

PAPER IV

THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE IN QUEENSLAND

To the Greater Glory of God

The inaugural meeting of the Catholic Daughters of Australia was held on 10 December 1927. The location was the Civic Buildings, Queen Street, Brisbane (opposite the GPO). The rooms officially opened on 26 January 1928 when His Grace, Archbishop James Duhig, named the Association, the Catholic Daughters of Australia. The members of the Ladies Committee of the Seamen's Catholic Club had been asked by His Grace, Archbishop Duhig, to undertake the formation of the Association to provide a charitable organisation, club and rest room for the women of Brisbane, with the intention that the idea should extend itself to other centres in Queensland.

On 10 September a committee was formed to carry out the Archbishop's request and the Archbishop generously paid for the rental of the club rooms from 1 September 1927 to 31 December 1927.

The first President was Mrs P.K. Copley, Hon. Secretary Miss B. Pottinger, Treasurer Miss K. Johnston.

The aims and objects of the Association were:

(a) To provide for the spiritual, mental, physical and social welfare, by whatever means deemed advisable, of women and children, and to hold:

- (1) An annual weekend retreat
- (2) Annual Communion

(b) To provide in the city a rest room for women and girls.

- (c) To meet female Catholic immigrants and whenever possible secure employment for them and to provide hostels for female immigrants.
- (d) To visit hospitals and police courts.
- (e) To assist His Grace the Archbishop of Brisbane
 - (1) With the Cathedral Building Fund
 - (2) To provide a bursary for priests.
- (f) To provide an annual treat for the poor children of Brisbane before Christmas, the assistance of the local suburban Conference of St Vincent de Paul to be obtained in the furtherance of this object.
- (g) To co-operate with the St Vincent de Paul Society whenever assistance was requested.
- (h) To assist the said particular council and its special works such as the Seamen's Club and Old Wares Depot.
- (i) To do any necessary sewing that was required by St Vincent de Paul Society.
- (j) To promote or assist in any social gathering intending to further any of the above works.
- (k) To undertake any other work that the Committee may have deemed necessary to further the above objects or other such objects as the Committee may, from time to time, decide to undertake.
- (l) To conduct a cafe.

Records show that members immediately set about fulfilling the aims and objects of the Association. They undertook the furnishing of the rooms, using their own means but as their efforts became known, they received donations from business houses and friends.

The First Annual Report, dated 31 December 1928, revealed how every member had worked untiringly in the rooms, making curtains, painting furniture, etc. These were depression years and as many people were in need a sewing and distribution committee was formed. Classes were formed in dressmaking, millinery, arts and crafts,

cabinet making, physical culture, literary and debating, drama, tennis and swimming. The swimming classes, under the supervision of Mr C. Olsen, held a weekly swim at the Booroodabin Baths.

The First Annual Communion Mass was held at St Stephen's Cathedral. 200 members attended - a Communion Breakfast followed in the rooms. The Patron, His Grace, Archbishop Duhig, and Monsignor Curran of the Irish College, Rome, Rev. Fathers Bolton and Carroll were present.

At the close of the first year there were 506 members. Membership fee was 10/6 per year and 5/- for every additional member of the family. Life membership was five guineas.

Hospital visitation had commenced; clothing, where needed, was supplied; letters were written and posted for patients; magazines, etc. were supplied and to this day hospitals, aged and convalescent homes are visited by members.

The sewing and distribution committee set up machines in the rooms and many new garments were made - good used clothing was laundered and pressed and distributed by the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Records show that during 1932, 5453 garments were distributed; 1267 families received assistance. Some of the needs were for blankets, quilts, cot quilts, prams, even a go-cart! The unemployment brought heavy demands - 48 layettes were provided for wives of relief workers. One example of the generosity of donors was: a bale of wool (donated by Mrs McCormack, Merino Downs) was woven into serge and flannel by the Ipswich Woollen Co. Woulffe and Sons cut out boys' trousers (4 to 13 years). Social Services staff, South Brisbane, made up the trousers for Catholic Daughters of Australia members to distribute. CDA supplied material to Social Services and thus provided work for unemployed girls.

