New faces for Priests of Australia

By Jack Manning

South Australian priests Fr Peter Zwanzig, Fr Michael Romeo and Fr Stephen Aditi, and Adelaide Archdiocesan seminarians Anthony Bellarme and Colm Ashcroft feature in a new edition of Priests of Australia.

Sub-titled Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, the 32-page Jubilee Year of Mercy edition comes six years after the first edition of the same title.

The publication aims to inform readers of the vocation of priesthood through the lives of both past and present priests as well as those currently in training.

Priests of Australia begins with a selection of priests from ‘yesterday’, examining and sharing the lives of a number of men who made a mark around Australia.

It then moves on to priests of ‘today’ and shares the stories of those currently in service, with a collection of priests from around the country explaining their calling, passion and love for the priesthood.

Each priest featured within the publication has contributed their own ‘profile’ and has been given the chance to express their journey through their own words.

This offers a particularly interesting insight into both the challenges and rewards of priesthood, and allows readers an opportunity to gain an understanding of the vocation of men of different ages,ocations, callings and places.

Similarly, young seminarians — and the priests of tomorrow — share their stories in the third and final section of the publication.

The stories of these young men are as interesting as they are varied and highlight the individual nature of God’s calling.

Monsignor Robert Egar, the driving force behind the publication, writes in his preface: “This issue of Priests of Australia, like its predecessor of 2010, contains a very random selection of a few priests of yesterday, some of those from several thousand in the vineyard today and seminarians from six states, who are aspiring to receive the torch in the future.”

“‘In these difficult days for the Church it is encouraging for priests, religious and laypeople to know there are men drawn to priestly life,” he writes.

“The sharing of their vision can be an inspiration to all for whom the spreading of the Good News is important.”

The diverse, multicultural flavour of the Church today is reflected in the inclusion of seminarians such as Aid Inna, from Indonesia, and Toan Nguyen, born in Vietnam, who came to Australia as part of their journey to priesthood.

This lies in closely with the opening section covering past priests of Australia, with many of those who lived during the 1860s being born overseas.

My Egar says it is important to remember that the Church has been served dutifully in Australia for many years by people from all around the world.

“Our multicultural Australian Church has been served by priests from other countries since the beginning of European settlement,” he writes.

“Today we acknowledge the generosity of hundreds of priests from Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Philippines and other Pacific nations working in our midst.”

Priests of Australia is published by Pilgrims Quest, a voluntary committee that seeks to spread the “Good News” of Jesus through the printed word. It was designed by Peta Howard. To order a copy send email to rovertt@tpg.com.au.

A call to mercy

By Sister Duyen Nguyen nvn

I come from a close-knit family of 11 children and was raised in a small village in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975. I witnessed how the poor people lived in Vietnam and how bleak my family was.

My father was a public servant, working with the democratic government before 1975. After the fall of Saigon, he was chosen to live in a place in which the Communists called a “re-education camp.” After his release from prison, he was no longer a trusted family member. Since then he has lived in various cities in Vietnam. At the age of 60 my father had not yet found the freedom to establish a family.

This experience of family separation was “tough love” for us all. After 10 years, my family reunited in Australia in 1991. I came to Australia with my mother and three younger siblings under the sponsorship of my older brothers and sisters.

Once in Australia I did English classes and then a Bachelor of Commerce. I joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1996 and completed my teaching training with ACU in Ballarat and a Bachelor of Theology at Flinders University.

I was professed as a Sister of Mercy in 2009. Since then I have been involved in different ministries including teaching at Caritas College; organising and coordinating the pastoral program for children and families of the school and parish community in Port Augusta; assisting in the ROCA program and visiting and supporting the Vietnamese asylum seekers in the local detention centre.

I currently work as a religious education coordinator for the junior school at Menasha College. I love working with the staff and young people and supporting them in their awareness and relationship with God as part of their everyday lives. What makes me inspired and challenged is the boldness of our foundress, Catherine McAuley, in her vision and action. She gave the entire future of the Mercy community to her foster parents to build a “House of Mercy” for the poor and vulnerable in Dublin.

This image reminded me of the woman in the Gospel who anointed Jesus at Bethany with most precious and costly ointment (Mt 26:6-13). By her loving action she healed and proclaimed the Good News. Jesus spoke highly of her as one of his disciples: “whenever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her”.

I value the richness of diversity in my religious order, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea; and the many opportunities for me to learn, grow and share my faith.

Religious life today offers me a way of being true to myself and following what I value most — my search for a deeper relationship with God. It gives me the freedom to live my daily life so that I can have time for personal and communal prayer, being engaged in my ministry as well as offering hospitality, spending time in my garden and enjoying music.

Religious life teaches me a way of life that expresses and develops deep human relationships, that offers possessions without being possessed by them and power that serves and listens to others.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis, in his encyclical Laudato Si, urged us to hear and respond mercifully to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

In response, the Sisters of Mercy have invited all their Sisters around the world, together with co-workers and partners-in-Mercy to join in a reflection process. I am a facilitator, coordinating and organizing this Mercy International Reflection Process, looking at areas of need and proposing directions for our website to reflect on the visions to make a difference for our human and earth community.


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