

# WINDS OF CHANGE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SISTERS OF  
OUR LADY OF SION TO JEWISH/CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN  
AUSTRALIA: 1960s - 2020+



Joshua Koffman, *Synagoga and Ecclesia in Our Time*, maquette, April 2015

Marianne Dacy (nds)

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## Dedication

*In gratitude to the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, those who have gone before me and those here in Australia and throughout the world, and all who strive to foster relationships between Jews and Christians and interfaith relations and work towards building a world of peace, justice and harmony between peoples. I wish to mention particularly the Councils of Christians and Jews in New South Wales and Victoria, the Australian Council of Christians and Jews and the International Council (ICCJ), with whom it has been my privilege to work.*

*In memory also of my parents Harold and Margaret Dacy who taught me to value the pursuit of excellence and a deep appreciation of nature.*

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”*

*“Sha-ala shalom Yerushalayim.” (Psalm.122:6).*

## Foreword

Sion's evolving understanding of its *raison d'être* in the Catholic Church and the Sisters' subsequent commitment to Jewish/Christian dialogue worldwide, and, in particular, in Australia, were the result of several factors: reflection on the plight of European Jewry in World War 11, attentive listening to prophetic voices in the post-war era and courageous decision-making by the Congregation's leadership. The atrocities of the *Shoah* were the catalyst for a radical change of mentality in the way the Congregation interpreted its vocation. From the 1950s to the rewriting of its Constitution in 1984, the Congregation, through subsequent general chapters, made sweeping changes to the Sisters' prayer, apostolic ministries and indeed, the interpretation of their *raison d'être* and hence for the orientation of their entire lives.

*Winds of Change* focuses on Australia and as a title captures the progression that was made from the idea of conversion to encounter with Jews. In late 1962 Sr Shirley Sedawie returned to Australia after study in Jerusalem to found the Centre for Jewish/Christian dialogue. Her early activities led her to make frequent contacts with Jews and she was joined by other sisters. In 1967 she became a foundation member of the Catholic Ecumenical Affairs Commission. In 1970 a house was purchased in Kew for the Centre which was named Shalom, Centre for Jewish/Christian Dialogue. By 1986, the meeting room at Shalom was used monthly including by the Council of Christians and Jews (founded in 1985), the Victorian Council of Churches Working Group and the Ecumenical Affairs Commission Working Group.

In 1980 Sion's work expanded to Sydney, till early 2017. During that time the NSW Council of Christians and Jews was founded, the Archive of Australian Judaica at Sydney University and close contacts were maintained with the Jewish community.



Sr Shirley Sedawie at front gate of Shalom

# The Commitment of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion to Jewish/Christian Relations in Australia: 1950s – 2020

Sion's evolving understanding of its *raison d'être* in the Catholic Church and the Sisters' subsequent commitment to Jewish/Christian dialogue worldwide, and, in particular, in Australia, were the result of several factors: reflection on the plight of European Jewry in World War II, attentive listening to prophetic voices in the post-war era and courageous decision-making by the Congregation's leadership. The atrocities of the *Shoah* were the catalyst for a radical change of mentality in the way the Congregation interpreted its vocation. From the 1950s to the rewriting of its Constitution in 1984, the Congregation, through subsequent general chapters, made sweeping changes to the Sisters' prayer, apostolic ministries and indeed, the interpretation of their *raison d'être* and hence for the orientation of their entire lives.

## The Early History of the Congregation in relation to the Jewish People

Their founder, Theodore Ratisbonne, was born into a Jewish family and kept always a great love of his own Jewish people. His family was more culturally Jewish than religious. Under the guidance of a wise and learned Catholic woman, Louise Humann, he saw clearly the link between the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures as one continuous expression of God's faithfulness, personified in Jesus. Theodore was baptised Catholic in 1827 and ordained a priest in 1830. In response to the repeated requests of some women he had asked to assist him with the education and catechesis of some Jewish children, whose parents had requested baptism for them, Theodore founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in 1847.

Theodore's love of his own people inspired him to dedicate the Congregation to prayer that the Jewish people, like he, would receive the light to believe in Jesus as Messiah and embrace Christianity. The Sisters' apostolic ministry was predominantly one of the education of girls in large boarding schools where the Sisters welcomed children of all faiths yet never took the time to learn about their beliefs. Any form of proselytism among the students was completely forbidden; however, the Sisters held firmly to the Church's teaching at that time: the Catholic faith was the one, true faith, passed down from Jesus Christ.

## The Congregation's Transition in the Understanding of its relationship to the Jewish People

After World War II, the Congregation realised that the Holocaust could not have taken place without the negative teaching that the Church had fostered towards the Jewish people over the centuries. In 1953, Sr Marie Felix, the newly elected superior general, wrote a letter to the Congregation that was to have far-reaching consequences. "We do not know the Jews", she wrote. She called on all the Sisters to begin a course of prescribed reading and study of the history of the Jewish people as well as of the Church's theology and Scripture. Soon after, she asked that at least one Sister from every province "leave the classroom" to begin specialised training in Israel or in her own country in order, on her return, to act as a catalyst for change among the other Sisters and committed lay people, assisting them to develop a different regard and respect for Jewish people.

The next superior general, Sr Laurice, sent a circular letter to the Congregation, dated 21<sup>st</sup> March 1964, requesting that the Sisters no longer continue the practice of asking priests to celebrate the Eucharist annually for the conversion of the Jews. After beginning in 1907, the Archconfraternity of Prayer for Israel (API) which had been raised by Pope Pius X to an Archconfraternity,<sup>1</sup> ceased worldwide in 1965.<sup>2</sup> Around this time Sr Julian Slattery, who had coordinated the work of the API in Australia sent copies of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* to all the priests involved with a letter explaining the Catholic Church's new understanding of its relationship with the Jewish people.

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1 A leaflet and typescript are in the Shalom archives.

2 The circular is in the Congregational Archives in Paris.

Sion's response in defense of the Jewish people had begun at least ten years before *Nostra Aetate*, that finally re-defined, in 1965, the Church's relations to non-Christian religions and in particular to the Jewish people. Vatican II's *Decree on Religious Life* requested that religious Congregations return to the original inspiration of their institutions and asked that the founders' spirit and aims be clearly re-articulated for the present day. With this in mind, the Congregation set up a Centre in each province where the Sisters, who had received special formation in Israel, were appointed responsible to form other Sisters and lay people about Vatican II's teaching on the Jews.

The most important consequence resulting from Vatican II for religious Congregations was the re-writing of their Constitutions. The Church had allowed almost 30 years, till the late 1980s, for experimentation by each group to finally arrive at a re-articulation of its Congregation's charism. In 1984, the Constitution of the Sisters of Our Lady of Zion received the final approval of the Church. The Sisters were proud to state:

*We are called to witness by our life to God's faithful love for the Jewish people and to his fidelity to the promises he revealed to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel for all humanity. In Christ, the pledge of their fulfillment is given us. This call implies that our apostolic life is characterised by a three-fold commitment: to the Church, to the Jewish people, and to a world of justice, peace and love. (art. 13)*

## The Sisters in Australia

The Sisters of Our Lady of Zion arrived in Sale, Australia, in 1890 at the request of Bishop James Corbett to establish secondary schools for girls in the newly established diocese of Sale. By the 1950s, the number of Sisters had increased and they were responsible for two secondary schools in Gippsland, in Sale and Warragul, and one in Melbourne: Our Lady of Zion College, Box Hill. The Sisters also taught in several parish primary schools in Victoria. There was little to no contact with the Jewish community of Melbourne, yet the Sisters remained faithful to their prayer, dedicated to reparation for the Jews' refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

## The Australian Jewish Community

Currently, Australia has a Jewish community of about 91,000 (2016 census), with a high number of its student population attending Jewish day schools in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, but predominantly in Melbourne. Proportionate to its population, the highest concentration of Holocaust survivors in the world also lived in this city in post-*Shoah* days. The post-War immigration of Jews led to the burgeoning of synagogues and the revitalisation of the Australian Jewish community. Today, Jews are prominent in the arts, legal and medical professions and many others. There are approximately forty synagogues in Sydney and Melbourne respectively, with Jews in Melbourne numbering slightly more than those in Sydney.

Along with several Orthodox Jewish congregations, there is a strong Progressive movement which is open to dialogue with Christians, and in particular, with the Catholic Church, especially in Melbourne, where important initiatives in ecumenical and inter-faith work are undertaken annually. In addition, there is an active Jewish, Christian, Muslim group (JCMA).

## Beginnings of the Centre for Jewish/Christian Dialogue in Melbourne

Sr Shirley Sedawie was chosen from Australia and called out of classroom teaching to spend a year in Israel where a Studium was established, in 1955, for the Sisters' extensive formation in Scripture, Judaism, the history of the Jewish people down through the ages, culminating in the *Shoah* (Holocaust) during World War II, the Church's theology of supersessionism and antisemitism. At the Congregational level, Sisters set about trying to change the attitude and teaching of the Church, making friendly contact with Jewish people and using every opportunity to break down any latent prejudice and antisemitism.



Sr Shirley Sedawie

In late 1962, Sr Shirley Sedawie returned to Australia from study in Jerusalem to found the Centre for Jewish/Christian dialogue. The provincial Sister, Mother Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, had written to Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne for permission to set up such a work; his response was very supportive.<sup>4</sup> The Centre was opened, in February 1963, in the Convent at Box Hill, under the name “Shalom: the Centre for Israel”. Shirley was named in charge while beginning her studies in the Middle Eastern Studies’ Department of Melbourne University in view of gaining a Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees. She was also engaged in part time teaching of Biblical Studies at Our Lady of Sion College, Box Hill. In 1964, she wrote to the Bishops of Australia, asking them to uphold the cause of the Jews at the forthcoming Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The second Vatican Council began in 1962. The final vote on *Nostra Aetate* was in Oct 1965. At the same time, she assumed the direction of an interested group of past pupils and others who met at the Centre once a month. The aim was to reflect on the history of the Jewish people in an ecumenical spirit. (This group had, in fact, started years earlier, led by Srs Elizabeth Allman and Mary Poulson).

Shirley began by setting up a reference library in consultation with the Hillel Director Rabbi Rakovsky who had given a lecture to the first meeting of Christians and Jews, held on 29th October 1963.<sup>5</sup> For the next seven years, a pattern of activities was undertaken at Box Hill: monthly talks and discussions, held at the Centre and conducted by Shirley or a guest speaker, Jewish or Christian, depending on the topic. Various lectures were given, on request, to various groups: seminarians, post-graduate study groups, different societies and associations, Catholic or from other Christian denominations as well as inter-denominational<sup>6</sup> groups. Shalom had begun to fulfill its purpose.

Sr Shirley joined many of the women’s groups, extending her network to the Jewish community, making contact with WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organisation), NCJW (National Council of Jewish Women) and often attending synagogue services.

