

Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 30, March 2024

Dear Associates and Sisters,

By the time you read this newsletter, I think every group will have held its first 2024 gathering. Perhaps a few goals have been set for your group, or some priorities about what you'd like to do and achieve this year.

The year has started with some significant moments for the Mercy Associates community. First of these was the appointment of **Anna McGookin** as the Network Facilitator for Victoria and South Australia. Anna brings deep faith and valuable life experience to this role, and we warmly welcome her! On the next page is an article by Anna introducing herself.

Second was the **Mercy Associates Leadership Group** gathering in Sydney, earlier in March. This is always a key event for our Mercy Associates community because its gives us the chance to think about how we're going and look to the future of how to maintain and grow our groups—and even get new ones underway! Margaret Stewart from Ballarat was one of the people who attended, and she has written an article about the experience, on page 3.

He is Risen!

By the time most of you read this newsletter, we will be celebrating Easter Sunday—the feast of the Resurrection of Jesus. It's the most important feast day in the Christian calendar because it's the moment that defines Christianity—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead confirmed, for his disciples, his identity as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Catherine McAuley keenly understood the relationship between the cross and the resurrection. She wrote: Without the cross, the real crown cannot come. Some great things which He designs to accomplish would have been too much without some bitter in the cup.

Earlier this week, Marg Trevethan's prayer and reflection resource was sent out, *Praying the Easter Season*. Marg begins her wonderful resource with:

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The essence of the Easter Mystery is the merciful love of God.

It is said that the English word 'Easter' comes from an older German word for 'east', which comes from an even older Latin word for 'dawn'. The sun rising in the East, bringing light, warmth, and hope has become an image for the Christian of the rising Christ, the true Light of the world. However Easter is more than just a one-day event that marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a season in which disciples discover this mystery. ...

As disciples of the risen Christ we walk mercy balancing action and contemplation.

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May you and those dear to you be richly blessed during this Easter season...

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer

MERCY Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths

"Mercy bestows benefits, receives us anew and pardons us again and again" Catherine McAuley



Welcome to Anna...



A big "hello" to everyone. My name is **Anna McGookin**, and I am the new Mercy Associates Network Facilitator for Victoria and South Australia.

I live in the small town of Mt Egerton, about 30 minutes east of Ballarat. We are blessed to own a small property that we share with two dogs (Wilfred and Daisy), five horses (Flynn, Steve, Banjo, Copper, and Smokey), and numerous chickens. Our horses are used in a small charity that I run. They are used to help people overcome issues such as low self-esteem, poor mental health, and social isolation.

I became a Christian while at university (where I studied agriculture). It wasn't until I started volunteering for the church we were attending that I began to really understand God's call for my life. A large part of my faith journey has involved God undoing some of the misconceptions I had about ministry and leading me to a greater understanding of how I can use my interests to con-

nect with and display the kindness of God to others.

I love reading and learning. Since my early university days, I have completed a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies. I am currently completing a Master of Leadership course at Alphacrucis University College. I am also a credentialled pastor and am about to undertake further training as the next step towards ordination.

I am passionate about helping others to better understand the true nature of God's heart towards them and encouraging them to find ways to show the love and mercy of God to the people around them. I am amazed at how God pulls the various threads of our lives together. Like a detailed tapestry, what appears random is woven in with other events to create a wonderful picture. So often, we think we have nothing to offer, and yet, the various things we love to do when placed in the hands of God, can be used to bless others. I love listening to other people's faith journeys and look forward to meeting you and hearing your faith stories over the next few months.

Anna McGookin

Network Facilitator, Victoria and South Australia

The power of relationships — Get up and make God visible!

The prophet Zarathustra, whose name means *undiluted star*, said that gravity is the irrefutable force of love that binds us together. And the Chinese sage Mencius said that our impulse to drop everything to save a child from falling into a well—this holds everything together. And the rabbis of Eastern Europe rang their bells at dawn like spiritual roosters, barking that God is dormant until you are in relationship. They would chant: "Get up and make God visible!"

Isn't this how we complete each other? When I walk our dog, I wave to the mailman driving from house to house, though I don't know his name. At the register in the supermarket, I have the same small exchange with Betty about her arthritis every time I buy milk and bread. And when I board the plane, I have the same brief intimacy with Darren, the gate agent. He has two grown kids, one who won't speak to him.

