

## **A Story of a Tree!**

In 2011, as we were beginning our journey into the new Institute, an elm tree was among the trees that had to be cut down at St Joseph's Mount, Rahamim. Parts of it were rotted through and some of its large limbs had broken off in a storm. I didn't know what the wood of an elm would look like, but I thought it would be a lovely gesture to salvage what we could for future use in the building somewhere. I organised for the timber of the felled tree to be re-located to a property near Oberon where it would "cure".

Last year 2015, we had the desire to re-constitute our Chapel at Rahamim and we needed a new altar. A search led me to St Ignatius College Riverview, where I had taught in 1990's. The altar they had on offer was not suitable, but Bob Marsh, friend and property manager at Riverview offered to make one for us. When I told him that I had the wood of an elm tree that was probably ready for use, we dreamed up the design and drew up the plans for an altar, a lectern and a tabernacle shelf.

Shane from Rahamim, accompanied me to the property, where the logs had lain in a paddock for four years. We milled them on a very cold July morning. We managed to salvage just enough timber for the chapel requirements and a slab for a bench in the dining room. We put the milled timber on the back of a truck for the trip back to Bathurst, where Shane cut it into smaller pieces. Then, we loaded it into the back of my car and I drove the tree to Sydney where Bob welcomed it into his workshop and the magic continued.

Bob heard we were having a Sesquicentenary in the Bathurst Diocese and wanted to have the altar ready for the Mass the Sisters of Mercy were planning as part of the celebration. The occasion also marked the centenary of the Chapel at St Joseph's Mount. The beauty of the timber, in colour, texture and fragrance was inspiring. The simple elegance of the shape created by this most generous master craftsman matched the natural beauty in the timber. The design of the altar is three upward sweeping arms, giving the impression of branches holding up the offering on the altar: suggesting both Trinity and Incarnation. Bob had a challenge working with the imperfections of the tree, but the outcome is rich and earthy, beautiful in form and movement.

Bob also crafted two candle stands and a sanctuary lamp stand from the left over wood.

On Friday 29 October, Bishop Michael McKenna consecrated his first altar – in our one hundred year old Chapel on the occasion of the Sesquicentenary of the Sisters of Mercy of the former Bathurst Congregation. The tree lives on, assuming a new significance, as people from all walks of life gather around the table to celebrate life and death, commitment and hope in a God whose love and mercy is revealed in the beauty of creation. The uplifting arms of the tree - a sign of hope and promise in a world so disfigured by "rot" - are a symbol that will endure and hopefully continue to inspire.

Our most heartfelt gratitude to Bob Marsh for his beautiful gift and to Wayne Sales who "cured" the logs, and milled them, also as gift.

Just beyond the sanctuary where the altar stands, another elm holds its branches to the sky, offering shade and shelter for all kinds of creatures, while we look on in awe and amazement, in gratitude for all the beauty of creation.

Ann-Maree O'Beirne rsm