

150th Anniversary of the Arrival of the Sisters of Charity in Australia 1838-1988

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On the 19th January, 1789, Mary Aikenhead was the first child born to a strict Protestant, Dr. David Aikenhead and Mary Stackpole, the daughter of a Catholic merchant in Cork. Mary was baptized a Protestant. Being a frail baby, she was taken to Nurse Mary Rorke at Eason's Hill to be nursed and for six years remained in the country air in the midst of a deeply religious family. At home again with her family, Mary attended Sunday Service at the Protestant Shandon Church. Mary was confused by the poverty of the Catholics contrasting with the well being of the Protestants. She enjoyed her visits to Mrs Stackpole's Catholic home, reverting to the familiar prayers Nurse Rorke had taught her and revisiting the much loved Catholic Chapel with its strange halo of purity and peace.

During his last illness Dr Aikenhead, touched by his wife's passionately expressed sorrow, sent for a priest and after a long conversation, asked to be received into the Catholic Church. He died with great trust in God in December, 1801. In her sixteenth year Mary was baptized in the Catholic Church and received her First Communion and Confirmation. By the time she was eighteen she not only entered heartily into the pleasures of the evening gaieties but also attended daily morning Mass and made morning rounds in the miserable quarters of the town, bringing relief to the indigent and comfort to the sorrowing.

From her girlhood, Mary's ideal of happiness was the privilege of devoting herself to the service of the sick and suffering poor who lined the streets and lived in hovels, and of vowing herself to this work in religion. But there was no Religious Order whose duty it was to relieve the destitute in their homes and receive the sick into hospitals. She consulted Fr. Daniel Murray as to her religious vocation in 1808. He was emphatic that she should wait awhile for she was greatly needed at home. Then Fr. Murray was named Co-adjutor to the Archbishop of Dublin; Mrs Aikenhead died, and Mary was free to shape her own course.

Holidaying in Dublin, Mary heard that Dr Murray intended to found a Congregation of Sisters of Charity. She offered herself as a member but he sent her back to Cork. It was not until 1811 that the formal discussions, regarding the foundation, were opened. At last

Dr Murray told her that she was chosen to lead the new Congregation. Mary and a companion went to the Loreto Convent, York, for their Novitiate in 1812 and stayed there three years returning to Ireland on the 22nd August, 1815.¹

Throughout this period Dr Murray guided Mary and nominated her to be Superior General and Sr. Mary Catherine, her companion, Mistress of Novices, when they made their vows for one year in 1815. The rules were modelled on those of the Institute at York with a fourth vow added of 'devoting their lives to the poor'. On the 10th September, 1816, these two Sisters began their visitation of the sick poor in their homes. For the first time in Ireland, Religious were seen on the streets, and for Mary, her glorious vision had begun. In 1834 Mary established St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, staffed with Religious women, two of whom she had sent to Paris to train as Nurses.

ESTABLISHING IN AUSTRALIA

Meanwhile, Archbishop Polding was appointed Vicar Apostolic of New Holland and Van Dieman's Land in 1834.² He had long before invited Mary Aikenhead to set up a foundation of Sisters of Charity in his new mission. It was a twenty year old young woman from Tipperary who helped to bring about the Archbishop's desire. She went to him soon after his consecration in Ireland and asked if he was going to set up a Community of Sisters of Charity in New Holland. If so, she would like to join him. Dr Polding arranged with Mary Aikenhead that this lady, Miss de Lacy, be trained with her Sisters, entering the Convent in 1835. Although the Congregation was struggling at the time, Mary Aikenhead was prepared to found an overseas mission so great was her trust in Divine Providence.

Dr Ullathorne (a Benedictine Priest working in New South Wales) had written a pamphlet entitled *The Catholic Mission in Australia* in which he described vividly the horrors of the penal settlement. When he visited Europe, at the request of Dr Polding, he approached Mary Aikenhead. She was moved by his plea but the Sisters had not entered for foreign missions. Eventually five volunteers were found and arrived in Australia on 31st December, 1838, after a sea voyage of nearly six months on the *Francis Spaight*. As one of them, Sr. M. Xavier Williams, was but a novice at the time, she later became the first woman to consecrate herself to God and His Church in Australia on the 9th April, 1839.

For the first time not only Protestants, but hundreds of native born Catholics, glimpsed women wearing the Religious habit. Having the sanction of the English Government the Sisters of Charity had no obstacles in visiting the gaols, hospitals and schools. Before leaving England the Sisters were offered 40 pounds a year each by the Government to be Catechists. They refused this, preferring to be

perfectly free in the discharge of their duty.³ Dr Ullathorne had given Mary Aikenhead to understand that ample provision had been made for the maintenance of the Sisters, but no such provision was forthcoming and they found themselves often in need for want of money.

