

Sisters of St Joseph, Lochinvar

13TH GENERAL CHAPTER

DAY ONE—Report

Gathered in the Therry Centre, East Maitland, on this brilliant Spring day, eighty sisters gathered to begin our 13th General Chapter with morning prayer, in which we encouraged each other with the full-hearted singing of a commissioning hymn.

[Click here for Morning Prayer](#)

Patricia Egan rsj, Congregational Leader, welcomed and addressed us, sketching the background to the writing of her report of our life and mission, and all that had been achieved in her term of leadership, a time of ongoing change, challenge and struggle.

In a deeply compassionate way she called us to recognise those faithful members of our Congregation who have died in the five years. She set the tone of our discussions by quoting the words of Joan Chittister OSB who asks us to reflect that the quality of our lives is largely the quality of our relationships.

[Click here for Patricia's Address](#)

The congregation responded to the report by spontaneously standing and giving a resounding ovation, a drum roll of loving affirmation and thanks. In her response Brigid Linehan rsj expressed the Congregation's gratitude for Patricia's report, which she saw as thought –provoking and inspirational, reviewing the progress of the last five years. Brigid especially valued the recent regional gatherings which gave everyone the opportunity to share their reactions and ideas. This process was 'lively and life-giving'. She likened the report to a favourite line from a Slim Dusty song: *'Lookin' forward, lookin' back, I've come a long way down the track - Got a long way yet to go, making songs of what I see Making sense of what I know.'*

[Click here for Brigid's Response](#)

Ellen Royan rsj in her exuberant style thanked all of those who, in their committee and ministry reports, revealed just something of the fantastic work they had achieved. She spoke enthusiastically of her sense of WOW at so much slogging silent work with 'no song and dance' – just the dogged task of 'working behind the screens'!

In a process led by Christina Neunzerling rsj and Monica Cavanagh rsj, we explored issues we need to address. We considered four questions in small groups, and then shared our findings.





- By Thursday afternoon, I hope the chapter mandate will have given some direction to/around.....?
- Is there anything concerning the named Chapter issues of which the Chapter delegates need to be aware?
- From your perspective, is there a missing critical area that needs to be addressed?
- What seed could you plant today that would make the most difference to the future of the Congregation?

Much sharing and lively discussion took place.

Some comments from the day:

'It brought us together. It gave a whole new meaning to the responsibility of each of us for the Chapter.'

'There's a warm sense here today.'

'I felt heavy when I came, now I feel light.'

'Never doubt a group of committed people can do something worthwhile. It has changed the world before.'

'There is much searching for what connects us. Maybe this sense of searching is exactly the space where the Holy Spirit moves.'

GATHERING



Water—link to baptism **Light**-chapter candle on space

Word-scripture, constitution brought through the Assembly and placed on space during the singing brought in by the person who proclaims it



Gathering Hymn: Lord you give the great commission

Scripture: Phil 3:13-14

I do not consider that I have made it my own;
 But this one thing I do:
 Forgetting what lies behind
 And straining forward to what lies ahead,
 I press for the goal,
 For the prize
 Of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Silence...

From the Constitutions:

Our call is to proclaim and witness
 to God's love and presence in the world
 by our way of life and apostolic service.
 As the mission of Jesus has been entrusted to the Church,
 we respond to the call of the Spirit
 through our ministries
 in the various local churches,
 the universal Church and the wider community.





HONOURING CONTRIBUTIONS

each sister in being named is acknowledged for her contribution to the life and mission of congregation

SPRINKLING

CALLING DOWN THE SPIRIT

Come Holy Spirit
Fill the hearts of your faithful
And kindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your spirit
And we shall be created and
You shall renew the face of the earth



INTERCESSIONS

Response: Send forth your spirit
to renew the face of the earth
We remember our local church of Maitland-Newcastle,
May it continue to be a sign of hope and justice even in the midst of struggle and pain.



We remember world leaders,
That they may be inspired by justice and wisdom to bring about economic stability
in our world.



We remember all followers of Julian and Mary, and particularly ourselves at this time
of chapter that we be open to the Spirit of God as we discern our future path.



We remember our priests,
That they be nurtured by the consoling love of God as they minister to your people.

We remember the sick and particularly our own frail and elderly Sisters that they
may be a constant reminder to us of God's faithfulness and love.



We pray for all who are suffering distress in our world
We particularly stand in solidarity with our sister Megan and all her family at this
time.

CHAPTER PRAYER

Faithful God of our journey,
May your call to us in Christ Jesus
Be uppermost in our hearts this day.

Grace us with open hearts and a deeper knowing
Of our true identity in Christ.

Strengthen our willingness to further
Christ's mission in the world.

Keep us true to Christ's gospel
And to our founding charism as Sisters of St Joseph.

Give us zest for the way forward
And help us to encourage each other
To live with faith and hope
Truth and justice
Compassion and mercy
Credible in both word and deed. Amen.