And there was the old man wanting to buy two peaches. But they were only sold by the bag. So he left. And I watched the woman behind me run to the produce aisle and then to the parking lot to say, "Here, have them all."

These small exchanges make God visible. They hold everything together. They are us, one to the other, until the gravity of love binds us. So, for God's sake, say hello!

Mark Nepo, published on Jamberoo Abbey Facebook page, 30 January 2024



Mercy Associates Leadership Group 2024 gathering

On the second weekend in March, representatives of Mercy Associate groups from around Australia and Mercy Friends, Papua New Guinea met for the annual gathering of the Mercy Associates Leadership Group (MALG) in Sydney with Network Facilitators, Marg Trevethan (QLD), Chris Convery (NSW) and Anna McGookin (VIC) and Executive Officer, Carmel Ross.

On Friday evening we met for dinner which was a great way to get to know other participants. We were delighted to be joined by Sisters from the Institute Leadership Team (ILT) including Institute Leader, Karon Donnellon, Duyen Nguyen, and Theresia Tina, the ILT's Sister liaising with the Mercy Associates, and in this role Theresia joined us each day.

Saturday was a retreat day led by Chris Convery and devoted to exploring *four* ways of understanding leadership. Following an introduction by Chris, we were provided with readings relating to: 1) *Leader as Reader*, 2) *Leader as Teacher*, 3) *Leader as Healer* and 4) *Leader as Poet.* We were provided with significant periods of time to read and contemplate any ideas arising from the readings. Armed with sketchbooks and coloured pens, we were asked to create mindscapes of our learning using colour, images, symbols, sketches and shapes, with minimal use of text. While initially hesitant about our artistic abilities, each of us managed to create mindscapes, which when shared revealed the depth of our engagement with the readings and also feelings evoked about the nature of leadership. Chris then moved on to provide insights into *Leading from a Merciful Space* which focused on key elements of Mercy Leadership and Catherine McAuley and Everyday Leadership. We considered how unusual Catherine's leadership was in a time when the norm was a more transactional and hierarchical style. Through her letters and recorded interactions with her Sisters, it is clear Catherine led with the heart. Her faith in God and her devotion to the Gospel combined to ignite the fire that turned her ideals and beliefs into action serving the poor, providing education for girls and fearlessly standing up to the Church hierarchy when needed.

On Sunday Marg Trevethan ran a workshop in which we looked at how to ensure Mercy Associates and Mer-



cy Friends groups are relevant to their communities. In this context we considered practical ways in which the Mercy Associate and Mercy Friends groups could strengthen and potentially expand their reach in their own communities. Carmel has written about the ideas we came up with elsewhere in the newsletter.

L-R: Marg Trevethan, Chris Convery, Mandy Bosson, Carmel Ross, Annette Rowe, Grace Lalio, Rita Tomba, Margery Jackman, Margaret Stewart, Anna McGookin

An unexpected highlight on Sunday afternoon was a wonderful presentation by the representative of Papua New Guinea Mercy Friends, Grace Lalio from Wewak. We were in awe at the amazing diversity of work being undertaken from the heart by Mercy Friends for those in need in PNG!

There is so much more that could be said about the 2024 MALG gathering. In the beautiful Mercy way, the organising team managed to weave the retreat and workshop together seamlessly with acknowledgments of country, prayers, poetry, music, meals and refreshments. Our gratitude goes to the team, as each of us has come away renewed, with many ideas to share with our own communities.

Margaret Stewart, Ballarat



FB/Waftings from the Eth

How would you like your Mercy Associates group to grow in the juture?