At Parramatta the first house given to the Sisters—St Mary's Convent—was purchased by William Davis. It was the first Convent in the Southern Hemisphere. The Sisters of Charity visited the Female Factory where 800 women and 300 children were confined in the prison, the women breaking stones and sawing wood. The Sisters made representations to the Governor who acceded to their suggestion that a public laundry should be opened and needlework taken in for their employment. In a few months a great reformation of the Factory was noticeable.⁴

Another of their duties was to visit the cells of the condemned men, who, consoled by the Sisters' visits, made their peace with God. During this time young women joined the Order but because of the lack of good food, several succumbed to ill health; one sister died aged 24, another 26 and another 25.⁵

In 1841 two Sisters started a Community in Sydney from which they visited Darlinghurst Gaol and the Sydney Infirmary. Evening classes were held for young girls and the Sisters walked long distances to visit the sick in their homes. In 1842, the Congregation left the jurisdiction of the Superiors in Ireland and the Congregation of the Australian Sisters of Charity was established. A pattern of the apostolic life of a Sister of Charity in Australia emerged, that of visiting the gaols, the sick in their homes and in the hospitals, and educating the needy.

Trouble brewed for the young Congregation. From the early days in Australia there had been differences between the Clergy and the Sisters, regarding rules and customs as the Benedictine Clergy urged adoption of a Benedictine life style. Dr Polding went to Europe in 1842-1844 and Abbot Gregory, O.S.B., administered the Archdiocese in his absence. He decided to remodel the way of life of the Sisters. Friction increased and eventually Mother de Sales O'Brien, Sr. John Cahill and Sr. M. Xavier Williams (three of the pioneers) accepted the invitation of Bishop Willson of Hobart, who was not a Benedictine, to transfer to that town.

They travelled, penniless, to visit the poor prison population there as since 1840 Van Dieman's Land became the chief penal settlement. On 2 July, 1847, they took possession of their residence close to St Joseph's Church—the house built by Fr. Therry as his Presbytery⁶. This was to be their home for over a century and from here schools, a hospital and an orphanage would be founded. It was my privilege to live in this Convent in 1948. Nothing had changed, there was no

money for wood or coal for heating, the cold was intense, and being post World War II years, many people were desperately poor. I remember the cups of hot cocoa we provided for long queues of children each morning which for many was their only daily hot refreshment.

By 1877 there were sixteen Sisters of Charity in Hobart. Negotiations were opened in 1888 to amalgamate with the Sisters of Charity in New South Wales. On Palm Sunday 1890 Mother M. Xavier Williams was informed of the Decree of Pope Leo XIII approving of the proposed amalgamation.⁷

HOSPITALS FOR ALL

The Female Factory at Parramatta had been closed as a penitentiary in 1848, the Parramatta Convent was closed and all the Sisters came to reside in Sydney. One of their urgent needs was to rescue young women caught up in the surge of vice which was sweeping Sydney and a 'refuge' was opened. Another urgent need was for a hospital where, following Mary Aikenhead's ideals in founding St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, there would be no distinctions of creed or class.

An appeal was launched, and representative Catholics approached the government for a grant of land. Governor Fitzroy favoured the project and a narrow strip of land was set aside at Darlinghurst for the purpose. At this time the home of Sir Charles Nicholson was offered for sale. It was purchased on 5 March 1857, the deed of the property was handed over in trust for the Sisters of Charity, and 'Tarmons', overlooking the harbour, became St Vincent's Convent, still the Mother House of the Congregation.

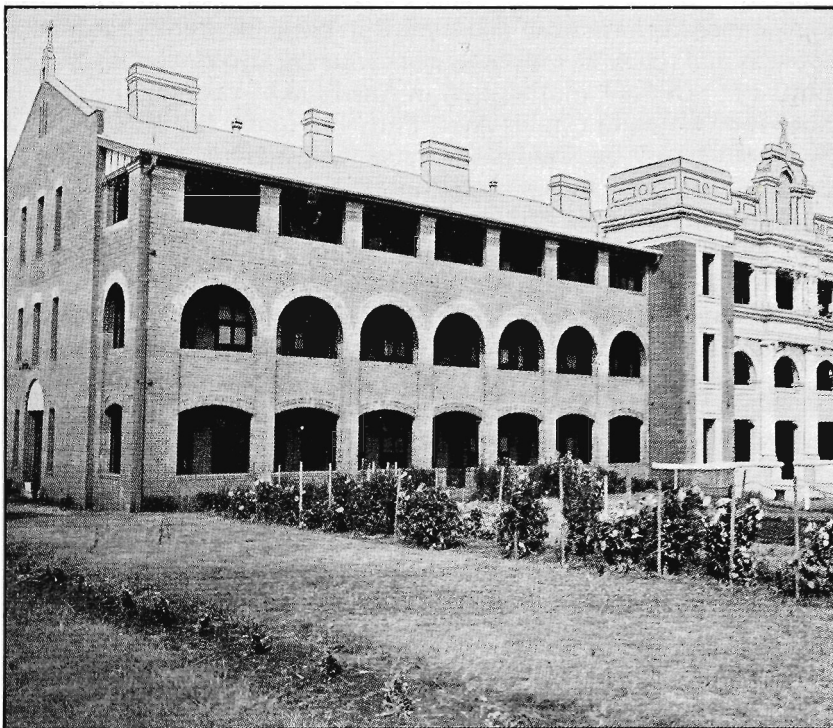
St Vincent's Hospital began there on 25 August, 1857 when the first patient was admitted, beginning a work which was to expand to undreamt proportions. Prerequisites for admission to St Vincent's were sickness and poverty. It was open to all creeds. Because Protestant Bibles were made available to the patients at the Hospital, Sr. M. Baptist de Lacy, the Sister in Charge, who had entered first for the Australian Mission, and who had trained as a nurse in France, was forced to return to Ireland.

