



175TH
LOVE AND SERVE
1846-2021

13 and 15 October, 2020

Dear Sisters, Associates, Colleagues and Friends,




Special greetings for our Society feasts this year! We are beginning our 175th anniversary celebrations in a different way than had been planned twelve months ago.

Let us look back at the context of our origin in 1846. England was a land of bitter divisions, hunger and disease. Cholera wiped out thousands of people and in Ireland a blight had almost destroyed the potato crop, causing the Great Famine. Hundreds of thousands of those made destitute crossed the Irish Sea to find work in newly-built factories in such cities as Derby. Conditions were often cruel with child labour, few safety regulations, and low wages for those who spent long hours each day producing the immense wealth of early Victorian England. It was also an era of exploding scientific awareness and technological expertise, for example, 272 railway construction Acts were passed by Parliament in 1846 and this means of transport and communication would have far-reaching effects. Alongside and evoked by this rapidly changing situation there was much religious questioning.

175 years later many of those descriptions can be 'matched' in all the countries where the Society is serving. We know the current times well ... and we also know that when Cornelia and the first sisters arrived in Derby they 'rolled up their sleeves', literally and metaphorically, and got on with what God was asking of them in the situation. This anniversary year is an invitation for us to do the same, whether still shielding or in semi-lockdown or returning to work in schools and other ministries.

May we be creative in finding ways to mark this special time. One of Pope Francis' repeated reminders is "not to be robbed of our joy" when confronted with the magnitude of issues, allowing cynicism to replace enthusiasm. Cornelia often said something similar and in one way or another her early biographers commented that difficulties seemed to call forth from her greater serenity, faith and courage. Throughout the coming months we encourage you to make use of the rich resources in the *Retreat in Daily Life Together*.

Between now and next October maybe all of us can take at least 175 moments (planned and spontaneous) individually and together:

-  to REFLECT with gratitude about people, places and events in the Society's history;
-  to REJOICE and have some fun together;
-  to RESPOND to the tasks of service ahead, especially in the work of the forthcoming chapters.

Marking these significant October feasts, let us pray together, wherever we are, about Cornelia's words to us:

Let us only LOVE AND SERVE God.

Wishing you much joy.

With love and prayer,

Veronica Openibo, Pauline Darby, Cecilia Nya, Marie Ursino

Society Leadership Team