Footsteps Towards Freedom', and are located on the waterfront. The Sisters of Charity funded the Toby sculpture in 2018. Honouring the convict women and their children who sailed with them, the names of the women, the crime and length of sentence (including seven years for stealing a handkerchief) were written next to the sculptures. Reflective questions included: What is the connection between the sculptures and our ministries? If representing the poor and marginalised today – my sculpture would be ...? My thoughts went to the prison patients in St Augustine's at St Vincent's, Melbourne.

The following day we had a guided tour of the Cascades Female Factory in South Hobart. Separated from their children, in the early hours of the morning, the convict women walked four kilometres from the wharf to the Female Factory, while the children went to the Queen's Asylum. Our tour guide described real life stories revealing the tough conditions and hardships experienced by these women and children. The Sisters of Charity visited both places, providing the warmth of a human presence, affirming the dignity and worth of those with whom they connected.

We visited two of the Sisters of Charity established schools – St Aloysius Catholic College in Kingston and Mount Carmel College in Sandy Bay. Both schools have kept alive the significant history of the first three Sisters through artwork and naming buildings in their honour. Maria Wheeler rsc shared a story about the fire in Kingston at the beginning of the school year in the mid-1960s, when the children had to evacuate with the nuns to the water. To my surprise, during my first day back in my Pastoral Care work in Melbourne, I happened to visit a patient who was raised in Hobart. She had close friends whose two children happened to have escaped the fire to the water with the nuns.

Mass was celebrated at St Joseph's Church in Hobart, next door to which the Sisters had a convent for their first hundred years. There was a deep sense of significant history in these buildings from where the sisters lived, prayed and served the community, particularly those who were poor and marginalised. Anne Turner rsc, the only remaining Sister of Charity in Tasmania, joined us for the service and the evening meal. I shared a message of a loving greeting from her good friend, 105 years old Sr Josephine Cannell, who was born in Tasmania and who has a sought-after prayer list holding many St Vincent's patients.

There was a special feeling when we gathered at the graves of the early Sisters at Cornelian Bay Cemetery. The following questions were offered for personal reflection: How am I feeling as I stand in this place - the final resting place of these three founding Sisters? What legacy will I leave behind in our ministry? Profoundly inspired by the many stories that were shared about these Sisters and those who walked in their footsteps, I am aware of the privilege and the honour we have to embrace the opportunities to live out the life-giving mission of what we have inherited, as we walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before us.

In the concluding shared reflection were the words: I take back to my ministry...? Weeks after this amazing pilgrimage, I am still processing and deepening this heartfelt experience, a very sacred journey, a walk of love and purpose. I certainly take back with me a deep sense of mission, a deepened call to live out my pastoral ministry, journeying with those whom I am privileged to visit at St Vincent's Hospital, and to work as a team with my colleagues on this shared mission that was begun many years ago by Mary Aikenhead – to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly.

I am very grateful that I have had this spirit-lifting opportunity to reflect more on the inspirational story and mission of the Sisters of Charity. The Hobart pilgrimage is a journey to the heart and an experience I will never forget.

Mr Shaun Dowling-Horgan

Pastoral Care, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne



Ms Pauline Marriott, Director of Mission, St Aloysius Catholic College pictured with Maria Wheeler rsc



Pilgrims gathered at the Footsteps to Freedom statues and learning about the early convict women and children



Mass led by Fr Mike Delaney at St Joseph's Church



Pilgrims enjoying a meal together at the Historic Hadley's Orient Hotel



A small but special celebration with Maria Wheeler rsc



Pilgrims inside the original Convent building at St Aloysius Catholic College now creatively used for the Birth to Five Explorers program



Pilgrims listening to the story of the 1960's fires at St Aloysius Catholic College



