

Good morning Bishop Tim, Sr Gaye Lennon, sister Helen White, Sisters of Mercy, friends,

There has been a considerable time lapse since Sister Helen Mary (Peters) conceived the idea of recording this history, and today's launch. As I stand here on the site of the first convent, it seems timely that the unique story of the Townsville Mercies is told and the extensive legacy in education, health care and pastoral ministry that is theirs will live on.

I am indebted to the Sisters who contributed to their story: Sister Cheryl Camp wrote *Planting the Seeds around Cleveland Bay* and *Sister Benigna Desmond*, Sister Aquinas preserved some of the story in the 1950s, Sister Marie Leonie Williams for the New Guinea story and her suggestions with way the book is structured. Sister Annette Lowth spent many hours assisting and allowing me access to the archives.

Sister Mary Raymond (Hammond) told me the wartime story must be told. Sister Marie Melville walked with me through difficult decisions- we decided 100 years was best. Sister Carmel Ruddick got the manuscript moving again in 2016, and Sister Anita Ready read and re read and if I have errors in the story of the Irish sisters it is certainly my fault as Anita spent much time going over it with me. Sister Carmel King walked, lived and breathed the story and the photos with me for the last two years, I 'm sorry Carmel is not able to be here today. Finally, Sister Ros Carr persuaded me to take this on- for it not to be a chatty local history, nor to be an academic exercise alone but to situate the story in the story of the church, North Qld history and pioneering women. Thanks Ros.

Helen McCarthy conducted interviews with many of the sisters and these became the backbone of the story. Helen Lucas went to great lengths to support this writing, and thanks again Paul Lucas for the editing. My family and friends have endured the journey with me.

On the way I have had the privilege of reading every Mercy story written of the Sisters throughout Australia. So, I can say this story is unique. In a diocese with 33 Catholic schools today the Sisters of Mercy started 17 schools. The recruitment of Irish sisters was extraordinary in the numbers – 35 in 1926, by an Australian mother Superior who was not permitted to stay in Irish convents.

Despite considerable pressure in the 1940s, (Bishop Terry MaGuire wrote to Bishop Ryan urging the sending of the sisters to Victoria and offered 100 pounds to assist with their transfer). Sr Agnes refused to send the Sisters south and set up and extended schools in the west during the war in extremely trying conditions.

The Sisters have always had strong links with the diocese while maintaining their independence- Bishop McGuire's reception after his consecration was held at St Patrick's. Mother Aloysius, or so we are told, refused to give Bishop McGuire the deeds to the strand buildings when he asked for

them in 1939. Bishop Ryan walked the strand every afternoon and called at the convent where he was served his solitary afternoon tea in the parlour. The sisters rose to every call from the diocese, even moving in 1936 into the convent at Collinsville which had no roof and was open to the elements.

This history needs to be read in conjunction with Sr Cheryl Camp and Sister Gretta McCourt's Mater history for a complete picture of the work of the Sisters of Mercy.

The history is 100 years. With ISMAPNG forming I was asked to add a bridging chapter which I have done to jump to 2011-2012. All sections of the draft were read at least twice by the sisters. However, oral history is only as good as the memory at the time, written records including names on photos, as we found, can also have errors. Hopefully the rest of the story will one day be written and corrections made. So today I would ask you to celebrate this wonderful story, and acknowledge the contribution the Sisters of Mercy have made to this diocese. Be tolerant of any of my factual errors and perhaps the dispelling of some long-held myths. The story is the collective story of the Sisters of mercy in this diocese- all the Sisters are part of story whether named or not in the text.

Sister Brigid Hearne expressed wonderfully in poetry significant changes always with a note of hope; **1939: when the convent bell was given to the Cathedral: She wrote;** *They tell me now acushla that my voice is lovely still and there's years of work before me upon this holy hill.*

Then in 1958: the beautiful belfry on the corner was demolished to build the chapel; *Just now the wheels of progress are rumbling up the strand , and the Sisters there are planning to build a chapel grand,*

2018 with apologies and acknowledgement to Sister Brigid I pick up her voice again;

Tis 'well nigh 60 years or more since I laid down my pen, And now with sad but happy heart I take it up again,

It's time to pay a tribute to sisters then and now, 140 years of ministry, Sisters take a bow!