

WOMEN OF THEIR SPHERE

NOTICE

TO be disposed of by LOTTERY, on
THURSDAY, 8th October, at the
School-room adjoining the Convent.

An elegant Note Case in paper pouch
and a feather of Pearl. Tickets 2

5 shillings. Madrasa won get a note
the said 5 shillings.

The number of tickets for each article is
limited to one hundred.

During the drawing of tickets, a selection of
Music, vocal and instrumental, will be
performed.

Admission: 2s 6d, for persons who have not
purchased Lottery Tickets.

The proceeds to be applied to the erection of
a School House.

Tickets are to be had of Mrs. Abcott, at each
of the principal Stores, and at the Convent.

Drawing to commence at 4 o'clock p.m.
The Sisters of Mercy feel sincerely grateful
to all who have kindly responded to the appeal
made in the beginning of the month

September, but they regret to say that they are
yet far short of the sum necessary to build a
school-house. They therefore most earnestly
and respectfully invite the good and charitable
to assist their humble efforts now, by taking
tickets, which they endeavour to render as
valuable as possible, by providing a selection
of music, and giving gratis a ticket for a
handsome piece of Needlework, in a gilt
frame, to all who purchase tickets for the
articles mentioned in the advertisement.

The Sisters regret much being obliged to use
such public means to procure accommodation
for their little pupils of the Free School, and
humbly trust that all may soon have the
satisfaction of seeing those dear children
enjoying the advantages of an airy school-
house, the want of which is so distressingly
felt at this season.

A HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY IN
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ANNE McLAY



MOTHER URSULA FRAYNE



*M. Ursula Frayne, leader of pioneer
group of Sisters of Mercy in Australia.*



Painting of our Lady of Mercy from St. Brigids Craigie Mercy Convent.

WOMEN OUT OF THEIR SPHERE

Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia from 1846

Anne McLay

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Western Australia.

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I thank also the archivists of the two congregations, Sister Anna Maria O'Shea at Victoria Square, and Sisters Kaye Bolwell and her assistants Norma Scheikowski and Scholastica Hartnett at Craigie. Others who read and gave valuable critiques of substantial portions of the draft included Sisters Anne Tormey, Beverley Stott, Maura Kelleher, Marcella Blake, Elizabeth Devine, Paula McAdam, Assissium Wright, Jan Grey, Rosa MacGinley, PBVM, Frances O'Donoghue, RSM, and Sister Carmel Leavey, OP. Thanks also to the many others who critiqued bits and pieces of it, or allowed themselves be interviewed or quizzed, individually, or in groups, formally and informally. Sister Joan Flynn was always ready to answer questions about West Perth. Sister Wendy Hay gave help with the cover.

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Chapter One has been called "A Story and Its Telling" Conceived originally as an introduction, I have now made it the first chapter. It gives my methodology and perspective. As such, it is an integral part of this account. To read it first, before embarking on the actual history, may make the whole work more comprehensible and meaningful.

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West Australian Newspapers

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Nettley, Jilley Road, Boyanup (sketch)

Vince Isaacs, Architect-Artist (sketch)

Sister Maree G. Allen: "The Labourers' Friends"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne McLay is a Sister of Mercy from Brisbane.

Interested in history over a long period. Teaching of history at secondary and tertiary levels. Co-authored two sets of secondary history texts. Masters degree in education was a history of the Brisbane Mercy schools from 1861. Ph.D. in history was a biography of the first Catholic Bishop of Queensland, James Quinn. This was published and it is in its second printing.

Directed a three year action-research project for the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, and, as director, edited the report *Project Catholic School. A blue-print for the future of administration of Catholic schools in Queensland*, and a subsequent document, *There is Hope for the Tree*, designed to help school and parish communities to study and operationalise the report.

Was twice a member of the National Catholic Education Commission.

