

**SERMON PREACHED AT THE WAR WIDOW'S GUILD SERVICE  
AT CHRISTCHURCH CATHEDRAL NEWCASTLE  
BY REV DAVID CAMPBELL BA (HONS); BD  
(Minister of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Newcastle)  
On Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 at 11.00am**

During my twelve years in Newcastle I have attended the War Widow's Guild Anzac service in this cathedral on several occasions. I have always found the service to be distinctly different from other Anzac commemorations mainly because of its focus on women and also because it includes the Anzac Field of Remembrance ceremony at the end of the service when small wooden crosses are planted in an area at the side of the cathedral in remembrance of those who have died due to their involvement in war. As I hear the hammering of the crosses into the ground I am profoundly moved. For me this is the most precious period of reflection and memory during the Anzac season. Coming to Australia from N Ireland I wasn't familiar with the work of the War Widow's Guild. Having found out about this organisation's important practical work, I have come to appreciate its worth and significant contribution to Australian society.

The War Widow's Guild of Australia was established in 1945 in Victoria by Mrs Jessie Mary Vasey, widow of Major General George Vasey. It began as a craft guild which taught weaving and other handicrafts to its members so that they could augment their inadequate pensions. Established by women for women the Guild has endeavoured to bring war widows together to support each other and to speak with one voice to improve their financial and social circumstances. Within two years of its formation the Guild had spread across Australia. It was established in New South Wales in 1946. As Guilds were established in all states in Australia the organisation became a powerful lobby group which was consulted by governments on matters concerning war widows. Each state made its own arrangements to cater for their members' needs, but all of them made housing a priority. By 1954 the Guild was in a position to take advantage of the Aged Pension Houses act and use it to provide housing for its members.

From humble beginnings the War Widows Guild grew and today it is an influential and respected organization with approx 27,000 members across Australia. The Guild operates with the assistance of many volunteers, some of whom are present at this service.

I would like to thank you for all the work you have done and continue to do. What stands out for me about the War Widow's Guild is its motto which is an extract from the Christmas message delivered by King George 6<sup>th</sup> in 1941. The extract was considered to be a suitable expression of the Guild's ideals. It states; **“We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other's needs and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life”**. As I reflected on this excellent motto I noted two features about it. Firstly, it is very biblical. Secondly it can be applied to all of us, members and non-members of the Guild alike.

Repeatedly the New Testament writers exhorted Christians to engage in specific activities that would enable their community to function effectively and grow numerically and spiritually. Frequently they used a unique Greek word 'allelon' translated 'one another' in English to describe this mutual and reciprocal process. It occurs over 100 times in the New Testament. Approximately 59 of these occurrences are specific commands teaching us how to relate to one another. Obedience to these commands is imperative. It forms the basis for true Christian community. When all the 'one another' exhortations are studied carefully & grouped together they can be reduced to 12 significant actions. It seems to me that at least four of these are implied in the Guild's motto. The apostle Paul sets them out in his letters. Firstly in Romans 12 v 5; **'Members one of another'**. Secondly in Romans 12 v 10; **'Be devoted to one another'**. Thirdly in Galatians 5 v 13; **'Serve one another in love'**. Fourthly in Galatians 6 v 2; **'Bear one another's burdens'**.

Life is lived out in community. We cannot live effectively in isolation. We need to connect and interact with others. Sadly modern society has become very individualistic. I remember one morning being struck with how true this is as I travelled into the centre of Sydney on a packed train during rush hour. Everyone in the carriage was tightly squeezed together. Some were sitting, others were standing. Most had ear plugs in their ears listening to music. Some were busy scrolling their smart phones sending and receiving text messages, catching up with facebook or browsing on the internet. Some were trying to work on their laptops, while a few were trying to read the Sydney Morning Herald, and this was before it was reduced in size. One man was watching a

funny movie on his ipad which caused him to laugh loudly much to the annoyance of everyone around him. Nobody was looking at anyone. Eyes were looking down or were closed. All the commuters were deeply engrossed in their private little world.

There's nothing individualistic about the motto of the Guild. It stresses the necessity of community; that its members belong together; that they depend on each other; that they serve each other & are willing to make sacrifices for each other. I am convinced that the reason why the War Widow's Guild has survived for almost 70 years is because it has always put the needs of people first. Many war widows in Australia have received much practical help and support from the Guild's activities. It is my prayer that all of us will live out the motto of the War Widow's Guild. May we find our true life, which is being willing to make sacrifices for others. Come to think of it, that is the true Anzac spirit. Amen.