

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION



Kerrie Wehbe

OLSH Staff Spirituality Day (22 November)

Twenty-two OLSH lay staff from the Provincial House, Kensington communities, St Joseph's and Hartzler Park gathered for their annual Staff Spirituality Day, a time to step away from work and respond more deeply to the call to be 'heart people' and partners-in-mission.

The day began with Mass in the chapel for those who could arrive early. Sister Philippa Murphy, Provincial Leader, then warmly welcomed everyone. The Hartzler Park staff, who had come from Bowral to Sydney by train, arrived in time for morning tea in the convent dining room, which was beautifully prepared by Irene and her staff from the Kensington communities, as was the wonderful lunch with the Sisters. All the staff introduced themselves and told the group how long they had worked with the Sisters: one for just six months, while several others had done so for over twenty-five years! The focus of the day was the OLSH Sisters' 150th Jubilee, and the presentations were centred on Fr Chevalier, Mother Marie Louise, the arrival and early beginnings of the OLSH Sisters in Australia, and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Participants also watched a video made last year for the OLSH General Chapter about the early days of the Australian Province. The final session, held in the chapel, was a reflection on the Visitation, with reflection questions and quiet time to open our hearts to the day's inspiration. The day finished with a short missioning ceremony and the praying of the Memorarae together.

Our thanks go to Sr Lorraine for organising the day and to the Sisters and staff of the Kensington communities for their kind hospitality.



Presentation on Jules Chevalier

The spirituality of the heart that Jules Chevalier came to practise came to him, not through study or learning, but through his personal and lived experience, which allowed his understanding of the love of God revealed in the heart, the essence, of Jesus to grow and which gave him a new direction in his life.

The strong and overwhelming encounter with God during a retreat before his ordination in 1851, which Jules described as a ‘conversion,’ completely changed him. He had been a rather serious seminarian, dedicated to his duty, stern and aloof with others, but inspired by a talk on Devotion to the Sacred Heart, his heart was changed. Those studying with him later said that they could tell something had happened to him; after the retreat, he was always, without exception, good-natured, smiling and gentle, and they referred to him as ‘a man completely renewed.’ This was the beginning of Jules living a spirituality of the heart. He wrote of this sudden conversion of heart: *This doctrine went straight to my heart; the more I went into it, the more attractive I found it.*

This gift of the Holy Spirit to the young Jules Chevalier, his special charism, which is shared with all in the Chevalier family, allowed him to see that it’s not enough for our religious response to God to be one of duty – it needs to become a generous response to love and a return of love. He saw God not as a harsh judge (as per much of the preaching of Jules’ time) but a God of love revealed in Jesus in the Gospels: Jesus who responded with a heart full of love, compassion and forgiveness for all those he came in contact with; Jesus who loved being in the world with others; Jesus who loved creation and spoke of birds, flowers, the wind and the waves in his stories about God’s care and concern for all people.

Jules Chevalier felt compelled to gather people around him, both consecrated religious and lay people, who would also encounter God in the same way: knowing that they are loved, being concerned for all people (especially the “little ones” in our society) and wanting others, everywhere, to know that God loves them.

He understood the close relationship between Jesus and Mary, to whom he gave the beautiful title Our Lady of the Sacred Heart: the mother and disciple who taught her Son and, at the same time, learned from him how to love, rejoice and suffer; the woman who can inspire us to be disciples who are ‘heart people’ too – who can lead us to the heart of her Son, that source of living water.

