



Words of Remembrance

SR JOAN CARMEL MCBRIDE SM

16/07/1929-----24/06/2023

It is fitting that we gathered in Holy Name of Mary Church, Hunters Hill, for it was there that Joan Carmel McBride was confirmed, aged 11 – the Church in which her parents had married in 1913. Though Joan was born in Katoomba and baptised there in St. Canice's Church, she moved with her family to Hunters Hill at an early age.

Joan was the youngest child of Muriel and Bernard McBride, and remained very close to her three brothers and three sisters – Mary, Barbara, Bernard, Ruth (who joined the Dominican Congregation), John and David. Joan's siblings and later, their respective families, were always a vital part of Joan's life.

Joan was introduced to the Marist spirit in her formative years, completing both her Primary and Secondary education with the Marist Sisters in Woolwich and Mittagong. After finishing her schooling she took up a Secretarial position. As a young woman, Joan was drawn to the charism of the Congregation of Mary and, desiring to consecrate her life to God, she applied to enter the Marist Sisters. Just before her 21st Birthday she was received into the Novitiate in Merrylands, and it was there that she made her first Profession in 1951. Known as Sr Aquinas during her early years of ministry, she was later to return to her Baptismal name – Joan Carmel.

Joan lived her Marist Religious life with loving faithfulness and wholehearted commitment, witnessing to the Gospel in the spirit of Mary, and being always ready to fit in wherever she could be of service – taking up roles of responsibility within the Congregation as well as those of external ministries. From her earliest days, Joan's talents and abilities were recognised. She was given opportunities to undertake University studies, while showing a keen aptitude for teaching, particularly History. She excelled as a Secondary School Educator, and was appointed Principal at Marist Sisters' College, Woolwich, and Cerdon College, Merrylands. Joan had great love for learning and was keen that others be given every opportunity to reach their potential. In particular, she worked to ensure that our Sisters in missionary areas, as well as here in Australia, had opportunities for furthering their education and undertaking tertiary studies. As Principal, Joan was very supportive of staff, students and families, and had particular care and compassion for those who were struggling or disadvantaged - always assisting

in a quiet and unassuming way. Joan spent a year teaching in Fiji before her appointment, in 1983, to Mackay, Queensland. Recognised as a gifted educator and an insightful, perceptive leader, Joan was asked to take up leadership of a pioneering Education venture in Mackay. Together with a small community of Marist Sisters, she journeyed north to begin Emmanuel Catholic School in the Diocese of Rockhampton – initially a Year 1 to 10 School. Joan loved her experience in Mackay and was greatly respected there. In the words of one of her Deputies, she was a “guiding light of Emmanuel in its formative years”.

In 1991, Joan’s ministry took a new direction. Her aptitude for History equipped her well to focus upon Archival practice, and she soon became a very able and methodical Archivist, ensuring the preservation of our Marist historical documents, not only here in Australia, but also in our General Archives in Rome and in other parts of the Congregation. She readily assisted other Religious in Australia who sought her help to establish and/or maintain their Archives.

Joan was a thorough, historical researcher and during this period she completed three major works – the first, a History of the Marist Sisters in Fiji. This work was originally presented as a thesis - part of Joan’s degree of Master of Letters, through the University of New England, Armidale, which she had begun as an external student some years previously. Following the publication of this work in 1991, Joan completed a study of the development of the Constitutions of our Congregation with particular reference to the history of change in administration; and then a History of the Marist Sisters in Australia.

Joan was reserved in nature - a private person - who also possessed a good sense of humour. She loved classical music and art, enjoyed sport, and was adept at knitting. She was hard-working and always generous with her time and talents. Though outstanding in her fields of ministry, Joan did not draw attention to herself and her own achievements, or cling to the familiar. She was ready to embrace new challenges, consistently offering herself when expressions of interest in a new mission venture were sought. How fitting that she died on the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who proclaimed: “He must increase, I must decrease”.

Throughout her life Joan faced many difficulties, including serious health issues and periods of illness. However, these experiences – born with patience and strong faith - did not deter her from remaining focussed on the Work of Mary entrusted to her. Through her Marist studies, Joan deepened her knowledge, and love for the Congregation. She believed it essential that the inter-relationship between our Founders, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn and Jean Claude Colin, be fully grasped and valued. Joan’s great

desire was to help Sisters, particularly the young members of the Congregation - especially those in missionary countries - develop their knowledge of Marist history, and be confident in speaking of the Marist charism as they continued to draw others to Mary's Way in the Church of today.

When diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia, Joan was very accepting and spoke about it quite openly. While the illness slowly robbed Joan of her memory and clarity of speech, she gradually became less measured in her interactions and we saw a lighter side of Joan. The Staff at St. Anne's warmed to her readily and, up until the last weeks of her life, she made us all smile and laugh quite often. Joan seemed always pleased to see her visitors and often had much to say. I got the impression that she observed the activity around her, aware that the Staff were running from one task to the other, and she wanted us to know how busy they were. We are very grateful for the care and consideration given to Joan during her years of residency at St. Joseph's and St Anne's. The attention she was given and the gentle, pastoral and spiritual support she received, particularly in the last week of her life, touched us greatly and we are deeply appreciative.

We thank Joan for her faithful Marist commitment and her deep love for our Congregation. She has left us a wonderful legacy through her writings, words and actions. Joan did "All for the greater glory of God, and the honour of Mary." May she rest in peace.