Two novices imparted fresh courage to the chastened and despairing Community. They were told that as they were not yet bound by vows they were free to return home to join the Good Samaritan Sisters. The novices declared they had entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity for the Australian mission and would make their vows at Tarmons. It was resolved to make one more effort to take root in Australian soil. With steadfast faith the Sydney Community, consisting now of only five Sisters and two novices, survived the crisis of confidence.⁸

In 1858 St Vincent's School opened at Tarmons and by 1860 it was expanding and needed more room. Pupils travelled there from all over Sydney.⁹

A new hospital was required. The foundation for the new St Vincent's Hospital was laid at the strip of land at Darlinghurst but being totally dependent on voluntary subscriptions, it was not ready for occupation until October, 1870. On the following day the patients were transferred from Tarmons in horse drawn buses and the new St Vincent's Hospital went into operation just as unobtrusively as had the original.

Within twenty years additions were made to the hospital, the Hospice for the Dying was inaugurated in a small cottage in the hospital grounds and a Convent and a Chapel built. One of the features of the hospital from its early years was the special ward reserved for patients from the Royal Navy. Men from the French and German Navies were among those admitted. Wisely the Sisters purchased more of the adjacent land. During the 128 years the hospital has been at Darlinghurst many new buildings have been added, and Sisters of Charity and thousands of student nurses have been educated there. It has become renowned for its clinical school and is now one of the leading hospitals of the Commonwealth. Open heart surgery, microsurgery, organ transplants and nuclear medicine are part of the normal service of this hospital. Besides the Thoracic



St. Vincent's Hospital, Toowoomba in 1922 soon after its opening by the Sisters of Charity.

Wing there is the St Vincent's Caritas Psychiatric Centre, the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, St Vincent's Private Hospital and now on the opposite side of the road a new Sacred Heart Hospice.

In 1886 at the suggestion of Cardinal Moran the Sisters established a hospital for the incurably ill, especially those suffering from tuberculosis, at the old St Mary's Hospital, Sydney. It was transferred in 1892, as St Joseph's Hospital, to Auburn. Now a modern hospital it serves as an acute hospital with a busy casualty serving a heavy industrial area¹⁰. St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, was opened in 1893 and as a teaching hospital it at once raised the standard of teaching in the other clinical schools in Melbourne¹¹. Mt St Evin's Private Hospital, later to be rebuilt as St Vincent's Private Hospital, opened in 1915, and was able to generate some return to the generous honorary staff at St Vincent's and also to help St Vincent's with any surplus revenue.

St Vincent's Hospitals were opened at Lismore, Bathurst, Toowoomba and Launceston and the Sisters took charge of the hospital at Cootamundra in the years 1925-26. In all, sixteen hospitals have been established by the Sisters of Charity.¹²

THE WORK IN SCHOOLS

In every city where the Sisters have been, they have established schools at the invitation of the Bishop. Initially, most were in the inner suburbs educating poor and needy children. In all their schools, high standards have been maintained in religious studies, academic subjects and the Arts, especially music. In 1907 St Vincent's College, Potts Pt., achieved another first in Australia by opening the Garcia School of Music in Challis Ave., Potts Pt., under the direction of a Sister of Charity, Sr. Paul of the Cross, who had had a distinguished career in England, Europe and Australia as Madame Christian¹³.

With great foresight Mother Francis McGuigan, Superior General 1882-1920, had sent her Sisters to take charge of the Parish schools in suburbs throughout Sydney, where Henry Parkes educational policy might otherwise have stifled Catholic education. She continued founding new schools in Melbourne after 1890 as well as at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains and on the far South Coast at Bega and Bombala. As the Sisters received no salary their story is one of resourcefulness and their schools seemed to gain strength rather than be weakened by the Government policies.

In Victoria, as well as Parish schools, two excellent secondary schools were established, St Columba's College, Essendon, opened in 1897 and Catholic Ladies College at East Melbourne in 1902. The latter has now moved to Eltham in excellently equipped buildings and spacious grounds. Likewise St Joseph's College in the centre of Hobart was relocated as Mt Carmel College at Sandy Bay.

Over eighty schools have been opened by the Sisters of Charity. Many now have few or no Sisters on staff, but continue to flourish in the hands of dedicated lay teachers. While some Sisters are still engaged in Administration and classroom teaching, a number now work in other areas of school-based education.