As well as a few articles on Christian feminist issues, also wrote a publication for the National Catholic Education Commission, published as *Rediscovery of the Feminine in Church and Education*.

Also wrote the revised Australian Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. This involved a wide and lengthy process of consultation.

Apart from teaching, spent eleven years in Order administration as member of the Brisbane Mercy Council and one year on the National Executive Council. Has been invited to write the history of the Sisters of Mercy, Adelaide.



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There are a large number of relevant photos available in:

Sisters of Mercy Perth Archives, Victoria Square.

Sisters of Mercy West Perth Archives, Craigie.

St. Anne's Mercy Hospital, Mt. Lawley.

Archdiocesan Archives, Catholic Offices, Victoria Square.

The West Australian has some relevant photos, copies of which I have procured.

The convent archives and some of the convent residences or institutions
have some interesting artefacts, of which photographs could be taken.

This book is dedicated to all those Sisters
who have gone before us, especially

Catherine McAuley

Ursula Frayne

Catherine Gogarty

Ignatia de la Hoyde

Anne Xavier Dillon

Aloysius Kelly

Baptist O'Donnell

Catherine (Evangelista) Reilly

each of whom represents something special
in the heritage of women religious.

CHAPTER ONE

A STORY AND ITS TELLING

This book differs somewhat from the conventional history of a religious order or other institution. It is basically a history of the West Australian Mercies, the second group of Catholic women religious to come to this continent, the first to settle in the western part of the country, and the prototype of a considerable number of groups of Irish and English Sisters of Mercy to arrive in our land. As a history, the book tells the events of their group lives and reflects on and interprets those events in the context of Australian society and church. It is based on primary documents wherever possible, but makes much use of secondary written and oral accounts.

As I have been writing, I have become aware of a second dimension to the exercise. I have had a vivid sense of being on a sacred journey, one that set me walking again in the footsteps of my forebears. Not only am I a Sister of Mercy — though a "t'othersider" from the east — but, on my mother's side, I belong to the clan of O'Daleigh (Daly), chief poetic clan of Celtic Ireland. That little piece of family history has come to have import for me in the context of this work.

Listen, the national Mercy Journal, helped me bring this feeling into consciousness, when it said, in one of a series of articles on Celtic spirituality:

The Bards, who trained for twenty-one years, were the "historians", constantly reminding the people who they were, where they had come from, setting the context of their lives. There was in this a constant weaving together of past and present so that they could look to the future with wholeness.¹

Language rather than genetics was what bound the Celts together as a race. They formed a "community of the imagination", a people who used a similar process to make meaning of their lives. Throughout the various tribes, there was one common thread holding this common imagination — the place of the story in the life of the people.

Native North Americans say

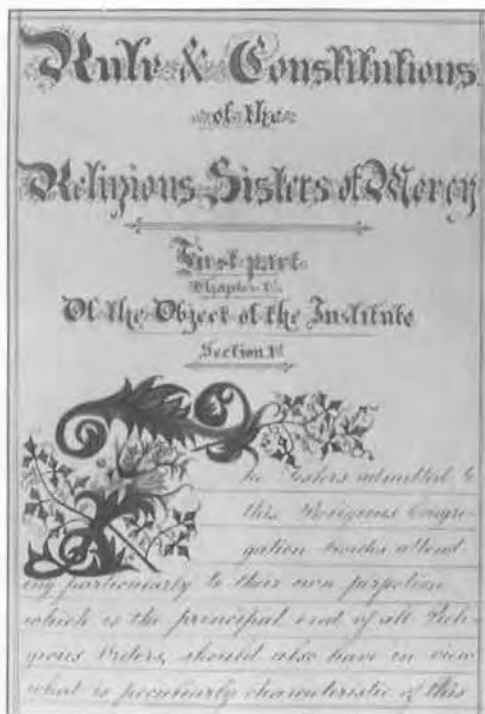
stories live in the world and may choose to inhabit people, who then have the option of telling them back out into the world again. This all can form a symbiotic relationship: if people nourish a story properly, it tells things about life.²

So this is also an attempt to nourish the Mercy story, as it has inhabited the Mercy community of imagination here in the West. The Western Australian Mercies have taken the option of telling their story back out into the world so that it may be nourished and tell further things about life — for them and for us.