Shirley was involved in Jewish/Christian work in Box Hill and Kew between 1963 and 1974. In 1975, she left Melbourne to join the Sion Ratisbonne community in Jerusalem. In 1978 she was called by the Sion General Council to Rome to the work of Jewish/Christian Relations in SIDIC (*Service Internationale de Documentation Judéo-Chrétienne*) where she served until 1988.

## Catholic Ecumenical Affairs Commission

In 1967, Archbishop James Knox established the Ecumenical Affairs Commission (EAC), which Sr Shirley joined as a foundation member. The Commission website acknowledges her contribution:

*At the time she entered the order, she was given the name Sister Callistus, and it was under this name that Archbishop James Knox appointed her as the only religious sister on the Commission in 1967. The minutes indicate that she returned to her baptismal name in June 1969. In December of that year, it is reported that she was invited to be a part of the planned “Council of Christians and Jews” in Victoria. Thereafter she was always a guiding force on the Commission for the Archdiocese’s relation with Jews. Her obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald was co-authored by Rabbi John Levi with whom she formed the Catholic-Jewish Liaison Group in 1973.*

3 She reverted to her baptismal name Stella O’ Donnell. Sr Elizabeth Allman had been known as Mother Gerardine and Sr Mary Poulson as Mother Raphaella.

4 No written record has been preserved in the archives.

5 Report from the Australian province 1970.

6 Report from the Australian province 1970.



St. Patrick's Cathedral,  
Melbourne, Vic. 3002.

November 1, 1967.

Dear Reverend Father,

As announced at the recent Conference of the Clergy, His Grace the Archbishop has appointed a Commission for Ecumenical Affairs. Membership is as follows:

**Chairman:** His Lordship Bishop Moran.

**Members:**

Rev. B. O'Connor, P.P.  
Rev. A. J. Cleary, P.P.  
✓ Rev. D. Conquest, P.P.  
Rev. L. W. Kelly, P.P.  
Rev. E. D'Arcy, P.P.  
Rev. P. Willy (Y.C.W.)  
Rev. D. Murphy, M.S.C.  
Rev. M. Costigan (Press)  
Rev. M. King (Radio and TV)  
Rev. Bro. R. S. Stewart  
Sister M. Callistus  
Mr. J. J. McKenna  
Mr. R. Walker  
Mr. J. Callinan  
Miss A. Orlebar (Radio and TV)  
Miss A. Healy (Grail)

**Consultors:**

Rt. Rev. Mgr. J. F. Kelly  
Rev. J. H. Cleary, P.P.  
Rev. J. Perkins, P.P.  
Rev. P. Jones, P.P.  
Very Rev. M. Scott, S.J.  
Rev. Gregory Manly, C.P.  
Rev. Camillus Hay, O.F.M.  
Rev. H. Knowles, O.P.  
Rev. Austin Cooper, O.M.I.

The Archbishop also announced terms of reference for ecumenical matters requiring the approval of the Parish Priest or Administrator. They are:

- a. Delegations invited to be present without active participation at functions or services of other Churches must be appointed or approved by the Parish Priest or Administrator (appointed as such).
- b. The Parish Priest or Administrator is competent to consult with other Ministers of Religion concerning inter-Church functions within the limits of his parish.
- c. The Parish Priest or Administrator will decide when any member of the clergy may address other religious gatherings outside of religious services which are held within his parish.
- d. No Minister of another religion may address any Catholic group without the permission of the Parish Priest or Administrator.

Matters not covered by the above points must be referred to the Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs (Bishop Moran), who will have any matter discussed by the Commission and take the appropriate action.

Yours sincerely,

*L. M. Clarke,*

VICAR GENERAL.

Melbourne had a strong ecumenical movement and the Centre was associated with the ecumenical movement at the local level through the Box Hill Inter-Church Council and, at a broader level, through membership of the Archbishop's Ecumenical Affairs' Commission, as well as with the Women's Inter-Church Council of Victoria. On the level of Jewish/Christian relations, a liaison existed between the Centre and the Victorian Council of Churches which had a committee consisting of the Secretary of the Council, Rev A D Dargaville (Anglican) and Principal Robert Anderson (Presbyterian) of Ormond College, Melbourne University. Dr F Woods, the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, organised regular meetings from April 1966 until his retirement in 1978.

The Sisters have had a long association with the Catholic Archbishop's Ecumenical Affairs Commission, now named the Archdiocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission.

In mid-1978, the Archbishop appointed Sr Lenore Sharry a member for four years. She resolved to contribute all she could in the area of Jewish/Christian Relations.<sup>7</sup> She resigned because she moved to Sydney. Sr Ethel Shelton seems to have completed Lenore's appointment. Sr Ethel served on the Commission from 1980 to 1982.



**Sr Mary Lotton**

Later, Sr Mary Lotton was welcomed as a member at the meeting on 6 April 1983. She is recorded in the February 1995 minutes as among the "retiring members" who were farewelled the previous December (1994) at the end of year dinner. Mary was employed for one day a week for the EAC for six years, (1983-1989). Mary remained a member of the Commission, reporting on the work of the Ecumenical Affairs Sub-Committee for Jewish/Christian Relations at each meeting.

In 2006 Sr Mary Reaburn joined the Commission and she continues to be an active member. She is also active in the Commission's sub-committee on Interfaith Relations.

In 2018 the Commission launched new guidelines for Catholic schools which welcome students and staff from a variety of faith traditions. Melbourne is now a multi-cultural and multi-faith city and greater sensitivity is required when people of other faiths are welcomed into Catholic schools. The document is entitled: "Welcoming Each Other" and implies the mutual enrichment which comes from such openness. This Commission also co-hosts the annual Catholic-Jewish dinner where Jews and Catholics share friendship and a meal and sends official greetings to the Jewish Community for Rosh Hashanah.



**Sr Mary Reaburn**

In the latter part of 1973, the most notable event in Jewish/Christian activities was a meeting of the Social Action Committee of Melbourne's Liberal Jewish community with representatives of the Archbishop's Ecumenical Affairs Commission. The Social Action Committee was composed of representatives, rabbinical and lay, of the three congregations of Temple Beth Israel; its aim was to form a liaison between liberal Jews and the community at large. The initiative for the meeting was taken by the Social Action Committee; it began by reviewing the past, the work done by Sion, lectures given by a Rabbi at theological halls and seminaries and the growing interest among Christians in Judaism and liturgy, both in the synagogue and in the home.<sup>8</sup> This same file contains a letter, written by Isi Leibler from the Executive of Australian Jewry, expressing his appreciation of the provincial, Sr Trudy Nabuurs' letter which expressed hope for the beginning of a new era of peace in the Middle East between Jews and Palestinians. A letter from Fr Jean Dujardin clarified the French Bishops' Committee for Relations with Judaism on the vexed subject of the establishment of a Carmelite convent adjacent to the camp at Auschwitz, Poland.

<sup>7</sup> Sr Lenore's letter to Archbishop Mannix, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1928.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Australian province 1973.

The Australian Bishops have a very active Commission on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. It began in 1972. This has had various titles. There is a Council linked with this Commission. Sr Mary Reaburn was a member of this Council (2006-2015). During those years it was headed by Archbishop Prowse, a past pupil of the Sisters and included Bishop Michael McKenna, another former student of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

Mary Reaburn was appointed to a re-constituted Council of the Commission (Australian Catholic Council for Christian Unity and Religious Relations with Jews) in 2019 and continues to be an active member of this Council. She led it in a study of the Vatican document: *'The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable' (Rom II:29) : A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (No.4).*

## The Rapid Development of Jewish/Christian Dialogue at Shalom in the 1970s

At the beginning of 1970, the Australian province of Sisters purchased a house in Kew for the Centre. The house was named Shalom, Centre for Jewish/Christian Dialogue, and began to function in May of that same year. The newsletter of the Sacred Heart parish church, Kew stated "The Sisters hope to achieve a dialogue of love and understanding between Christians and Jews."<sup>9</sup>

The suburb of Kew had been chosen for the Centre for several reasons:

1. A growing number of the Jews of Melbourne had moved to Kew and its locality allowed easy access to other nearby suburbs where most Jews resided.
2. It was close to the centre of Melbourne.
3. There were two synagogues, one orthodox and the other liberal, within walking distance of Shalom.
4. Kew was sufficiently close to Box Hill to enable Sisters living at Shalom to teach at OLS College.



Sr Lenore Sharry

Sr Lenore Sharry was involved in Jewish/Christian works in the Centre from 1970 to 1979. In 1970, both Srs Lenore and Shirley were working part-time at the Centre; Lenore was mainly concerned with the novices' formation, according to the evolving understanding of the Congregation's *raison d'être* and giving courses to the Sisters, while Shirley was engaged, in general, in the field of Jewish/Christian relations with interested lay people. Between 1969 and 1971 diary entries show that invitations to give talks doubled and lessons in schools increased. The 1969 diary records six pages of activities as compared to twenty four pages in 1971. By 1971, Shirley was working full time at the Centre; a noteworthy assignment during this year was to address the congregation of the Leo Baeck Jewish Centre in Kew.<sup>10</sup> Lenore continued teaching part-time in Box Hill and gradually established close contact with the Jewish community, in particular, with the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies. When Radio 3CR began broadcasting anti-Semitic remarks; she supported the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies in their efforts.<sup>11</sup> This same year in 1971 Sr Aline from Jerusalem

visited Melbourne. Sr Aline and Sr Shirley were invited to Rabbi Levi's home for the Sabbath Eve meal and attended the Synagogue service where Rabbi Levi and Sr Aline gave a dialogue sermon.

Groups visiting Shalom included ladies of the Temple Beth Israel Women's Guild to meet over Morning Coffee with those of the Kew parish. These same Jewish ladies asked to be invited as observers at a Mass; this was arranged in the parish Church of Kew, followed by an informal lunch at Shalom. An "at home" was also held at Shalom for some Jewish and Christian friends to meet together. Another group of about thirty Sisters from the Assumption Institute<sup>12</sup> also came to Shalom for a talk on Judaism. Although most were from Melbourne, some were from further afield, such as Papua New Guinea.

9 See *The Parishioner: official Organ of Sacred Heart, Kew*, Vol 2, No 2, April 1971, 3.

10 Letter 25<sup>th</sup> May 1971.

11 Correspondance 1977-1986.

12 These were novices and young Sisters in formation who undertook various courses.

In 1971, Sion was appointed responsible for a two-hourly six week program on Judaism for the formation of novices, of both women's and men's Congregations. Its content was as follows:

- Week 1: Study of the Jewishness of Jesus.
- Week 2: A Jew's sharing on what it means to be observant in today's society.
- Week 3: A Visit to the Holocaust museum.
- Week 4: Reflection on the program so far, followed by input on the "Rupture between Judaism and Christianity" and the "Portrayal of Jews in the New Testament".
- Week 5: A Visit to Shalom.
- Week 6: Visits to the Liberal and Orthodox synagogues.

