The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4158

Sister Esther

(1858 - 1931)

Born	18580526, Stalham Norfolk England
Died	19310911, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Community worker, Religious Sister, Welfare worker

Summary

Born and educated in England, Emma Silcock was a gifted musician and craft worker who showed leadership potential as a young girl in school. In her twenties, she felt God was calling her to the Religious life and in 1884 was received as novice into the Anglican Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage. Henceforth, she was known as Sister Esther.

She moved to Melbourne in the mid 1880s on medical advice and, almost immediately, became involved in the work of the Church of England Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne, initiated in 1885 by Bishop Moorhouse to minister to those living in the infamous city slums. In 1888 she moved into the mission's house in Little Lonsdale Street. Two workers joined her in 1889, forming the nucleus of a permanent community. Under Esther's leadership they engaged in home, factory, hospital and prison visiting, and attendance at police courts. They established a House of Mercy for fallen girls at Cheltenham (1892) and a Home for Neglected Children at Brighton (1894).

Sister Esther had a particular vision for the establishment of a community of religious women dedicated to living and working with the poor, and it took some time for her to find an Anglican Bishop to support this vision by receiving her vows in profession, and enabling the Community of the Holy Name. The guiding rule of the community was:

The aim and object of this Community into which these Sisters have been called, is two-fold. First, the Glory of God and the perfection of those He calls out of the world to serve Him in the Religious Life, under the perpetual vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Second, the Community has been founded for active Mission work in the Church for the honour and love of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ

Sister Esther was associated with this community, located in Cheltenham in Melbourne, Victoria, until she died in 1931.

Published resources

Resource Section
Silcock, Emma Caroline (1858 - 1931), Jolliffe, Peter, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110621b.htm

Sister Esther: An Anglican Saint (reprinted from The Melbourne Anglican, September 2001), Stewart, John W and Sister Marie, 2006,
http://localhistory.kingston.vic.gov.au/htm/article/190.htm

Book
Out of the silence: a study of a Religious Community for women: The Community of the Holy Name, Strahan, Lynne, 1988

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Author Details
Nikki Henningham

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