In 1897 the Sisters of Charity founded their own Teacher Training College, preparing teaching Sisters for schools in the four Eastern States. In the last fifty years many of the Sisters of Charity have read at Universities and similar colleges in Australia and overseas. They in turn educated many young women for entry into useful university and college courses. Some Sisters have moved onto tertiary education and are working as tutors and lecturers as well as caring pastorally for the students in many of the Australian Tertiary Institutes.

An Order with such deployment of educational works has always realized the importance of youth work and is involved in the healing of the victims of unemployment, disillusionment and drug addiction. Drug prevention and rehabilitation centres are part of their hospital organization, particularly in the capital cities, but task forces are at work too, at school, home, community and street level.¹⁴

From the day the first Sisters of Charity set foot in Australia the compelling love of Christ has urged the Sisters to engage in social work in the gaols at Parramatta, Darlinghurst, Long Bay, Pentridge and Hobart. They act as Assistant Chaplains and one Sister is Deputy Director of the gaol infirmary. Their work involves not only visiting the prisoners but also contacting families outside and keeping in touch with ex-prisoners. At the Requiem Mass for Sr M. Germanus in 1986 the Church was filled with prison wardens as well as ex-prisoners, all having been touched in some way by this gentle Sister of Charity over a period of thirty years.

As the Sisters reach retirement age many have taken on parish work, visiting the elderly, the sick and the needy. As a young Sister I was well tutored in caring for the poor. My senior companion would fill her pockets, and mine, with nourishing soups and jellies, etc. to be distributed on the way and often we cleaned a home or washed a patient, changed a bed, and even laid out the dead.

Other activities of the Sisters include adult Scripture classes, provision of Retreat and Conference facilities, catechetical instruction in state schools, work with the Catholic Marriage Tribunals in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, conducting education programmes for staff of schools and hospitals and teaching crafts to the handicapped, elderly and terminally ill. Orphanages were run by the Sisters in Sydney and Hobart but these are now closed as the welfare system has changed. Literary and research pursuits, writing of history and the provision of archival facilities have all been undertaken.¹⁵

There have been requests from Bishops to our Superior Generals begging for Australian Sisters of Charity to staff schools and hospitals in foreign countries. To some degree the requests have been granted and Sisters, teachers and nurses, have been to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Zambia and the Solomon Islands. Always the Superior General has sought volunteers and the Sisters most qualified and most likely to adapt, have been chosen.

BEGINNINGS IN QUEENSLAND

Sisters of Charity came to Queensland in 1920 when His Grace Archbishop Duhig and Right Reverend Monsignor Fouhy invited them to come from Sydney to Toowoomba to nurse the sick. The Superior General and her companion visited Toowoomba and purchased a suitable property on the Range for 2,300 pounds. The first Mass was celebrated in the small cottage there on 18 May, 1920, by Archbishop Duhig.

A 'Pound Appeal' was launched and the Sisters went about the country towns where nuns had never before been seen. When the Foundation Stone for St Vincent's Hospital was laid in Toowoomba on 22 May 1921, special trains ran from Warwick, Crows Nest, Dalby and Brisbane.¹⁶

Toowoomba people gave generously towards the cost of the hospital, 20,000 pounds, which was a large sum in those days. On 19 November 1922, the opening ceremony was performed by Dr Daniel Mannix, Archbishop of Melbourne. The first patients were admitted on 1 March 1923, and in the first year 1,054 patients received care.¹⁷ Bed capacity was increased from 66 to 98 in 1924 and 266 by 1982. A clinic for the treatment of poliomyelitis was established in 1936. Sister Kenny visited St Vincent's and examined the 30 patients being treated there. She expressed pleasure with the progress made by the two Sisters of Charity who were especially trained in her methods of massage and hydrotherapy¹⁸.

Fund-raising was important to the hospital. Gifts came in all kind, including

eggs, vegetables, poultry, quantities of fruit, 50 bags of oaten chaff, flowers, quantities of hay and use of paddocks for cows, etc.¹⁹

St Vincent's Hospital Annual Ball began in 1925 and the Annual Rodeo in 1956. Both are important social events in the city. Formally convened in 1967, the present Ladies Auxiliary continues to raise money for the necessary additions and equipment.

The war years did not leave the hospital unscathed. On the Monday in Holy Week, 1942, Bishop Roper called about 7.30am to

tell Mother Rectress that the Sisters would have to leave within days. It seemed impossible, and it was not even possible to contact Sydney as the army had taken over all the telephones for the remainder of the week. So the Sisters stayed and prepared sandbags and metal strips should the hospital be bombed. Then the Battle of the Coral Sea was won in May, 1942, by Australia and the U.S.A., signalling the safety of Australia.²⁰

The maternity unit was opened on 2 September 1957. During the 1950's the midwifery course commenced, new nurses' quarters were opened, the operating unit expanded and the new children's ward was set up. In the 1960's the new Chapel was opened, also the new convent, and the Home Nursing Service was inaugurated.