In presenting this Mercy story I adopt a hybrid approach. Largely, it is straight narrative, but narrative with attention to people as much as places and institutions. So there is much anecdotal material included, in an effort to catch



M. Catherine McAuley, (1778-1841), Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.



Page from early hand-written Rule of the Sisters of Mercy (approximately 1845).



Entrance porch to Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin.

the personalities involved and the spirit of the groups. The anecdotal material may or may not be factually accurate, yet it is true in the deeper sense that myth and story are true. There is also what may seem an unbalanced emphasis on ministry. But ministry is their *raison d'être* as a group; and there is an attempt to describe their way of living and their spirituality. Then, to help interpret the data, I have looked at theory which considers organisations as corporate cultures with their own value system embodied in myths, rituals, tales of heroines, stories of events remembered and retold. Accordingly, I have tried to analyse the Mercy ethos and the West Australian founding myths in the light of insights from current organisational theory.

In particular, I have looked at a recent national Organisational Culture Study, conducted for the Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia by researchers from Macquarie University.³ Using the concepts of culture developed by anthropologists and sociologists such as Eliade, Turner and the like, modern organisational theorists are examining how the founding (or creation) and other identity myths of a corporate group are important in giving it a sense of wellbeing, energy, and creativity. This is especially so for a well-established group as are the West Australian Mercies as it enters into a period of transition accompanied by confusion or chaos. The recounting of founding myths can then become a source of new life, a kind of "regeneration ritual".⁴

I hope I have also written a critique of a group of women in the Australian society and church, which has been enlightened by new understandings of the relationships between women and men. If so, it will have value for other women and men struggling to be free from the bonds of patriarchy.

An irate cleric once fumed that the first Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia had out-stepped "the proper bounds" for women by getting "out of their proper sphere". Dominic Urquhart had considered exorbitant, Ursula Frayne's expenditure on a house for little Aboriginal girls, "young savages" as he called them. But, more seriously, in his eyes, she had failed to confide in him, "the proper person" in the absence of Bishop Brady to whom the community should have looked for support in all matters, spiritual and temporal.⁵ He was, in other words, the sisters' protector, representative of the church which had taken the place of father or husband in these women's lives.

Ursula was but following in the footsteps of her foundress, Catherine McAuley, in offending male clerics, who wished to hold onto their prerogatives. At Archbishop Murray's suggestion, Catherine had opened the Baggot Street chapel to the laity. The archbishop told her to accept offerings for the use of her refuge. Several of the Dublin clergy who were already opposed to the unorthodox nature of her Institute, were even more annoyed by this later development. Using against her, Catherine's own habit of signing herself **C. McAuley**, one clergyman wrote to **C. McAuley, Esq.** and delivered her a lecture on the masculine character of works of philanthropy, business, and finance.⁶

What was and is "the proper sphere" for women, and for religious women in particular? Were they on a somewhat unreal pedestal, "the good sisters", God's specially favoured "virgin brides" a particular kind of "worthy

helpers" somewhat distanced from those they served in spiritual motherhood? Or were these women so committed to sharing Mercy with others, especially those who knew little compassion or loving kindness from the institutions of society, that they were willing to step "beyond the proper bounds" set for them by church and society? Were they willing to get "out of their proper sphere" to walk companionably with those who suffer? I have attempted somewhat falteringly to answer this basic question.