By 1930 branches were established at Gayndah, Manly, Cairns and Chillagoe and the following year a branch opened at Biggenden.

By 1934 branches were opened at Atherton, Innisfail, Mareeba and Tully. In 1939 fifteen branches were established. CDA kept growing and by 1958 with the consent and approbation of His Grace, Archbishop Duhig, and with the co-operation of the Bishops of all dioceses of Queensland, Archdiocesan and Diocesan Councils, consisting of representatives from all branches, were formed to control the affairs of the Association. In addition a State Council, consisting of President, Secretary, Treasurer and two Delegates from each Diocese was established.

As my research has been on the history of CDA/CWL in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, I have endeavoured to give some details of the other Dioceses from Annual Reports. I have found members from all Dioceses do parish work, support St Vincent de Paul, visit hospitals, aged homes and sick and bereaved in their homes and support the missions.

Townsville Diocesan members in the 1950s assisted the displaced and destitute in Hong Kong. Cairns Diocesan members worked with the Comforts Fund during the war years and met and sheltered evacuees. They fed and entertained members of the services. Rockhampton members, too, were ever ready with sewing and knitting and have been involved in caring for evacuees, servicemen and women. Toowoomba Diocese formed after the war, but their works of charity, the care of the sick and aged and parish work, along with assistance to St Vincent de Paul is recorded.

In 1974 at a Conference held in Toowoomba, members voted to change the name "Catholic Daughters of Australia" to "Catholic Women's League", thus bringing Queensland into line with the other States.

In 1976 the Archdiocesan President and the four Diocesan Presidents were granted the status of State Vice-Presidents (ex-officio).

In 1929 the first Catholic CDA Company of Girl Guides formed - this was the first Catholic Company in Queensland. Miss McGrath, a member of CDA, was the Captain. The guides attended the procession at Stuartholme in honour of Christ the King and also the Corpus Christi procession at Nudgee. They joined CDA at Masses in St Stephen's Cathedral and as part of CDA assisted by caring for the children who were given holidays. They also worked at the Royal National Refreshment rooms at the Exhibition grounds -they used the rest room at the CDA rooms for meetings and social functions.

The first holiday home for sick and poor children was established at Manly. Members assisted a live-in housekeeper in caring for the children on a roster system. The Emigration Society approached CDA re training for farm boys (15 years to 18 years). CDA set about contacting boys through the New Settlers League and endeavoured to keep in touch with the boys when they were placed in employment on the farms, and in some cases, kept contact with the parents in the U.K.

In 1930 the Association assisted with the Silver Jubilee celebrations of their Patron, His Grace, Archbishop Duhig.

The cafe and rest room which opened in 1928 was now a successful venture.

A cook had been employed in the cafe - morning and afternoon teas were a specialty - catering was available for weddings and club reunions. In the Annual Report mention was made that the meals were cheaper in the rooms than anywhere in town.

A great number of the members were young, single women, so a Younger Set was formed. They assisted at the Exhibition Stall and took the Deaf Society members on picnics and outings. The Younger Set held dances in the rooms to entertain the seamen and the revenue went to the Seamen's Club.

The Deaf Society was formed by the CDA. Mrs Boland, President, was convenor for many years. Each year on Ephpheta Sunday a Mass for the deaf was held at St Stephen's Cathedral. Religious instruction was given by sign language - the members provided a luncheon in the rooms following the Mass and entertained the deaf. The Deaf Society marched with the Association at Corpus Christi and for many years the Association served afternoon tea to the hierarchy following the march. Even in 1992 the deaf are supported by CWL - Banyo Parish has a Mass for the deaf every month - CWL members from Banyo are involved in this celebration.