The Advisory Board was established in 1970 and later the geriatric unit was renovated. As facilities continued to improve in the 1980's a new building was commenced to house and accommodate advances in medical technology and specialized equipment.²¹

Responding to Archbishop Duhig's invitation to undertake the work of education in the Ashgrove Parish, Brisbane, the Sisters of Charity purchased the old Stewart homestead, Grantully, in 1925. They began teaching catechism after the 9am Mass on Sunday 31st May. Next day St Finbarr's School was opened in the convent but when the Church school was ready in 1927 the primary school children moved into it. When the first brick building was opened at Grantully in 1941, the name of the Secondary College was changed to Mt St Michael's.

In the early days a Mr Mullard drove an old buggy which picked up some of the children from their homes further west and brought them to school. Mr Tom Quain drove the Sisters to the Parish Church and to school and would then mount his motor bike and tear into the G.P.O. where he worked. The Primary School Sisters undertook the long walk each day until mothers became owners of cars. As fund raisers the mothers were indispensable. The busiest time for St Finbarr's was in the 1950's, following the baby boom after the war.

One of the biggest problems the Sisters of Charity from the south had to face was the fact they were not born and bred Queenslanders. Parents were nervous that the all important Scholarship examination results would not be effective. As the girls reached the higher primary grades in the Sisters of Charity schools, many transferred to older established schools where it was thought a Scholarship pass would be assured. Gradually as excellent results were attained the prejudices disappeared.

St Finbarr's Sisters were also busy Parish workers—training altar servers, preparing Catholic children from state schools for the Sacraments, leading sodalities and visiting the sick and the elderly. From the years 1963 to the end of 1968 I was appointed Principal at

St Finbarr's and found myself challenged by the great changes occurring in education. The Scholarship examination had been abolished and the curriculum was becoming less formal. We were one of the first Catholic schools in the state to introduce the reading method 'Words in Colour' and Cuisenaire rods for Mathematics. When we held a weekend workshop on 'Words in Colour' applicants came from as far north as Maryborough and as far south as Warwick. Sr M. Leonore Murphy, R.S.C., the lecturer, had been using the method for some time in the southern states, even with illiterate prisoners at Long Bay Gaol. Sadly the last Sister was withdrawn from St Finbarr's in 1981.

From 1925 to the late 1950's the small loyal band of pupils at Mt St Michael's College, was urged to take much greater initiatives, to see loyalty and obedience not as negative qualities, to be prepared to speak out and to offer real leadership wherever and whenever they were competent and free to do so.²² During the decades of the 60's, 70's and 80's the numbers of pupils increased and modern school buildings had sprung up as government grants became available. Properties adjacent to the college were bought and an active Parents and Friends Association has not only helped to maintain the college campus, but has also raised funds.

Of prime importance at the college and any other Catholic school is the effort to build and strengthen the faith of the school community. Therefore top priority is given to religious education. At



Grantully, dating from 1899, became St. Finbarr's and later Mt. St. Michael's Convent.

St Michael's, the year has begun with inaugural Masses for students, parents and staff, and closed with the whole college community gathered for a Mass of Thanksgiving.²³

With its enrolment of over 400 students the College has been small enough for the teaching staff to know the students and to strengthen the bond of being a Christian community, yet large enough to offer a substantial range of courses, plus sporting and cultural activities.²⁴

In the 1950's the Parish of St John's Wood was formed and the Sisters of Charity were asked to open Mater Dei School. Later in 1962 the Convent of Mater Dei was opened. At the beginning of 1969 I was appointed Principal with five Sisters of Charity staffing the school. A very active 'Parents and Friends' group attended to every aspect of school life. Enrolment of pupils was 250. Christian attitudes were caught and taught through all subjects.

Visitation of the elderly, the needy and the sick continued. Though we were far from poverty, heartbreak and sorrow were never far away. As I left at the end of 1974 I also closed the Convent. In 1984 the last Sister was withdrawn.