This aspect of the history was considered vital also by those who initiated the project. Feminist theologian, Anne Carr, maintains that "the insight fundamental to the women's movement is that the place of women has traditionally comprised a partial sphere, a domain or realm within the whole of a world that is male, and that this sphere or realm has been determined by men as the possessors of the whole. Thus the goal of equality or mutuality of participation logically includes the defining of women's place by women themselves." She goes on to say that Karl Rahner recognized that women themselves would have to determine, from their own experience and as "the church of women", their place in both society and the church.⁷

Feminist writings are passionate and involved and looking to the future as much as the past, a future envisaged from a non-patriarchal standpoint. Feminist history is also a new project. When I began, I was not at all sure what it meant, methodologically, to write from a feminist perspective. I did know that I wanted to produce more than another "women's history" I knew that I wanted to contribute more directly to the raising of consciousness of both men and women, and especially in the church concerning the ways in which women's lives and contributions have been and still are devalued. In other words, I wanted to write a kind of "history of liberation" I wanted to contribute to women's definition of their place.

Now, reflecting on what I have done in this somewhat blind fashion, I am clearer as to what is the main distinguishing element in feminist history, viz. the attempt to put squarely onto the historical agenda, the item of gender, and to relate and explain the ways in which women have been subordinate in most of the relationships which have existed in our society between men and women. This includes not just how and why men have dominated women, but also how and why women have submitted to that domination, and have often been willing accomplices. In other words, the overarching topic of feminist history and its underlying assumption is sexism.⁸

Like any liberation work, it involves telling it as it was for those on the underside of the historical agenda being contemplated. This means paying attention to the various members that make up the group, not just to the designated leader of a hierarchical structure. Hence the study is people-oriented as much as possible. At the same time, it hopes to provide a variety of female (and hopefully "feminine") images of leadership. It hopes also to go beyond the traditional preoccupation with the public sphere and to delineate the growth of a female culture, albeit a specialised one. This means attention to such domestic elements as health, food, recreation, house work, community building, and motherhood and child rearing — in this case, within the context of vowed celibate living. On the other hand, these women were

not limited to the domestic sphere. They were extremely active and productive citizens and church members. They often refused to resign themselves to being victims. Hopefully, the probing of their experiences in both private and public spheres will help towards a more holistic historical analysis of our past.

My feminist goal led to some points of tension. My approach has been much more interdisciplinary than many academic historians might approve. There are elements of sociology, psychology, and theology. I trained as a historian. My understandings of the other disciplines are relatively "lay." Does this matter in the new "discipline" of feminist history? Feminists seem to be saying that their scholarship is necessarily interdisciplinary. I certainly found it so in my attempt to discover the insights I needed to explain events and persons and ideologies.

Secondly, I had to learn to accept what my former Ph.D. supervisor used to call "antiquarianism." I was trained at a time when written records were seen as being most valuable. These were largely, though not totally, from the hierarchical superiors of the group and of the church. If I wanted to write a history from the viewpoint of those on the underside, to write it from the bottom looking up, I needed to find out who were the others in the story and what they thought. I had to try to begin to explore the everyday experiences of these others. I found a tremendous scope for this in the burgeoning technique of oral history. And a justification for the use of the material thus received in the sociological understandings of the role of myth in corporate cultures.

Thirdly, there was the tension between analysing sexism as it operated with respect to the Mercy sisters and examining other relevant forms of oppression which they may have experienced or may, themselves, have exercised. Racism, for example, is a strong characteristic of Australian society. I have made some attempt to look at the Mercy response to the Australian Aborigines. I have touched but lightly on classism. Have I examined sufficiently the significance and the impact of the role these women played on the work scene? As the story tells, they administered and often built institutions such as schools, hospitals, and homes. This was outside the "normal" division of labour between the sexes.

Obviously, one book can do just so much. I examine a specific cultural situation from the standpoint of one closely allied to it. Thus access to data was easy. But it was data seen as a white, middle-class, woman, and nun. Most of the people studied were as I am Celtic or Anglo-Celtic European and most were nuns. Theirs and my perspectives cannot be the perspective of all Australian women, let alone of all Australians. One thing that I see is sexism operating strongly within Australian society and church. Besides, I am more and more convinced that sexism is an underlying component of all the other dualistic tyrannies of which we are capable.

