

Learning Sequence 2, Teacher Resource 1

The Arrival of the Sisters of Mercy 1846 - 1857

Beliefs of the Sisters of Mercy and meaning of the Mercy Cross

Mercy means loving kindness and compassion. Catherine McAuley was the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland. In 1827 she established the first House of Mercy in Baggot Street in Dublin from where she and other women provided care for the poor and sick as well as education for young girls. McAuley and two colleagues took their religious vows in December 1831 to become the first Sisters of Mercy. Ten years later in June 1841, the original Rule and Constitution of the Sisters of Mercy, mainly written by Catherine McAuley, was confirmed by Pope Gregory XVI. Catherine McAuley died in that year. The Sisters of Mercy believe that God, revealed in the works of Jesus Christ, wanted all humans to experience the love, compassion and kindness that are at the heart of the Christian religion. The main beliefs of the Sisters of Mercy can be summarised in the following practices:

Compassion: "As God's chosen ones clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience." Paul in a letter to the Colossians, Ch3 v12.

Justice: "The poor need help today, not next week." (Catherine McAuley).

Respect: "But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those (who labour) amongst you." First letter Paul to the Thessalonians, Ch5 v12.

Hospitality: "Welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God". Paul to the Romans, Ch15 v7.

Service: "It is for God we serve the poor, not for thanks." (Catherine McAuley).

Courage: "Speak as your mind directs and always with courage". (Catherine McAuley in 1841).

Works of Mercy were to support the physical (corporal) and religious (spiritual) needs of people.

The corporal activities included:

- Feeding the hungry
- Giving drink to the thirsty
- Sheltering and clothing the homeless
- Visiting the sick
- Helping prisoners
- Burying the dead.

The spiritual activities included:

- Teaching the ignorant
- Counselling the doubtful and sinful
- Bearing wrongs patiently
- Forgiving offences
- Comforting the afflicted
- Praying for the living and the dead.

For more information go to:

<http://www.mercyed.org.au/> click on “Resources” and “Mercy Education Values”. This site also includes information on the life of Mother Catherine McAuley

Mercy traditions and values of compassion, justice, excellence, integrity and service are still central to the beliefs of Mercedes College which is at the site of the original school established by the Sisters of Mercy in Perth during the 1840s.

The Meaning of the Mercy Cross

The image below is from a display which can be found at the Mercy Heritage Centre Perth.



Source: Display at Mercy Heritage Centre

The Roman Catholic cross usually includes the figure of Christ on a cross, the crucifix. The body or figure of Christ is called the corpus. The Mercy Cross has no corpus on the cross. This is because Mother Catherine McAuley aimed to remind the Sisters that “trials and sufferings” were part of their calling as Sisters of Mercy.

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The Arrival of the Sisters of Mercy 1846-1857

Problems facing the Sisters of Mercy 1846 to 1851

The primary and secondary sources below classify the problems facing the Sisters of Mercy during their first five years in Perth into social, economic and political issues. Students can use this information to create a mind map or an explosion chart showing the main problems and suggest ways the Sisters dealt with these challenges.

Economic recession

That the economic [down turn] was materially affecting the progress of the colony is shown in the statistics of population and in the prices of stock. The arrivals (immigrants) from August 1844 to August 1845 were less than the departures (emigrants), and it was only by the birth rate that the colony was able to maintain its population. In 1844 the number of people was estimated at 4,301, and in 1845 at 4,369. Prices of stock decrease[d] even [from] early 1843. At a public sale held in October 1845 six hundred sheep were sold at an average of 7s. per head, cattle at from £4 10s. to £5 and horses at £9. (Source: Kimberley, p 135)

Shortage of Sisters

Sister Goherty, one of the original Sisters, died only six months after arriving in the Swan River Colony. In December 1847 Sister Ursula wrote to Rev Mother Cecilia in Ireland that "...there is one drawback - the Sisters [do] not come and we are in such want of assistance - but patience, I know you will not suffer the Order to die away in [the Swan River Colony] where I trust it is so firmly established. I have every confidence that as soon as you can you will send reinforcement...."

(Byrne 1981, p 76). In March 1848 Sister Ursula wrote in a letter to Ireland: "I know not what we shall do if we do not soon get assistance." The three new Sisters arrived in the colony on 13 December, 1848. They were Ellen Dillon, Anne Strahan and Sister Mary Francis Goold.

The Sisters worked very hard and Ursula wrote of "the continuous trot in which we are from morning until night cannot be called healthful exercise..." (McLay 1992, p 35) and many suffered from sickness. Their work was to "the greater glory of God" and took up much of their time.

