

Sisters open the doors for inquirers

Australia's youngest women's Catholic Religious community is opening the doors to women who would like a taste of how its members live, work and pray. They also revealed what they wear to bed.

THE Missionaries of the Gospel, based in the Perth suburb of Willagee, are inviting interested women to come and live their way of life from January 22-24 with an option of applying to stay on for a few more days until January 28.

They are somewhat chatty and have supplied the answers to the following questions:

Who are you guys?

We are Missionaries of the Gospel. Some people call us John Paul II Sisters, because we follow Christ in the footsteps of our late Pope John Paul II. It is his charisma and spirituality and mission in the Church that our community is founded on.

How many of you are there?

Three. Usually we are then asked how many sisters are there including other parts of the world. People are often surprised that in the whole world there are only three of us.

We are in no hurry to grow beyond the little steps that our Lord seems to be taking with us. There are many lessons we have to learn (usually from experience!) and it is important that our foundation is a solid one.

Are there priests, brothers or lay people in your community?

Not yet. We hope there will be one day.

Where do you live?

We live in a residential house in Willagee. We call it a convent because it is the home of sisters, but from the front it looks like any other house. We are very blessed to have such a home. As I'm sure you know, in the past, many of those who began something new, started out in far more humble abodes.

How are you different from other communities?

The MGs are not distinguished by a particular work like teaching or nursing. We believe that the main charisma (or gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church) of John Paul II was his way of being in relationship, with others and with God. This is hard to explain in a few words here. However, we have found many who do not need words, because they experienced our charisma by simply being in the presence of JP II.

What do you do for work?

The apostolate of the sisters falls under three broad headings of Evangelisation,

Formation and building community. We try to find creative ways to help others encounter Christ, realise their dignity and live the Gospel, by making the Good News relevant and real for them.

Do you work in your parish?

We are not parish-based like many other groups, so whilst our work may be available at a parish level, our focus is first on the needs of the diocese.

Can I catch up with you and the sisters?

In the future we hope to reach out to more people and help them according to our mission. But at the moment we are still in formation, so the work we are doing is limited in order to provide the space to be well prepared. We describe it as a cocoon of our time in the desert.



No, Santa's little helpers have not fallen off the sleigh. It's Mother Bernadette, at left, and Sister Beatrice, enjoying the snow during a yearlong visit overseas to gain experience in establishing the new women's religious community, the Missionaries of the Gospel.

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How long will that go for?

Though there are some directions under canon law, the way an order will form their sisters can vary significantly. In our community, the first stage is postulancy. This period of 12 months is a time of 'asking' both for the community and the postulant.

The next stage is novitiate. Here the novice spends two years in intense formation.

Contact is reduced for all three years, but most especially for the canonical year of novitiate, which we are currently undergoing. Upon completion of novitiate, we receive the full habit, and make temporary vows. These are renewed yearly for five years before final vows are made.

Why do you change your name when you make your vows?

There are several occasions in the Bible when our ancestors received new names because of the new mission or state of life they were beginning. This is an old tradition that a few communities like ours maintain. Whilst we don't mind if people call us by our baptismal name, our new name is a reminder of our being set apart for God and His work.

Do you have an age limit?

Women must be at least in their 18th year and have not reached 30 years of age.

How do you live, where does your money come from?

Like a few other communities in Australia, we live solely on Divine Providence. We do not receive regular and expected income from any source. We have been very blessed to witness how God provides through the generosity of both friends and strangers, from \$10 in an envelope after Mass to a box of vegetables on our doorstep.

We don't have much, but we have never had to go without something we needed. And what do you do if you have too much?

Our policy is only to keep that which can be used for our work or for the welfare/care of the sisters. Twice a year we will re-examine what is in the convent to see what can be given away. It does not happen very often, but if we have too much food or something we don't need, we deliver these to someone who needs them more than us.

Why do you wear the veil (or habits)?

To this question, one of the novices recently explained that Sr Bernadette wears a veil because her head is very blotchy! In truth, we have seen wisdom in the Church's direction to wear a common dress and be a witness for others. It is not easy and Sr Bernadette has endured

abuse from some who are unhappy at the presence of a sister, but there are so many fruits that have flowed from people knowing who we are, and knowing that we are available for them to approach and talk to.

What is the symbolism of your habit?

The royal blue colour is to remind us of our Blessed Mother and Queen- Mary, who is a model for us in religious life. The white veil reminds us that we are brides of Christ who are called to try to be spotless and pure.

The white also reminds us that even if we complete our novitiate, we are always novices, always learning. The rope represents the vow of obedience and is taken from the Gospel of John when Peter is told that he will be taken places he would rather not go. The capuche signifies our Lady's mantle that protects us who have entrusted ourselves to her.

What do you wear to bed?

It is amazing how often this question is asked! Though we wear the habits every day regardless of where we go, we don't wear them to bed.

Do you have hair under your veil?

We keep our hair short for several reasons.

What time do you get up in the morning?

We begin prayer at 5:15am.

What do you do all day?

Whilst we are in formation - we have about four hours of prayer throughout the day, several classes, study, work, meals, recreation and exercise. We have a balanced lifestyle that is centred on teaching us to grow in love with God and those around us.

Do you have or want a TV?

No.

Do you visit your family often?

Visits with our families are reduced during formation but we still maintain regular contact.

Who is responsible for your community?

Ultimately, it is the Archbishop. For things on a day-to-day basis, there is consultation between the sisters and the final decision lies with the person the Archbishop has appointed Mother Superior.

Why did you choose to be a sister?

Obviously this answer is different for each sister because we did not fall for a common idea but a person whose call for each of us was personal. One thing that seems common though, is that we were searching for something more, and found a love that was stronger than anything we had experienced, enabling us to sacrifice the temporary delights that we had known.

Seeking further information? Email info@mg.org.au