

Woolwich Celebration - 23 March 2019

Address by Sr Cath Lacey

Dr Dan White, Mr Michael Krawec, Dr Anne Ireland, distinguished guests, staff & students of Marist Sisters College, ex-staff and students, members of the Marist Family & friends of the Marist Sisters.

On 30th December 1907 three Marist Sisters arrived in Sydney (two travelling from Fiji and the third from France). It was anticipated that Australia would provide a place where particularly sick Sisters from the newly established mission in Fiji could recuperate, as well perhaps being a source of vocations for the mission area. A specific task also awaited the three Sisters, that of teaching in the parish primary school of Blessed Chanel.

These Sisters were greeted by the Marist Fathers and by the Sisters now known as the Marist Missionary Sisters with whom they stayed until moving to their first small house 'Kamona' in Alexandra St. At the end of 1908 the Sisters moved into their residence here with the help of Fr Hault and the generosity of some of the parishioners.

In reflecting on 110 years of Marist life on this property, two images came to mind. Firstly, the image of a river (maybe the Lane Cove). A river usually begins up in the mountains as a little brook bubbling over the rocks, then winding its way (all the time gathering momentum) down to the sea, giving life to all along the way. The second was of the trees in our surroundings – some having been here for a great number of years giving shade to all around. It takes time for the tree to mature and for the beauty of the tree to become evident.

So with this place. If those first three Sisters (Mother Melanie & Sisters Cyrille & Odilon) were to visit Woolwich today, what a change they would see in the surrounds, but I believe that they would be delighted to see & feel that the spirit implanted so long ago is alive. After 110 years of Marist life here I believe that the Marist spirit which was planted by these Sisters and nourished over the years has taken root and, like the river has spread far and wide. And...this spirit continues to flourish through the staff and students of the College. This has been evident to me in my dealings with Anne, her staff, the students and ex-students who take our Marist spirit out into the wider world, helping to fulfil Fr Colin's dream of making the whole world Marist.

For us Sisters, the decision to leave this property has been significant and one which was not taken lightly. We had been discerning the sustainability of our presence here for a number of years before making the final decision.

We are sad to be leaving this place, which for many Sisters has been ‘home’ for a significant part of their life. Some of our Sisters went to school here, taught here and spent a number of years in the community. But... although we will no longer be physically present, this place and those who are here will remain in our prayer. We know that the Marist Spirit **is** alive here and will live on to nourish future generations.

We are happy that the purpose for which we came here – education – will continue on this site.

I would like to thank Anne and her staff for this wonderful gathering and the work they have put into making it happen so beautifully. When Anne first mentioned it to me I envisaged just something small and simple. It is overwhelming that so many have been able to come to say farewell.

I thank each of you for taking the time to be here to celebrate with us. Although we won't be **here** we will still be around Sydney and hope that our contact will not be lost.