

## 130 YEARS OF BRIGIDINE LIFE AND MINISTRY IN ARARAT

This year marks one hundred and thirty years since the first Brigidine Sisters arrived in Ararat on November 14, 1888. Earlier in that year, Bishop Moore of Ballarat recruited a small group of Sisters to help with education in Ararat. The pioneer Sisters who generously volunteered to form the Ararat community and serve the people in that town were from two convents in Ireland. Three came from the Abbeyleix community (Mothers Gertrude Kelly, Josephine Clancy and Paul Barron) and two from the Goresbridge community (Mother Cecilia Synnott and Sister Mary Malachy Byrne).

In mid-September 1888, they sailed on the SS Ormuz (right) from London along with six Nazareth Sisters, Redemptorist Priests, Holy Ghost Fathers and some Diocesan priests all destined for the Ballarat Diocese. The Loreto Sisters offered hospitality for the Sisters for a few days in Ballarat. The Sisters then travelled to Ararat and their first home was in the presbytery graciously given over by Fr Meade (pictured below with Foundation Sisters) until the convent was built.



Schools began the following year offering a wide variety of subjects. Times were hard and they were a long way from home but the generosity of the Parish Priest and the people was amazing and greatly helped them settle in. The Convent was built and school rooms extended as student numbers grew. At the same time many young women came from a wide area of Western Victoria wanting to join the Sisters. By 1900 the community numbered twenty sisters. In 1900, a small group of Sisters went from Ararat to begin a new community in Maryborough and later in 1920, another group went to Horsham.



Over the years as student numbers increased, many great lay teachers took up the challenge to teach with the Sisters in the spirit of St Brigid and Bishop Delany, our Founder, making a marvellous contribution to the education and Christian formation and leadership to thousands of young women and men. This has made it possible in more recent years for the Sisters to move out into other fields of education in the Parish and beyond, working closely with priests and people in leadership in such areas as adult education, RCIA, Sacramental preparation, prayer groups, hospital and

home visits and prison ministry. Always with great respect and care for the suffering and disadvantaged, assisting the poor, the asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and being a voice for the children and women abused and trafficked. Just this year 'Kildare ministries', a governing body, took on the governance of our schools ensuring the Brigidine spirit and heritage is carried on as our legacy into the future. There are two Sisters in Ararat and Sr Jacinta in Horsham continuing this precious legacy and many parishioners working beside them continuing this spirit of hospitality, strength and gentleness.

The Parish celebrated with a special Mass and shared a luncheon to mark these one hundred and thirty years of Brigidine life and ministry in Ararat. In his homily, Fr Andrew Hayes spoke glowingly of the place and role of Religious Sisters in the Church in Australia. He spoke of their enormous historic contribution to setting up the Catholic Education and Catholic Health systems in Australia as well as their bold initiatives in other areas especially in recent years. He said that Religious Sisters in Australia are “tough, brave, risk-takers” who are vital to the life of the church in this country. He spoke, in particular, of the Brigidine Sisters and their compassion and boldness in supporting refugees and asylum seekers, fair trade choices and the need to address issues of people trafficking. Fr Andrew was also very thankful for the support of Sr Maree and Sr John in the Parish of Ararat.

Several visitors including the Victorian Leader of the Sisters, Sr Anne Hill, four other visiting Brigidine Sisters, Loreto Sister Denise Demarchelier, Horsham visitors and some others were able to join the parishioners in a delicious shared luncheon. Following the luncheon, Sr Jacinta spoke of our need to ‘keep the music playing’ in the sense of parishioners and all of us needing to hold the heritage that we have received dearly and carry it forward into the future in the spirit of St Brigid, strong in our convictions yet gentle in our relationships. A cake was cut and shared to honour the occasion.

*Sr Maree Holt*



L: Srs John, Jacinta and Maree cut the cake.

R: Srs Veronica and Rosemarie Joyce - past pupils. (Rosemarie also past Principal of Marian College.)

B: Srs Denise, Julia, John, Veronica, Rosemarie, Maree, Jacinta, Kathleen and Anne.

