

Eulogy

Sr Norma Wood SM

On the day of her reception, 17th March 1947, Norma wrote in prayer: “This day that I have been longing for has now come. I aspired to wear Our Lady’s Blue and desired to give myself to You, the sweet Spouse of my soul. I know I am not worthy to wear Our Lady’s Habit but, O Jesus, since You have called me to the Religious life, will You not give me all the graces I need to be a worthy Marist, a true blue Marist, a good child of Your most Holy Mother?” We give thanks today that Norma’s prayer was answered. Called by gracious choice, she responded with the whole of her being and God did indeed give her all the graces needed to be a true blue Marist.

Norma came to know the Marist Sisters through her visits to Merrylands after her close friend, Patricia de Coek, entered the Novitiate there. Norma described Pat as a ‘real inspiration’ and said, “I couldn’t help noticing how serene and happy she was. There was an atmosphere of peace and prayer about the place. I began to feel that there were more important things than dancing and tennis and swimming etc.or was it that God and His love became more important to me than these other things? Somehow within my heart I knew He was the only One for me.” And so began what Norma described as her “Love Affair” with God.

For over 67 years Norma lived her Marist life in faithful love, doing all “for the great glory of God and the honour of Mary”. In her early years, known as Sr. Evangelist, she ministered in Primary Schools in Australia and New Zealand, later taking up the role of Provincial Bursar for Oceania. In this administrative role Norma gave assistance to bursars in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. She was so supportive and encouraging, initiating many of us into the complexities of accounting and bookkeeping, always with patience and ready humour. Norma was often appointed Local Superior or Local Bursar, serving the community with kindness and compassion, laughter and joy. Many stories are told of Norma delighting others with her great sense of fun, her comical acting, and ability to tell a good yarn. Norma loved engaging with people, and her gifts found ready expression in pastoral ministry, where her acceptance and understanding of others was so greatly appreciated. It was with much sadness that Norma set aside her pastoral work in 2004 when her health began to fail. She did not find it easy to move from active parish ministry in Laverton to a quieter life in Marian House. However, as with all her appointments, Norma accepted this move in a spirit of great faith.

Though blessed with a happy disposition, Norma’s life was not without challenges. These included such experiences as the isolation she faced in Te Huahua - a rather remote part of the Hokianga in the North of New Zealand - where Norma was appointed in 1966 as Principal of the little School of forty pupils. In her latter years she would recall these days, remembering with good humour the loneliness she faced at that time. Among other challenging experiences for Norma were the demands she encountered when undertaking the Clinical Pastoral Education Programme at Royal North Shore Hospital in 1985. This was far

from easy for her but Norma remained steadfast, completing the course which then enabled her to engage in a most valued ministry in Hospital Chaplaincy at Royal North Shore for a number of years.

Norma always met life's challenges head-on, with gutsy determination and undaunted commitment. As with her driving, it could be said that Norma put her foot to the floor and was off, letting nothing stand in her way as she lived her "Love Affair" with God. Even when needing to be cared for in Nursing facilities, it was hard to keep Norma contained. Until she was no longer able to walk, she would be on the look-out for opportunities to be out and about, slipping off when no-one was watching, surely believing that God's work was still calling for her attention.

Norma was a generous, warm and affectionate woman, who delighted in her family, her community and the people she encountered in ministry. She also had a special care for animals, and the Convent cats and dogs always knew they had found a friend in Norma. Norma loved life, and lived it to the full. In her last years of suffering she remained serene and peaceful, her smile showing gratitude and appreciation, while her blue eyes retained their twinkle. In one of the last letters she wrote a few years ago, Norma said: "God loves me and I will soon be going into His arms for good. He has been a wonderful support and I love Him dearly. I guess He knows that and I am only waiting for His call to go home to Him. Soon I will be in His arms forever, and I am looking forward to that." The time has come, Norma, and your "Love Affair" has culminated in the joy of eternity. You have been a true blue Marist - just like your close friend, Patricia de Coek, who has surely welcomed you into Heaven, having gone before you so recently. We will miss you greatly. Thank you for the inspiration you have been to us. May you rest in peace.

Julie Brand SM – 8th January 2016