COMMISSIONING

The day concluded with the Commissioning of Chapter Members.

[Click here for the Commissioning Ritual](#)

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Welcome by Sr Patricia Egan rsj

Welcome to this first formal day of our 13th General Chapter in the 125th year of our history.

A special welcome to our facilitators Monica and Christina, and to our two other Josephite Sisters, Carmel Pilcher and Monica Barlow who have agreed to help us prepare our daily rituals. Thank you so much for being with us.

... Opening Ritual

A few weeks ago when I sat down to write my report I thought it was appropriate to begin by putting it in the context of the world and church in which we live. I do believe we need to reflect on the extent to which we influence or fail to influence the world in which we live, and the extent to which we are, unwittingly or otherwise, influenced by it.

What I wrote about the signs of our times is still valid, I think, but I can't help feeling that in the last few weeks, indeed the last few days, our world and our church have experienced upheavals that we did not dream of even a couple of weeks ago. The challenge to be radical disciples of Jesus, women of genuine Christian hope, seems to be greater today than it was.

With the global economic crisis, our capitalist world is being brought to its knees, and goodness knows how that is going to affect us and especially the poor and needy we serve in the coming months.

And now in the last few days our local Church has taken yet another battering. I'm sure we have all come here today with great heaviness in our hearts - and with earnest prayers for Megan, Peter and the Brock family.

My own hope and prayer is that, like Cardinal Bernardin, Peter will be found innocent of the charges made against him, and that good will in fact come from all this. One of my favourite quotes is from Dom Helder Camara: ***The night was dark, so dark I was terrified, and then I remembered: the darker the night, the lovelier the dawn she carries in her womb.*** We are people of faith: faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Coming back to the purpose of today, Sisters, we are nearing the end of a Chapter journey which we began together some months ago. We really began the journey in May last year when Lauretta gave us a presentation on *Current Thinking about Chapters*.

And I must say that it has been my dearest hope since then that this Chapter would be celebrated well; that it would truly be *a sacred event, a time of grace* for us all and those we serve, that it would help us to live a whole paschal newness - a freshness and an infectious optimism. That seems to have been the experience of some other congregations who have had recent chapters, especially our Whanganui Sisters. I pray it will be ours also.

In September last year we appointed a Chapter Planning Group and Reference Group, and I acknowledge with much gratitude the time-consuming, generous and conscientious work of those Sisters over the last twelve months.

In February we had the formal convocation of our 13th General Chapter and at the congregational gathering following it, the Planning Group shared their thoughts on a Chapter focus and prayer based on St Paul's words to the Philippians: ***I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining ahead I press for the goal, for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*** Thanks to Carmel and Monica for taking up that text in our prayer.

Dorothy's wonderfully artistic, dynamic illustration of the Philippians text has been before us all the year and has particular significance for us right now as we strain forward to what lies ahead for us in the coming days – the call of God in Christ Jesus.

In March you will remember, we celebrated Eucharist at Lochinvar on the feast of St Joseph, and then gathered in the Conference room at Lochinvar. Monica facilitated further sharing on the Chapter process and the issue of delegates, and the planning group explained that the congregational days scheduled for the remainder of the year would be based on broad themes from our Constitution:

May: MISSION: A CALL TO WITNESS
June: A CALL TO A COMMON HEART and VOWED LIFE : A CALL TO
FAITHFULNESS
August: GOVERNANCE: A CALL TO SERVICE

The Planning Group prepared resource materials and I know that so many of you conscientiously reflected and shared together on our Constitutions.

Finally in September I distributed my report which was written with the assistance of the Team and on their behalf, in an effort both to be accountable for the responsibilities you gave us five years ago, and to present an overview from our perspective, of the life and mission of the congregation at this time in our 125 year history. Over 80 Sisters participated in the six regional gatherings. All of you who came to those gatherings - without exception - had clearly reflected a great deal on what I had written, and came prepared to share their thoughts and concerns. For that the Team and I were very grateful.

Since then we have distributed other documents that complement my report and provide a fuller picture of the life and mission of the Congregation: the Congregational Data, Committee reports and Ministry Reports. Assuming you have all read that material, it will inform our further sharing today.

The hope is that by the end of this day everyone present here will have had the opportunity to contribute her wisdom and insights to what the Chapter members will consider over the next few days in formulating directions for the life and mission of the Congregation in the next five years. I encourage each and every one of you to be earnest in sharing your thoughts and contributing your wisdom - *without which the whole picture will not be presented and the whole wisdom of the Spirit will not be available.*

To conclude I would like to share with you something I read a couple of days ago in Joan Chittister's recent book, *The Gift of Years*:

***At its core life is not about things. It is about relationships
It is the hands we hold in our hearts at the end that define the kind of
life we have led.***

Our relationships determine the quality of life as we have known it.