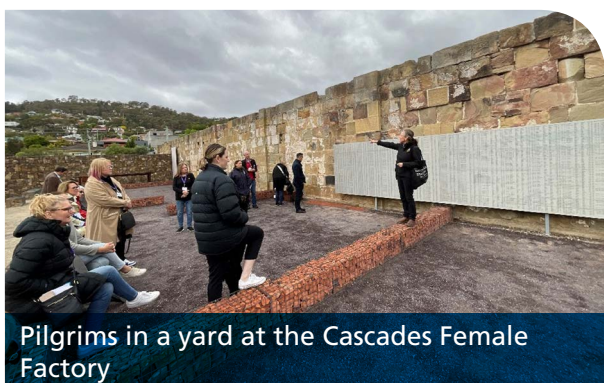
Ms Kerrie Loveluck, Mount Carmel Business Manager pictured with Maria Wheeler rsc, Trustee Prof. Michael Drew, and MAM CEO Mrs Marita Winters



Mr Anthony Chapman, Director of Identity and Mission leading Pilgrims around Mount Carmel College



Pilgrims listening to the Notorious Strumpets & Dangerous Girls Talk at the Cascades Female Factory



Pilgrims in a yard at the Cascades Female Factory



Pilgrims gathered in prayer and reflection around the Graves of the early Sisters at Cornelian Bay

TMAM JOINT FORMATION & MISSIONING

On 13 November 2023 the Trustees hosted a joint formation day with the Board Directors of Mary Aikenhead Education (MAEL) and St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA); this inaugural gathering was held at the Sisters of Charity Heritage Centre, Potts Point. It is a place rich in the presence of the Sisters' mission and ministry in Australia.

With facilitation and input from mission leaders, Mrs Louwana Saba, Dr Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegheer and Mr Paul Fumei, the program enabled board directors and trustees the opportunity to discuss their shared work and responsibilities in mission. There was an exploration and discussion of scripture and how the gifts of the Gospel offer insights and guidance for governance and leadership in mission today; the learnings from the recent Synod were also part of these conversations. A highlight of the day were the conversations and connections that emerged through the discussions related to the writings of Venerable Mary Aikenhead, noting how her wisdom continues to offer inspiration and relevance for contemporary times.

The formation program also included a missioning liturgy, blessing the work of recently appointed board directors, Ms Kathleen Bailey-Lord, SVHA and Mr David Hutton OAM, MAEL. This was held in the beautiful St Vincent's College Chapel.

At the conclusion of the program, Br Ian Cribb SJ, our listening companion, shared insights and offered encouragement for this collaborative endeavour into the future.



Missioning blessing of Ms Kathleen Bailey-Lord and Mr David Hutton OAM

The Trustees are most grateful to the SVHA and MAEL board directors for the generous ways that they entered the program and for their continuing commitment to the governance of our health and education ministries.

Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries

FAREWELL CHRISTINE RAESIDE

We have been very fortunate to have had Chris Raeside as the Executive Officer of Mary Aikenhead Ministries for nearly six years.

Chris is very committed to the charism of the Sisters of Charity and indeed is an ex-student of St Vincent's College Potts Point, as is her daughter. Chris was very pleased that she was able to attend the Irish Pilgrimage this year as it underlined her commitment to "love and service" at the heart of all our work.

She is imbued with the concepts of service and justice and always worked to ensure fairness and thoroughness was applied to the operational aspects of the Ministries and had a very collegial and cooperative relationship with them.

Chris enjoyed seeing the ministries at work and could always be relied on to see that nothing "fell through the cracks". Her training as a CPA meant that she was methodical and very efficient.

Chris has felt the need for a new challenge and in her new role as General Manager, Sisters of Charity of Australia she will certainly have this.



We are so pleased that she is "still in the family" and we will have further opportunities to work together.

Chris, Thank you for all you did and most especially for doing it wholeheartedly in the Spirit of the Venerable Mary Aikenhead.

Mr Richard Haddock AO
Chair, Mary Aikenhead Ministries

OPENING OF “THE COTTAGE” OPEN SUPPORT

A vital crisis accommodation facility “The Cottage” was opened on Wednesday 22 November 2023 by The Hon Justine Elliot, Assistant Minister for Social Services. Consisting of 8 purpose-built, self-contained units, the new facility can accommodate up to 32 families or 102 individuals per year.

Adopting a “Core and Cluster Model”, The Cottage uses an innovative approach that allows for independent living and privacy while also providing access to supports. Under the Core and Cluster model, self-contained accommodation is located next to a ‘core’, which provides access to services such as counselling, legal assistance, education and employment support.

