

Biography - Sister Janet Mead

Extracts from State Library website: [Vale Sister Janet Mead | State Library of South Australia](#)

Growing up in the Adelaide suburb of Goodwood to parents who 'lived their faith' by visiting prisoners in jail and housing refugees in their own home, Janet was inspired from an early age to care for the disadvantaged. Hers was a family who loved to sing and from the age of eight she was taught piano by an elderly sister at her school, St Aloysius College. It was while still at school that her decision to join the teaching order of the Sisters of Mercy was made, joining the convent at the age of 17. Recognising her musical abilities, the sisters put her forward as a candidate for the Adelaide Conservatorium where she studied piano and violin. For almost 30 years Sr Janet taught at her old school with six years teaching at Mount Gambier during this time.

Following the enormous changes to the Catholic Church brought by Vatican II, Sr Janet sought to make the Mass more relevant to her students through modern liturgy and music. Encouraged by Fr Rob Aitken she started a Rock Mass service at St Francis Xavier Cathedral in 1972, which at its height, was attended by 2,000 people. Sr Janet began publishing music to help other parishes to run similar services, including recording a single with Festival Records in 1973. The flip side of the record was a recording of Sr Janet singing a version of *The Lord's Prayer* composed by Arnold Strals as sung at the Rock Mass.

To the amazement of all, the single became a hit and was the first ever to make gold record sales in both Australia and the USA at the same time – later also reaching gold in the UK. Sr Janet Mead became a household name all over the world.

Sr Janet's most lasting and profound legacy is her work with the Adelaide Day Centre for Homeless Persons, which she established in 1985 with Sr Anne Gregory as a drop-in place for homeless and unemployed men, in Moore Street. Soon larger premises were needed and the work moved nearby to Queen Street but retained the Moore Street 'connection'.

To support the work, the Romero Community – a group of nine lay people – was formed to work with Sr Janet.

For decades the Queen Street Centre, with its beautiful gardens, has been the hub of an incredible support base for people experiencing homelessness, refugees, newly released offenders, the unemployed and people just struggling to make ends meet. Around 50 phone calls per day, with a similar number of door visitors keeps the Centre staff busy giving out food parcels, furniture, referrals, or assistance to negotiate the tangle of government departments and bill paying.