

Archbishop names lasting honour for religious

*by Paul Dobbyn
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Buildings in the St Stephen's Cathedral precinct will be renamed to reflect Brisbane archdiocese's deep connections to the Mercy and Josephite religious orders. The old St Stephen's School will be renamed Mercy House and The Catholic Centre will now be known as Penola Place. Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane made the announcement in a homily during Mass in the cathedral last Sunday, March 10, to celebrate the 50th year of formation of Catholic Religious Australia, Queensland (CRAqld).

CRAqld executive officer Mercy Sister Mary Lowcock said more than 400 religious attended the Mass, the first of a series of events to celebrate CRAqld's anniversary year. CRAqld president Josephite Sister Moya Campbell, welcoming all to the Mass, said the organisation "began in a small way in Queensland on December 3, 1963, with a meeting at All Hallows' Convent, Brisbane. CRAqld provides the opportunity for religious congregations to work together in supporting the contemplative and prophetic service of Catholic religious in Queensland," she said.

The Archbishop used the day's Gospel reading to draw a link between the actions of the father of the Prodigal Son and the work done by religious in the archdiocese 'since the middle of the 19th Century'. "The extravagance of the father is magnificent, mysterious, weird and wonderful ... and that's where this celebration focuses this afternoon," he said. "From the very dawn of Christianity in this city, the religious have been responsible for the greatest apostolic works the Catholic Church has ever known in this part of the world. The religious have gone out in a way that is mysterious and magnificent to offer the welcome of God to everyone ... especially those who are judged worthless, condemned by others, those who have found no welcome."

Several leaders of religious congregations in Queensland, speaking after the Mass, said it had provided a positive start to CRAqld's celebrations. The Mercy Sisters' Brisbane congregation leader Sr Sandra Lupi said the order had great pride in its history and the news on the naming of Mercy House had been met with surprise and many positive comments.

Sr Lowcock said religious would draw "a lot of encouragement from the Archbishop's words. There was a lot of recognition for what religious have done in the past," she said. "Many ministries started because of the religious – for example in education and health care. These dedicated people slaved away for no visible reward."

Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception congregation leader Sr Pauline Robinson was one of the readers at the anniversary Mass. “The linkage in the Archbishop’s homily to the father of the Prodigal Son was apt,” she said. “It captured the idea of religious as welcoming all, going out and meeting all. Today’s religious are still on the cutting edge out on the streets working with people often no one else will work with.”

Sr Robinson said Queensland’s religious, many of whom were getting on in years, still had much to offer. “Looking around the church, I saw other religious who were aging but full of wisdom,” she said. “Also now they have time on their hands they mightn’t have once had when working in classrooms and hospital wards.”

Archbishop Coleridge, in his homily at the CRAqld anniversary Mass, spoke of ongoing change in religious orders. “We all know forms of religious life are changing and have changed over the 50 years of CRAqld ... that change will continue,” he said. “But religious life has been one of the great constants of the Church through 2000 years so there will be new forms as older forms give way to new forms. As that happens, we can never forget what has been done since the middle of the 19th century by religious men and women in this part of the world. You have been the prime evangelisers in a thousand different ways.”

The Archbishop also referred to a “lost fresco” in St Stephen’s Cathedral of Mother Vincent Whitty and the first Mercy Sisters. “In some ways sadly with the renovation of the cathedral that fresco was lost,” he said. “But the memory cannot be lost from this the mother church and its precinct. Therefore I have decided that what we call Old St Stephen’s School will be known as Mercy House as a tribute to the Mercy Sisters and their unique contribution. I have also decided what we call The Catholic Centre will be called Penola Place in honour of the patron of the diocese, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, also as tribute to the Josephite Sisters. These are not just names but a symbolic gesture not just to the Mercies and Josephites but of the archdiocese’s unpayable debt of gratitude to all religious.”



Religious force: Representatives of various religious orders at a Mass in St Stephen’s Cathedral, Brisbane, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Catholic Religious Australia, Queensland