

*a centenary of canberra's catholics*

**In the 11th in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power pays tribute to Jean Reid, a convert, teacher and inspiration to many.**

# Jean personifies best of 'Canberra values'

Canberra in its first 100 years can be rightly proud of the educational opportunities offered to its students, the care for the strugglers in our community and the spirit of ecumenism among the churches at times when elsewhere bigotry and secularism were the order of the day.

Jean Reid personifies the best of these "Canberra values". Born into a Protestant family in Tenterfield NSW, Jean was inspired by her school-teacher father to follow in his profession but reacted to some aspects of her religious upbringing which she perceived as being too exclusive of lay-people in its decision-making.

Jean would later seek to right some of that same imbalance in the Catholic Church. She became a Catholic while she and her future husband, Jim, also a school-teacher, were courting. They were married in 1940 and would eventually have six (very talented) children.

Jean and Jim Reid moved to Canberra in 1954 after they had taught in a series of NSW schools. Jean recalls that there was a series of lucerne fields where Lake Burley Griffin adorns the city today. Jim was science master at Canberra High School while Jean taught at Turner Infants School.

Although she was trained as a secondary teacher, Jean was asked to teach the infants because she could play the piano. Later she would be a very dedicated teacher of children with learning difficulties. She took five years off teaching after the birth of twins, her last born.

Joining the Catholic Women's League, she admired the growth of the organisation under leadership displayed by strong women such as Mary Scholtens, Ursula Southwell and others.

Jean was proud to note the contribution made to the CWL by vibrant country branches.

Sheila Tilse's history of the Catholic Women's League in this Archdiocese describes Jean's election as archdiocesan president in 1958 in these terms: "Jean Reid was to prove herself one of the most capable women to head the CWL in Canberra and Goulburn. A convert, brought up in the Methodist faith, she was enthusiastic about the League and its work. Jean has been described as a 'mover and shaker' (borne out by the growth on the CWL in her time in office). Jean herself speaks of her hopes of finding a place for women in the Church beyond making cakes. She wanted her members to be interested in what was going on in the world, with Catholic women seeing their role in the wider society."

The American Catholic activist, Dorothy Day, was a source of inspira-



tion to Jean. She also speaks of the great encouragement received from Archbishop Eris O'Brien.

Jean became national president of the CWL in 1960 and the following year led an Australian delegation to Rome for a meeting of WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations).

All this happened on the eve of the Second Vatican Council which was to confirm so many of her hopes for the Church and the world.

Around this time, a new Catholic college, Daramalan, was about to open



in Canberra, staffed by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Its headmaster, Fr John McMahon MSC, headhunted Jean for its foundation staff in 1962. When she completed her time there 20 years later, she was the only remaining original member of staff.

Fellow pioneer teacher Fr Fred Ross, writes, "My memories of Jean during the early days of Daramalan are all pleasant ones. Jean was well respected by all students, particularly by those she called 'slow learners'."

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ABOVE LEFT: Jean Reid.

ABOVE RIGHT: As national president of CWL in 1961, with Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn Eris O'Brien, Mrs Madge Horgan, Mrs Pat Mitchell and Miss Ann Coughlan.

TOP: With fellow Canberra delegates, Joyce Purcell (far left) and Joan Street (seventh from left), after an audience with Pope John XXIII.

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