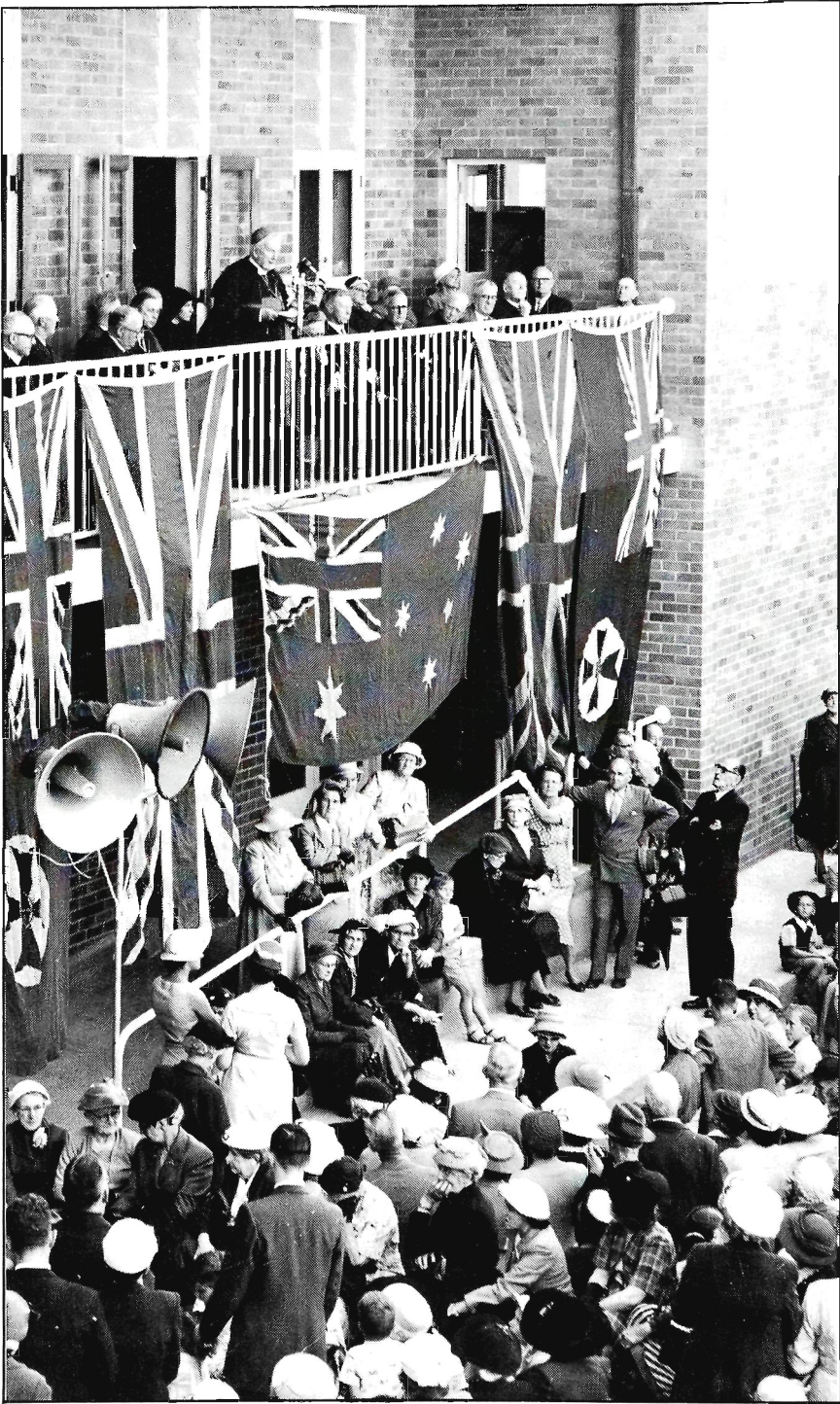
To cater for the rapidly increasing population at The Gap, St Peter Chanel Primary School was opened by a Sister of Charity in August, 1972. A Sister of Charity is now Librarian there and three Sisters of Charity opened a small convent at The Gap in 1986. As well as helping with the education of the children they take a very active part in the spiritual and liturgical life of the Parish.

Two other schools were opened by the Sisters of Charity in Queensland, one at Kingaroy in 1929 and one at East Coorparoo in January 1955. Kingaroy then had a population of 1,700 people. The three Sisters lived in a convent built in the old Queensland style—on stumps and surrounded by verandahs. Most of the children were from families of the local butter factory workers. After six years the Sisters regretfully handed the convent and school over to the Good Samaritan Sisters who continue to work in the area.

At the insistence of the local Parish Priest of St Martina's Church, East Coorparoo, a small primary school was begun by the Sisters of Charity on the 24 January 1955. This little school taught all grades and music, but within ten years it was seen that the educational needs of the area were being well catered for by other Sisters, and the Sisters of Charity withdrew.

MOUNT OLIVET HOSPITAL

Since 1930 one of the congregation's revered Sisters, Sr M. Agnes FitzGerald, a daughter of the sugar pioneer, T.H. FitzGerald, had pleaded for a hospital for the incurably ill in Queensland. Her earnest request first went to Mother M. Edmund Daniel, Superior General, who replied that there were no Sisters available. Later, when Sr M. Agnes heard of some land that was to be offered for sale at Enoggera,



Archbishop Duhig addresses the crowd from the upper balcony at the official opening of Mount Olivett on 8 September 1957.

she wrote to the next Superior General, Sr M. Alphonsus O'Doherty, who eventually decided to buy it.²⁵

Events took a new turn in mid 1951, when the Superior of Ashgrove received a telephone call from Miss Bedford, a member of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, who wished to bequeath her home at Kangaroo Pt for a hospital for the incurably ill and dying, as the view from her home would be beneficial to these people. Her dear friend, Dr Lilian Cooper, the first woman surgeon in Queensland, had died in 1947 and Miss Bedford wished to perpetuate her life and work.