The ideas below arose at the Mercy Associates Leadership Group gathering in Sydney. They may help you to increase the **visibility** of Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends, with a view to attracting more people to become involved:

- Invite non-Associates to meetings 'come and see'.
- Think about our own networks and who among them might be interested.
- Think about how we (or do we) speak about our own involvement in Mercy Associates in our conversations with friends and family. Are there opportunities we miss because we're too shy about this?
- Mindful of the age profile of most groups, are there ways we can promote Mercy Associates to those in, say, their 40's and 50's?
- Publish articles in *Just Mercy* so the Sisters and staff are more aware of what we do.
- ♦ Develop a simple version of the Vision statement, that is easy to remember and conveys the gist of what we're about. Probably no more that 8 – 10 words. *Note: This is something the Network Facilitators will work on now.*
- In Melbourne and Adelaide, see if there are any practical ways to connect with Young Mercy Links.
- Look for connections between groups, e.g., Townsville or Cairns with Papua New Guinea groups. Connections might also be beneficial in regional areas in Australia, such as the links between Griffith and Young.

What's viable for your group ? Have a chat about this at your next meeting and what your local possibilities are...

For most groups and organisations, the best way to attract new people is by 'word of mouth' - people around you see or hear of your involvement with Mercy Associates and become interested. We need to be confident in speaking to others about what Mercy Associates is all about—a like-minded community (group) of people who share the Christian faith and want to gather for prayer and hospitality.

Mercy Friends in East Sepik

Mercy Friends in East Sepik continue do corporal and spiritual works in our local parish and the Greater Sepik. We are the shining lamps to those who need help, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Mercy Friends at Kaugia Parish never stop doing community service every Friday at the local parish, the Heath Centre, and the Primary school at Kaugia Mission Station, Wosera District. They have been very supportive to the Parish Priest ensuring the parish yard is kept clean (see photo below), the parish priest



has local food, and they help in any big celebrations and on festive seasons. Their compassion expresses the charism of Mercy.

Helping people with disabilities is a greater mission, and the Mercy Friends at Bapmu Parish have weekly visits to people with disabilities (a blind family of 4 and a person with a limp). Mercy Friends accompany the communion ministers. The Friends help people with disabilities gather at a common



area and share food brought along with them, and then they receive the Holy Eucharist.

Cairns – A new beginning for Mercy Associates

Mercy Associates in Cairns had not met for some time however in February eight of us were able to come together at the Seville Mercy Centre. Julie Clarkson with support from Priscilla O'Brien, the Ministry Development Coordinator at Seville, and encouragement from Sr Faye, invited Associates and any interested friends of mercy to gather. We had a time of prayer and reflection in the Chapel, shared a cuppa and some Seville hospitality, and then discussed the possibilities for Mercy Associates going forward.

Those present had great memories of being Associates and would like to reconvene. They thought there were others who would also come along if we re-established the community. There was a lot of positive energy in the room, gratitude for the support given by the Sisters and Terry Power, and a desire to continue to live and share the mercy charism with others. It was wonderful to experience.

Julie has been asked to coordinate efforts to contact Associates and reconvene the group, with support from Priscilla. The next gathering is planned for April 14th with the beautiful Seville as the meeting place. The for-



Attending the Cairns gathering were, L-R: Vicki Newport, Julie Clarkson, Marg Trevethan, Priscilla O'Brien, Sean Moore (standing behind Priscilla), Patricia Martin, Val Cooper and Jill O'Kane.

mat for gatherings of Associates includes a time of prayer and reflection with a Mercy theme, some sharing of how those present have been encountering and sharing mercy in their daily lives, and hospitality over a cuppa. I'm looking forward to supporting Mercy Associates in the Cairns area as they begin to gather again and to connecting them with all the other groups in Queensland and around Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Marg Trevethan,

Queensland Network Facilitator for Mercy Associates

News from Young

Our first Associates meeting was on 19th February with 12 members present in the Parish Centre. Joy led the reflection on the Epiphany. Helen Fowler recently went to Baggot Street and presented a lovely glass candle holder to the group. It was also decided to invite monthly guest speakers to our group.

The Associates donated to the local Can Assist group.

Congratulations to one of our founding members, Barbara Hislop on her local Senior Citizen of the Year award - truly deserved.

Joy Cameron

Christmas gathering: Back row: Allen Crowe, Val Patterson, B Hislop, N Hardman, Sr Lorraine, Sr Mary Quay, Sr Kate, M Kearney. Front row Sr Helen, V Bower, C Hardcastle, Ann Murphy, Sr Rita and Joy Cameron.