Biblical Studies students<sup>13</sup> visited Shalom to learn more about Judaism, its feasts and customs. After attending a Sabbath Eve Service at Temple Beth Israel, Catechists, both lay and religious, also came to Shalom for supper. Other activities were maintained on the Archdiocesan level. Membership of the Box Hill Inter-Church Council was exchanged for that of the Kew Inter-Church Council with several inter-denominational study groups held under the latter's auspices.<sup>14</sup> Together with Rabbi Levi, Rabbi Lubofsky and Professor Robert Anderson, in June 1972<sup>15</sup> Shirley appeared on television in a program featuring Jewish/Christian dialogue. That same year, Shirley participated in a radio series on the same topic.<sup>16</sup>



L –R Shirley and Mary Lotton

The main features of 1975 were the involvement of more Jewish speakers in the program for Jewish studies and an extension of ecumenical contacts. Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky from the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation also gave a series of lectures.<sup>17</sup> The correspondence files witness to the industry of Lenore who contacted numerous rabbis, clergy, teachers and others, both in Australia and overseas, organising lectures and maintained relations with as many as possible. Lecture series continued in 1976 and 1977, including topics such as "Jewish Prayer" and "A Jewish and Christian Approach to the Book of Exodus",<sup>18</sup> given by Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky, the Hillel Director, Dr Alan Unterman, Professor Robert Anderson and Major Gerben Stelstra from Sydney. The Centre had also organised a program of approximately twelve lectures, arranged in four series of three, during the first and second terms of the academic year. In addition, a seminar had been given once a term on Sunday afternoons for those not free to attend the evening lectures.

Topics included:

1. A Jewish and Christian interpretation of certain passages from the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. An introduction to Jewish prayer.
3. The development of the reform movement.
4. Highlights in the history of Australian Jewry.
5. Personal experiences in Jewish/Christian dialogue.
6. The new antisemitism.

A new area of contact was opened in 1975 with Sr Stella O'Donnell's involvement in retreat work in Sydney where there was the opportunity to centre prayer around biblical themes, such as Covenant, Desert, the meaning of the Sabbath, Passover and other Jewish feasts and their relationship to Christianity. Retreatants came from all over Australia as well as from the Pacific Islands and New Zealand.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Students from different schools.

<sup>14</sup> Report from the Australian Province, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Annette Achilles, *Jewish-Christian Relations in Melbourne*. Religious Studies IV. Latrobe University, 1989, p.41.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Report 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Report 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Report 1977.

In 1978, Sr Lenore attended a short course, 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> March, at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, near Geneva, run by the World Council of Churches. At each seminar, a Jewish and a Christian participant prepared the exegesis of a biblical passage, demonstrating the different treatment and significance attached to the Bible in the two faiths. In this same year, Fr Cornelius Rijk, director of SIDIC, Rome, visited Australia from 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> September. He met members of the Church and the Jewish community and gave several important lectures. His was the first of visits of overseas speakers, organised by the Centre. Since 1965, Fr Rijk had been a member of the steering committee, chosen by the Bishops after the second Vatican Council, to explore possibilities for setting up an international information and documentation service for developments in Jewish-Christian relations, in the wake of *Nostra Aetate*. Until 1973, Fr Rijk had been in charge of the Vatican Office for Jewish Catholic Relations when he was appointed as full-time Director of SIDIC. At the same time, he gave courses on Jewish/Christian relations at the Gregorian University, Rome and a Preparation Course for Visits to the Holy Land. Sadly, Fr Rijk's visit was to be his only visit to Australia: shortly after returning to Rome, he took ill and died. Sr Rosalie Hanley a member of the Ein Karem Sion community in Israel from 1971 to 1975, which welcomed Israelis and overseas visitors to a beautiful restful oasis on the outskirts of Jerusalem, returned to Melbourne for further study in JCR before joining Lenore in the work of JCR at the Shalom Centre in 1978. She took over Lenore's role as director in 1979 when Lenore moved to Sydney.



Sr Rosalie Hanley

Rosalie was involved in Jewish/Christian work at the Centre from 1978 to 1989 before joining the Sion community in Sydney. In 1984, Rosalie's activities focused on *Education on the Holocaust* which in schools was found to be sadly lacking. A year later, in May 1985, the 40th anniversary of survivors from the death camps in Europe was commemorated with an international meeting, held in Sydney from 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> of that same month. This was the first time such a meeting had been held in Australia. In addition, both Lenore and Sr Marianne Dacy attended the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vatican II declaration, *Nostra Aetate*.

Sisters Rosalie and Ethel became involved with the Holocaust Exhibition of the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Centre and were asked to work in building up the section, given to the Righteous Gentiles (Righteous Among the Nations). They were invited to interview Jewish couples in their homes, helped by Christians during the Holocaust. The Jewish community had asked for the co-operation of the Churches

in this area; the Victorian Council of Churches agreed to become involved although it remained largely the responsibility of the Jewish/Christian committee. The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Frank Little, wrote a very encouraging letter to the Sisters who were working at the time for the Exhibition.<sup>20</sup>

*Your letter gives testimony to the deep involvement of the Sisters of Sion in so many ways in the work of Jewish-Christian dialogue, especially through your involvement in this venture.*

*Recently, it was my delight to hear some very remarkable tributes made by Jewish people about the Sisters of Sion. They gave abundant praise, both to the Sisters engaged in the work and to the work itself. I thought that you would be pleased to hear such deserving words of recognition; they never seem to be made to the people who have gained the distinction.*

*May the Lord bless you through your work so that growing in appreciation of the heritage that is ours from the people of Israel, we may come to grow in our response to the Christian message.<sup>21</sup>*

*Frank Little, Archbishop of Melbourne*

The Holocaust Exhibition moved to Sydney where Lenore became involved, establishing both Jewish and Christian contacts, including with Mrs Sophie Caplan and Sr Antoinette Collins.

<sup>20</sup> Report 1980.

<sup>21</sup> The letter in the Shalom archives is a copy, so is not signed.

## The Expansion of Activities at Shalom 1980 – 1999

After eighteen months study in Jerusalem Sr Mary Lotton returned to join Rosalie in Jewish/Christian Relations (JCR) work at the Shalom Centre in 1980. She gave many lessons on “Introduction to Judaism” and “Jesus the Jew” in Catholic primary and secondary schools. Mary and Sr Kathleen Keely began a small JCR newsletter, *Christian Jewish Scene*, which ran for some years and became the Newsletter of the Council of Christians and Jews Vic and then that of the Australian CCJ. Mary became involved with the Catholic Ecumenical Commission and later the Ecumenical Affairs Commission JCR Working Group. This group organised many tours for Christians to the Jewish Holocaust Centre and a Synagogue visit which brought many Christians in direct touch with Jews, their faith and customs. This group also established an annual Shoah (Holocaust) Memorial Service for Christians, following the initiative of Sr Verna Holyhead, who had been instrumental in beginning such a service in Sydney. The first service in Melbourne was held in the Chapel of Newman College and following years in St Francis’s Church and then in various Christian churches. In recent years the Shoah Memorial Service has been held in chapels or halls of different Christian secondary schools.

In the 1980s, the work of Jewish/Christian relations continued to develop in Melbourne at different levels. *Christian and Jewish Scene*, as the newsletter of the ACCJ in Sydney was now in the hands of Susan Bures, the editor of *The Australian Jewish News*. It was subsequently edited by Henry Mendelson and then Kate Mannix until 2015. At the same time, Shalom’s letterhead changed from *Centre for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* to *Centre for Jewish/Christian Relations* in order to better express its role.

Sr Ethel took responsibility for the library and correspondence while Mary gave talks to various groups, compiled class kits and prepared a brochure describing the work of the Centre. Lenore had built up a group of friends and helpers who appreciated and understood Sion’s charism. In addition to the team, the whole community was involved in Jewish/Christian work in varying degrees which became a unifying apostolic endeavour.

A report, dated June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1980, written by Sr Ethel Shelton, announced that a Shalom Board had been set up consisting of Srs Patricia Fox, Helen Frawley, Lenore, Mary Lotton and Rosalie to coordinate the work of Jewish/Christian Relations for both Melbourne and Sydney.

### Catholic Ecumenical Affairs Commission Sub Committee on Jewish/ Christian Relations

During her time as director of the Shalom Centre Rosalie wrote to Archbishop Little requesting that there be established a JCR Working Group as part of the Archdiocesan Ecumenical Affairs Commission.

This Catholic EAC sub-committee for Jewish/Christian Relations was formed in 1983, with Fr Bill Smith SJ, Rosalie and Mary Lotton as members; Mary was named secretary. The group took some time to become active but eventually met monthly to organise various events; five were organised in 1990, with one cancelled due to lack of interest. One significant project was to arrange for courses in Judaic Studies, to be given by a rabbi at the three theological colleges affiliated with the Melbourne College of Divinity: United Faculty of Theology at Ormond College, Melbourne University. Yarra Theological Union, Box Hill, (mainly for students from Religious Orders) and Catholic Theological College, (principally for Archdiocesan seminarians).<sup>22</sup>

On 17th October 1981, the Catholic Archbishop was invited to speak at Temple Beth Israel synagogue; he asked the Centre for resource material to aid his reflections on *Nostra Aetate*. Rabbi Levi who had been a friend throughout the budding dialogue, wrote to invite the Sisters and any of their Catholic friends to what he believed was the first occasion at which a Catholic Archbishop would speak at the Shabbat service in an Australian synagogue. That night, the synagogue was filled to capacity.<sup>23</sup> In December, the Jewish/Christian working group of the Victorian Council of Churches organised a day for clergy and other interested people for a visit to Rabbi

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22 Report 1975.

23 Bulletin No 2, November 1980.

Lubofsky's Orthodox synagogue. This resulted in a series of lectures being organised for the following July and August of 1981 at Shalom.<sup>24</sup>

The Shalom report of 1981 noted that one of the events attracting great interest was the Passover celebration on Tuesday evening of Holy Week by the parish council of Sacred Heart Church, Kew. The Sisters' aim was to foster an understanding that Passover was a Jewish feast and not a forerunner of the institution of the Eucharist. Two signs of positive development in this area were teacher groups wanting to prepare Passover celebrations themselves and greater understanding that Passover should be celebrated as a Jewish feast. Various talks were given in schools and individual enquiries about Judaism were received. Calls for information about preparing a pilgrimage to Israel were also being received and progress was made in building up the Shalom reference library.

At the August meeting, the Victorian Council of Churches Commission on Community and Race Relations recognised the Jewish/Christian dialogue working group as part of their organisation for the Commission with Lenore, co-opted as its representative.<sup>25</sup> Knowing she would be moving to Sydney in 1980, Lenore resigned at the meeting of 15th November 1979.<sup>26</sup>

## The Victorian Council of Churches

The Victorian Council of Churches (VCC) had several sub-committees. A Commission of Living Faiths and Community Relations was formed around 1984, with first Rosalie as a member, then Shirley and finally Kathleen Keely. This group aimed to meet on a monthly basis to organise lectures for Christian groups; they produced three monographs: *When Jews and Christians Meet*, *Jews and Christians: Creating a New Spirit* and *Pathways to Understanding*. Sr Marianne Dacy edited the latter with Sr Rosalie Hanley contributing a chapter. Sr Mary Reaburn contributed a chapter in the second monograph.

