



The Community of Saints Barnabas and Cecilia â?? who on earth are they?

By Sr Cheryl Wiseman

Have you, in your travels, encountered a person wearing a grey and dark blue outfit like the ones in the picture below and wondered who are they and what lifestyle and religious commitments have they made? In this article, I hope to address these questions.

My name is Cheryl Wiseman, and I am a professed, (vowed) Sister of the Community of Saints Barnabas and Cecilia, a modern-day community of nuns and monks in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Yes, the Anglican Church is one of several denominations that continue the monastic tradition in the Christian faith. In Australia alone there are about 11 communities of nuns and monks with each pursuing its own unique form of ministry, (which we call a charism).



***Front Row: Helen Goulden Sage, Rev Sr. Sandra Sears, Rev Sue Burgess (Chaplain), Sr Riccarda Favorita, Sr Cheryl Wiseman, Janet Wiseman.
Back Row: Rev Tim Sherwell, Bishop Jeremy James TSSF (Willochra Diocese; Visitor for CSBC) Sr Sue Nirta, Anthony Clayfield***

Some are traditional communities with its members living together in houses, abbeys, convents, and monasteries. Others, like mine are dispersed with its members living separately in their own homes. There are also solitary monks and nuns who live in their own homes but are not associated with a particular community.

The Community of Saints Barnabas and Cecilia, (CSBC for short) is the youngest of these groups having started in 1996 when our founding members, Sr Sandra Sears and Sr Jean Johnson were called by God and the Bishop of Willochra, David McCall into community for the purpose of providing a ministry teaching and encouraging religious music in the Willochra Diocese in South Australia.

At first the community was based at Jamestown in the Anglican Church rectory and then moved to the Peterborough Anglican Church rectory.

During this time CSBC was a traditional community with the two sisters living, praying, and working together, composing music and hymns (including the Southern Flinders Mass Setting) providing music lessons and workshops in schools and the wider community, establishing and running a choir and playing music at services around the Diocese.

Since its inception, the community had attracted many friends who were interested but were unable to join. This suggested to the sisters that perhaps God and circumstances needed them to become more accessible. After much prayer and discussion, they introduced some changes.

Firstly, CSBC would become a dispersed community. This meant that members could continue living in their own homes, adhering to a common prayer life and charism and meeting regularly for worship gatherings, and meetings including an annual retreat and renewal of vows service. They would also be required to carry out the charism in their local church and community and support the other members in doing the same.

The second change was to expand the charism beyond the musical area to include the other gifts community members may possess.

Thirdly CSBC re-emphasised that its membership included men and women, married and unmarried, from all Christian denominations and walks of life who felt called to this community and its values. Saying annual vows were confirmed in recognition of flexibility needed as members made their commitment to CSBC.

Finally, it was decided to adopt an optional habit, (uniform) which would serve as an outward symbol to themselves and to others of the commitment they had made to God.

In 2004 two big changes took place. CSBC, which had been classified as a community in formation was recognised by the Advisory Council for Anglican Religious Life in Australasia, (ACARLA) as a fully established community. As a result, we became a full member of ACARLA with the right to attend and vote at the ACARLA conference on matters pertaining to religious life in the Anglican Church.

Since then, 13 Sisters and Brothers have joined CSBC and enriched us with their presence. Some have since left the community while others have gone to God, but all are loved, remembered, and prayed for.

In 2011 a large house in Gladstone, SA came on the market. Its floor plan made it perfect for use as a community house. So, it was purchased by a community member and named NABAS House in reference to our namesake Bar- Nabas, meaning encouragement. Nabas House remained our community house up until the end of 2023.

Then 2019 came along COVID.

Apart from our common prayer life and supporting each other, our respective communities and families, we, like everyone else in the world, had to shut up shop for a while due to covid restrictions meaning face to face contact and interaction were not possible.

Since then we have been emerging from our shell

So, as a religious community, where are we now?

There are now 8 members living separately in Gladstone, Gawler, Adelaide and McClaren Vale. There are also 14 Friends who pray for us and join us for some activities. Once again, we are having regular gatherings and our yearly retreat and renewal of vows. Unfortunately, we no longer have a Community House which had to be sold.

We each have our own unique abilities and gifts. Our creative ones include music, poetry, photography, art, writing and needlework. We also have, in our number, those with other gifts and skills including cooking, hospitality, administration, organisation, health, spiritual and pastoral care.

From a ministry point of view, we have not at this moment undertaken any projects as a group. Individually we are working and witnessing in our own churches and local communities while supporting and encouraging those around us.

Where are we going?

Our intention is to re-invigorate our group activities. While the scope and nature of these activities are under active discussion, we do know that, with members living in several Diocese in SA, we will strive to bring our ministry wherever possible.

Further to this we intend to re-establish and strengthen ties with the other religious communities in SA, to support and help each other in our respective ministries and lives and to have a positive influence on our wider communities.

Should our news spark any further interest in our Community, please feel free to contact me,

Sr Cheryl at lewise311@hotmail.com or Sr Sue at suenirta@iprimus.com.au

Date Created

August 9, 2024