His Grace placed "Prague House", Spring Hill, at the disposal of the Association for the purpose of teaching growing girls domestic science. The Exhibition Stall came into being and this continued until the war when the military were billeted at the grounds. As this was a great means of raising funds the return to the stall in 1946 was welcomed but this proved to be a period of great hardship for the members due to food shortages, rationing, transport and labour. However they struggled on as funds were low and the demands of the poor had to be thought of and however hard it was to manage the stall, their efforts would help feed and clothe the needy.

During 1930-32 families were assisted, 1891 garments were distributed (1,000 of these were new garments). Children were clothed for school -clothes were sent to the country. Meals were provided - employment was found for girls. At this period there was an Old Wares Depot in Brisbane and assistance was given to the Depot with clothing and material.

In 1931 a Chaplain was appointed (Rev. Father Owen Steele, St Sebastian's, Yeronga). Previously the Administrator from the Cathedral had been chaplain.

Manly was established as a parish this year and the seaside house was required as a presbytery, so CDA acquired a house at Sandgate and through members and friends, six weeks' rent was paid. A cook was engaged, the committee caring in turn for the children. Black and White buses conveyed these children to and from the holiday house free of charge and continued this service each year until war broke out.

A hostel for unemployed girls (the house was donated by Miss E. Driscoll) proved to be too big a drain on the CDA's limited resources and when funds were depleted the hostel closed.

The 1932 records show members as delegates to the New Settlers League, National Council of Women, Travellers Aid, Mothercraft Association. Street collections were a means of raising money to assist the Ambulance. Members also assisted the Mater Public Hospital's Appeal and Nazareth House Appeal.

In 1933 the Interstate Catholic Women's Conference was held in Brisbane. During the Conference a Garden Party was held at Wynberg. His Grace welcomed Lady Wilson (wife of the Governor) and Dame Barlow (southern delegate). The speeches of welcome were broadcast by 4BC.

Retreats were held at Stuartholme and Loreto Convents. The bridge circle came into being and is still a means of raising funds and giving pleasure to women today.

Throughout the 1930s branches distributed clothing and magazines to many pitiful hospital inmates. A monthly balance sheet and list of garments was forwarded to the Social Service League to avoid over-lapping. It is recorded money received from Finney Isles Christmas Cheer enabled CDA to distribute 100 joints of meat, some going to St Vincent de Paul's hostel. Each week members forwarded 60 lbs of tripe to the hostel. 4BC gave 100 cards valued at 5/6 each for materials, etc. for the needy. This helped Nazareth House and Magdalen Home with their needs for the poor.

In 1956 a fund was established to furnish one four-bed ward at Mt Olivet Hospital, conducted by the Sisters of Charity. This undertaking was completed in 1959 when a plaque was erected in the ward, reading: "Donated and maintained by the CDA". Some branch members still visit the hospital and in earlier years helped feed the patients and manned the trolley service.

Members from some branches visit the Red Cross rooms at Princess Alexandra Hospital and Royal Brisbane Hospital. Visitation at Calvary Hospital, Cairns, was carried out by the Cairns Diocese.

Rockhampton Diocese members did visitation, etc. to Bethany Hospital. All Dioceses visited the Public Hospitals, supported Red Cross, Blind, Deaf and Dumb Welfare Associations. Migrants were visited in hospitals; migrant classes, meetings and naturalisation ceremonies. Migrants were assisted with finding housing and em-

ployment. Migrants were visited at Wacol.

A Public Welcome to the Brown Sisters (Our Lady's Nurses) was held in the rooms. CDA raised funds for the Sisters in their work for the poor. Layettees, etc. were made available to the Sisters for the needy, likewise the St Vincent de Paul.

In 1958 Mrs S. L. Quinn received the Papal Cross. This honour was conferred by His Holiness, the late Pope Pius XII.

In 1967 Miss M. Walsh (Toowoomba) represented Mrs Quinn at the Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in Rome.

Members represented on the Old People's Welfare Council assisted the Senior Citizen's Club organised by the Institute of Social Services in the care of invalid or semi-invalid citizens. Headquarters of the Queensland Social Services League and staff co-operated with the CDA and made donations of blankets for the Winter Appeal and Christmas Cheer. On request for nightgowns for patients in Royal Brisbane Hospital, Social Services and CDA met the needs.