A VCC Nominations' Committee was formed in the early 1980s.

By 1986, the meeting room at Shalom was used monthly, sometimes fortnightly, by a number of groups for meetings and as a working space. Groups included:

- The Council of Christians and Jews.
- The Victorian Council of Churches' Working group – monthly.
- A monthly Publication group.
- A Promotion Group of the Council of Christians and Jews – monthly.
- The Ecumenical Affairs' Committee Working Group - monthly.
- Shalom Group – meeting fortnightly.

There were also informal meetings with Jewish people. Others came to seek information and to chat with Srs Theresa Condon and Rose Twomey. The meeting room was thus used eight times a month for committees, and about four times a week for informal meetings.<sup>27</sup>

In 1987, the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion assisted the Jewish community in Canberra in establishing a Jewish/Christian dialogue group. Dr George Stern and a Catholic acquaintance began the group. Bishop Patrick Power shared the cost of a plane fare to bring a Sister of Sion, Sr Patsy Crotty, to form part of the group. Ray Brown from the group continued to correspond, especially with Rosalie and Patsy, and became its convener.

The Shalom team met on a weekly basis with three Sisters: Shirley, Kathleen Keely and Mary Lotton. The meetings were basically about organisational matters of the Centre, such as calls made to the Sisters to respond to various requests.

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24 Report 1981. The Ecumenical Affairs Sub-Committee on Jewish-Christian Relations was set up at Sr Rosalie's initiative. Achilles p. 51.

25 Letter 23rd October 1978.

26 Letter 14th November 1979.

27 Report from Shalom Meeting 28th October 1986.

In 1987, an issue of a Catechetical magazine *Celebrate* was dedicated to *The Jews- our Brothers and Sisters*. Many aspects of Jewish life and faith, as it had been lived for almost 2000 years and continuing to the present day, were presented. The editors noted that this information would help Christians to gain a basic understanding and respect for present day Jews and Judaism. The important topic of the *Jewishness of Jesus* began the publication:

*In studying Judaism, we Christians are, in fact, studying our own identity. There is a bondedness because of Jesus, between the two faiths, and this has been stated clearly in both Vatican documents, Nostra Aetate and "The Notes" of 1985. Celebrate takes us to the directives of the "The Notes".*<sup>28</sup>

A group organising talks on theological questions had existed from 1988 to 1992. The members of the group included Sisters, a Catholic layman, John Uren, and a Jew, Bernie Boas. Jewish speakers were invited to Shalom to speak on such topics as Jewish prayer. Christian theologians, e.g. Andrew Hamilton SJ and Fr Peter Cross, were also called upon. The group met with Centre workers from Sydney; Lenore attended most, often as the sole representative from Sydney.<sup>29</sup>

The Shalom Centre received support from the Congregation, at the provincial and general levels, and from individual Sisters. Support also came from the local Church, with calls and invitations from Bishops and priests who understood the importance of Judaism, the official texts of the Church and from individual Christians, interested in questions of the Church's relation with the Jewish people.<sup>30</sup> The most prominent source of challenge for the Centre were events demanding immediate response through appropriate initiatives, such as antisemitic attacks, antisemitic graffiti, attacks on University students or anti-Jewish articles. Shalom wrote letters of solidarity to the Jewish community and of complaint to an editor of an offending article. Sometimes, it was necessary to speak to a local priest about his homily that had negative remarks about Pharisees or implied supersessionism. An alert to a particular crisis often came through the media: television, radio, newspapers or periodicals. More demanding questions tended to be related to the position of the Church with manifestations of fundamentalism.<sup>31</sup> As a conclusion to the celebration of the centenary in 1990 of the Sisters' arrival in Australia, an Advent booklet of *Readings for Homilies* was distributed to the priests of the Melbourne Archdiocese.

Correspondence from the 1980s outlines Rosalie's activities. It includes letters to rabbis, to Archbishop Little and to people who were asking for information about visiting Israel. At the request of the general chapter of 1980, an international Congregational meeting on antisemitism was held in Rome from 10<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> February 1984; it was attended by Lenore and Rosalie.<sup>32</sup>

In July/August 1985, Fr John Pawlikowski visited Australia; six lectures were organised and attended by Jews and Christians as well as by students at the two theological colleges: Ormond, (United Faculty of Theology) and Catholic Theological College where the archdiocesan seminarians studied. Fr Pawlikowski returned to Sydney several times to give lectures in following years, being invited as a guest speaker.

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28 Editorial draft of *Celebrate*.

29 Typescript.

30 To Be a Blessing 1992.

31 To Be a Blessing.

32 Letter from the General Council January 15, 1982.





CCJ (Vic) celebrates its Tenth anniversary

L-R (front) Sr Shirley Sedawie (holding commemorative book with ten issues of Geshet), Justice William Kaye and Rabbi Raymond Apple (CCJ (NSW) and ACCJ L-R (back) Rabbi John Levi, Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky, Archbishop Frank Little (Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne), Hon Richard McGarrie (Governor of Victoria), Bishop Oliver Hayward (Assistant to Primate Archbishop Raynor), Dr Warren Bartlett (Moderator of Uniting Church), and Rev Robert Anderson.

## The Council of Christians and Jews (Vic) Inc

Early attempts to establish a Council of Christians and Jews had repeatedly failed. In 1961 and again in 1962, Archbishop Woods and Archbishop Mannix had agreed to be the presidents but the Jewish community would not join the endeavour. The possibility was again mentioned in correspondence of 1982. Shirley and Lenore, as well as the Rev Robert Anderson, had met seven times, from March 1973 till June 1982, with Dr Dargaville, seeking his help to form such a Council. Shirley and Lenore also held discussions with Fr Bill Smith SJ of Belloc House as well as with Rabbi Levi. Isi Leibler had also spoken of the formation of such a Council. Over the years, there had been resistance to the setting up of the Council, as Lenore mentioned in a report in 1974. She pointed out that Australia had little or no overt antisemitism but that there still lingered a good deal of prejudice among Christians, imbibed from an incorrect catechesis of the past.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, in 1985, the CCJ was established. The founders were Sr Rosalie Hanley, Rev Professor Robert Anderson, Rabbi Dr John Levi and Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky. Rabbi Lubofsky agreed to be one of the presidents, an office he held, with distinction, for the rest of his life. The Sisters of Sion were actively involved, with Rosalie as secretary until 1989. The office was established in the Centre run by the Sisters in Kew; the secretary was firstly Rosalie and then Mary Lotton. Both office space and personnel were provided free of charge and the CCJ was able to begin its very important work. The position of Secretary was much more than a Minute secretary. It was a full time position which included organising events, facilitating publications and much more. From 1990 Mary became the Hon Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews, a position which she held until 1999. This role was handed over to the Rev George Grant for a time.

*Gesher*, an annual publication of the Council of Christians and Jews (Vic) Inc. was established in October 1990. Gad Ben-Meir was the first editor followed by Morna Sturrock. Articles on a wide range of themes continue to be published today. *Gesher* is the medium for Jews and Christians to express their views and invite comment. Sponsorship is essential for its continuation and is sought annually.

## Activities in the 1990s

Dr Eugene Fisher, Executive Secretary of Catholic Jewish Relations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, was invited, as an international speaker, in July 1990, for the centenary celebrations of Sion's presence in Australia. Shirley, who had just returned from nine years at SIDIC, Rome, and two years in Sydney, was also asked to be a speaker. The target groups for Dr Fisher's visit were B'nai B'rit, the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the CEOs of Catholic Education Offices and the staffs of the Theological and Teachers' Colleges. Public lectures in Sydney and Melbourne were also organised.

In 1990, letters of support were sent to the Jewish community because of the Gulf War. Again, in this same year, Sion's superior general, Sr Patricia Watson, expressed to the whole Congregation her concern over the possible beatification of Queen Isabella of Spain. This same question was raised in November 1990 at the meeting of the National Workshop in Chicago.

In November 1990, Rosalie, who was studying for an MA in J/C Relations at Seton Hall, and Marianne attended the National Workshop in Jewish/Christian Relations in Chicago, USA. In all, sixteen Sion Sisters from around the world were to meet following the workshop to share their reflections on the national workshop and their involvements in Jewish/Christian work. A number of themes for discussion emerged, with the Shoah as a focal issue in all the discussions. The Middle East situation and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict were matters of great anguish. There was also discussion on pluralism, looking at the disturbing issues within the Catholic Church itself. The most important of these was the Christological question. Several theological questions were also explored: the meaning of the Land for the Jewish people, the impact of the Shoah on the understanding of forgiveness, power, God, Christ.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Typescript.

34 See Minutes of meeting, Nov. 1990.



# GESHER

BRIDGE

*The Official Journal of*  
**THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS & JEWS**

Vol. 1 No. 1

Editor: Gad Ben-Meir, LL.B., LL.M.

October, 1990

**NOSTRA  
AETATE  
25 YEARS**

**1965-1990**



*Nostra Aetate pointed to a significant new direction in the Catholic Church and the development of Christian-Jewish Understanding. Sr. Mary Lotton, Secretary of the Council of Christians & Jews, is a leading proponent of the vital need for such understanding.*

Front page of first issue of Geshher

Another eminent visitor, in February 1991, was Dr Jacobus Schoneveld, general secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews. A visit from the general council of the Sisters of Sion encouraged greater cooperation with other like-minded organisations, rather than the Centre attempting to do all the work alone. The principal difficulties to Jewish/Christian dialogue, as identified in the Church, were indifference, ignorance and the treatment of questions relating to Jewish/Christian relations as of secondary concern. The clergy had not been formed to deal with antisemitism and anti-Judaism, and the Church lacked theologians capable of attempting the much-needed new approach. As a result, the Church was often awkward in its approach to these questions.

Other major challenges were the Church's tardiness to integrate and coherently assimilate the new theological reflection emerging since Vatican II and the awakening of people's interest in Judaism; the latter difficulty corresponded to the lack of personnel qualified to respond to inquiries.<sup>35</sup>

In 1991, Professor Yehuda Bauer was invited to Australia under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs where he gave an excellent lecture in Sydney on the Holocaust. The lecture was supported by the Council of Christians and Jews, CCJ (NSW). In 1991, a serious problem arose between the Jewish community, influential members, and the Anglican authority in Melbourne. The latter was held responsible for a presentation of St. Stephen's martyrdom, depicted in the old deicide and supersessionist model. A member of the Jewish community entered the classroom of an Anglican school that had class notes on the blackboard which very clearly reflected the "old" deicide charge. Unfortunately, the Jewish side of the correspondence was not limited to objective reality and deteriorated into emotional and acrimonious recriminations.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of this experience, the CCJ formed a committee to produce New Testament guidelines for clergy and teachers in their use of New Testament texts. These were subsequently published. (*Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth* and *Re Reading Paul*). The Council also asked the Anglican and Catholic Archbishops of Melbourne and the Moderator of the Uniting Church each to appoint two experts to study this question. The CCJ then appointed its six nominees, two Christians and four Jews with the team deciding on four main subjects for study:

- a) Supersessionism.
- b) The Trial and Death of Jesus.
- c) The New Testament portrayal of the Jewish people, their groups and leaders, especially the Pharisees.
- d) Jewish religious beliefs and practices - law and legalism.

