

23 June 2013

St. Damian's Church,
5 Settlement Road,
Bundoora 3083

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate today the Diamond Jubilee of Sr. Cesarina Paolini and Sr. Letizia Selle, and the Golden Jubilee of Profession of Sr. Anna Genovese it is the whole people of God who celebrates with them.

It is indeed a privileged for me to preside in this occasion as I begin my new mission barely 3 months in Australia, while these sisters have long stories behind them, which are too long to recount. They have touch the lives of many many people in Australia in the 170 years of service combined. Their persons are the living testimony of a life-long service for Christ and his Church.

While reading through the book entitled "Building Community", written in 2008 during the 50th Anniversary of Pastorelle presence in Australia, it then that I realized the magnificent work that the sisters in the foundational era have done for the Church. If we have to talk about building the church as an edifice brick by brick, I would rather say that the real living church are the people of faith who enkindled the faith in others. These Pastorelle sisters have taught the people to have faith in God and faith in themselves as they struggled in early days of immigration in the 50s, the 60s and 70s, and bridging the gaps for the new generation to continue in the same faith of their forefathers.

God works through varied ways accomplishing things in surprising manner.

Take the case of Sr. Letizia coming from the Tiser, Agordo in Belluno province of Italy. The chance encounter with Fr. James Alberione on the car to Perugia as she hopped into the car for a spare seat was a twist of fate; little did she know that the founder would bring her to another destination she did not think of. Instead of teaching kindergarten and catechism in the southern section of Italy called Calabria, she would be transported among the Calabrese immigrants in Carlton, Australia. With little faith in herself, she understood the inspiration of the Lord with a touch from behind as she boarded the ship to the new mission --- "it is not my will, but yours be done."

On the other hand, we have Sr. Cesarina, who was enthusiastic to go to the missions only to find out that the missionary work is not as "ideal" as she thought it out to be. Wanting to do the work in the parish in collaboration with the parish church, she began her story interwoven in the life of the early Italian immigrants beginning their lives --- from the temporary hostel at Carlton to visiting their new homes. But, as a true missionary, she knew how to improvise and adapt to the existing conditions. To them she became a teacher, spiritual counselor, mediator, a shoulder to cry on, and even bathing new-born babies. And not only that, the sisters raised many eyebrows when they began driving a

car, which seemed unlikely for women to do, much less a nun; but they had to visit as many people as they can who needed their assistance. Her charm (as with her Mona Lisa smile) goes a long way through the 90s and through the turn of the 21st century getting involved in the renewal programs of the various charismatic prayer communities.

And how about Sr. Anna who comes from Avellino Campania; she would be fascinated by the flock of sheep coming from the campagna of Abruzzo. Little did she know that she would be tending a different breed of sheep in the graze lands of Australia, starting from the small sheepfold of kinder students in Thornbury, then gradually attending to the higher level of educating young mothers, and further occupying heavier responsibilities at the Catholic Italian Resource Center by renewing the faith in the archdiocese of Melbourne. Melbourne is not too small a place for her, that she would volunteer to invade the campagna of Adelaide; this time in the midst of a multi-cultural immigrants from Asia, Oceania, Middle East, South America, and Eastern Europe.

As true shepherdesses, I urge you then my dear Pastorelle sisters to continue living in simplicity of the ordinary family, to reach out to the marginalized, to search for the lost and the abandoned, to lift up the “anawin” or poor ones of society. Like the leaven, the sisters are inserted within the heart of social life, to instill the growth of faith, building not just a community, but a community of believers in the Lord.

Today is a joyful day of celebration for everyone, the community built up in faith, and by faith in the Lord Jesus the Good Shepherd who gathers us together. Borrowing from words of the Founder Blessed James Alberione: “We sing “Te Deum” in thanksgiving for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us. And for ourselves, a prayer of “Miserere” for the lack of correspondence and our sense of insufficiency in doing God’s work. Let the faith that has been begun continue to flourish as it is handed to the next generation; let the faith remain alive. Amen.

Fr Ruben Areño SSP