



Marist Laity Australia's

Maria Baden

Sharing at the Fourvière celebration,
Holy Name of Mary church
Hunters Hill, NSW,

Jul 23, 2017

The visitation is such a beautiful story. I find it so ALIVE and visceral. Mary *hurries*, Elizabeth *cries out loudly*, babies *leap* and all seems *blessed!!*

Today, face to face visits are often replaced with technology. *Visit us on Facebook. Visit our website.* Can you imagine if Mary had sent an email or a text message to Elizabeth instead of actually going to the Judean hills to Elizabeth's house? No, the physical encounter with the other can never be replaced.

We had a visit last week down at Kiama.

I belong to a little group called Kiama Welcomes

Refugees. Some are Catholic, some UC, Anglicans, a Baha'i couple, a Quaker and several others not affiliated with any religious group.

Last week we hosted 50 refugees from Granville. After many months of negotiation with Miriam, the woman who runs the organisation, we finally settled on a date for their visit.

Originally, we wanted to offer a few days of respite for them in our homes because these refugees are living in limbo. They are on bridging visas or TPVs. A cloud hangs over them as they await news from the Australian government – will they be sent back to their countries or will they be allowed to settle in Australia, a land “with boundless plains to share”?

But Miriam was hesitant: legal requirements; police checks on us; the psychological vulnerability of these people who have seen and heard what most of us here never have! We would have to be in-serviced by case workers to prepare us with the stories and situations of these refugees.

So an interim plan was adopted. They would all come down on a coach and we would give them lunch, a walk along the beach and of course, the famous Kiama Blowhole!! It's a beautiful place, the South Coast. Nature is evident wherever you look. This is its power – a power to bring beauty, awe, peace and joy to those in need.

Why am I telling you this story? Because it has Marist connections!

So, our little KWR group inherited a heap of mattresses and furniture from a local motel which was closing down and shortly after that, a restaurant closed down and gave us all their tables, chairs, cutlery crockery etc. Luckily, we were able to store all this in an unused warehouse.

But, we don't have refugees in Kiama! It's still very Anglo!

And then, Jim Cartey SM popped into my head!

He began the **House of Welcome** many years ago, helped by Marist Sisters, Gail Reneker, Grace Ellul and Therese Campbell. So I rang ... *Yes we need mattresses. Yes, we need tables and chairs.* And here I was, delivering stuff to a house at Hector St. Sefton, which I had visited several times when the Marist Sisters lived there. And now, thanks to the sisters generosity, refugee families have a roof over their heads!

Mary goes to Elizabeth's house; The House of Welcome; we are wanting refugees to stay in our homes for respite; the Sisters' house at Hector Street has become a home for refugees.

It seems to me that the house, the home, the domestic is the place where help and support and love of the other are most naturally found.

Mary goes where and when she is needed – to the house of Elizabeth who is in her 6th month. And it is in this house where Elizabeth's prophetic utterance, a LOUD utterance, is cried: *Blessed are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb...and blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord*".

And likewise, Mary's prophetic utterance in the Magnificat!

The place of prophecy, in the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, seems to be the beginning of a series of events that happen in Luke's Gospel and in the life of the early church, the domestic church, the church in people's homes. Prophecy, the proclamation of the Word, ***finds its matrix in the home***. Both the home at Nazareth and the early church, the home churches, are focal points of Marist spirituality.

You will find cards on your seats of an unusual depiction of the Visitation by Michael Galovic, an iconographer, who has strong Marist connections. I recently attended a conference at ACU Strathfield where Michael's latest artwork

was on display and saw an updated version of this very painting. The only difference was that the babies stood out in gold relief!!

But I rather like this one. It's unusual. I'd invite you to have a good look at this Visitation scene. *(give a few moments for people to gaze at the painting)* The faces of Mary and Elizabeth show a depth of sorrow. It's as though they are looking deeply into each other's eyes and seeing what awaits their as yet, unborn sons.

Sorrow and suffering are present even in our most joyful moments just like hope and joy must exist even in our darkest times.

Back to our visitors last week!

It was truly wonderful!

It was LOUD, chaotic, with lots of little kids LEAPING AROUND!! There was too much food.

And then, the walk along the beach – the brilliant blue of the Pacific ocean, the soft blue of the sky, the lighthouse and the blowhole.

In the joy and excitement of the visit, I think we all felt a sadness as the bus took off back to Granville. Yes, just for one day, we were all "lifted up" and "filled with good things", but what will the future be for these men, women and children refugees?

"Mary, Bearer of Hope to the world, pray with us".