A letter from the Australasian Union of Jewish Students issued an invitation to Shirley to participate in a Holocaust Victim naming Ceremony in the Melbourne City Square. In May 1992, *Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations* were launched by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. Lenore was actively involved, working closely with Bishop Bede Heather and Lesley Caplan from the Jewish community. The *Guidelines* followed the basic outline of the 1985 revision of the *US Guidelines*, with changes clearly designed to suit Australian conditions and some small but significant differences in language. The Australian document was the first set of *Guidelines* to be adopted by any national Catholic Church, after the United States.<sup>37</sup> Later in that same year, *Gesher* published the *Guidelines*, with 4,000 copies being distributed. Correspondence from 1994 noted several reactions to the *Catholic Bishops' Guidelines to Jewish/Christian Relations*, not all of which were positive. The *Guidelines* were launched in Melbourne on 17th August. The final document, promoted in schools, had taken four years to formulate.

Three years later, Shirley alerted friends to Lenore's death on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1995. That same year, a native fig tree with a plaque, "For the peace of Jerusalem, pray" commemorating Lenore's commitment to J/C relations was planted in Cook and Phillip Park, right opposite St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. This act was the inspiration of the CCJ (NSW); several Sisters of Sion travelled to Sydney for the event.

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35 To Be A Blessing.

36 Letter to Eugene Fisher August 13, 1991.

37 Rebecca Lacey "Dialogue, Doctrine and Diplomacy: a Consideration of the Australian Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations", AJHS, v. XVIII, part 1, p. 49.



Plantng a native fig tree in honour of Lenore L- R Srs Shirley Sedawie, Marianne Dacy. (Back) Kathleen Keely, Mary Lotton.

In 1994 Shirley resigned from her involvement in the work of the VCC in order to give more time to the work of the Shalom Centre which was dear to her heart. Part of this was helping students who came to use the library, of which there had been a larger than usual number that year.

CCJ (Vic) seminars for the year covered such topics as: a three-lecture course to help teachers, preachers and students to handle NT passages causing great concern for J/C Relationship. Another seminar, organised by a sub-committee of the VCC, addressed Jewish religious literature, such as the oral literature of the Talmud. The text of *Rightly Explaining the Word of Truth* was launched on 17th August, 1995. 10,000 copies were initially printed and widely distributed to clergy and teachers in primary and secondary schools.

In 2005, Shirley was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her work in Christian/Jewish relations. Now an oration named after her “The Sr Shirley Sedawie oration” is held annually in her honour and is delivered by a prominent scholar. This is sponsored by CCJ (Vic) and the sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

## The Later Development of the Shalom Centre Kew 1990 - 2015

In 1998 an expert, Sr Margaret Endicott rsm, spearheaded a review of the work of the Centre that had been continued by a group of Sisters and some friends of Sion, concerned with Jewish/Christian relations.

The review:

- gathered up the achievements of the Centre over the past thirty years.
- evaluated its present reality.
- identified the future purpose, direction, goals and strategies of the Centre.
- clarified the relationships between the groups using the Centre and future directions of the Centre.
- made recommendations regarding Sisters of Sion – personnel and resources, personnel and the library.

The review team summarised the data, as follows:

1. Deep appreciation and positive affirmation for the work the Sisters had done to foster Christian/Jewish relations.
2. All thought the work should continue.
3. The time had come to begin to throw the net wider and to start the pilgrimage again.

Eleven recommendations were made, designed to act as starting points for the future:

4. The Sisters would remain committed to the work of fostering Christian/Jewish relations within Victoria.
5. Shalom in Kew would remain the Centre for Christian/Jewish relations for the next period of time to 2008 (10 years).

The Centre would:

- be available for the use of groups to hold meetings.
  - be a place where people could gather.
  - hold the library and resources, to be used as much as possible, or it could be partly leased, (including the library), by the CCJ.
  - be a contact point, through the CCJ secretariat, for people seeking information on Christian/Jewish relations.
  - remain the home of the Sisters, as needed and, in the future, be considered as a place of residence for those committed to the work for a period of time.
6. The purpose of the library needed to be clarified, with computerisation essential for it to be fully functional. (This recommendation was never implemented as books were available elsewhere). The library needed to be culled.
  7. It was believed that at least one Sister of Our Lady of Sion should remain a member of the CCJ Executive for at least the next 2–3 years.
  8. The Sisters would not provide secretarial resources for the CCJ. However, the province might be interested in providing some financial assistance for the next two years to enable the CCJ to employ adequate secretarial support.
  9. The role of the CCJ needed to be clarified, including its use of parts of the Centre, future possibilities for the Library and as a contact point for Jewish/Christian relations.
  10. There was need to build up a pool of people to undertake the work of the Centre.
  11. Time and resources were needed to be allocated for the dissemination of education and information, beginning within the Catholic Church and community and other Christian Churches.
  12. A small group of Sisters and those interested in working on the future direction of the Centre needed to be convened to develop an Action Plan, based on these decisions, taken as a result of the review.
  13. The recommendation was made to take opportunities, as they arose, to promote the work of the Centre, without undertaking a particular promotion campaign.
  14. A review of the Centre's work would take place every three years to ensure continuing reflection on its direction.

As part of the overall future direction, it was strongly suggested that a core group be established to implement these recommendations. The Centre core group would need to be involved with three groups:

- 1) A group of leaders, rabbis, academics, theology students and lecturers.
- 2) A group of ordinary people, consisting of grassroots persons: teachers and students in Christian schools, groups and organisations, with energy and commitment, parishioners, Catholic and other Christian Churches and members of the Jewish community.
- 3) A group of Sisters to join as a core group with lay people, committed to the charism of fostering Christian/Jewish relations.

The group of Sisters, committed to J/C relations, would continue to meet and organise events, one of which would be to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, planned for 6<sup>th</sup> November 2005 in Melbourne. A world-renowned speaker, Professor Mary Boys, was invited with a comprehensive program set up in both Victoria and Sydney.

In May 2005, some reflections on Sion re-visioning commitment to Jewish/Christian relations were expressed. One thought became clear: "We Sisters do not own the charism; rather, we are its stewards, called to be its witnesses. The charism belongs to the Church; we must share it, not claim or guard it as though it was our possession."

It was also noted that numerous Vatican Documents had shifted the negative attitude to the Jewish people to a more co-operative one. Gradually over the years, the isolationist attitudes of the earlier years had broken down and there was, within some circles of both our faiths, real dialogue and an acceptance and respect of the other that had created a good working relationship. In 2000, Pope John Paul II's apology to the Jewish people for the Church's sins of the past had a powerful symbolic value with many different groups becoming involved in either Christian/Jewish relations or inter-faith activities. In addition, the CCJ in both NSW and Victoria had grown and developed.<sup>38</sup>

The report also reflected that, in the 1960s and 1970s, from a certain perspective, it had been easier then to begin the work as there was very little happening in interfaith activity. It had now become more demanding to discern clearly where Sion was called to witness "*to keep alive in the Church the consciousness that, in some mysterious way, Christianity is linked to Judaism, from its origin to its final destin .*" (Constitution of the Congregation, article 14.)

From 1998, regular meetings had been held by a core Jewish/Christian group of Sisters organising overseas speakers and other important Jewish/Christian events, such as the 40th and 50th anniversaries of *Nostra Aetate*.

In 2005, the Jewish/Christian working group embarked on a process of strategic planning for the future. In 2009, after twenty years' accommodation by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in Shalom, Kew, the CCJ relocated to a spacious office in Richmond, formerly St Ignatius' primary school. The property was owned by the Australian Province of the Jesuits. From 1993 on, Mrs Elizabeth Parker had been a volunteer assisting Mary and Shirley. In 2000, she was employed, part-time, as executive secretary. (In the interim year of 2000, George Grant acted as secretary). In 2011, Mary Lotton received the honour of being made a life member of the CCJ. At the end of 2015, Mary Reaburn had completed nine years as a member of the Council of the Australian Bishops' Conference of Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Relations she continues in this role. The Sion Sisters marked the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in 2015, with a public lecture by Didier Pollyfeyt of Leuven, Belgium, at Our Lady of Sion College, Box Hill, and a meeting with teachers of our heritage schools in Sale and Warragul as well as a lecture at Yarra Theological Union.

## Sion's work expands to Sydney 1980 – 2016

A community of Sisters of Sion was established in Sydney in 1980.

The plan was that the Melbourne Shalom Centre would liaise with the new community, meeting three times a year. Sr Lenore wrote:

*We see our role as a bridge or liaison between Christians and Jews - with any Jew or Christian who is interested in knowing more about the other. We work mainly with Christians who, in our experience, know very little about Judaism – which is understandable, when the Jewish population of Australia is only 0.5% of the total.*<sup>39</sup>

Lenore noted the prior existence of a Jewish/Christian study group which met bi-monthly at the Great Synagogue under Rabbi Apple's leadership. Another Jewish/Christian study group also met at Bondi, with Rabbi Alony of the Central Synagogue and a Catholic/Jewish Liaison Committee, overseen by Professor Alan Crown of the Department of Semitic Studies, University of Sydney.

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38 May Leadership Meeting 2005.

39 Undated typescript only.

Lenore observed that, on the whole, the reaction to Jewish/Christian discussion was very cautious and the situation, a delicate one; much discretion was needed. She enumerated several challenges to be faced:

- We enter J/C relations here at our request; therefore, we must make our own way,
- Interest in ecumenism and interfaith work is almost non-existent among clergy and Bishops who have not been educated to it,
- Many priests are threatened by the changes and involvement of the laity,
- The Jewish community is not interested in contact with the Church; they want to be left alone. (Sydney has large numbers of Hungarian Jews who suffered in WWII.)<sup>40</sup>

On returning from SIDIC, Rome, in 1988, Shirley met with Rabbi Apple, the chief Minister of the Great Synagogue. On his arrival in Sydney in 1972, he had spoken with several Christian clergy with a view to re-activating dialogue between the Churches and the Jewish community and in particular, in re-establishing the Council of Christians and Jews (one had existed in the 1940s); the response was not very positive. Those who supported the move included Major Gerben Stelstra (Salvation Army), Canon Cuttris (St James Anglican Church), Rabbi Brasch (Temple Emmanuel Progressive Judaism) and Jean Skuse (Uniting Church). As an alternative, the Jewish/Christian study group was inaugurated in October 1974 at an informal gathering in the Great Synagogue. The meetings were held bi-monthly over a sandwich lunch. Jews and Christians alternated in presenting material for discussion.

