



**Launch of 'An Ardent Desire To Be United To God And To Serve The Poor,  
A Celebration of 100 Years of the Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Townsville 1878-1978'.**

The first thing I did when I sat to read this book was to look to whom it was dedicated. I think the dedication often holds the heart of a book...and I wasn't disappointed! It reads: 'This book is dedicated to The Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Townsville, past and present, for their selflessness, compassion, resilience and loyalty to the communities in which they served'.

As I read, I was captured by the young women who made the arduous journey from Ireland to Australia; by Sister Anne Chester, first by her photo with the dog, and then with Sister Raphael Bracken reflecting the very practical ways they responded to the social issues of the day; by the tenacious way sisters continued to educate and accompany families during the war; by the discerned establishment of the Townsville Mater and the provision of ongoing health care; by the generosity of spirit sending sisters to countries of need including Papua New Guinea and Pakistan.

One hundred and ninety eight sisters were professed as Sisters of Mercy in the Townsville Congregation. In recent months, I have often reflected on the lives of sisters as seeds. Seeds planted, life given in ministry, in love. I think of our early sisters who would never have dreamt about the impact their lives had on individuals, within institutions, the congregation, the diocese and local community. So I googled the Townsville area to see what plants throw seeds and that grow readily here. I read that the soil here, three different types, is not great for good gardens and along with the climate 'horticulturally it can be a nightmare for gardeners'. Natives grow well but anything else presents a challenge. And I thought again of the early sisters coming across the sea and establishing themselves, embedding themselves in this soil, producing fruit and giving life. This book holds stories of some of these seeds.

Joan, thank you for carrying the spirit of mercy and revealing it through your very readable words to bring to life the heritage left by Sisters of Mercy from 1878 til 1978. Your final paragraph captures the essence of the Sisters of Mercy of the Townsville Congregation:

'In the midst of the changes observed by Sisters over time since their foundation in 1878, fidelity to their vows remains at the heart of their call to service in Mercy. The Townsville Sisters remain active in diverse ways: sharing with other community members or the world at large, living simply in a world overflowing with commodities, living ecologically, moving into new areas of ministry, ministering to one another, sharing worldly goods with those in need, speaking the truth about unjust structures, living non-violently, offering hospitality, and living a life dedicated to justice and peace.'

And so our lives continue.

This book is precious. It holds the memories of our Sisters' lives, their history and offers it to the world. The threads of challenge, of courage and resilience and of Mercy, weave their way through the years to highlight again and again the pioneering, loving and, at times, tenacious spirit of these Sisters of Mercy from Townsville and beyond. I launch this book, *An Ardent Desire To Be United To God And To Serve The Poor, A Celebration of 100 Years of the Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Townsville 1878-1978*, in gratitude for the lives who have been planted here and ask for God's blessings on all of us as we continue to walk this path of Mercy.