

Friends of Caroline Chisholm

NEWSLETTER

13
July 2016



Published by Friends of Caroline Chisholm GPO Box 2171 Sydney NSW 2001 www.mrschisholm.com

Further recognition of Caroline Chisholm's continuing importance to the Australian Church has recently been given. This issue of the Newsletter reports on the Australian Catholic University's naming a building after her, in which significant items of memorabilia are now displayed and which could act as a focal point for her commemoration in the future. It also reports on a new statue of her at Caroline Chisholm College, Glenmore Park, and sets out the College's *Statement of Charism and Identity* that draws deeply on the life, work and writing of their patron and on Scripture.

The issue includes an article that considers why colonial Catholics (or many of them) initially opposed Caroline Chisholm's plan to "serve all" and wanted her to help Catholics only. In addition to sectarian tensions, the article introduces another contributing factor: Bishop Polding's earlier (unsuccessful) effort to establish a Magdalene before his departure for Europe in 1840. The historical article notes more research is required and that it "might shed much-needed light on the Bishop's silence about Caroline Chisholm's pioneering lay apostolate". The archives have not been fully combed!

Caroline Chisholm House at ACU's North Sydney Campus

The Australian Catholic University has acquired a new building at its North Sydney campus and named it Caroline Chisholm House. Located at the corner of Berry Street and the Pacific Highway, the 13-storey building was officially opened by the Hon Mr Trent Zimmerman, Federal Member for North Sydney and blessed by the Very Reverend Gerald Gleeson, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Sydney.

The ceremony was held on 30 May, 2016, the day being chosen as it is the anniversary of Mrs Chisholm's date of birth. Among the direct descendants at the ceremony were Don Chisholm and his brother Robert, who are great-great grandchildren, and five great-great-great-great grandchildren, some of whom cut the birthday cake provided by the university.

The Chisholm family have given on long-term loan to the university significant items of memorabilia, including a small prayer book with Caroline's writing inside the front cover and her kitchen clock. These are displayed in a cabinet in the foyer of Caroline Chisholm House.

Professor Marea Nicholson, Associate Vice-Chancellor (NSW/ACT), said the new building was named in honour of Caroline Chisholm, "a

strong, independent woman who respected the dignity of all, especially the marginalised and those in need".

The North Sydney campus is actually called the Mackillop Campus, on which a building is named after Father Julian Tenison-Woods, co-founder with St Mary of the Cross Mackillop of the Australian Josephite order. Last year, the university named a building on its Melbourne campus after Sister Mary Glowrey, an Australian-born medical practitioner who worked as a missionary in India and whose beatification cause was begun there in 2013.

Representing the Chisholm family, Don Chisholm thanked the university for honouring their ancestor and related how fitting it was. She held education to be of great importance, opened and ran three schools - the one in Madras (now Chennai) in India being for disadvantaged children - and she expressed solidarity with "the original holders of the soil", the Aboriginal people, Don said.

These are in keeping with the university's place as a "premier educational institution" in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students are offered special support.

New Statue and *Statement of Charism and Identity*

Caroline Chisholm College at Glenmore Park now has a striking bronze statue of Caroline Chisholm. The statue was commissioned by the College, which is at the foothills of the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, not far from the route taken by the colonial explorers who first crossed the rugged mountain range in 1813. Mrs Chisholm travelled the road that was subsequently built, when she took inland some of her bush parties of new settlers.

Father Chris Antwi-Boasiako, administrator of the local Padre Pio parish, blessed the statue on 16 February, 2016, which the College celebrated as Caroline Chisholm Day. It is situated in the College's front garden, near the entry gates, where, Mr Greg Elliott, the College Principal, said, it will "remind each of us to live up to the promises we have made to be people of compassion, dignity and justice, just as Caroline Chisholm was".

In late 2015 the College staff developed the following statement of its *Charism and Identity*:

"The person of Jesus Christ is at the centre of all we do and strove to achieve at Caroline Chisholm College. The word Charism simply means **gift** and we acknowledge the God-given gifts that Caroline Chisholm recognised and lived throughout her life:

'On the Easter Sunday, 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 or creed, but to try and serve all justly and impartially . . .' (*Chisholm, 1842, 4, Female Immigration*).