Shirley, supported by Rabbi Apple, was involved in the foundation of CCJ (NSW) in 1988, as its first secretary. The general atmosphere of co-operation between the various religious communities suggested that the time was at last ripe. CCJ (Vic) also facilitated this development.

After two years, Shirley moved back to Melbourne while Lenore continued until 1991 to work in promoting Jewish/Christian dialogue in Sydney, both within the Catholic Church, in other Christian traditions and, where possible, in other groups. The framework for such involvement was largely provided by the CCJ (NSW), the Catholic/ Jewish Relations' Committee of the Catholic Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism, Sydney and the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion of which she had been a member for forty years.

1981-87 Lenore was appointed the Liaison Officer of the Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism in Sydney. This involvement gave her observer status at meetings of the executive committee of the Australian Council of Churches. As a member of the Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism, Sydney, she was involved in various projects, both independently and with the NSW Ecumenical Council.



**NSW Council of Christians and Jews 2012**

L-R: William Szekely, Debbie Weissman (ICCJ President), Marianne Dacy nds, Rev Paul Weaver, Bedelia Melville, George Harris, Major Graham Harris, Dr David Wansbrough, Rev John Queripel (centre), George Sternfeld (right).

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<sup>40</sup> Lacey, p.48.



In 1987, Lenore instigated the establishing of a Catholic/Jewish Relations Committee, attached to the Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism. Its members were from the Catholic community, nominated and approved by the Archbishop. Lenore was secretary with Fr Richard Dixon, Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine<sup>41</sup>, as chair.

The Jewish/Christian apostolate, undertaken by the Sisters in Sydney, was carried out in collaboration with various institutional networks and interested individuals, in both the Christian and Jewish communities. Health reasons obliged Lenore to leave Sydney in 1991. Studies took Rosalie to the USA to undertake a Master's Degree in Jewish Studies at Seton Hall, New Jersey. Briefly, she became secretary of CCJ (NSW) and was succeeded by Sr Marianne Dacy in August 1992.

At the time when Lenore wrote the 1991 report, the CCJ (NSW), besides holding the bi-monthly lunch-time meetings for members of the Jewish/Christian Study Centre at the Great Synagogue, also held two annual symposia with Christian and Jewish speakers and a yearly Memorial Service for Victims of the Shoah (Holocaust). During Lenore's time in Sydney, a Christian Holocaust Memorial Service was first held for a small group of Christians, with some Jewish participants, at the Rookwood cemetery, then in the crypt of St. Mary's Cathedral. When Sr Verna Holyhead sgs, who had initiated this service, moved to Melbourne, she continued her involvement, while Marianne took over organising the service in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral. The rabbi, Ben Elton, of the Great Synagogue and his cantor now participate with the cantor singing the Jewish memorial prayer. There are more Jews involved in the service in Sydney than attend in the Melbourne service where, however, there are more Christians. A commemoration of Kristallnacht was also inaugurated annually at Martin Place, in the city centre of Sydney; leaving the lights illuminated in churches had not proved effective.



Sr Marianne Dacy

From 1992 to 2016, Marianne became the honorary secretary of CCJ (NSW); she continues as secretary of the Australian Council of Christians and Jews from the late 1990s, succeeding Mary Lotton in this role

## The Archive of Australian Judaica, University of Sydney

Returning from Israel in August 1982, after several years of study in Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University, Marianne worked on a six month project at the Manly Seminary with Hans Aarns on a bibliography of all theological journals in the Theological Colleges throughout Australia and New Zealand. The project was funded by the Australian Catholic Research Council. It resulted in a publication called AULOTS (*Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Collections*) which continues to be updated and is now online.

On 4th July 1984, Marianne began work at Sydney University on a project, The Archive of Australian Judaica, organised by Professor Alan Crown (right), Semitic Studies Department, Dr Neil Radford (left), University Librarian and Dr Jennifer Alison, the Gifts and Exchange librarian, in the Fisher Library. The position, three days a week, was listed as temporary, but Marianne remained there for thirty and a half years, until the end of 2013. When Professor Crown died on 2nd of November 2010, he was replaced by Professor Suzanne Rutland.

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41 *ibid*, p.49.



**Archive of Australian Judaica**

The Archive of Australian Judaica was set up to collect and preserve the records of the Australian Jewish community in a central research repository. Many had been lost through deterioration. In the course of the years, the Archive House Records included some key Australian Jewish organisations, such as the New South Wales' Jewish Board of Deputies and the Australian Zionist Federation. The records include those of some eighty individuals who contributed to Australian Jewish life and the life of their communities. This work entailed Marianne visiting numerous times interstate Jewish records in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. Memorabilia was also collected and oral testimonies recorded. Scattered runs of Australian Jewish newspapers were filmed and a serial bibliography was put online. A webpage supplies leads for research.

For several years, Marianne assisted for one day a week in the library at the Catholic Theological Union, Hunters Hill, where she taught two semesters of Biblical Hebrew and gave other lectures. She continued to study, gaining a Master's degree in Philosophy, a Doctorate of Philosophy with a thesis entitled *The Separation of Early Christianity from Judaism* and a Bachelor of Divinity. Marianne also received numerous requests to assist with research for conferences and television documentaries and from students writing theses. Some of Marianne's writings appear as monographs, as chapters in books or in edited volumes, such as *Pathways to Understanding*. For many years, she acted as Secretary to the Australian Association for Jewish Studies, attending and giving papers at their annual conferences. She also attended the conferences of the Society for Early Christianity at Macquarie University. Marianne was a member of the *Women's Interfaith Network* which Josie Lacey convened, *the World Council for Religion and Peace* and *the World Union of Jewish Studies*. In 2013, she was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). She moved to Melbourne in 2017, to join the Box Hill community.

## Other Involvements of the Sisters in spreading Sion's Charism

In September 2015 and again in April 2016, the Congregation asked Marianne to give a Course at Holy Trinity Theological College, Harare, Zimbabwe to the seminarians on *The Parting of the Ways and the Jewish feasts*. Sr Mary Reaburn was also asked to give a course on the *Psalms* at Holy Trinity College, Zimbabwe in January/February 2018 and returned in 2020. Mary has been a member of the teaching staff at Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity, for many years. In addition, she has assisted with courses in the Biblical Program in the Notre Dame de Sion Convent of Ecce Homo, Jerusalem, and accompanied students and teachers on pilgrimages to Israel.

It must also be acknowledged that Australian Sisters serve the charism of the Congregation and specifically contributed to building relationships between Christians and Jews on the international stage as well. Shirley worked with the Fathers of Sion "Ratisbonne Centre" in Jerusalem and later led SIDIC in Rome. In both places the centres arranged lectures on Jewish/Christian topics; assisted those engaged in research and education and produced important publications. Stella, Rosalie and Bernadette led the English Centre for Biblical Formation at Ecce Homo in Jerusalem where the teaching of Scripture always included a Jewish perspective and some teaching by Jewish scholars. Stella began the Centre in the 1980s, Rosalie stepped in when the future of this Centre was in jeopardy in the late 1990s and Bernadette continued the work from 2007 to 2015. It was mentioned earlier that Marianne and Mary Reaburn went to Zimbabwe to teach, which was as part of a Congregation desire to spread the importance and meaning of Jewish/Christian relationships in African countries. Finally, Australian Sisters were members of two international Congregation Teams related to the commitment to Jewish/Christian relationships: the Jewish/Christian Team (Marianne from 2009 - 2015), and the Christology Team. Mary Reaburn remains a member of the latter. Both a local Jewish/ Christian team and a Christology Team continue to meet regularly. Membership consists of Srs Marianne Dacy, Mary Lotton, Mary Reaburn and Patricia Watson and Christian co-workers - including Mark Walsh, Carmel Crawford, and Anna Gionfriddo (JC Australia team).



The sunrises and sunsets were spectacular!



Fr Sylvester, Rector of Holy Spirit Seminary, Harare with Srs Teresa Brittain (UK) and Marianne (Sept 2015)



The Spiritan Community at Tafara with Srs Teresa Brittain and Marianne (Sept 2015)

## The Australian Council of Christians and Jews

The Australian Council of Christians and Jews, (ACCJ) was established on December 17, 1992 with a phone link up of the CCJ(Vic) at Shalom and the CCJ(NSW) at the office of Rabbi Apple at the Great Synagogue, Sydney, thus becoming one of now 39 national organisations affiliated with the ICCJ at Heppenheim. Mary Lotton was its first secretary, succeeded by Marianne in the late 1990s. As the ACCJ website points out, the Australian Council of Christians and Jews seeks to deepen mutual respect and understanding for the distinctiveness and integrity of each other, to learn from each other, while seeking to respect differences between peoples in Australian society.

All mainstream Christian churches and Jewish religious groupings in Australia have long been actively and publicly associated with the ACCJ, whilst also maintaining a warm relationship with the Councils of Christians and Jews in New Zealand

The ACCJ Patrons are: Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple AO , Rev Dr Peter Carnley AO, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy AO, Rabbi Dr John Levi AM and Mrs Jeanne Pratt AC. The ACCJs former Chair Rev Dr Michael Trainor is also a member of the ICCJ executive board. The new Chair, Dr Ron Hoenig elected at the biennial General Meeting and Deputy chair Rev Jenny Chalmers represent a Jew (Chair) and Christian (Deputy Chair) respectively. The ACCJ is composed of representatives of the various Councils of Christians and Jews round Australia. Rev Jenny Chalmers is a New Zealand Anglican priest and is a long time member of the ACCJ.

Marianne played an active role in organising the International Conference of the Council of Christians and Jews, (ICCJ) in Sydney, in 2007, held at Shalom College, where Peta Jones Pellach gave invaluable assistance, as well as with the ICCJ Women's Meeting, at which there was an aboriginal speaker, Mrs Elsie Heiss, She worked with Henry Mendelson and Bill Clancy from Melbourne who helped obtain Government funding. A generous donation was received through Sam Lipski from the Pratt Foundation, the Gandel Foundation and from the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, of whom eighteen attended from Melbourne and overseas. Philip Bliss from Victoria and his daughter helped in the organisation and registrations. At this conference, John Pawlikowski presented Marianne with the Sir Sigmund Sternberg prize for her "sustained intellectual contribution to the furtherance of inter-religious understanding particularly, but not exclusively, in the field of Jewish/Christian relations." This was a high point for the Sister of Our Lady of Sion in Australia.

From 2007 - 2009, Marianne was involved in the writing of the Berlin Document for the ICCJ with two groups of Jewish and Christian theologians, in meetings in Arnoldshain and Friborg. Twelve points were listed for dialogue between Jews and Christians and others, updating the Ten points of the Seelesberg Document of 1947, which was an address to the Churches and a milestone in the dialogue. In 2013, Marianne gave a workshop on Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology during the ICCJ Abrahamic conference in Aix en Provence, France.

