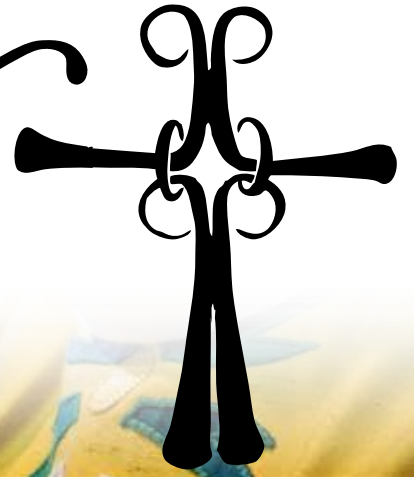


# missio



Newsletter of the Society of the Sacred Mission Australian Province **Summer 2015-16**



## WORKING AT REIMAGINING RELIGIOUS LIFE

*SSM's history spans more than a century, but this has not stopped the Australian Province from beginning anew, working at reimagining religious life and what it means to be faithful today.*

A sign of this reimagining came to life when the Revd Catherine Pennington was received as a professed member of SSM in a liturgy celebrated at St John's on Saturday 31 October.

A past Visitor and long-time friend of SSM, the Most Revd Philip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, presided and preached at the service, which was attended by the current Visitor, the Rt Revd Gary Weatherill, Bishop of Ballarat.

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## *This issue*

### **Professed at St John's**

Revd Catherine Pennington

### **Speaking up**

New member Alexis Fraser

### **A moment**

Welcome companions



As well as the profession at St John's on 31 October, three friends of SSM interested in living according to SSM's principles were admitted to membership. They were Fr Ryan Bennett of the Diocese of Ballarat, Ms Alexis Fraser of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, and Fr David McDougall of the Diocese of Willochra.

In addition, 19 people were welcomed as companions (see back page), committing themselves to offering prayerful friendship for SSM, its members and their work and being assured of SSM's interest in and prayers for them.

In his sermon Philip Freier said that from the beginning religious life in one form or another has been a reality in the life of the church. 'Its terms have changed throughout the centuries, but the desire abides to gather with like-minded people as intentional disciples of Christ', he said.

*Fr Herbert Kelly founded SSM in England in the early 1890s; however, it is Kelly the theologian and his interest in God's ways with humankind that seem to have endured.*

Australian Provincial Fr Christopher Myers said that until recently SSM had believed that the days of professions were numbered and perhaps even the future of religious life itself was in doubt.

'However, we have been heartened by this profession, the first for many years, and also by enquiries about the nature of profession in contemporary life.

'The legacy of Fr Kelly's thinking, set out in his book *The Gospel of God*, still has the power to teach and lead us into an encounter with

"the living God" among people who are grappling with the "riddle of life" in our time', says Christopher.

*Over the course of its history, SSM has been responsible for training some 3500 people for the priesthood, serving in Korea, Africa, England, Australia and Japan.*

Catherine Pennington says she has found SSM to be made up of people who live authentically in a religious Christian context different from any she has known previously.

'SSM's energy around theology is really strong, along with its commitment to an openness in and confidence about the future in line with the principles Fr Kelly has given the society', she says.

Catherine is associate vicar of Wymondham Abbey in the Diocese of Norwich, England.

Fr Herbert Kelly founded SSM in England in the early 1890s to train young men from working-class families for the priesthood.

SSM-trained priests have served in Australia since 1912, initially in far-north Queensland. The theological college of St Michael's House, established in the Adelaide Hills in 1947, was destroyed in the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983. Since that time, SSM's primary presence in Australia has been in South Australia at St John's and pockets of the Society are also in Ballarat.

Over the course of its history, SSM has been responsible for training some 3500 people for the priesthood, who have served in Korea, Africa, England, Australia and Japan.