The Cottage is operated by Open Support, an arm of St Vincent’s committed to providing outreach for the most vulnerable members of our community. In this case, three levels of support are provided: Crisis, Transitional & Outreach. An important feature of the facility is that all children up to 18 years of age can be accommodated with their mother.

“With a key mandate to serve the ‘unmet needs’ of those who slip through the gaps of other community services, inclusivity is a major focus of ours, where all cultures, ages and beliefs are welcome - particularly for women with precarious visa status. Referrals mostly come from the NSW DFV Line, but clients can be self-referred,” said Katie Viviers, CEO St Vincent’s Clinic.

At The Cottage, Case Managers support clients for up to 3 months in crisis and then up to a further 2 years through our Transitional and Outreach Programs, where clients are supported in their own private rental homes. Furthermore, The Cottage’s Child Wellbeing Advocate – focuses solely on the needs to the child (physical, social and emotional, educational development).

“These wrap around supports mean that women are less likely to go back to their perpetrators or unsafe environments - with only 1 client returning last year,” Katie said.

Open Support gives each client a keyring that has their name engraved on it, to which they can proudly attach the key to their new home. For many clients, it’s been the first time they’ve had their own key, to



Ms Kate Viviers, CEO – Open Support pictured with The Hon Justine Elliot, Assistant Minister for Social Service and Mr Chris Blake, Group CEO - St Vincent’s Health Australia

their own place, with their name on it - creating a feeling of being seen and heard.

In NSW there are approximately 2,500 reports of domestic violence to the police every month – but this likely represents only 40% of actual incidents due to underreporting (NCOSS, 2020).

According to the 2022 report (The National Homicide Monitoring Program), in 2019-20, there were 45 intimate partner homicides; 36 of these were female victims (80 per cent). This averages to approximately one woman being killed by an intimate partner every 10 days (Plan 4 Women’s Safety 2022), with Australian women nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner (ABS, 2017).

The Cottage was funded by the Australia Government Department of Social Services and the generous donors and supporters of Open Support.

THE FACES OF MAM

PAUL PREISZ

Director of the Emergency Department
St Vincent's Public Hospital Darlinghurst

Which of the organisations within Mary Aikenhead Ministries do you work for, and how long have you been there?

I have worked at St Vincent's Public Hospital in Sydney for a little over forty years, for the most part in Emergency Medicine. We will see nearly sixty thousand patients in the coming year with a high proportion being vulnerable and complex.

The MAM values are love, justice, compassion, hope. Which of these resonates most with you and why?

Although each of these values is a pillar for our work, I have always thought that a strong virtue of social institutions is justice. We do our best to provide for all because all should be provided for.

What do you think sets your organisation/ministry apart from other workplaces?

We have a unique group of people, all feel this work as a calling, they do exceptional work, often under difficult and stressful conditions and they do it with humility and kindness. We are a very bonded family who care for our patients and care for each other.



If you were to have lunch with Venerable Mary Aikenhead today, what story would you tell her about your work?

Fifteen years ago we recognized the need for better services for our vulnerable patients in the Emergency Department, particularly those with medical, mental health, drug or alcohol issues and social support needs. We campaigned far and wide through government and ministry and with the help of fundraising and our benefactors we opened a unique new service which has been very successful and now serves as the model for complex care patients across Australia.

What do you think she might say to you in reply?

In reply she would likely have said, "Fifteen years? You took your time didn't you?"

THE FACES OF MAM

PAUL FUMEI

Mission Formation Leader
Mary Aikenhead Education Limited

Which of the organisations within Mary Aikenhead Ministries do you work for, and how long have you been there?

Mary Aikenhead Education, 10 months

The MAM values are love, justice, compassion, hope. Which of these resonates most with you and why?

While each of the MAM values ring true for me, I find strongest resonance with the value of 'compassion'. To have 'compassion' is the preparedness to 'suffer with'. To have 'compassion', is to be indiscriminate in suffering with those nearby, whether loved or perhaps held at a distance. Compassion is with all of creation, animate and inanimate. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the charism of the Sisters and the work of our various ministries each draw me towards the other who suffers, to be open to them and to participate in their suffering, "their griefs and their anxieties".

What do you think sets your organisation/ministry apart from other workplaces?

