

A Day in the Life – Rural Ministry

Description of Sr Lyn's various activities in Cloncurry Ministry

I might begin with today, 5 October 2020, in Cloncurry, “the friendly heart of the great North West” of Queensland. Where is Cloncurry? I hear you ask – 120 kilometres east of Mount Isa. Of course, the day's activities depend on which day of the week, which month and which Season of the year one is describing... and it's mulberry time here – and a public holiday! So this morning, after feeding the school chooks, also the Corelas, with Bakery leftovers, and watering the garden, I delighted in thrusting my face into and among the lovely cool, new green leaves of my numerous mulberry bushes, searching out the sweet fruit! Friends make jam, tarts etc – a joy in this drought-stricken area, with Spring temperatures already up to 40°C.

As in many rural ministries, I am the sole Sister remaining, as I was also in Mount Isa while still teaching secondary. In these cases, especially where there is no resident priest, the Sister is very busy doing many different works (not even including housework!). Hence, here I am Parish secretary, treasurer, sacristan, musician, Liturgy planner, visitor of the sick and elderly and taking Communion where needed etc, etc.

I also teach keyboard and guitar, but thankfully most of my pupils over the years, have seen the light and moved on – but five youngsters persist – so at 8:05am Monday – Friday, I teach music.

On a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday mornings, I head for our Vinnies op. shop – the only op. shop in this town of about 3,000 people and in a large area east of Cloncurry.

Ten years ago, I attended a meeting in town, when the Vinnies shop was about to close, and came out as Manager (or Supervisor the technical term!) A learning experience indeed! The work necessary to make the shop a “going concern” then, and currently, takes up many of my waking hours – evidenced by the bags and baskets of Vinnies stuff in this room in the convent, as I write! But I love the work, catching up with the locals and meeting visitors, hearing of problems, providing clothing help for needy children in Mount Isa, men's groups, and surrounding communities. We, the volunteers and I, delight in preparing and providing great items cheaply for the town and surrounds. P.S. Obviously lacking humility, I will boast that a few visitors have written in our Visitor's Book: “One of the best op. shops in Australia!”

The convent is adjacent to St. Joseph's Primary and Secondary School, Prep – Year 9, as our Sisters opened and ran the Primary School from 1910 till recently, when lay Principals took over. Indeed, the school can boast that it was the last one founded by Mary MacKillop just before she died. Sr Cecilia, one of Mary's nurses, was one of Cloncurry's founding Community of Josephites.

I am often asked by the teachers here, to speak to their class on various topics e.g. Mary MacKillop, Parish life etc – and rocks (I am a retired science teacher, and love rocks!)

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Afternoons and evenings? I love the garden and plants, so might pot plants for the few shade areas here and succulents for the long, very hot and sunny areas. Thankfully, and thanks to Artesian Bore water, there is lush green grass, and trees, on this Parish block, including the school oval – which used to be a bare dustbowl. This is an oasis in this brown, drought-stricken area, providing a calming and meditative influence on the mind and soul.

After a usually late dinner, I might sit at this work table, do Parish banking, pay bills, write letters/cards, or sort Vinnies stuff, cut rags, or iron while watching “the idiot-box!”

In conclusion, in my nearly eighteen years of ministry here, many days have been unpredictably different – crises, floods, tragedies, stresses, joys – but most days, I guess, predictable – regarding things to do, places to go, people to see. But all days I find interesting and rewarding as a humble Sister of Saint Joseph in rural Queensland.

Sr Lynette Freestone