Funding Mercy Projects

In a letter dated November 1846, Ursula wrote "Our position in regard to [money] matters is exceedingly disagreeable". (Byrne 1981, p 46) In 1847 Sister Ursula wrote that "this mission is the poorest of the poor." (Byrne 1981, p 62) Evidence shows Bishop Brady administered Catholic finances carelessly which affected the Sisters' missionary work and establishment of schools.

Ursula was also concerned that Bishop Brady also interfered with the "Rules and Customs" of the Mercy Order.

See Mercedes College History here: <http://www.mercedes.wa.edu.au/index.php/Our-College/history.html>

Ways to raise money

A [fundraising bazaar] took place on Tuesday and Wednesday of Easter week. Three tables were full and displayed in the school room. Bishop Salvado played on the piano for an hour. Prizes in the raffles: a fire screen worked in Berlin wool. The second prize was a hexagon quilt. £57 was gathered. Half from the lottery. Bishop Salvado was paid £5 for his playing. (Source: Byrne, Valiant Women, 1981)

Homesickness

One of the Foundation nuns, Sister Mary Ignatia, was very homesick from the early days, often being silent and dissatisfied. She spoke to Bishop Brady and hoped she would be called home to the Dublin House. Bishop Brady would not use the Propagation of the Faith funds to pay for her passage back to Ireland.

All the Sisters joyfully received letters from Sisters of Mercy at "St Catherine's", the Dublin House, missing their friends and life in Ireland.

The School - illness

On the 23rd March 1848 Sister M Baptist wrote to Mother di Pazzi:

"I have charge of the school in Perth and instead of being mistress of it for the last three weeks, I am nurse. There is scarcely a child who has not got the whooping cough. Though they are suffering very much, still they are anxious to attend." (Source: Byrne 1981, Valiant Women, pp 88-89)

The Colonial Governors and Anti-Catholic attitudes

Governor Irwin and Bishop Brady had a poor relationship - Irwin did not grant land to bury the Catholic dead. Law and leadership in the colony were closely linked to religion, the "established" British religion, the Church of England (or Anglican Church).

All the Governors (up to Frederick Weld who became Governor of the colony in 1869) and many people in the wealthy classes were biased against the Church of Rome in the first 40 years of the Swan River Colony. In 1847 Ursula noted: "Anti - Catholic prejudices are so strong in this colony; the Protestants seem to think our coming here an invasion of their rights and appear resolved not to give us any encouragement". (Source: Byrne 1981, p 53)

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Arrival of the Sisters of Mercy 1846 - 1857

What the Sisters of Mercy believe

Most of the questions provided here can be answered from the Virtual Museum of the Sisters of Mercy. Further exploration will be required to complete some of the questions.

Access the Virtual Museum of the Sisters of Mercy at:

<http://institute.mercy.org.au/about-us/archives-and-heritage/virtual-museum/>

Read Section 1, "Introduction" and Section 2, "Religious Life", to find answers to the questions below.

1. Introduction

1. The Baggot Street house in Dublin was established in 1827 and became the Convent of Mercy in 1831. What support was provided by the Sisters at the Convent of Mercy for the poor people living in Dublin?

2. Sketch the Mercy Cross. What is the meaning of the Mercy "cross within a cross"?

3. Ursula Frayne, a Sister of Mercy from Dublin, established the first Mercy Mission in Australia. Which groups did she aim to help in the Swan River Colony?

4. A number of the Foundations established by the Sisters of Mercy around the world are mentioned on page 3 of the Virtual Museum. List the location of each of these Foundations:

5. In 2011 the Australian and Papua and New Guinea congregations of the Sisters of Mercy joined to establish an organisation called:

2. Religious Life

6. List the stages by which a Sister of Mercy would be "professed" into the Church. Make sure that you include and define the following terms: postulant, novice, profession of final vows.

7. Describe how a Mother Superior was elected by the Sisters.

8. Find the image of the box containing the patron and virtue cards. Describe how the Sisters used the cards in the box.

9. What was the importance of the Postulant Candle for the Sisters?

10. Find, sketch and describe the beautiful stained glass window, donated by Governor Frederick Weld in 1871, which can be found in the Mercy Heritage Centre chapel.

11. Choose one of the quotes in the Virtual Museum to share with your class. Be prepared to share its meaning and why you chose the quotation.

12. Write out the meaning of the following terms used in the Virtual Museum and add them to your glossary: Foundation, patron, virtue, refectory, professed, postulant, novice and vows.

Begin a list of new words that you find in your reading. Continue to add to this list as you discover new words.

Learning Sequence 2, Student Resource 2

The Arrival of the Sisters of Mercy 1846 - 1857

Through their eyes: What did the Sisters see on their arrival in Perth?

The information provided here comes from four primary sources – observations and memories of the Sisters of Mercy, and others in the group who arrived with Bishop Brady, as well as a visitor to Perth during the 1840s. One secondary source is included from a historian, Professor Stannage, who describes the housing in Perth during the 1840s. It is through these descriptions that we can imagine and reconstruct the appearance, the sounds and smells of the small town to which the Sisters of Mercy arrived in 1846.

