

Words of Remembrance for Kathleen Mernagh rsj

On 3 May the Denison Street Sisters gathered in Kathleen's unit to farewell Clare who was moving to Lochinvar. At this occasion, Kathleen shared some times from her life. Somehow, especially in retrospect, it felt like a farewell for Kathleen. Within a fortnight she was in hospital, not to return. She spoke of her first jobs, her mother's confronting of an employer about injustice, her joy in a job with happy friends, but she said, there was an emptiness. *Work all week, go out on Saturday night, then all over again. I felt empty. There had to be something more.*

Kathleen was drawn to the *something more* with the Lochinvar Sisters of St Joseph. She had known the Sisters all her life. She knew their love for their pupils and families, especially the struggling. There were many poor families around Charlestown. Twenty-year old Kathleen set out for Lochinvar on 1 January 1953. She did not look back. She was named Sr M Eudes. St Eudes was a saint who promoted love of Jesus as the Sacred Heart and of Mary as the Immaculate Heart.

Kathleen spoke of her first appointments. At Cessnock, she contracted bronchitis, but had to keep teaching. 'That is what you did.' For two weeks, each night one of the Sisters brought hot lemon juice and rum to sick Kathleen. According to Kathleen it knocked her out. The knock out possibly saved her. There was no self-pity. This was life and you made the best of it. Fr Tenison Woods would quip, 'bad was the best of it'. At Dungog, she said the school resources were very poor. The parents had to help and they did. People there remember her as a happy, kind young Sister, a lovely teacher.

These experiences, added to her family upbringing, shaped her life-long attitude of getting on with the job, pressing on regardless, toughing up, ignoring the difficulties and going on with a smile. She knew whom she was serving and to whom she was giving her all.

She was an enthusiastic teacher. Recently a man contacted her to tell her that she was his inspiration to become a teacher. The day she died there was a message from a lady who said Kathleen taught her children and she will never forget her wonderful impact on her them.

After teaching, Kathleen's energy found new channels: pastoral worker in schools, parishes, St Vincent de Paul Society, Life Line, refugee support, Charles O'Neill hostel, taking Holy Communion to the sick. She was part of Reconciliation Walk of 2000,

People felt her kindness. She had special care for the needy and was kind to the priests. Her love was fuelled in prayer. Every day, till her last hospital trip, Kathleen was faithful to prayer. The heart of her life was the Mass. She loved her Josephite congregation, happy to be in contact with all the Sisters.

Kathleen was welcoming, generous and eager to share new ventures, courses and study opportunities. She lived and worked in nineteen of our diocesan places and in Port

Macquarie and Wauchope. She also shared ministry with the Sisters in Tasmania for some months.

Kathleen was capable. She was a good cook. She asked her often- visited dermatologist would he like her to make him a cake. With quick wit, he asked was she a good cook. *Yes, I am*, came her unhesitating reply. The result: he and his staff enjoyed a treat after her next visit. We won't forget her tasty jam drops brought to congregational gatherings. When the pandemic lockdown came, Kathleen began by baking muffins for everyone on site.

Kathleen loved her family and they loved her. She knew all the growing clan, prayed for the sick, delighted in the new arrivals. The family in England were all alive to her. She shared with the Sisters the latest family news.

In recent years Kathleen was no stranger to pain, but she never complained. She bore suffering with courage and dignity. Her apostolic zeal was outstripping her health. They were in increasing inverse proportion.

In her last days, she recognised her health had failed and accepted this in peace. The evening before she died, she thanked everyone present for their kindness. She wanted someone today to thank our congregational Leader, Sr Laretta and team, her carers, Karen and Michele, her community, the congregation, everyone who helped her, Calvary Care, the staff at Hunter Valley Private and Lingard ICU.

May she rejoice fully with the God of Love, the *Something More*.