It actually spoke to me about our Chapter – I think we could substitute Chapter for the word Life. But it spoke to me also of the Sisters who have gone before us in faith and I thought we might take a moment to remember them.

In particular that quote reminded me of Jean Marie. On September 1 last year, I rang Jean as I did the other Sisters nominated for the chapter planning committee, and told her why Sisters had nominated her. With her usual energy, generosity and enthusiasm, she accepted to be on the Reference Group. About two hours later I had a call from Ellen at Taree Hospital to tell me there was something radically wrong with Jean – and the rest, of course, is history.

But for me personally, the last months of Jean's life and her dying during this Chapter year, put many things into perspective, and not least this Chapter. Because we all know that more than anything else, Jean's life was all about relationships.

Our Life and our mission as a congregation is about relationships: with our God, with one another, with the people amongst whom we live and work. Our relationships will certainly determine the quality of Chapter we will have. And could I suggest that for some of us, as we groan inwardly at the very thought of another Chapter, right relationships may require a measure of forgiveness - of ourselves and of others.

To quote again from the same book:

***We ourselves have failed often, have never really done anything completely right, have never really been perfect ...
We are who we are – and so is everyone else. And it is our forgiveness of others that gains for us the right to forgive ourselves for being less than we always wanted to be.***

Let us pray for one another, Sisters, that each and everyone of us will be truly open to the Spirit of God during these days of Chapter: the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - and forgiveness.

And with that thought, I declare open the formal sessions of our 13th General Chapter

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Thanks to Patricia

Brigid Linehan RSJ

Patricia, on behalf of all of us, it is my very great pleasure and privilege to thank you for your thought provoking and inspirational report to the Congregation. Through it you have drawn for us as it were, the road map that shows the direction the life of the Congregation has taken in the last five years. Having read the report and reflected on it, was reminded of some words of a song written by Slim Dusty in the latter part of his life. The song begins:

*'Lookin' forward, lookin' back
I've come a long way down the track,
Gotta long way left to go.
Makin' songs from what I know
Makin' sense of what I've seen.'*

That's probably a simplistic way of describing something as serious as a congregational report, but I believe it describes the journey we have taken up to this point.

In addition to writing the report, I thought the process you used to engage us with it in regional groups was both helpful and enriching. It's one thing to read and reflect on an article of substance by oneself, but in sharing the thoughts and insights of a group, one gets a wider perspective. I was fortunate to be in the group that met at Lochinvar where interaction was both lively and life-giving.

About the report itself Patricia, I believe you wrote it with a great sense of accountability on the part of the leadership team for the mandate given at the beginning of your term of office. You affirmed what has been done well in the pursuit of Mission, Ministry, Charism and Communio, clarified areas of uncertainty and challenged us to reconsider our commitment in other areas and above all encouraged us to keep our focus on Mission and radical discipleship as we age and our numbers decline.

Finally, Patricia, you left us with serious questions regarding not just our future as Lochinvar Josephites but the broader picture of involving lay people as well as religious in keeping alive the Josephite charism.

So, on behalf of all of us, I wish to thank you for a such a reflective view of the way we have lived, loved and prayed over the last five years.

I would like to end with some words from the beginning of John O'Donoghue's book *Anam Cara* :

*May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the protection of the ancestors be yours.*

*And so, may a slow wind
Work these words of love around you,
An invisible cloak to mind your life.
John O'Donoghue: *Anam Cara* p.12.*

COMMISSIONING RITUAL

Salve Joseph

Constitutions reading

We who have taken up the task of the first Sisters of St. Joseph
*must press on into each age as it unfolds
in a like spirit of daring,
strong in our commitment to love.*

Delegates are called forth by name

*Drawing on the past, we will never take refuge in the past,
but together, in partnership with the Holy Spirit,
we will confront the world of the future fearlessly,
to bend that future to the dynamic purpose
of the Creator.*

Water

Reader: We ask you

All: to be women living out your baptismal call, passionately engaged with God and Christ's mission.

Word

Reader: Knowing the Spirit of God deep within you, we ask you

All: to listen to the Word alive in your hearts and to rejoice in the legacy of Julian & Mary.

Congregational documents

Reader: We ask you

All: to seek out and embrace the neglected and marginalised of our world.

Candle

Reader: We ask you

All: to keep the flame of Christ, your Light burning brightly as a sign of hope for our world.

BLESSING

Through the example of Julian Tenison Woods and Mary MacKillop,
may we learn to recognise God's will for us
and trust in God's providence.

Amen.

May their life of service awaken in us
a deep respect for the poor
and a passion for justice.

Amen.

May we share in their courage,
see with their vision,
and love with their heart.

Amen.

May our provident, generous and loving God bless us,
During these days and all the days of our life
Amen

SENDING FORTH

The Chapter Delegates move from the Assembly to continue the Chapter process accompanied by the singing of God who gives the great commission.

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