Read the primary and secondary sources which follow and then complete the activities.

1. Ursula Frayne memories of the trip from Fremantle to Perth in January 1846

The scenery was charming, the river broad and winding. Nature here had undivided [power].... At length we came to the landing place, a ... jetty [at William Street], upon which were assembled a crowd of sightseers, a few of whom hailed us with delight. Others looked on with indifference and the greater number with positive displeasure...

We landed.... The crowd preceded us and we followed. Our way was along a very dusty quiet country road [made of stone and clay] as we thought, but which we afterwards found was the principal street of the city. [St Georges Terrace] By degrees the crowd dispersed, and only a few persons remained with us to the end of our march, which to some of us seemed endless – but I must describe our appearance which indeed was very odd. The procession was headed by the Bishop and two or three Catholic men then came the nuns – two and two, then the priests, next the students, two of whom carried a long flat leather box, containing the portable altar and vestments etc.

(Source: Frayne, 1864, p 9. Seventh letter, 8 January, 1846.)

2. Rosendo Salvado's description of Perth when he arrived with the Sisters in January 1846

A journey of three and a half hours [by boat] brought us to Perth Waters, where a large crowd assembled at the jetty welcomed us with shouts of joy...We marched... singing Te Deum (which I had the honour of leading) and made our way to the church [the pro-Cathedral]. This consisted of four bare walls, with a wooden roof, without altar, doors or windows. Here the procession and singing ended, and we went in, said the usual prayers and received the Bishop's triple blessing.... One could say that the town was still half bush, for a lot of the original trees were still in streets and squares and by the houses, many of which are shaded from the sun by thick leaved eucalypts.... We found mosquitoes very troublesome, and the croaking of frogs in marshy, stagnant waters here and there within the town limits was so loud that we sometimes had to raise our voices, as if talking to the deaf. (Source: Stormon 1978, pp. 30-31.)

3. Mother Ursula Frayne and her community of Sisters moved into a small cottage on St George's Terrace, near Victoria Avenue. Ursula wrote:

Our house is within five minutes' walk of the church; the road to it and indeed the whole country is like a beautiful garden. We have two fine gardens; there are olive trees and vines loaded with fruit which will be very soon ripe.

(Source: Byrne 1981, Valiant Women, p 20. An extract from a letter written by Ursula Frayne on 10 January 1846)

4. W. B Kimberley described Perth in 1848

The houses on [the] banks [of the Swan River] were surrounded with ample grounds, and here and there were hedgerows of olives, almonds, and peach trees.... The streets of Perth were generally unpaved, and sometimes almost impassable. The footpaths where wood had not been tried were sometimes formed of clay. The Perth-Fremantle road was six inches deep in sand. Most of the houses in [Perth] still stood alone, often surrounded by luxuriant fruit gardens.
 (Source: Kimberley, p 141)

5. Perth buildings in 1848

Of the 400 or so houses in Perth in 1848 perhaps 250 were made of brick and belonged to the gentry, officers and merchants, as well as affluent (wealthy)... builders like [Henry] Trigg... Some were rented by working men. The rest of the houses were made of wood - often reeds and bushes, crudely constructed and extremely [likely to catch on] fire.

Note: Perth did not possess a fire brigade until 1848.

(Source: Stannage, T, 1979, p 63.)

Activities

i.) Use the primary and secondary sources provided to complete the table below:

Aspect of life	Description from sources 1 to 5 in your own words
The welcome by residents of Perth	
The condition of the roads and paths	
House materials and gardens	
Trees, native and introduced to Perth	
Describe what the weather would probably have been in Perth during January 1846.	

ii) According to the sources what natural sounds did the group hear? What other sounds do you imagine greeted the newly arrived missionaries?

iii.) In your own words describe the different points of view of people in the crowd greeting the Sisters as they arrived at the William Street Jetty in January 1846.

iv.) Sketch the path taken by the Sisters from the William Street Jetty to the pro Cathedral on 8 January 1846. You can use the map of Perth streets in 1845 to help you here. Find the map on the following website: [Perth Townsite 1845 - Datasets - data.wa.gov.au](http://perth.townsite.gov.au/datasets) , then click on the link next to "Data portal".

Also see the pamphlet: "Walking in Their Footsteps, 2016"

<http://institute.mercy.org.au/walking-in-their-footsteps/>

(Go to the second last line of the website page where you will have access to the pamphlet through the following instructions: "Click HERE to read the small guidebook used on this pilgrimage".)



v.) Write a diary entry describing what one of the Sisters may have heard, seen, smelt and felt during her first few hours in Perth in January 1846. Illustrate your diary entry.