# PROFESSION: THE ORDINARY EVERYDAY MIND-BLOWING STUFF OF GOD

Catherine Pennington

Profession is very ordinary—you can find it everywhere, in families, in churches, in young lovers, in schools and hospitals. An intimate interpersonal bonding within a shared and emerging culture (or society) of 'my life' or 'our life'. Religious profession is not more exotic but more ordinary, more grounded in the 'beingness' of God's society. It is not joining a gang of pious people living in a closed bordered and patrolled society, but rather a society of people finding themselves together in the freedom of God. There is quite a difference; one is constricting religious topiary; the other is verdant growth.

*Kelly said in many places that he was interested in God not religion and in theology not the academy.*

The professed life expands the sense of the individual 'I' into a way of being as incorporating and transcending the accidents of personality or history.

We each have many vocations in life; family of course, brothers and sisters, parents and nieces and nephews, work and church and community and for me my children are the greatest vocation. Religious profession, to be authentic, includes our other loving professions together with the best self-examination we can endure. It is not a process of 'leaving behind', but a mindful integration of all that 'I am' woven into the fabric of the SSM charism and community. In much of life this sort of blending is done unconsciously, in formal religious profession that blending is slow, conscious and deliberate.

Kelly's original motivation for SSM is sometimes expressed as a desire to produce priests to serve the church: I understand it very differently. Kelly saw God's glory as catholic, universal and real. He disliked elitism and loved ordinary people and so he found a way to respond to what he saw was God's calling to people who would not otherwise have the opportunity of a university education. He believed in people and his pigs as conveyers of God's grace and wisdom.

Kelly said in many places that he was interested in God not religion and in theology not the academy.

The Society carries these Kellyan impulses: open theological thinking with an authentic and unpretentious,



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wholehearted embrace of life and God. A charism of intellectual freedom; of persons in community living with attention to God's economy and God's glory with a groundedness and a reverence for creation. SSM is a community of idiosyncratic expressions of that charism.

I have found my strongest connection with Kelly's deeply contemplative nature; in later life he wanted to start again as a novice. This idea is radical, profoundly anti-elitist and inspiring. For Kelly and for SSM, the theological cutting edge, the deepest wisdom, the holy life is to be found in the heart of beginners who with a naïve yearning and a boots-and-all impetuous response, throw themselves into the Gospel of God.

*Ad gloriam Dei in eius voluntate*  
To the Glory of God and Her Will

## SPEAKING UP

*Alexis Fraser has been a friend of SSM for more than 20 years. Now a member she reflects on her relationship with SSM and the meaning of membership in her life today.*

In 1997 I was a senior crown prosecutor in Alice Springs and transferred to the Darwin office. There had been three SSM-trained rectors in Alice Springs and two of the current brothers [Roderick and Robert] had visited often. Being a native Queenslander, I had never before encountered SSM or its style of theology and churchmanship. It sang to my soul.

As a single woman with no children, I was in search of a community of faith to support me sufficiently in the difficult task of prosecuting the constant diet of rape and murder that was the lot of the Northern Territory. Father Roderick suggested I apply to SSM, which I did after much soul searching, and thus began an interesting journey of discovery for SSM and me.

It became obvious that the brothers were very divided as to whether they could continue as before, close, or seek a new manifestation, which included women members. The vote for my candidacy was due in January 2002; however, on the eve of the Chapter I fell ill and was unable to attend, telling Christopher Myers I was happy to leave the result of the vote up to the Holy Spirit. I was feeling very Julian of Norwich-ish.

The Chapter voted to profess Margaret Dewey who had, at that stage, been travelling with SSM for more than 30 years, but the vote on my acceptance was tied. This was a sign to me that divergence of our respective paths was indicated for a time—until SSM decided it was ready for a very new and different paradigm.

My work as a prosecutor continued, despite the onset of severe depression. Into the middle of this stepped William, my now husband and SSM companion. I had met William and his first wife Irene many years before in Alice Springs when William was engineer in charge of Pine Gap. The three of us enjoyed a rich friendship until they returned to the United States, where William was Irene's carer for the last two years of her life. After her death William came for a holiday to Australia and proposed within a month and we have been together since September 2002.

I thought the 2002 Chapter was the end of my SSM dreams, but in a very roundabout journey and with enormous thanks I gave my promise to Christopher in November at St John's and was made a member.