A new journey begins again — Mercy Friends in Yarapos and Kaindi

The sun peeked over the horizon, casting a golden glow on the quaint church nestled in the heart of Yarapos. It was Saturday morning and the Mercy Friends members from Yarapos and Kaindi were preparing for their 2024 Commissioning Eucharistic Celebration.

The members' hearts fluttered with excitement. They had worked as Mercy Friends for few years, and now they were about to embark on another new chapter again. The commissioning Mass would bless their official journey and works as Mercy Friends for the year.

As the clock struck nine, the Commissioning Mass begins at St. Joseph's Church. Sunlight streamed through glass windows, painting the pews with hues of marigold and chiffon. The air smelled of fresh flowers and



candle wax. The members huddled together, their faces a mix of anticipation and reverence.

The choir sang hymns that resonated deep within each and everyone's soul. After the homily, the members stood alongside, their hearts pounding in unison. The priest, clad in rich vestments, stepped forward. His voice echoed through the nave as he blessed each Mercy Friend. "May your steps be guided by compassion, your hands by service, and your hearts by love," he intoned.

Everyone felt a surge of purpose. They remembered the works done in previous years. This commissioning was more than a formality—it was a consecration of their commitment.

The congregation rose as one, their voices lifting in prayer.

"Go forth," Father Alphones said, his voice unwavering. "Bring light to the darkest corners, comfort to the wea-

ry, and hope to the broken."

As the final hymn swelled, the church seemed to expand, its walls dissolving. The members stepped out into the sunlight, carrying the Eucharist within them. They became living tabernacles, vessels of love and mercy.

Each knew their journey wouldn't be easy—the roads would be winding, the challenges immense—but with Catherine McAuley as their guiding light and the blessings of the commissioning mass with them, they are ready to serve, to love, and to bring light to the world—one compassionate act at a time.

Elvairah Rasa, Wewak

Mercy Associate Honorary

is an option available to Mercy Associates who, because of age, frailty, illness, etc., are no longer able to attend meetings of their local group. It enables them to remain Mercy Associates, with their ministry being prayer for others. A formal acknowledgement is provided through the issuing of an 'Honorary' Certificate. Contact your Network Facilitator (Chris in NSW; Anna in VIC & SA; Marg in QLD; Carmel in WA) if there are Associates in your group for whom this option should be considered.

Network Facilitator contact details

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WA, PNG & other locations: Carmel Ross

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NSW:

Gunnedah Associates farewell local Sisters

Gunnedah Associates joined other parishioners and some from the wider community at a farewell Mass and Morning Tea on February 4, for Sisters Christine Belling and Gabrielle Foley. Christine has since moved to Casino and Gabrielle to New Lambton. In their many years in Gunnedah each had been the Major Superior of the former Gunnedah Congregation and each had been Principal of St Mary's College. The College later had a separate farewell. Christine and Gabrielle have supported the Associates by frequent attendance at meetings and events and by interaction on a personal level. Gabrielle had also looked after the Associates' funds. They will be missed.

Maree Hobson

Above right: Parish farewell catered by the Mercy Associates, Sr Regina, Sr Christine, Sr Gabrielle, St Xavier's principal Jen Honner and St Mary's principal Cath Martin Right: : Farewell at St Mary's College, former principal Max Quirk, Sr Christine, current principal Cath Martin, Sr Gabrielle and former principal Tony Moran



Tuart Hill Associates volunteer at St Catherine's House of Hospitality

Richard and I feel really privileged to work with a happy group of volunteers at St Catherine's House of Hospitality in Tuart Hill, Perth. It gives us great joy when after seeing our guests arriving with heavy hearts and then after a day or a weekend of respite, "wobble" out with a big grin on their faces and a vow to return as soon as possible. Two other Associates from our group, Ros and Jan, also volunteer at St Catherine's.

We feel that in some small way, we are in a little Baggot St in Dublin, Ireland, showing compassion



and love as Catherine McAuley did two centuries ago.

Due to expert management, our facilities have been extended and we are now able to accommodate two groups of guests at a time.

The groups who visit our House vary greatly in their need for respite.

We have grandparents raising grandchildren, Māori women who have many sub groups and who believe that Catherine "must have been a Māori as we share the same ethos". Other guests who attend are craft

groups, seminarians, secular lay Franciscans, prayer groups and retreatants.

