

# LOVE OF MERCY

It has always been my experience that God speaks to us through the circumstances of our lives. Indeed, that is how my love and commitment for Mercy came about.

In the 1940's children going to a Catholic School were not allowed to travel on a Government bus. As my parents wanted us to have a Catholic Secondary Education, we seven children went off to Boarding School after completing year 8 at the local Birregurra State school. The three boys went to St Bede's in Mentone and we four girls to Sacred Heart College, Geelong. So began my love of Mercy! The wonderful Mercy women there were such an inspiration that my dream of becoming a teacher changed into a desire to be a teaching Sister of Mercy and to give my life for God and God's people.



Bishop Paul Bird and Sr Marion McDonald

I took that step in 1951, completing my Novitiate at Rosanna and my teacher training at Ascot Vale in 1954. I still believe that teaching is a most noble profession - enabling children to grow, to develop their abilities and potential and to become the persons God calls them to be. This is even more so in today's society when more and more responsibility is being placed upon our schools! The greatest tragedy is a wasted and unfulfilled life!

I enjoyed my profession, teaching in both Primary and Secondary Schools in Terang, Seymour, Dennington, Geelong, Colac, North Melbourne, North Brunswick, Ballarat and Mildura. While teaching during the 50's and 60's was challenging, with large classes of seventy and eighty students, little money for resources and teaching full time as well as being principal of the School, I loved my ministry of teaching and passing on our faith to the students. I found great joy in the children!

True to the vision of Catherine McAuley, we not only taught all day but frequently, after school finished, we'd visit distressed and needy families, providing what support and comfort we were able to bring them.

A health issue in the mid-nineties caused me to retire from teaching in 1997 and after a sabbatical year I was asked to take up my current ministry of Parish Leader in the small Parish of Merbein. At that time this was a new initiative within the Diocese of Ballarat, where a Religious or a team of lay people took responsibility for the ministry of small parishes that had no resident priest. Once again, God called through the circumstance of my life. I continue to minister here, under contract with the Bishop of our Diocese and the local Parish Council and find that daily I am able to bring God's merciful love to many people.



Ministering under the restrictions of Canon Law causes many a frustration for me, as a woman. I am obliged to minister under the supervision of a Canonical Administrator, I can celebrate Baptisms and Funerals, but not anoint the sick or celebrate reconciliation! I thought of becoming a Marriage celebrant but decided against it when I was told that those marriages would not be recognised by our Church. I have been blessed to have had priests in the neighbouring parish who support and encourage my role. I pray for the day when Lay

Leadership will be recognised as an authentic ministry so that small Catholic communities will continue to be a vital part of the Church, the "Body of Christ" and not tagged on to larger Parishes and lose identity and the sense of Christian Community.

A few lines of the “Magnificat” - one of my favourite prayers;

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. .... for God who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is God’s name!”

I share three of these 'great things':

Vatican II opened the doors of our semi-enclosed convents, cast off the medieval clothing and enabled us to minister mercy as true apostolic religious women.

Meeting with a Sister of Mercy from U.S.A. in the 1970’s and through her becoming a member of the Theresian World Ministry. My life has been greatly enriched and broadened through friendships and International Conferences and meetings with these wonderful women from all parts of our the world.

The opportunity to spend time at the Jesuit Theological College in Boston and the American College in Leuven, Belgium. Both were special times of spiritual and personal growth.

“God who is mighty has done great things for me, Holy is God’s name”

Because the Parish House where I live is next door to our Catholic Primary School, I enjoy frequent contact with the children. Earlier in the year I was talking with some of the new Prep children, when one of them who didn’t have much experience of Church or “nuns”, asked me, “Sr Marion, whose sister are you anyway?” While I was thinking about an appropriate response to this question, a little girl answered for me, “Sister Marion works for God and the Church, so she’s everyone’s sister!” Out of the mouths of babes! I love that description of my life as a Sister of Mercy!



Right: Sr Marion and Sr Grace Rogers

*Marion McDonald rsm*

*Reprinted with permission from Just Mercy- September 10 2015*