

# Sisters in Service: Lay Sisters in the Dominican Order, Eastern Australia 1867-2019

Wednesday 30 September 2020 4:15–5:30 pm

School of History Zoom Seminar Series  
Speaker: Elizabeth Hellwig (ANU)

Meeting ID: 932 0795 6027

URL:

<https://anu.zoom.us/j/93207956027?pwd=bG9lZ1o3UDBRUnJOcUsvU3ZnTmRWZz09>

Password: 813469

Between 1867 and 1958 eighty women took up the lay sister housekeeper position in Dominican convents throughout Eastern Australia. They were the helpmeets of the teaching sisters, known as choir sisters, who without the domestic work of the lay sisters could not have maintained their convents and



boarding schools alongside their commitment to the communal recitation of the Prayer of the Church. In 1958 the two classes of lay and choir sisters were subsumed into one. This seminar addresses historical questions about who these obscure lay sisters were individually and collectively, the nature of their social class, what led to its abolition and the outcomes for the women whose identity and rights had been aligned with their lower class occupation. Historiographically this is a unique study of a group of women rarely mentioned in the increasingly available literature about Religious sisters.



**Elizabeth Hellwig** is a Dominican sister who knew and lived from time to time beside 40 of the women whose lives she is discussing, after the suppression of their class. As a professional archivist, Elizabeth has had privileged access to the 150 years of documentation surrounding the sisters' lives. She personally experienced the way individual former lay sisters took up the challenge to reinvent themselves, especially after Vatican II revolutionised the lifestyle and theology underpinning religious life itself. Elizabeth is a teacher, archivist and storyteller who first studied Australian History under Manning Clark in the 1960s.