MAM - and for me, my work with Mary Aikenhead Education Ltd. - sets itself apart from other workplaces by being a place of welcome without prejudice. Throughout the gospels and the great story of Venerable Mary Aikenhead, we are reminded to be ever attentive to the suffering of those we encounter. More than welcome, our ministry calls us to embrace difference in whatever way it is revealed. Oftentimes, difference discomforts. For all who answer the call to work in Mary Aikenhead Ministries the response to being discomforted can only be compassion, love, justice and hope.



If you were to have lunch with Venerable Mary Aikenhead today, what story would you tell her about your work?

I would tell Venerable Mary Aikenhead about the friendship that I have struck with one of her own Sisters. I would tell her that my friendship with her Sister here in Australia has been a profound gift, a gift that connects me to the person of Jesus Christ and to Mary Aikenhead herself. This friendship challenges me constantly to truly listen to the cry of the poor, of Earth and of the future. She brings to life the character of Venerable Mary Aikenhead through her living out the charism of the Sisters of Charity here in Australia. It's a generous and precious gift of friendship given with sincerity of heart and received with deep gratitude.

What do you think she might say to you in reply?

I think Venerable Mary Aikenhead would say, "What did you expect? She is one of my own!"

EMMANUEL - A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION



Emmanuel: God with us.

Behold, Mary will bear a son, and name him Emmanuel meaning God with us. Emmanuel is not "God was with us" or "God will be with us", even though both are still so true. Emmanuel is God with us, in this present moment. In the simplicity of this name we find our understanding of God; a God who was born a human, who is relational, who wants to be with us right now. God is not apart from us because Emmanuel is the opposite of separateness, the antithesis of disconnection. By naming Jesus 'Emmanuel', we are reminded that through the birth of this child we are better connected to God.

Christmas is the reminder we need that our God yearns to accompany us in our life's journey. God seeks a personal connection and an intimate communion with us. God is with us in our celebrations and joy, He is with us in our sorrows, and the world's troubles and grief. God is with us as we wrestle with tension and anxieties. He is with us as we anticipate, wait in hope, or accept our life's uncertainties. God accompanies us.

If God is always there, then what does that mean for me? The onus is on us as humans, the other half of the relationship with God, to determine how much we give of ourselves. How much of our time, energy, head, and heart space do we allow God into. Just like any relationship we possess, we can either nurture it or we can allow it to wane. Being in relationship with God, is realising that God is with us in the moments and the people we encounter. God is with us on our drive home from Eltham, our train ride out of Potts Point, the foyer at Griffith, the streets of Ashgrove or Fitzroy, the lifts at Darlinghurst, the virtual help in your home, the car park at Kangaroo Point, the Healing Garden at North Sydney, the hot desks at Bowen Hills, the kitchens at Hawthorn, the cells at Parklea, the chapel at Auburn, the Irish room at Mitchelton, the lawns at Essendon, the boardroom at Woolloomooloo or the park across the road from Albert St. God is in all the people and all those places we encounter. *God is with us.*

Christmas reminds us that we are not alone, that we are being accompanied, held, loved, cared for. We must open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to that. We must be vulnerable. Accepting that God is with us isn't an easy feat. It's a challenge. But I encourage you there. I might meet you there along the way too, because I am forever searching for and yearning to discover God in my life. It is a path I want to travel, one that isn't separate or disconnected from the rest of humanity but that invites me into a shared communion and encounter with others.

This is why Jesus is born on Christmas Day, so that God remains in communion with us.

So, this Christmas, Welcome Emmanuel, Cheers to Emmanuel, Happy Holidays Emmanuel!

God is with us,
In the birth of a child.

God is with us,
In love, in our relationships.

God is with us,
In all our suffering and all our hope.

Emmanuel.

This is our Christmas message.
Amen to that.

Merry Christmas to you and yours. May the summer days be restful, energising, and full of love and peace.

[Mrs Louwana Saba](#)
*Mission & Formation Director,
Mary Aikenhead Ministries*



'JOURNEYS' IS PUBLISHED BY
MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES

SUITE 103 LEVEL 1/26-30 SPRING STREET
BONDI JUNCTION NSW 2022

GRAPHIC DESIGN BY
FINELINE PRINT & COPY NSW

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