

EULOGY for Sister Christina Fealey (fondly known as ‘Sr Chris)

When I have thought about what to say today - and this today has been expected for about the last 6 years I have wondered how I could do justice to the life of our dear Chris who lived her Franciscan missionary life so fully and well. As I looked round the chapel last night and now today I realise I did not have to do justice Each and everyone here and so many who are not here holds part of the beautiful gift to our world which was Chris’ story and our world will continue to be a better place as we reflect and share and take inspiration from her life.....so LETS keep telling the stories and cherishing the memories.

Chris lived a life so utterly conformed to Jesus her friend, brother, mentor & Beloved. If ever anyone doubted Chris’ love for Jesus you just needed to have the privilege of giving her holy communion - her eyes would light up and she would receive the host with such utter reverence and love and then just ‘be’ in the intimacy of that moment.

One way Chris differed from Her Beloved, Jesus was that she was not perfect – she had her fair share of human weakness, limitation, imperfection like the rest of us...and how deeply she was aware of this but, Chris, this is all now healed and transformed in Christ

Chris – Liverpool and family – one of three siblings Joe and Andrew having gone before her – but much to her delight she graced this earth for 14 days longer than her dear sister Joe!! Chris was always proud of her roots and especially that the family lived near Aintree racecourse and that THE Queen Mother had once come to their humble house to use the facilities.

Chris - Guildford & Aldershot – her initial formation & training years – Chris, I have remembered to say you were the last to be clothed as an OSF in June 1946, as we became FMDM in 1947; then after 1st profession and training off on a great missionary adventure.

Chris - Bulawayo Zimbabwe -25 years of midwifery & nursing along with the adventure of pioneering a new mission in a new country – selfless, hardworking, dedicated and always loving and great fun. It was in Bulawayo that the first of Chris’ great scams (Chris loved that word) was recorded. Chris loved coffee and for some reason fmdm only drank tea but she would find ways of the staff or patients getting her coffee which would be hidden in the most unlikely of places and drunk with great delight by Chris.

Chris – Amman and Zarqa in Jordan – 17 years of caring for the poorest and most vulnerable - refugees and displaced people women and children in the Middle East The scams and adventures continued - on a trip to Egypt Chris managed to wheedle her way in to The Hilton Hotel acting as if she owned the place – Dot still blushes as she recalls the story.

Back in UK – Tooting Bec, Clapham supposedly for health reasons but there was more to come!! Chris continued her missionary life for the next 16 years spreading the Good News of the Gospel to more vulnerable and marginalised people - those in **Wandsworth prison**. Here the stories are endless; the fastest climber of those familiar prison metal spiral staircases and that was **with** calliper and crutches. Sneaking sugar, salt and pepper into her menyes it was always sugar and not drugs!! Being Christs compassionate heart for so many – as testified on the inside cover of our liturgy. When Chris thought she would have to leave the prison chaplaincy because she could no longer manage without crutches – potentially a dangerous weapon in prison – the governor told her

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in no uncertain terms that if she left he could not afford the cost of staff to secure the place as it would cause such a riot.

We must also remember your membership of formation communities in Canterbury and Clapham where the example of your life inspired the next generation of fmdm – many of whom sent messages today. Also Chris we thank you for your amazing ministry of hospitality to all who visited any community you lived in.

Chris was not one to confine her ministry to the ‘workplace’ – she stopped and talked to anyone and everyone – the tube station staff loved her, the flower shop people loved her, the shop attendants loved her! One of my clearest memories of Chris in Clapham was arriving home – crutches and all – every Friday after work in the prison with flowers packed inside her coat in the front and flowers in her little back pack on the back – a free gift from Michael and the girls at the flower shop

Chris came to **La Verna** in 2011 and from April 2012 was confined to bed from where she has continued to minister and offer hospitality to countless fmdms, family members, friends, visitors, staff, even the birds and squirrels at the feeders outside the window. What this cost you, Chris, we will never know – your extrovert, busy, relational personality confined to bed! Jesus certainly took you at your word when on your profession day you wore the crown of thorns symbolising your desire to imitate Jesus in his suffering and death – you have borne your cross – and ours – with grace and a deep joy. Thank you for your truly extraordinary ministry here. There were prayers for everyone, interest in everyone, always chocolates in the drawer, letters written, phone calls made and a sharing of faith and experience of God which everyone of us will treasure. As St John says at the end of the gospel if it was all written down the world itself would not hold all the books.

Chris was certainly someone who stuck at a role and ministry for many years.....maybe that is why she took the **ministry of dying** so seriously and spread that out over decades with several close shaves with death in car accidents, strokes, supposedly terminal cancers and as we know even in these last years several ‘resurrections’ – we were never sure, Chris, whether heaven was not ready for you or this earth had not finished with you – but whichever way – finally the communion of saints in heaven won out!!

I want to mention those who have accompanied this marathon of dying – the sisters and staff of La Verna and medical staff from the Mill and local services. The attentive, loving, patient, expert and innovative care you gave Chris inspired us all – the efforts you went to enable Chris to get to Sunday Mass – something Chris treasured so so much – and then to bargain with her about when else she could ‘get up’ for whatever events were going on. The outings – just as far as the grounds where Chris loved to listen to the birds, smell the air and celebrate life! Thank you seems so inadequate but I know you will also say ‘it is in giving that you receive’. Silvana please make sure your whole team know how much we have valued the way you all cared for Chris.

As Chris left us in the early hours of 14th August I am sure, all of us just imagined the shouts of joy and welcome in heaven – her family – parents, brother and sister; so many of our own sisters Teresa Mac, Trin, Teresa Leahy, Aine – to name a few; her great companion Padre Pio, Francis and Clare would have greeted Chris with open arms and said “well done my girl! Welcome home”. I am sure there has been a party going on ever since as Chris caught up with “all her pals”, shared the stories,

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laughed at the scams and adventures – the pain and disability gone and now living in the complete freedom of the children of God

I will end with a quote from Joe Chinnici, OFM which has stayed with me whenever I have thought of preparing for this day. Joe, in attempting to capture the gift of St Francis of Assisi to our world, said:

**Francis, in the manner of Jesus, left those who followed him
the human and graced text of his own life**

Chris, you too left us the human and graced text of your own life. You were never in authority, your name was never up in lights but your life lived so fully and well to the end spoke with the authority and authenticity of the Gospel.

As you lay dying in these last weeks the theme for the next FMDM General Chapter was emerging amongst us but as I look back at your life you have been living this theme for decades BECOME WHAT YOU LOVE CHRIST CRUCIFIED FOR THE WORLD – Chris, as you now rest in the arms of your beloved please pray for us that we too may BECOME WHAT WE LOVE & live our Franciscan Gospel lives as fully and as authentically as you did for the world

Rest in peace our dear sister, friend and imitator of Christ and on behalf of us all thank you for the privilege of sharing this great adventure of life with you.

Delivered by Sr Jane Bertelsen
during the Funeral Mass on Friday 24th August in Ladywell Chapel