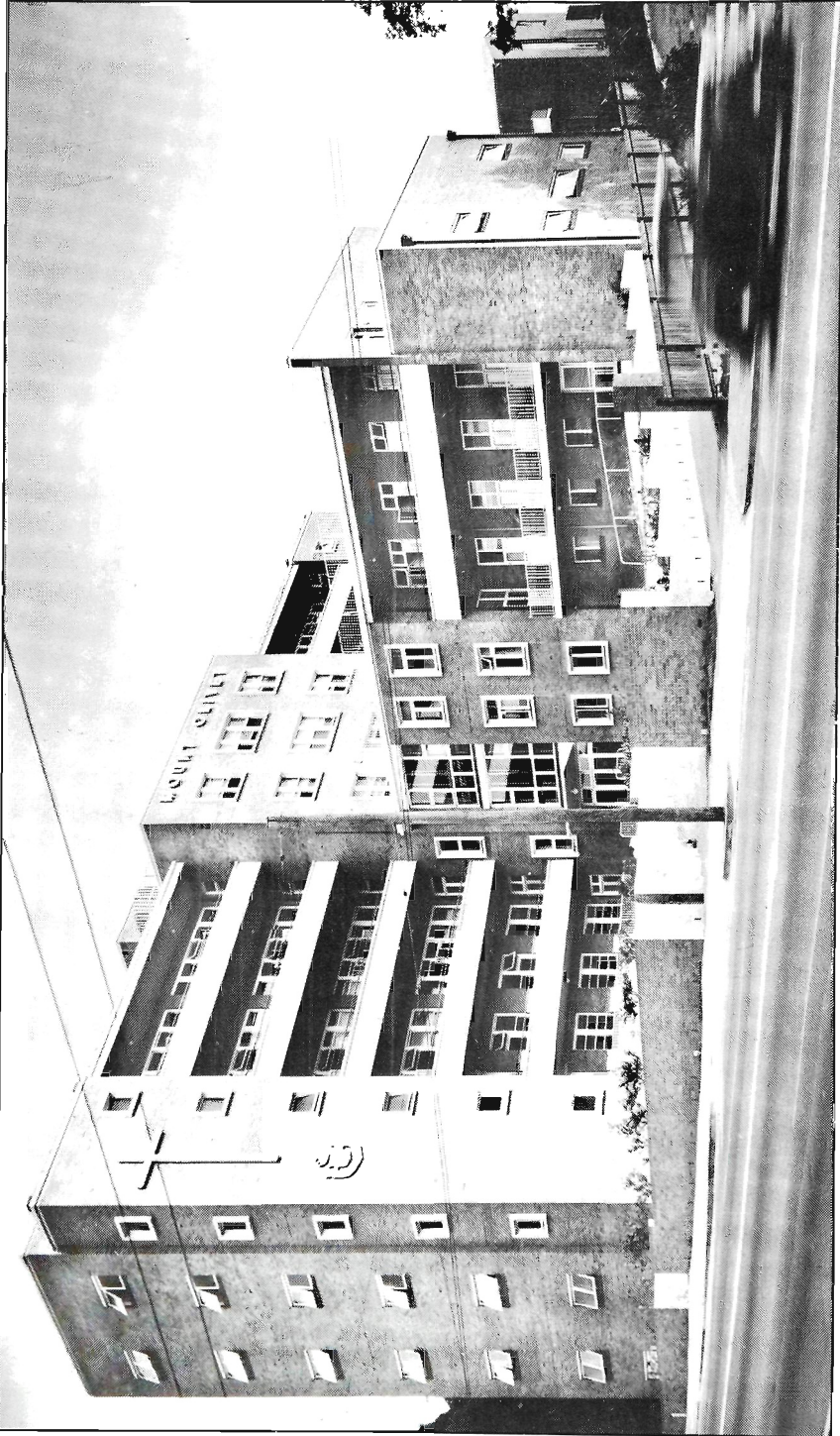
By 1951 she had decided to devote the property of old St Mary's, her home, in perpetuity, to the care of those confined by incurable and terminal illness. The search for an organization to carry out this important work had led her to the Sisters of Charity.²⁶ By March 1952, all necessary documents had been signed by both parties.

In May 1953, Mother Giovanni Ackman, experienced in hospital administration, was entrusted with the building of the hospital. She was a woman with great faith, trust in people and a spirit of fun. A Jewish woman, she became curious about christianity, and one day bought a penny catechism in which she found all the answers. Without her mother's knowledge she was baptized a Catholic. When her mother died her thoughts turned to religious life. After qualifying as an optometrist, she established her own practice in Collins Street, Melbourne. She used to work at the Outpatients Department of St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, and thus became acquainted with the Sisters of Charity.