The statue of Mrs Chisholm at Caroline Chisholm College, Glenmore Park, NSW

Caroline Chisholm was a model of living a **lay Christian life**. She advocated for and strove to improve the lives of the marginalised people of her time (Matthew 25:35-40), especially showing God's love for new emigrants, women and families (Matthew 7:12). She challenged existing social norms through **advocacy** and she led social reform (Matthew 5:1-17).

Her unique combination of gifts is encapsulated in the values of **faith, courage, tolerance, dignity, compassion** and **justice**. She lived these six values through service — so our scriptural mandate is lived here at the college through service. We, the Caroline Chisholm College community, are called to be Jesus' 'disciples' and to serve God by 'loving one another' (John 13:34-35).

Caroline Chisholm was an ordinary woman who led an extraordinary life. The Caroline Chisholm charism is the lens through which these values are enlivened in our relationships, in our teaching, in our welcome of all and through Caroline's Footsteps, our social justice program."

Calling for Your Contributions

The editorial in the last issue of the Newsletter took stock of how well the Friends' objectives have been implemented or advanced during the past eight years. It pointed out that the www.mrschisholm.com website and the Newsletter would benefit from contributions by a broader range of Friends and others. Mail your ideas and suggestions to GPO Box 2171,

Sydney, 2001 or email them to:

webmaster@mrschisholm.com

Last issue's editorial thought it desirable that additional promotion be undertaken in 2016 so that more Australian Catholics are aware of the prayer card and come to understand Mrs Chisholm's significance. What do you think? Please let the editorial team know.

What Brought About the Catholic Opposition?

Why didn't Caroline Chisholm receive the endorsement and backing of her fellow Catholics when, over the course of 1841, she lobbied privately and publicly for establishing the Female Immigrants' Home in Bent Street, Sydney? Why, moreover, did some attack her, as she describes in her 1842 book?

The reason given in major biographies is that Catholics were opposed to Mrs Chisholm's plan to "serve all", irrespective of country or creed. They wanted her to look after Catholics only.

In September, 1841, came the most extreme expression of Catholic opposition. Writing under his own name and giving his location as Hyde Park (that is, St Mary's Cathedral), Father Michael Brennan attacked Mrs Chisholm in the *Australasian Chronicle*, the Catholic newspaper, claiming the Home was "a private scheme of benevolence perfectly Utopian, and only excusable as the effect of an amiable delusion". (1)

Caroline Chisholm disclosed in her book the humiliation and hurt that it engendered: "it was of so painful a nature that I am astonished how my mind held out: I felt a giving way of the body first; I found I should be driven from the field by those who ought to raise the standard and cry, 'On, on!'". (2)

What lay behind the Catholic opposition to Mrs Chisholm's proposed charitable work? The explanation is to be found in the sectarian disagreements that simmered and, at times, flared in the Colony in the 1830s, when new issues of contention emerged as the Catholic community strengthened and multiplied.

At the risk of simplifying, the Church's institutional interests were seen to lie in separation from other denominations in every important respect. There had been growth and consolidation of the Church's personnel, ecclesiastical and educational buildings, and expenditures on the Church's mission, following decades of neglect and underfunding by the colonial administration and meagre financial contributions from the Catholic laity, the great majority of whom were poor and, in diminishing proportion over the 1830s, convicts or former convicts.

By the end of the 1830s, however, the Catholic Church was in a stronger position, financially and in terms of infrastructure and personnel, including a seminary and a small group of religious sisters. The number of adherents (including practising adherents) was increasing much faster than the overall population. In fact, the institutional expansion attracted the ire of colonial agitators such as John Dunmore Lang, minister of Scot's Church, and Judge William Burton, as well as criticism from hostile newspapers.

One of the new issues of contention was Bishop John Bede Polding's attempt to start a Magdalene for unmarried mothers and prostitutes. It was to be for Catholics alone, (3) whereas a somewhat similar kind of retreat at the government-funded Benevolent Society's asylum and lying-in hospital wing was already in place without a religious test, but requiring attendance at Divine (that is, Anglican) Worship.