For several years, ACCJ telephone links were established between the Australian States and Wellington, New Zealand; in 2016, they were replaced by Skype. As yet, Queensland is not a member, even though an ACCJ National Conference was held there; ACCJ conferences have already been held in Wellington New Zealand, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. On 5 April 2020, the ACCJ held its first Webinar on *Ecology and Religion*. Among those who attended were Philip Cunningham from Philadelphia and Debbie Weissman from Israel, both former Presidents of the ICCJ. The latest issue of *Gesher* was also issued before the Webinar and is the first of three issues in 2020 in electronic form. The second part was issued at the CCJ (Vic) Annual General Meeting on August 23 2020. David Shutz is the editor. The COVID-19 epidemic, while preventing face-to-face meetings, and limiting social gatherings, has opened up new creative possibilities for national and international participation in virtual events.



**Sisters of Sion who attended the ICCJ Conference in Sydney in 2007**

- L-R (Back): Ellen Know (UK), Kay MacDonald (Canada), Carmel Niland (Ireland), Stella O'Donnell (Australia), Mary Reaburn (Australia), Helen Frawley (Australia), Margaret Rush (Australia)
- L-R (Middle): Angela Bayliss (Australia), Margaret Shepherd (UK), Kathleen Keely (Australia), Marianne Dacy (Australia), Mary Barbuto (Australia), Darleen De Mong (Egypt and representing the General Council)
- L-R (Front): Ania Bodzinska (Poland), Patricia Watson (Australia), Celia Martin (Australia), Stephanie Schmidts (USA)

## Conclusion

It can be said that the contribution of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion has been very important within the Catholic Church of Australia, especially in Melbourne and Sydney where the largest Jewish communities are found. Sisters were members of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commissions in Melbourne and Sydney. One Sister is a member of the national Catholic Bishops' Ecumenical and Interfaith Advisory Council. Sisters work at the local and parish levels in what would now be called the dialogue of life. They assisted the establishment of CCJ in Victoria and NSW and finally the Australian CCJ. They did this through the dedicated work of several Sisters and by providing an office space for CCJ (Vic) for twenty years while it became established. The Sisters also support the annual publication of *Gesher*, the journal of the CCJ (Vic). On a wider scale the Sisters in their various ministries do all they can to assist Christians to understand better the relationship between Jews and Christians in their origins and in the dark periods of history as well as in better moments. Sisters work for and alongside the Jewish community and built friendships based on respect. Australian Sisters also make very important contributions on the international level: through SIDIC in Rome, the Centre for Biblical Formation in Jerusalem, through teaching in Zimbabwe and through membership of the Congregation's international Jewish/Christian Team and a similar Christology Team. Thus it can truly be said that they contribute a great deal to the initial stages of Christians and Jews setting out on a journey to establish new, respectful and just relationships in Australia. The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion continue to be involved in Christian/Jewish events and meetings of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Their aim is to leave a legacy of friendly relations between Jews and Christians, a greater understanding of the Jewish roots of Christianity and a deeper appreciation of the Jewishness of Jesus. The total elimination of any antisemitism, xenophobia or racism of any kind in Australian society remains a priority, to be immediately addressed, by the Sisters and by others, especially by the Christian Churches.

## APPENDIX

Several of our co-workers in Jewish/Christian relations have written tributes to the works of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

### **The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in New South Wales**

by Raymond Apple, Emeritus Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, Sydney

The Council of Christians and Jews in New South Wales had two incarnations. The first was an organisation brought into being during the Second World War, when a small group of high-minded religious leaders endeavoured to create a climate of tolerance between Christians and Jews and to plan for a more harmonious society once the war was over. But once the war ended the Council seemed to fade away though good relationships were maintained in part but not all of the NSW religious community. At this stage it was not clear whether the Roman Catholic hierarchy would be supportive since the Jewish community felt that the Vatican and some of its Australian representatives had not shown great sympathy for Jewish suffering in the Holocaust.

It was not until the early 1970s that a fresh attempt was made. A formal Council was not yet possible because certain Christian dignitaries were lukewarm and unconvinced, though Cardinal James Freeman was a great source of support. The nucleus of activists - Canon Cuttriss, Jean Skuse, Major Gerben Stelstra, Rabbi Rudolph Brasch and myself - did not give in, however, and we instituted a Christian-Jewish luncheon club which had neither office-bearers nor a constitution but worked well for many years, meeting every two months at the Great Synagogue.

Eventually the time was ripe for an official CCJ. The break-through occurred in 1988, when Sister Shirley Sedawie returned to Australia after nine years in Rome with SIDIC and four years in Israel with the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in Jerusalem. Sister Shirley became a quiet dynamo in Australian inter-faith work. She and her Sisters, who in NSW included Lenore Sharry and Marianne Dacy, became our guardian angels. Determined that the Roman Catholic Church would never again be accused of cold aloofness (or worse) towards the Jews, the Sisters worked behind the scenes as well as publicly, and the reborn Council was activated.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion played a leading role in formalising Jewish/Christian understanding in Australia. Though originally established in the nineteenth century with the aim of converting Jews to Christianity, the Order had changed from a missionary to a dialogical stance. With the Sisters supporting the longstanding endeavours of Rev Bern Stevens, Major Gerben Stelstra, Bishop John Reid and myself, the CCJ was re-born on 24 August 1988, under the sponsorship of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Uniting Churches, the Salvation Army and some other Christian denominations, with the Jewish community represented by the Great Synagogue, Temple Emanuel and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

When I think back to those years I accord more significance to the ecclesiastical diplomacy of the Sisters than to the admittedly more evident range of meetings, talks, dialogues and climate-changing campaigns that we instituted. I think of the quiet way in which both sides were consulted when ways and wording needed understanding and articulating. I think of how we all somehow became members of one another's families. I remember how when Lenore died we all mourned.

There must be special mention of Marianne Dacy. Over many years she provided the Christian-Jewish dialogue movement (in New South Wales and federally) with a solid, happy practical base of practical administration, becoming our indispensable "spirit in the wheels", to use Ezekiel's phrase.

In a tribute I had the sad duty to pay to Lenore Sharry I acknowledged her "remarkable sensitivity, insight and dedication". The words apply to the Sisters as a whole. With the moral courage that recognised a new world and its new challenges, they have loyally and lovingly borne "witness to God's faithful love for His people", to quote a policy statement of their Order. Many individuals and groups have combined to create and usher in the new era, but the Sisters have made the greatest contribution. As a rabbi I can't and don't pronounce sainthood, but rabbis can and do bestow the accolade of "righteous among the nations", and the Sisters of Sion head the Australian list.

### **The Works of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion**

by Josie Lacey, founder of the Women's Interfaith Network

*"The Church repudiates all persecution of any person. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews and motivated by the Gospels' spiritual love and by no political consideration, she deploras the hatred, persecutions and displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source." (Nostra Aetate)*

One group that has been trying to take this command very much to heart is the congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, who in 1990 celebrated the centenary of their arrival in Australia.

Sr Lenore Sharry was to comment:

*"No Christian with any knowledge of Church History can fail to acknowledge Christian responsibility for the "teaching of contempt", albeit in ignorance, that marred so much of Christian presentation of the Jewish people. The source of the "Christian Antisemitism" can be traced back to a false interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures by the early Christians, and their inability to understand why most Jews of the time of Jesus and Paul did not accept his teaching and become his followers." (B'nai B'rith Background 1990)*

Since the sixties all of the Sisters have done some of their training in Israel in order to be aware of the important place the land holds in Jewish life, and of the rich diversity that exists among Jewish people.

In cities like Rome, Paris and London the Sisters have documentation centres which are well used by students, educators and others involved in correcting misconceptions, media and other sources.

Wherever groups exist to further understanding, such as Councils of Christians and Jews, some of the Sisters try to be involved. Others fight to combat prejudice in whatever milieu they find themselves in various parts of the world, including Arab countries. They also collaborate in building projects for a just and peaceful society wherever possible.

## **A Sister of Our Lady of Sion in Sydney**

by Dr David Wansbrough, professor at Moscow University

Imagine this scenario: Jews are renowned for their scholarship. They wished to form an archive of Judaica so they searched for the appropriate scholar, one who would be respected by other scholars and able to win their confidence. With all their learned numbers who did they select? A Catholic nun, a sister of Sion, Sr Marianne Dacy.

She was funded by a Jewish trust and sat in a large chamber of the University of Sydney's Fisher Library surrounded by floor to ceiling shelves filled with books, photographs and manuscripts containing the intellectual, artistic, commercial, legal, scientific, family and community aspirations of a people.

She was proactive. Sister Marianne welcomed the momentous and the ephemeral but she sought out and inspired new innovative works. She herself wrote a booklet on the Jewish origin of Christian festivals.

As a Sister of Sion she and Rabbi Brian Fox gave a series of theological and historical lectures in the Aquinas Institute. (At the time it was the focus for intense intellectual activity). When she visited Temple Emanuel (on an open day) the Rabbi placed her in the front as an elder beside Cantor Deutsch and asked if there was another member of clergy who had done as much for Christian/Jewish relations. This was a spiritual recognition for her work in the *Shoah* Education series.

Her candidate's thesis earned a PhD and was published in book form.

Sr Marianne has organised the annual Shoah service for many years. She has created a script of extraordinary power that acknowledges the Christian historical complicity in the persecution of Jews, and of the non-intervention of Christians when there was the deliberate attempt to exterminate an entire race... This service has been held for Christians of various denominations in the Crypt of the Sydney Roman Catholic cathedral, and once in the actual cathedral on an anniversary, it attracted a very large civic gathering. In these events Jews can witness Christians (leaders and laity) seeking atonement.

This is in keeping with the religious ideals of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

On a social level Sr Marianne phoned around to attract the right audience to the bi-monthly meeting of the Christian/Jewish Luncheon Club at the Great Synagogue. At year's end in 2013 Marianne made her home available and prepared for the party that allowed committee members and their families to meet in another context.

But the sheer physical effort of being the long term NSW CCJ minutes secretary must be acknowledged.

How many newsletters has she folded and how many envelopes has she addressed over the years?

No wonder this Christian Sister of Our Lady of Sion was nominated by a Jewish women's organisation and received the high Australian honour, the AM.

Through Sister Marianne Dacy the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion have been well represented in Sydney.

## **The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in Victoria**

By Albert Isaacs

In the early 1970s, two diverse religious instituta established headquarters in the Melbourne suburb of Kew, namely the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion Shalom Centre in Cotham Road, and my synagogue the Leo Baeck Centre for Progressive Judaism in Harp Road.

Because LBC was geographically near to the Shalom Centre, Sr Shirley Sedawie and Sr Rosalie Hanley in particular, made regular visits to Friday evening services at LBC; the first such visit taking place very soon after the first such service in 1972. In those days, the Sisters were still wearing Habits and there were many in the congregation who felt threatened by the appearance of two ladies wearing nun's apparel. Remember that in 1972



there was virtually no religious dialogue in Melbourne – this was not to commence properly until about a decade later. Therefore, in the minds of many Jewish congregants, the only reason for the appearance of these two Sisters would be to convert Jews! Nevertheless, there were some in the congregation, including me, who wished to know more about these visitors. I was one of the few exceptions who already had an interest in religious dialogue, even in those very early days. Therefore, I asked the Sisters many questions about their Order and about Catholicism in general.

