

# Friends of Caroline Chisholm

## NEWSLETTER

# 1  
July 2010



Welcome to the first issue of the Friends' Newsletter. The Friends, whose objectives are outlined on page four, came together because of their shared interest in the life and work of a truly great woman and from their desire to make her better known and understood. The founding Friends see in Caroline Chisholm someone who displayed heroic Christian virtue and to a saintly degree. In her lifetime, especially among those she helped and those who were indeed seekers of the truth, she stood out, radiantly and without peer in colonial Australia and in mid-19th century England and Ireland, where she was lauded for what was then termed "philanthropy" — love of humanity (to translate it inclusively).

This issue reports on a Catholic parish's artistic commemoration of Mrs Chisholm, some years after she contributed to the building up of their local community. That's our lead article. The other major article relates how Carmel Kavanagh is working with and for refugees, and it illustrates the adjuring power of Christian example.

This inaugural issue is being circulated widely. To continue receiving the Newsletter, we ask that you email [webmaster@mrschisholm.com](mailto:webmaster@mrschisholm.com). To become a Friend of Caroline Chisholm requires that you use snail mail, sending the completed form on page four and a small cheque. Formalities, to be sure; but please also consider volunteering, so as to assist the inauguration of a Cause for one of Australia's and Britain's foremost woman.

## Caroline Chisholm returns to Goulburn

Caroline Chisholm often visited Goulburn in the early 1840s. Very fittingly, a mosaic featuring her will soon become a central feature in the New South Wales town. It is an important part of the restoration project of St Peter and Paul's Old Cathedral, and Goulburn's Mary, Queen of Apostles parish has commissioned the mosaic for the lancet windows of the Old Cathedral's northern wall facing Verner Street.

The recently commissioned artist is Nola Diamantopoulos, who is pictured on the second page of this Newsletter. The mosaic will show Caroline Chisholm travelling to Goulburn, a journey she frequently undertook to help find employment for young immigrant women in the country areas of the colony. In addition to the central figure of Caroline, the mosaic will include symbolic representations of Caroline's Easter Vow and of her husband Archibald, who unstintingly assisted her in her work. A sprig of wattle which Caroline is holding is another symbol. The generic botanical name for wattle is *acacia* — a Greek word meaning *without malice* — and the choice exemplifies the spirit which animated Caroline's work.

On Easter Sunday Caroline made her vow:

"I was enabled at the altar of our Lord, to make an offering of my talents to the God who gave them. I promised to know neither country nor creed, but to try and serve all justly and impartially."

This openness and generosity of spirit is one of the great marks of her work, and it is well reflected in the wattle symbolism.

The Old Cathedral of St Peter and Paul houses an historic Hill and Sons organ in the northern transept, behind which are three lancet windows that have been enclosed to protect the organ. The mosaic will be placed over the exterior of these windows. The mosaic is to be constructed with enameled glass tiles called *smalti*. These are visually similar to stained glass, which is more traditionally placed in Church windows. Mosaic, however, also has a long tradition in Church decoration dating back to the foundation of Christianity. [Continued page 2]

## Caroline Chisholm returns to Goulburn (continued)

The mosaic recognizes Goulburn as one of the sites of Caroline Chisholm's immigration depots and the contribution this made to the local settlement. These depots were administered by a committee of local settlers who assisted Mrs Chisholm in identifying suitable employment for the young women. She probably established Australia's first non-profit employment service. She matched workers with prospective employers in a manner that ensured the employee's rights were safeguarded. Contracts were signed in triplicate: a copy for the employer, one for the employee and one for Caroline Chisholm's records.

A committee led by Mrs Patricia Groves and parish priest Fr Dermid McDermott has already held a fundraising dinner at which Nola Diamantopoulos and Clara Geoghegan were guest speakers. The scope of the mosaic project and the work of Mrs Chisholm were enthusiastically supported. Fundraising to complete the project is continuing. Please contact the parish committee on 02 4821 1022 or email [sppoc@goulburn.net.au](mailto:sppoc@goulburn.net.au)

In addition to assisting immigrant girls, Caroline Chisholm worked to bring about family reunion, and among those benefitting were some families in the Goulburn area.

Canberra resident Myles Hannan has identified one of his ancestors as the beneficiary of Caroline Chisholm's family reunion efforts. From the early 1830s, Bounty immigrants in the colonial period were required to pay for any child younger than or excess to the Bounty policies, and many could not afford to emigrate with their whole family.

Myles's ancestors had, for this reason, been compelled to leave behind in Ireland three of their six children. One of these children was



Nola Diamantopoulos, the mosaic artist, and the Old Cathedral's lancet windows

Ellen Kelleher, Myles's great-grandmother. She travelled to Australia in 1848 on the *Sir Edward Parry* by a special emigration scheme known as the Regulation of 6 May 1846, for which Mrs Chisholm had lobbied. Ellen lived in Liverpool until her marriage to John Hannan. After their marriage, they moved to Mutbilly on the Breadalbane Plains, about 20 miles west of Goulburn. There Ellen and John happily raised ten children.

Clara Geoghegan

**More on Goulburn:** Goulburn is acknowledging the contribution of Caroline Chisholm in other ways. In April this year Caroline Chisholm Cottage was opened by Catholic Care, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn. The renovated Cottage, which is on Verner Street and overlooks the proposed mosaic, hosts programs such as Youth Connections, Rural Counselling, New Arrival Humanitarian Service, CatholicCare ACCESS and Disability Employment Service. All of these services continue, these many years later, the vision of Caroline Chisholm.