An Annual Communion Breakfast followed a Mass at St Stephen's Cathedral. Branches today still hold an Annual Mass and in most cases a luncheon or morning tea follows. The Mass in later years was held for deceased members.

The war years saw Father Steele enlisting and Rev. Father Skehan appointed as Chaplain. Funds were raised by the cafe catering committee, the Bridge Circle, Morning Teas and President's at Homes, etc. Refugees from the Baltic States were met and assisted. Evacuees from Hong Kong and Shanghai were helped. A Catholic Patriotic and Armed Welfare organisation was formed and CDA held a fete at Wynberg to raise funds for this organisation. Branches throughout the State worked for the Comforts Fund. (In Brisbane sewing was done in the rooms). Members knitted and made fruit cakes to add to food parcels to send to the forces. Servicemen and servicewomen were welcomed in the rooms and visited in hospital; members attending to their needs.

The holiday scheme for the sick and poor children ceased and there was always the dream of building a home for women and children. In 1950 £850 were paid for land at Scarborough. The building fund for the project was helped by the *Courier Mail* "Find the Ball" competition, the Leutenegger Estate (Mrs Leutenegger was Patroness), the Estate of M. W. Davis, a bequest from the William Angliss (Qld Charitable Fund) of £1,000.

In 1955 through the Hon. the Premier, Mr V. Gair and the Coronation Gift Fund Committee a cheque for £5,012/19/0 was received. This money was to be used to benefit women and children.

In 1959 the Blessing and Laying of the Foundation Stone took place. Madonna House opened in 1962 after many disappointments - the inability to obtain an order of nuns, the failure of the government to grant financial assistance. For some time the home operated through the services of a Matron. It was opened in October and a few cases were admitted during the Christmas holidays in 1962. As time went by, owing to the expenses and labour situation, Madonna House was not utilised as intended. During 1963 several children and mothers were in residence with a house-keeper in attendance. These were non-paying but very needy cases. The expenses were heavy and it was decided to reduce the capital debt before incurring further liabilities. In the meantime the Spiritual Director of the YCW requested to use the house on some weekends for Leadership Courses. The Executive decided that was a worthy cause and would held to defray expenses, rates, electricity, etc.

In 1964 the Sisters of St Joseph took over the management of Madonna House. The Sisters were welcomed by 250 members and friends. Also present were His Grace, Archbishop O'Donnell, Rt Rev. Monsignor Frawley, Rt Rev. Mgr. C. Roberts and several other clergy. From the beginning the branches supported Madonna House with funds and otherwise.

The year 1965 saw the home under the Sisters working as it was intended. For various periods children came from as far west as Charleville and Blackall. Mothers were also cared for. The two Sisters in charge were Sisters Albeus and Wolstan. Mrs Strachan, Convenor (Scarborough Branch President) and her husband worked unceasingly for the home and it was decided to form a sub-committee. Mesdames Quinn, Daley, Russell and Earner were appointed. Mrs Strachan (ex officio) was Convenor. The fees for mothers were \$10 per week, \$2 for each child, and with rising costs, it was decided to give Mother Albeus a new set of rules. The home had been built for convalescent mothers and children and was not intended for deserted wives and such. Lifeline had sent women and children to the home, without payment, and the non-paying residents were a drain on the resources. Lifeline and other organisations were informed that sending residents without payment was impossible.

In 1971 the Sisters were not happy with the state of affairs, their shortage of nuns, etc. and a meeting with the members was called. Following this a letter was received from the Superior General of the Sisters of St Joseph, Sydney, advising that the order could no longer staff Madonna House - so Madonna House closed. After so much hard work and trouble this caused great distress. The house was to be sold. A

meeting in 1972 was attended by Rt Rev. Monsignor Frawley who offered to purchase it with the view of making it, on a charity basis, a home for retired priests. He offered \$20,000 for the land and \$30,000 for the building, payment to be \$25,000 on signing the contract and \$25,000 at the end of June. Father Lee addressed the meeting. He felt if sold to Monsignor Frawley it would continue to be a charity. Monsignor Frawley offered to pay all legal costs, stamp duty, etc. The furniture and statues were not required by him. His Grace, Archbishop O'Donnell, when approached, sympathised with the members.