For the purpose of the proposed refuge, Bishop Polding obtained from the colonial government a one-acre land grant in November, 1837. (4) A little earlier, in July, 1837, he had applied (though late) to the Legislative Council, through the Governor, requesting a grant of £1,000 in 1838 for the setting up of the refuge, which was to be matched with £1,000 raised by the bishop through private donations. (5) It seems the application was not approved, perhaps because of its lateness, and Bishop Polding does not appear to have reapplied in the following years.

The land grant of 1837 was at a distance from the town's centre and very close to a new jail, then under construction, but it was never used for a Magdalene, though it later had a Catholic school on it. Later, again, the land reverted to government ownership and became part of Green Park, opposite St Vincent's Hospital. (6)

Throughout the 1830s, complaints were voiced in the colony about the influx of prostitutes among assisted emigrants, made possible by lax supervision of unscrupulous Bounty agents in England and Ireland, and also at the overall prevalence of prostitution in Sydney. (7)

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What Brought About the Catholic Opposition? (cont.)

Caroline Chisholm never sought to establish a Magdalene. Rather, her exertions were directed chiefly at addressing and reforming the social conditions that were leading young women into unmarried pregnancy or into prostitution — both covered by the euphemism “to lose character”.

Soon after she and her husband Archibald arrived in the colony on his sick furlough in October, 1838, Mrs Chisholm and he recognized the main problems facing so many new emigrants. Shelter, gainful employment and loving Christian assistance were needed, and that is what they gave, initially in their family home, and then through a widening network among their friends and their friends' contacts, until, at the beginning of 1841, Mrs Chisholm saw the necessity for a larger, public response.

This centered on a building to provide shelter, food and an employment agency for the burgeoning numbers of young newly arrived female emigrants in need of them, and entailed changes in public policy and programs. The latter Mrs Chisholm refined during the Female Immigrants' Home's operation, so that the same problems would be alleviated, if not avoided, in the future.

The Home doubtless gave shelter, food and help to some of those a Magdalene would have assisted, but that was not its stated aim. The Catholic opposition was focused, as noted above, on Mrs Chisholm's stated intention to serve all, not solely Catholics. Although I have not found any explicit mention of that opposition having been associated with Bishop Polding's desire to begin a Magdalene, it would still have been fresh in the popular and corporate Catholic memory.

The bishop was away in Europe from the end of 1840 until March, 1843, but he corresponded regularly with his Vicar General, Father Francis Murphy, and others, and received copies of the colonial newspapers, including the *Australasian Chronicle*, (8) which was edited by a lay convert, who eventually championed Mrs Chisholm's work with new emigrants.

As I read them, Polding's letters show him to be well informed about goings-on in the colony and especially about matters affecting the welfare of his flock and the Church's broader situation. Yet I could find no reference in them to Caroline Chisholm herself or to her efforts to have a Home established, nor to its operation and her varied work with emigrants in the colony. This is surprising. There was not only Father Brennan's newspaper attack on Mrs Chisholm but also the riposte soon after that compared her work for “the poor and distressed” to that of the Catholic Apostle of Charity, St Vincent de Paul, whose charity, likewise, “was too great to allow him to pass by . . .”. (9) The second of her major biographers, Mary Hoban, thought that the riposte, carrying the nom de plume “Caritas”, came from Dean John Brady, a Catholic priest at Windsor, where the Chisholm family were living.

Possibly charged by the response of “Caritas”, Father Murphy and other Catholic clergy went on to support the Home through the public subscription, while he taught religious education to Catholic children there. All things considered, I think we could assume that Father Murphy had kept Bishop Polding informed; but a check of the Archdiocese of Sydney archives would settle the matter and might shed much-needed light, too, on the Bishop's silence about Caroline Chisholm's pioneering lay apostolate.

Rodney Stinson

Sources: (1) *Australasian Chronicle*, September 18, 1841; (2) *Female Immigration Considered*, reproduced in Rodney Stinson's *Unfeigned Love*, page 23; (3) Father Patrick Hartigan, *On Darlinghurst Hill*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984, page 28; (4) *The Letters of John Bede Polding OSB*, Volumes I and II, Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Sydney, 1986; (5) *ibid.*, pages 87-88; (6) Hartigan, *op.cit.*, page 28; (7) John Dunmore Lang, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*, Volume I, Sampson Low, et.al., London, 1875, page 263; (8) refer to *The Letters of John Bede Polding OSB*; (9) *Australasian Chronicle*, September 21, 1841.