### **New and recent books about the good woman:**

Read Carole Walker's *Savior of Living Cargoes*, released in 2009. Also, look at *See, Judge Act* and *Unfeigned Love*, released a year or two before.

**The Friends** look forward warmly to the upcoming Canonization of Mother Mary of the Cross. Beneath the Southern Cross there are many Saints.

**Would you like to receive future issues of the Newsletter?** If you would, please email:

[webmaster@mrschisholm.com](mailto:webmaster@mrschisholm.com)

**If you don't want to receive them,** do nothing.

**To find out more about Caroline Chisholm,** you could go to [www.mrschisholm.com](http://www.mrschisholm.com), check library resources and Google her name.

## “Who I saw before me was my son”

Carmel Kavanagh has been visiting detention centres for the last eight years. In that time, she has befriended dozens of refugees, assisting them to obtain residency visas and to reunite with their family. Many have lived in her Ballarat home while their refugee applications were being assessed.

Carmel's awareness of the situation facing refugees had developed a few years before, when she opened her home to West Papuan students who were studying in Ballarat. She became aware that these students were in fact refugees. They would face certain persecution if they returned to their homeland.

Through this personal experience and the media portrayals of the official "reception centres" in the early 2000s, Carmel became very concerned with the plight of refugees at the Baxter Detention Centre in Port Augusta. Together with another Ballarat woman she began to visit asylum seekers there. Their visits were featured in *Payback Time*, a TV documentary, which described them as "two ordinary Australian women doing extraordinary things".

The first asylum seekers Carmel met were Africans and a Palestinian. Of one, she says: "Who I saw before me was my son. If he were in a foreign land in a similar situation, who would care for him?" This concern for the individual and their family continues to move her to work tirelessly for the welfare of the refugees she meets. She learns their story and sees the human dignity of each person. She naturally responds to their religious requests, and was at the recent baptism of a young refugee. As our discussion showed, she displays a keen sensitivity to cultural differences and the trauma that may distort the perceptions of refugees.

When Baxter closed the inmates were transferred to centres at Villawood (NSW) and Maribyrnong (Vic). Carmel now visits these centres and continues to make new contacts. Carmel's approach is very matter of fact. She has learnt to weave her way through the Immigration department's bureaucratic requirements so as to achieve the best possible outcome. Yet it remains clear to her: compassion rules.

Carmel relates that her parents awakened her social conscience. They were struggling dairy farmers who raised six children in a farm cottage with one bedroom and a sleep-out. Her father had left home at age 11 to work on a dairy farm. Before and after school he milked the cows, and sent his income to his parents. On the family's farm, he would employ Aborigines and drifters others would not hire. Although a strict man he was always ready to give people a fair go. Carmel recalls her mother never complained of the hard life and that, "In our home, no-one was excluded. We had no concept of there being any difference between black or white."

Carmel's work with asylum seekers and refugees has brought her closer to God, she says, for "this work has made me pray a lot more". When I comment on how much she had achieved, her reply is "I don't do much". A passing comment that she reminds me of Caroline Chisholm brought the response: "I often pray to her".

As I have come to know Carmel, I can see something of Caroline Chisholm's ability to assess a situation and come up with a practical solution, as well as her abiding compassion. Interestingly, Carmel has Caroline Chisholm prayer cards in the box she takes with her to the detention centres. "I thought I'd put them in there," she explained. "The asylum seekers ask us for all sorts of things." Clara Geoghegan



A Jewish family seeks refuge in Egypt.  
Matthew 3:13ff.

### Friends of Caroline Chisholm — Objectives

Friends of Caroline Chisholm is a voluntary organisation which exists in order to promote knowledge and appreciation of the life and works of Caroline Chisholm (1808-1877) and to ensure her life of heroic virtue is better understood and imitated.

In particular, the Friends wish to promote and support the following:

- ◇ Research into the life and work of Caroline Chisholm, Archibald her husband and their family circumstances.
- ◇ Evaluating the continuing soundness and relevance of her approaches to issues of migration, the well-being of women, children and families; the role of women in public life; and conditions for the creation of a just society;
- ◇ Understanding her motivation and commitment in assisting persons in need regardless of “country or creed” as grounded in a strong sense of Christian vocation;
- ◇ Maintaining a listing of contemporary organisations which bear Caroline Chisholm’s name and the rationale for their commemoration of Mrs Chisholm;
- ◇ Collating a database of descendents of individuals and families assisted by Mrs Chisholm’s immigration work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- ◇ Distribution and use of the approved prayer for Caroline Chisholm’s intercession and for the commencement of a Cause for her beatification within the Catholic Church;
- ◇ Accepting in confidence and storing letters from those whose intercessory prayers have been answered, for later reference in the hoped-for Cause;
- ◇ Identification and, if needed, the preservation of historical and contemporary records of relevance to the formal historical inquiry relating to the Cause for the beatification of Caroline Chisholm within the Catholic Church;
- ◇ Publication of a newsletter to inform Friends of developments;
- ◇ Use of the [www.mrschisholm.com](http://www.mrschisholm.com) website and other media outlets for effective distribution of more detailed information and resources.

### Friends of Caroline Chisholm — Membership Form

Name/Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque for \$25 for two years’ membership. Please email my copies of the Newsletter to \_\_\_\_\_

OR send to postal address Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me five/ten prayer cards at no cost Yes/No For bulk supplies go to [www.mrschisholm.com](http://www.mrschisholm.com)

I am interested in actively helping the Friends. Please phone me on \_\_\_\_\_

Return completed form and cheque to: Friends of Caroline Chisholm P O Box 232 Wendouree Victoria 3355