When the St Vincent de Paul Society set up shops the members in some areas worked in them. Branches continue to assist the Society with donations, layettes, clothing, etc.

Missions: For years branches have contributed to a fund for the education of a New Guinean in Aitape for the Priesthood. Missions in Korea and India have been supported also. At present a fund has been established to support the continuing education of the clergy in the Archdiocese. Branches also give to a fund to provide books for the library in Banyo Seminary.

The Civic Building was sold in 1946 and CDA moved to rooms in Elizabeth Street and in 1976 CWL moved to the Catholic Centre, 143 Edward Street.

Time does not permit me to tell you of the conferences held and attended at Diocesan, State and National levels.

A member, Miss Maureen Gilmartin (a previous Sate President) is the CWL representative for the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) and is the Asian/Pacific representative on the Board. In 1987 Maureen was awarded a Papal Medal and in 1988 the Medal of Australia (A.M.) for her work with the Catholic Women's League. Maureen also holds a Bachelor of Science degree.

This year (1992) eleven Australians attended the WUCWO assembly in Mexico. There were 48 countries represented and membership is over 30 million.

The State Executive is presently situated in the Rockhampton. In recent history CWL members have been as much to the fore in community work as their forebears. For instance in the north of the State in times of national disasters they have:

- * prepared meals for travellers held up by floods;
- * taken mothers and babies into their homes and have prepared meals for

- them and laundered their clothes;
- * met refugees from Cyclone Tracey and fed them;
 - * taken boarders from the boys' colleges into their homes for holidays when they couldn't go home (this applies mainly to Thursday Islanders and New Guineans);
 - * supported their fellow townspeople when in need.

With the shortage of priests and the necessity of lay people to participate in Church Liturgy, CWL are well represented in parish activities. In one parish, in the absence of a priest, they lead the liturgies on the weekends and conduct Eucharistic Services on weekdays. In one country parish where there is no priest CWL is recognised as the official voice of the Church in the town. In fact members are represented in all aspects of parish life such as: Special Ministers, Catechists, Choir members, the RCIA programme, St Vincent de Paul work and church cleaning. In the wider community the members may be found helping with Meals on Wheels, Respite Care Centres, Red Cross, visiting the sick in hospital and at home and Care and Concern.

Although the cafe closed down when the Civic Building was sold in 1946 the Association took over the Coffee Shop in the Catholic Centre in 1976.

Through Bridge Parties, Cent Auctions, Street Stalls, etc. donations were made to worthy causes. Through a meeting held in July 1977 regarding a project, Mrs O'Reilly, President, reported having an interview with Bishop Gerry as to a possible project for CWL and thereupon introduced Mr D. Flynn (Secretary of the Archdiocese) and Sister Magdalen Mary who were present at the meeting and a scheme was discussed. The CWL had the money from the sale of Madonna House invested. Mr Flynn reported that under the Aged Person' Hostels Act, approximately \$270,000 had been allocated to the Archdiocese by the Government and it was proposed with the finance to erect seventeen hostel units for aged persons at Mitchelton. The suggestion was that CWL buy 1 1/2 acres of land at a price of \$20,000 (approx.) with another \$20,000 for landscaping same. This was to be considered by the branches. At a meeting (with Sister Magdalen Mary present) in 1978 the discussion of a nursing home being purchased took place. Points made by Sister to queries were: Government funding previously allocated for Mitchelton Hostels was still available; there was a large house in nursing home grounds which could be demolished and hostels erected later. Archdiocesan authorities were well aware of the lack of nursing homes and hostels for the aged in comparison with other denominations (Canossa Hospital was always full, having to meet the needs of Villa Maria and other urgent cases. Mary Crest for mobile people had a thirty bed nursing home) who had not had calls on them for educational facilities such as Catholics with 114 schools within the Archdiocese.

