

Sr Anastasia Vanderfeen

SMC 1912-
SMC Staff 1930-1973

Sr Anastasia was born Annie Vanderfeen on 10 August 1896 at Sydney Flat near Bendigo and attended St Mary's College as a boarder from 1912.

In 1913 her father, Norman Vanderfeen gave his consent for her to enter the Sisters of Mercy. He passed on to her his own mother's advice 'They are well guided that God guides'. He added 'There should be room in that big head of yours for brains to invent means to help the weak and friendless in the days to come'. Annie professed her vows in 1916 at Ascot Vale and began her long teaching career in 1917 at St Kilian's. She spent time briefly at Holy Rosary before returning to St Kilian's in 1922 to teach Merit (Form II) to a class of 65 students.



In 1930 she moved to St Mary's and achieved an incredible teaching career which did not end until 1973. During that time she taught every grade in both primary and secondary level and had a wonderful ability to know every student and family. She was blessed with good health and continued to work past retirement age.

After retiring from teaching, Sr Anastasia continued with works of mercy, particularly in comforting the sick and bereaved.

In November 1986 she celebrated her Platinum Jubilee with a Mass of Thanksgiving at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, with Bishop Noel Daly as the principal celebrant and twenty priests concelebrating. Soloists and instrumentalists were boys and girls and teachers of Catholic College Bendigo. During the Mass, Sister Anastasia renewed her vows, holding her jubilee candle which was presented to her by the Congregation Superior of the Sisters of Mercy, Sister Gabriel Jennings (herself a former student of St Mary's College). Hundreds of past students of St Mary's College attended. Afterwards she enjoyed afternoon tea at the Town Hall with friends, family, Sisters and past students.

Excerpt from the Bendigo Advertiser November 1986:

More than 1300 people from all over Victoria and beyond filled the Sacred heart Cathedral on Sunday afternoon to celebrate with Sister Mary Anastasia Vanderfeen the 70th anniversary of her profession as a Sister of Mercy.

After the Solemn Pontifical Mass which marked the occasion, the crowd swamped the city hall for afternoon tea.

Then long queues formed, mostly former students, daughters, mothers and grandmothers for a few words with Sister Ana.

They were still queueing at 8pm.

The Bishop of Sandhurst the Most Rev Noel Daly, principal concelebrant of the Mass, recalled visiting Amiens Cathedral in Northern France, the church in which Australian soldiers rendered their thanksgiving for the end of World War I. He added that Sister Anastasia was then a girl of 20. "In all these years in between," the Bishop said, "she has offered to us here in Bendigo the fullness of herself and her life to bring to the children and to the people of this area Jesus Christ, His message of salvation and peace.

"It really is a remarkable achievement and it is fitting that so many could be here today to record our Congratulations to Sister and our joy and to share with her this extremely special occasion."

Sr Anastasia died in 1996.

Sr Mary Duffy, one of Sr Anastasia's past students gave the eulogy at Sr Anastasia's funeral, held at St Mary's Church Golden Square.

"Ana took great pride and was vitally interested in the life of each person she encountered – student, parent, friend, priest, parishioner and, of course, her Mercy Sisters. She had an incredible ability to remember the names of students and their families, a gift we saw so vividly at the time of her seventieth Jubilee when men and women greeted her in the City Hall and stood amazed as she asked about their families and friends by name! this ability to remember was no chance act; it reflected Ana's deep humanity and her lasting concern for the welfare of each person. How often this concern was expressed through her many hours of home visitation to those in need of comfort and support! Many past students of the forties and fifties will share my vivid memories of Ana donning the gloves as soon as classes finished and setting off down the street to visit the hospital of a family – a practice often well extended in many a weekend. Ana knew that 'the poor need help today not next week' and she was always ready to offer them 'the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows'.

"Perhaps nowhere is Ana's profound belief in the human story better encapsulated than in the meticulous records and archival material which she maintained right up to her departure from Bendigo in 1989. Nothing was missed in the telling for Anastasia firmly believed in the significance and value of each person's contribution to the unfolding of history.

"It is impossible to gauge the influence of Anastasia as an Educator, the woman whose teaching career spans a period of sixty years. One might say that some of her methodology was quite unconventional – often adapted to meet the daunting challenge of large classes and changing curriculum. As I look around this afternoon, I see many women who will readily recall those moments of apprehension as we were called to demonstrate a mathematical problem at the blackboard, only to be inevitably told within a very short time to 'rub that unfortunate thing off the blackboard and sit down in your place'. Perhaps one day a glossary may be compiled of Ana's unique yet telling turns of phrase and gesture!

Ana had a real love of learning and an ongoing interest in developments in education that reached well past her own days in the classroom. With limited financial resources, she was part of a group of Mercy women who St Mary's College into a place of faith, culture and learning. The presence of so many past pupils at her Jubilee celebrations and again here today is testimony of our deep esteem and appreciation. We are grateful for the grace of Ana's life as teacher, for her sensible, unflinching rightness of mind, for guiding us on our journey to the very heart of things."

Source: CCB College Magazine 1986, Bendigo Advertiser November 1986, Sr Mary Duffy Requiem Mass 21/5/1996