In 1985 the Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria) was formed, Sr Shirley being one of the founders. I was an original Council member, thus strengthening my amity with Shirley, and making new friendships with many of the other members of the Order. In this respect, I particularly mention Sr Mary Lotton. For many years, Mary was the Secretary of the Council and I was Minutes Secretary and we had a very good working relationship and a friendship that lasts to this day.

Both Shirley Sedawie and Mary Lotton were made Honorary Life Members of the Council. In the latter case, it was my privilege to have nominated Mary as an HLM.

When Shirley passed away, Sr Mary Barbuto was responsible for organising the funeral. She gave me the very great honour of asking me to place Shirley's personal Bible on the coffin prior to the burial.

I will always remember this as a privilege, and as a material reminder of the strong relationship that I have with the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, a relationship that now goes back nearly fifty years, and of the way that Catholic-Jewish dialogue has improved over those years!

### **Those Early Years...**

by Dr John Levi, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth Israel

It is difficult for us to imagine how sectarian religious life was in Australia both before and after the Second World War. Australians may have been able to speak to God on Saturday or Sunday but we had great difficulty being able to speak to one another about religion. How things change? There are reasons for this cultural revolution. I believe that we are still struggling to comprehend the impact of totalitarianism, the Second World War and the brooding reality of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) dictatorships, jihadists and remotely controlled missiles. We stood, and we still stand, at the edge of a nuclear precipice.

In remote Australia very few voices were raised to rescue the doomed Jews of Central Europe as the world descended into a war to be fought against Hitler and Mussolini. And nobody understood the nightmare of Stalinist oppression. Apologists for bigotry abounded. In 1938 Archbishop Mannix reminded his flock that "the Founder of the Christian religion Himself was a Jew and derived His manhood from a Jewish mother." A 1939 plan to settle the Jews of Europe in the "vast empty spaces behind Wyndham" in the Kimberley region gathered the ecumenical support of Bishop Vernon Pilcher, Archbishop H. W. K. Mowll, Archbishop Daniel Mannix, Bishop E. H. Burgmann and a list of distinguished Australians. But it was too little and it was too late.

In the postwar world the religious implications of the Shoah could not be ignored. Following the profound decisions of Vatican Two, the Sisters of Sion re-evaluated their mission and a revolution in Catholic/Jewish relationships ensued. I can remember attending a service of prayer in Ein Karem in 1968 and hearing the Magnificat reverently sung in modern Hebrew. It was an impressive indication that a new era had begun.

But I knew that already. One day in 1965 I happened to be babysitting our daughter Katherine. She was teething at the time and, to my surprise, a Sister Callistus came for afternoon tea. She was dressed traditionally in black gown and hood. She promptly took Katherine on her knee and, while the baby chewed happily on her rosary beads, we discussed Jewish Catholic relationships.

Shirley was always practical. She undertook a University course in Hebrew and Jewish sources. She offered the possibility of using the Order's home on Cotham Rd, Kew. On the outside of the building was a modest name plate which read "Shalom". The Sisters created an impressive library of books and journals about Judaism.

And it was there that the newly formed Council of Christians and Jews held the meetings that created friendships, new religious paths and interreligious dialogue.

There were, of course, ups and downs. The first “down” in my experience was getting the two religious Jewish wings to talk to one another. That took time and tact. The Catholic Church offered Raheen as the place in which the first round table discussions could be held. I think that may have been at the suggestion of Father Bill Smith SJ who became our first hon. treasurer. Shirley was the practical facilitator of the Council. She formed a warm relationship with the orthodox Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky and the Council took shape and prospered. Shirley also got me a “job” at the Yarra Theological Union and subsequently at Corpus Christi. I remember that I first taught a course in Rabbinic Judaism in the cellar of the building in Box Hill for a series of twelve lectures. To my surprise, the course grew and moved upstairs. It was now to be taught for three academic credits. For the next twenty years I taught for a semester and I got to know my fellow lecturers and a whole generation of priests and teachers.

By this time Sister Callistus had become Sister Shirley Sedawie. And Shirley was moved, or promoted, to Rome where she became the editor of the prestigious journal *Sidic* which documented the course of Catholic Jewish dialogue around the world. Thanks to Shirley I participated in one of the most interesting Jewish Catholic Conference in the hills near Florence with the active participation of the brilliant Cardinal Martini of Milan. His speech was groundbreaking and so radical that it has never been published in full.

Shirley was, of course, part of a devoted team that is to be found around the world. I know how important that amazing and talented team was in Australia. There was always an Australian in the Old City of Jerusalem at Ecce Homo helping to build bridges of understanding between Jews and Christians and Moslems. In the worst slum in Cairo I found an indomitable Sister of Sion working with the poorest of the poor. And in Australia there was a “second generation” ready to inherit Shirley’s legacy. Quite simply, I don’t know what we would have done without Sister Shirley Sedawie.

### **Our Lady of Sion Sisters and CCJ (Victoria)**

by Larry Nemer SVD

In 1994 Fr John Pawlikowski OSM, was President of the International Council of Christians and Jews. He gave a talk at the CCJ-Victoria Centre which at that time was located in a Convent of the Sisters of Sion on Cotham Road which I attended. After the talk he said to me: “Larry, in the twenty years we taught together at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago you never showed a spark of interest in Jewish/Christian Relations; what happened?” I told him: “I met the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.” All he said was: “Oh!”

Pope John Paul II in 1991 had published the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* and there was a small group of people who wanted to study the encyclical with me. One of them was Sr Mary Lotton nds, who was the Secretary of the CCJ (Vic) at the time. Whenever we would talk about inter-religious dialogue she would invariably ask: but what does this mean for Jewish/Christian relations? I was so focused on the dialogue with the other world religions that I never really thought about that question. But as time went on I began to realise that if we do not get inter-religious dialogue with the Jews “right”, we won’t get it “right” with any other religious body.

So I began to attend the talks and seminars for Christians and Jews that CCJ held on Sunday afternoons. It was a real learning experience for me. I became a good friend of Sr Shirley Sedawie nds, and discovered that she knew more about the genesis and development of the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* than anyone else I knew. She could tell stories about the commitment that John XXIII and Cardinal Bea had to changing the Christian attitude towards the Jews and the struggles these two faced to bring the Declaration into existence. Whenever I had to lecture on this declaration I would invite Sr Shirley to give the lecture on its genesis and development.

Over the years the Sisters also taught me to steer clear of the caricatures of “Jewish legalism” that often appeared in Catholic preaching. They and the Jews attending the Seminars on those Sunday afternoons helped me to appreciate the deep spirituality that undergirds Jewish religious practices. It is thanks to them that when I

attended a session at the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne in 2009 given by four rabbis I could walk out thinking: “how proud Jesus must have been of being a Jew”. I am deeply grateful for all that the Sisters of Zion in Australia and England have taught me about Jewish/Christian Relations.

### **The Sisters of Our Lady of Zion**

by Dr John Uren BDS (Melb) LDS (Vic) BTheol (Melb)

My first contact with the little-known Sisters of Our Lady of Zion came about when I took over a Dental Practice in Box Hill in 1966. Although they originally arrived in Australia in 1890 to set up schools in Sale and Warragul, they were then in charge of a relatively small secondary school for girls in Box Hill. One that has gone ahead in leaps and bounds ever since.

Several Sisters came to me as patients. Patricia Watson, Dorothy Renton, Patsy Crotty, Bev Speed soon were followed by many more. Assisting at an ENT operation on one of them at the Mercy Hospital, I was asked by the surgeon who these nuns were, and I facetiously replied “Sionese”, a joke which earned me a sharp rebuke from the operating sister in charge. Over the years through sharing lectures with Mary Reaburn and others when I was completing a BTheol at YTU, I soon realized this group had a unique charism in their relation to the Jewish Faith which in the post Vatican II age was on the cutting edge of Christian Theology. Founded by Theodore Ratisbonne in France 1847 “*to witness in the Church and in the world that God continues to be faithful in his love for the Jewish people.*” the Sisters were in a unique position to elaborate on Vatican II. The focus of Vatican II on ecumenism with non-Catholic Christian Religions had raised the more difficult question of our relationship with non-Christian Religions. How do they fit into our understanding of Salvation in Christ? The Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* had disposed of the teaching “outside the church there is no salvation” and also dismissed the accusation that the Jews were responsible for deicide, but were we content with Karl Rahner’s proposition that our non-Christian friends could be called “anonymous Christians”? If I slapped my Jewish friend on the back and said, “you’re all right; you are an anonymous Christian”, he would probably punch me on the nose.

With the change in emphasis from proselytisation to reaffirmation of the Jews as the chosen race, a positive approach to Jewish-Christian dialogue and the establishment of the Council of Christians and Jews at Shalom, the Sisters of Zion have been at the forefront of trying to come to a systematic understanding of Salvation in Christ not only in relation to Judaism but, as a corollary, to other non-Christian religions. In 1997 I was privileged to be sent with Mary Reaburn, Lois Elkin and Oonah O’Shea by the Sisters as their Australian representative at the Notre Dame de Zion International Theological Conference at Ein Karem in Jerusalem with the topic “Who is Jesus?”. As well as making our own presentations we were able to see how the Sisters of Our Lady of Zion have been able to exert a significant presence in Jerusalem and to hear from other delegates how they deal with Jewish Christian Relations throughout the world.

Subsequently, the Sisters of Our Lady of Zion have engaged us with lectures and seminars from such eminent theologians as American Fr John Pawlikowski OSM, Rabbi Fred Morgan, Jewish academic Paul Forgasz and Paul Collins, all the time exploring different interpretations of the Bible, of Systematic Theology and the History of Religion.

Of course, these academic pursuits were an add-on to their regular pastoral works in our local community and missions overseas. In 1990, our Melbourne Zion nuns Patricia Fox and Oonah O’Shea established the first community in the Philippines in the Prelature of Infanta, eventually ministering to catechists, and particularly to women and farmers in their day to day struggle for justice and a decent life. Other Sisters, among them Trudy Nabuurs, were called by the Congregation to minister to pilgrims in Jerusalem and students in the Centre for Biblical Formation, and those who come to pray and commemorate the passion and death of Jesus on the Lithostrotos, below the Convent.

My involvement with the Sisters of Our Lady of Zion in theological discourse, my Jerusalem experience and as a member of the School Board at Box Hill has been most rewarding and I am grateful to them for their inspiration in my own personal development over fifty years.

### **About the Author**



**Sr Marianne Dacy (nds)**

Marianne Dacy is a Sister of Our Lady of Sion and secretary of the Australian Council of Christians and Jews. She studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and holds a PhD from the University of Sydney where she ran the Archive of Australian Judaica for over thirty years. Currently, she continues to research early Christianity and Judaism and is active in Jewish/Christian encounter.