Mother Giovanni entered the Congregation, trained as a nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, and then was appointed to the Admissions Office where she came to meet the 'down and outs'. Coming to Brisbane from Lismore, Mother Giovanni showed tremendous courage as the Mt. Olivet project started from nothing. She began by contacting Archbishop Duhig, the Parish Priest, the bank, the architect, and in due time visited the Minister for Health and Home Affairs. It was agreed that the hospital was to be called Mt Olivet Public Hospital for the Incurably Sick and Dying, and the State Government, promise to give £1,000 (\$2,000) per bed and 10 shillings per day per patient.²⁷

She, and her companion Sr M. Lorenzo, drew up a campaign, organizing a committee, to appeal for donations, and approaching the banks for a loan, and praying. They decided door to door collecting had to be done.

It was hard grind. Mother M. Giovanni and her companion would catch a tram and go to the terminus and start street collecting—sixpence, two shillings, five shillings, a promise, a handful of change—day after day. Everybody loved her, she was so kind, people



A view of the completed Mount Olivet Hospital from Main Street, Kangaroo Point while trolley buses ran past its front door.

just couldn't say 'no' to this earnest little woman who was but caring for Christ's poor.

In 1956 the Xavier Society undertook to raise £75,000 for the furnishings of the hospital and the Mt Olivet-Xavier Appeal was launched on 9 April 1957. As well as stocking the hospital and making beds, etc. there was the task of finding specialist doctors to act in an honorary capacity, and of recruiting staff at all levels. Dr A.J. Lynch was appointed Honorary Medical Superintendent, Dr W.J. Lynch was appointed Honorary Medical Superintendent and Dr W.J. (Matt) Arnold—President of the Medical Board, and more than twenty specialist staff.²⁸ On the 8 September 1957, Mt Olivet was officially opened.

Before Mother Giovanni left Mt Olivet contracts were signed for the building of extra floors and more property was acquired close to the hospital including Twickenham Place and Hilderstone St. Early in 1972, Sister M. Julien Pearson began her term of office as Administrator, and, besides continuing the care of the sick and their families, she established the project of Marycrest Retirement Centre and the Lilian Cooper Nursing Home. Work went ahead despite the uncertainty regarding the Government subsidy. It was not until 19 May 1977, that the administration was advised by the Department of Social Security of formal approval of a Commonwealth Grant.²⁹

The opening of the Marycrest Retirement Centre took place on 11 December 1977. Intake of residents was gradual, carefully planned, and the Social Work/Welfare Department was instituted that year to assess prospective applicants to the hostel occupation and the Lilian Cooper Nursing Home (30 beds) on the 6th Floor. The maximum number of residents is 159 as two rooms are kept for respite care. All hostel rooms have individual private facilities and on each floor a sitting room, laundrette and snack bar. The beautiful Giovanni Chapel links Marycrest with Mt Olivet.

Early in 1981 the Xavier Society decided to move on to another 'worthy objective'. They came into the history of Mt Olivet just when its need was greatest, and the Sisters of Charity and all concerned with Mt Olivet could never adequately express their gratitude to the Society for its truly magnificent contribution of \$635,000.

Sr Nola Riley has been the Administrator of the complex since 1979. Like Mary Aikenhead, she has an overwhelming desire to meet the needs of the sick poor. Currently the hospital offers a program of palliative/hospice care for the terminally ill, a home care service and an inpatient facility, geriatric assessment and rehabilitation service, and medical and nursing care for the sick aged.

Mt Olivet is a gazetted Teaching Hospital with the University of Queensland in respect of Geriatrics, Community Medicine and Anaesthetics. Staff of Mt Olivet Hospital are very active in educating themselves and others in all aspects of caring for the terminally ill

and have run seminars on Care of the Dying open to other health workers throughout Queensland. The hospital is accredited with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners for its family medicine training program. Medical and nursing staff of the Hospice/Home Care Unit are also an educational resource and advisory group for general practitioners in the community and domiciliary nurses caring for patients in their own homes. The Sisters of Charity at Mt Olivet believe the Hospice/Home Care Service is meeting a growing need in the Community.

Where are the thirty six Sisters of Charity in Queensland in 1988? A few are engaged in education at all levels from Grade I through to Teachers College and University. The majority work in health care and several in social work. A few are retired but they contribute to the management of the Convents and visiting the elderly. Two of the Sisters work with the Marriage Tribunal in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, one of whom is studying Canon Law in Canada at present.

And what of the future? Changes in society have affected the numbers of Sisters and the changing needs of today's society call for new ministeries. The life style of a Religious is not as black and white as it used to be. Sisters of Charity see their task as continuing their tradition of influence and inspiration in their institutions. Things will have to be done differently. Laymen and women will be invited to share more vitally in the life of the Congregation. The Sisters have taken steps to strengthen the governance of their institutions in the light of the mission of the Church and their own charism of service to the poor and to hand over the administration of their institutions to lay people³⁰.

Perhaps the Sisters are being called like Mary Aikenhead herself to go where no one else has gone. Their vision is the same as it always was, to be with the people of God in their poverty, to pray, read and reflect. Mary Aikenhead's daughters today, like those first five Sisters, are responding, in love, to the needs of God's people. They too will rely on Divine Providence and go where God leads them.

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