We regard our work as prayer in action.

We regard our work as prayer in action.

There is such a need at this present time for hospitality, care and compassion that people need to book a year ahead!

Do Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends have a **charism**?

When we think about religious congregations such as the Sisters of Mercy, we think of them having a **charism**. In the case of the Mercy Sisters, a charism of Mercy—to express the Mercy of God in their day to day lives as they live out their lifelong vow to religious life.

Charism is one of those words used only in religious contexts. The nearest word in our daily language us *charisma*, which the Cambridge dictionary defines as: *the ability to attract the attention and admiration of others, and to be seen as a leader*. It's easy to see the link—religious congregations, inspired by the charism of their founder, in turn inspire others through their daily expression of their charism.

American Benedictine sister Joan Chittister OSB has provided an excellent definition of charism, extending its application from religious congregations who originally received a charism (considered a gift of the Holy

Spirit), to our contemporary context, where as lay women and men, Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends are called to express the Mercy of God in their day to day lives. She's suggesting that **charisms are not confined to religious congregations**—we also have this **gift as we commit to imbuing our lives with the Mercy of God...**

A charism is a gift, the heart of the founder aglow at one period in history, now beating in us in another day and age.

A charism is a living passion for peace, truth, healing, restoration, Mercy...

For what is missing now, here, in our time.

To be kept alive a charism must be given away to gain life in its multiple expressions.

Tuart Hill Associates recommit and welcome a new Associate

As you may have heard on the news a while back, WA has recently been in the midst of the worst heat wave in its recorded history. This affected everyone in one way or another and our Mercy Associates didn't miss out. Although we were looking forward to our first gathering for the year in February, when you've had 38, 39, 40, 42 degrees in a row ...and continuing, we looked like turning into grease-spots. Thus, we felt, in the interests of the health and wellbeing of the group, we had to cancel.

I note the above because, after a long gap, which hadn't been anticipated, last Sunday, 24th March, we actually *were able* to gather - and with a very special and happy purpose. It was our Recommitment Day, and, joyfully, we were able to welcome officially our newest Associate, Teresa Mitchell, who made her first commitment.

Sr Marie Ralph presented Teresa with her Certificate and her badge *(photo below)*. She also spoke to the



group, highlighting the mutual support of the two groups – the Sisters of Mercy and the Associates of the Sisters of Mercy.

Our day was given a special boost by the presence of eleven Sisters. They also became a part of the ceremony as they raised their hands in blessing over us and singing the blessing song (*photo below*).



We finished off a very enjoyable day with afternoon tea and happy chatter.

We am grateful to both the Sisters and the group for being part of the above occasion, helping to emphasise the importance of travelling together to enhance our spiritual lives, to be there for each other when the need arises and to walk hand in hand with the One who loves us totally, and " to the end".

Jan O'Connor

VISIT FROM QUEENSLAND NETWORK FACILITATOR WELCOMED BY ROCKHAMPTON ASSOCIATES

On 1st March, we were blessed to have a few hours reflection with Margaret Trevethan, who was travelling through Rockhampton to Gladstone for their Mercy Associates Gathering. How fortunate were we! We had a relaxed gathering in the spirit of Mercy, taking time to nurture our soul and connect with God



and each other. It was a time to reflect, talk, pray and share friendship. We had twelve in attendance and all were rewarded for taking this time out of our busy lives. The sharing with each other was very open and valued by all. Friendships were made and the prayer was beautiful. Thank you, Margie. It was also a good way for us to prepare for our annual recommitment ceremony which we will have next month.

Kathleen Winter

Back L—R: Peter Maloney, Kathy Maloney, Marion Davies, Marg Trevethan, Sr Moyra, Marriann Chase, Mary Davies Front L-R: Carol McIvor, Sr Beryl, Sr Margaret, Kathleen Winter

ROCKHAMPTON ASSOCIATES ENLIGHTENED ABOUT THE MERCY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

In February this year, the Rockhampton Mercy Associates gathered for their first meeting. This was an extra special meeting, because of our guest speaker, Sister Berneice Loch rsm OAM, whose presentation was followed by our Annual General Meeting (AGM).