In May 1978 CWL, in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Brisbane, took possession of "Bonney Lodge", Clayfield, and the nursing home is now known as Madonna Villa. The CWL gave \$100,000 to the Trustees of the Corporation of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. The funds of \$75,000 held in trust from Madonna House were committed to this project. The Council undertook to provide an extra \$25,000 over ten years. A further \$100,000 from the estate of Dr Joseph Arratta enabled the Church, with the grant from the Government, to meet the purchase price of the home - \$500,000. His Grace, Archbishop Rush and Father McHugh accompanied the Archdiocesan President, Mrs T. O'Reilly, for the official taking over of the home. The \$25,000 borrowed from the ADF was paid back in five years. It was proposed a CWL member would be on the Board of Management. Residents of Madonna Villa are visited regularly by the members. Fetes were held to raise money for the home's needs over the years and branches contributed generously in paying off the loan.

Donations are made to many worthwhile causes - to list a few in the past and present: Xavier Home, Nazareth Home, Freedom From Hunger, St Vincent de Paul, Brown Sisters, St Vincent's Hostel, Mt Olivet, Holy Spirit Hospital, Good Shepherd Convent, Legion of Mary Hostel, Cancer Appeal, Red Cross, Missions, Australian Catholic Relief, Right to Life, Pregnancy Help, Rosies, Damascus, Mamre and many others.

We live in an era of general moral lassitude but through our Social Issues Committees, which are set up in every Diocese, we make our voices heard in the decision-making arena so that we can countermand attacks on the family and morality. Letters are written on a personal basis to members of Parliament objecting to the easy availability of pornography and decriminalization of abortion, two areas under attack from secular society.

The State office in 1989 applied for and received some Government funding to conduct two Domestic Violence Forums followed by a full day's workshop for those involved in counselling from the whole Mackay region and extending to Bowen and Proserpine and to the hinterland coal towns.

At one time the State Social Issues Convenor undertook a project code-named Women's Health Task Force. A survey that was conducted highlighted concerns of western women which showed their main concerns were para-medical, emotional and physical trauma caused by isolation, unemployment and domestic violence; parent/childhood difficulties; being carers in an isolated situation; alcohol and drug abuse; and grief. This became a big issue and CWL joined forces with Family Care and presented their findings to the National Rural Health Conference recommending the employment of counsellors in conjunction with a nurse educator/social worker.

Mission in the Church is not complete unless we take part in something the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding CWL towards - this is union with other Christian Churches and CWL joins with other Christian organisations helping to break down the barriers of separation.

In a world of rapid change and unease and the obligation to bear fruit in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, CWL sees leadership and counsel by women in the Church as vital. CWL has endeavoured to encompass the new while retaining the heart and vision of the old - stretching beyond the traditional role of women.

So many wonderful women, many now in the presence of God the Son, Redeemer of mankind, faithful members of CDA/CWL, have received their eternal reward. Other still with us giving unselfishly of themselves have, I am sure, enriched their own lives. This address is only a summary of some of the work of the members throughout sixty-five years of existence.

The CWL now charts a new course in its endeavours to permeate as laity, the temporal order of the world in which we work and live. Yes, members still do all they can to make this a better world - loving and serving their fellow men and women - for their motto is "For the Honour and Glory of God".

Catholic Daughters of Australia
Catholic Women's League
Membership

1927 Archdiocese of Brisbane (Archbishop James Duhig)

1992 33 Branches - 1,000 members

1930 Cairns (Bishop Heavey)

1992 20 Branches - 400 members

1946 Rockhampton Diocese (Bishop A.J. Tynan)

1992 23 Branches - 500 members

1953 Townsville Diocese (Bishop A.E. Ryan)

1992 10 Branches - 300 members

1956 Toowoomba Diocese (Bishop W. Brennan)

1992 16 Branches - 234 members

Rita Daley