Since William and I became a couple and after I left the law, I struggled to find a manifestation of the Body of Christ that suited us. While devoted to our local Parish, we were in search of a community of faith that operated outside the standard diocesan model.

During my years outside SSM, William and I advanced our friendship with David, Gregory and especially Margaret,



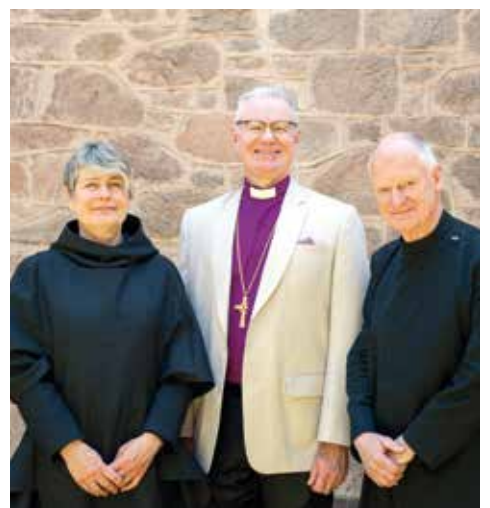
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who visited us in Darwin and later in Canberra and we relished our time with her. It was like taking a theology degree without the pain of assignments. Together with Margaret—and Herbert Kelly—we travelled far and felt we knew much about Kelly's ideas and we increasingly realised how prescient he was. I like to think of him as the Gaudi of Theology, a man far ahead of his time.

We feel in many ways as if we have come home and one of my great regrets is that Margaret could not maintain her grasp on the current world long enough to witness the full circle SSM and I have come.

I am starting work on a biography of Margaret's extraordinary life in part to thank her for all she taught and showed us, preparing us as St Michael's House or Kelham would have done for a life with SSM.

The next adventure is . . .



## A MOMENT CHRISTOPHER MYERS

Our final *Missio* for 2015 is a bumper edition, in a year that marks no small change in the life of SSM in Australia.



This is quite a moment, as you see from the photographs and the responses from those who have recently thrown in their lot with us as members and others who have drawn alongside.

As Father Kelly would say, 'What is God doing in all this?' I don't presume to know, but reading the signs of the times the outlook seems positive.

I rejoice in anticipation of the anniversary of the birth of the Christ child and all that it will bring.

## Prayers

For Iris in her steady recovery from major surgery

For Colin who is still on the road to recovery

For +John, David, Dunstan and Margaret in their end-of-life journeys

**May the holy angels surround them all.**

## Happenings

St John's Feast of Music

7-9 February 2016

Darwin Chapter Meeting

18-22 July 2016

## LIKE MINDS WELCOME COMPANIONS

Russell Starke is a St John's parishioner welcomed as a companion (see cover story). He said he expected a small group. 'I was surprised at the significance and size of the event, and such a lot of people of a similar attitude can only be a healthy and good thing for SSM', he says.

Along with Russell Starke, the following were accepted as companions:

Sara Bleby

Revd Keith Brice

Michael Cant

William Dahlberg

Marie Danvers

Wendy Farrell

Joan Gilbert

Revd John Gilbert

Simon Henry

Revd David Thornton-Wakeford

Prudence Walker

Anthony Williamson

*In absentia*

Hannah Bleby Orford

Matthew Bleby

Nicola Hardie-Beveridge

David Iveson

Peter Patterson

David Robinson.



## TO THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE DOING OF GOD'S WILL

The Society of the Sacred Mission is an Anglican religious community that unites the devotion of ordinary people, using it in the service of the church. By making a donation or bequest to the Society, you will be acknowledging the work of members who share a common life of prayer and fellowship in a variety of educational, pastoral and community activities in England, Australia, Japan and Southern Africa.

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## Form of Bequest

I give and bequeath to the Society of the Sacred Mission the sum of \$..... for the general purposes of the work of the province, and I direct that such bequest shall be free of all duties, and I declare that the receipt of the society's provincial officer for the time being shall be sufficient discharge for the same.