As usual, our meeting was held on a Saturday morning and the Mercy Associates were able to join in the regular Mass at St Joseph's Cathedral and have 'mercy input' in the liturgy. (We now have a 'tradition' that the beautiful song, *Circle of Mercy*, has become our recessional hymn.)

Morning Tea and a 'good catch-up' followed, before our

Dublin. However, she informed us, that everyone went into lockdown on 13 March, because of COVID! Sister went on to explain about the many challenges she faced and the new skills she developed in conducting zoom meetings with many participants from various countries throughout the world. At the same time, she was learning about her new role!

The work of MIA includes preserving and exploring the legacy of Catherine (including the care of the house on Baggot Street), as well as bringing together people of mercy and Mercy Ministry, throughout the world. As Mercy Associates, we are under this very large umbrel-

own dear Sister Beryl Amedee rsm, introduced Sister Berneice. Sister Berneice is a very much loved and highly respected Rockhampton Sister of Mercy with many, many achievements and so it was understandable that this required a lengthy and at times entertaining introduction from one of her own congregation! Sister Berneice had been Leader of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of



Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) for six years and later President of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

Sister Berneice had been appointed as the CEO of *Mercy International Association* (MIA) for three years, commencing on 1 March 2020 and based at Baggot Street, la, continuing the spirituality of Catherine McAuley in today's world.

Two of our Parish Priests, Father Jomon Poothara from India and Father Samuel Okoroafor from Nigeria joined us during the morning and were warmly welcomed.

Our AGM followed and our new executive elected, but not before our Chair Kathleen, reminded us of the many activities of the

previous year and the support we had provided to one of our local charities.

We concluded the morning in prayer and thanksgiving, looking forward to when we meet up again.

Jennifer Loscher

A busy start to 2024 for Gladstone Associates

The Gladstone Mercy Associates commissioned and welcomed their newest member, Margaret [Marg] Watson, on Saturday 2nd March in the Star of the Sea Parish Hall. The Mercy Associates were led by the Network Facilitator Queensland, Margaret Trevethan. Marg, who was inspired by Catherine McAuley and the local As-



Berneice Loch rsm, Marg Trevethan, Leonie Johnson and new Mercy Associate, Marg Watson

sociates, committed herself to being a Mercy Associate of ISMAPNG for an initial period of three years. On behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, Sr Berneice Loch rsm witnessed Margaret's commissioning. Marg is a first cousin of Sr Berneice and during her formation was mentored by Mrs Leonie Johnson. Welcome, Marg, to our Gladstone Associates and may your journey with us, enrich your life as you share the mercy of God through Catherine's vision and charism.

At the 'End of Year' Mass at Chanel College in 2023, students

brought forward the symbol of a *Lantern* to honour and remember the contribution that the Sisters of Mercy have made since establishing the College in 1966.

The choice of the Lantern [a shining lamp] symbolised the way that Catherine McAuley illuminated the path forward by being a beacon of love for the poor and underprivileged in Dublin. Catherine was urging her Sisters to recognise their own ability to shine and to project a future of hope for all those whom they encountered. At this Mass, two Mercy Associates presented the Mercy Leadership Awards to the College Captains, Sam and Jade.

The Opening College Mass for 2024 introduced the theme for the year, *Peace Be With You*. We were reminded of our call to be true to the words of Catherine McAuley, *Try to meet all with peace and ease*. Staff and students were called to be people who offer the warmth of welcoming, gentle compassion, a sense of belonging and a willingness to help each other grow ... in mutual support and with gracious hearts.



Annette Plath and Annette Rowe

Easter Alleluia

Jesus is Risen, death's conqueror!

To the Risen giver of life, To the Risen giver of love, To the Risen guide for the future, Praise and thanks to God! Praise and thanks for new life, Praise and thanks for new love, Praise and thanks for renewed future, Thanks be to God.

Philip FOX, cited on Jamberoo Abbey Facebook page

If we look closely we will find Jesus rising in our lives. The signs may not be obvious and will require a moment's reflection, but if we look in the right place we will find him risen in our midst. Mary Coloe PBVM (cited from WATAC on Facebook)