Finally, I had the constant fear that the end result would not gel, would be disjointed and unreadable, would be neither coherent story nor valuable feminist analysis. In the long run, it is a tale, and the tale must speak for itself. Perhaps this tale will be a tool in an ongoing process of reflection for men and women, Mercies and otherwise, on the place of women in today's world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGINAL VISION

"The Wilds of Australia"

When the first little group of Sisters of Mercy arrived in Perth, they did so in the white heat of a Western Australian summer. It was January 8, 1846¹ when they berthed at the tiny port of Fremantle and stood at last in "the wilds of Australia", the mysterious and rather frightening southern continent that had fired their imaginations sixteen thousand miles away in Dublin, Ireland. They were glad to say goodbye to the barque "Elizabeth" in which they had sailed from England and had spent four uncomfortable if fascinating months. To get to solid land, however, they had to be deposited precariously into small boats to bring them ashore — by means of a contrivance which resembled a wine cask cut in half, "like drawing water from a draw well." The long, weary and, at times, dangerous journey was over. Now they had arrived but the hot summer sun was burning their fresh Irish skins; there was deep sand to plough through; and hostile colonists to be faced. It was a rude awakening. Their leader, a young nun of twenty-nine, described it dramatically:

We stood in the wilds of Australia on that midsummer night and we could truly say with our Divine Model "We have nowhere to rest our head."

Seven Pioneering Women

Their names in the Order of Mercy were Ursula Frayne, Catherine Gogarty, Anne Xavier Dillon, Ignatia de la Hoyde, Aloysius Kelly, and Baptist O'Donnell. The first three were permanently professed members of their order, the others were still in training as novices. With them was Catherine O'Reilly, a postulant-to-be, aged twenty-one years. Ignatia was forty-two, the others were all in their twenties. Ursula, appointed Mother Superior, was second eldest at twenty-nine. Her assistant, Mother Catherine Gogarty, was twenty-eight and already a dying woman. They were the earliest women religious to set foot on the western edge of the continent, and the first of thousands of Australian Mercies, the second and largest order of women religious in the country. Altogether, they and their successors established throughout the continent numerous schools, hospitals, homes for children, women, and aged persons, as well as engaged in many other areas of spiritual and social good works.

They had come to Western Australia in the missionary party of the first Catholic bishop of the colony, Dr. John Brady. The diocese had been declared less than a year previously, and Archbishop Polding had sent Father John Brady over from New South Wales to care for the spiritual needs of the few Catholics. Brady had gone to Rome early 1844 to obtain funds for his new task. In Rome his statement that there were five thousand European and two million Aborigines awaiting salvation in the colony was accepted without investigation. A large amount of funds was made available from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.



Left: M. Aloysius Kelly.

Below: M. Evangelista O'Reilly.





*Above left: Sr. M.
Joseph Sherlock.*

*Above: Sr. M.
Francis Goold.*

*Left: M. Anne
Xavier Dillon.*

In May, 1845 Brady was consecrated Bishop of Perth. He gathered together a large group of future workers for his diocese and they sailed from England on September 17th of that year. The party was a mixed bunch in that it included the two Spanish Benedictine priests Serra and Salvado, one Italian priest and one layman, a French Benedictine novice and three priests and two brothers of the French order founded by Joseph Libermann, a Benedictine subdeacon from England, and one Irish priest, two students for the priesthood and six catechists. Then there were the six Sisters of Mercy and their prospective postulant. The impact of this assortment of characters was like that of an invasion to the colonists.

The women spent the night in Fremantle in the care of a Mrs Marmion. This was a special sign of grace for Ursula, since the dearly cherished Mother Superior they had just left was Cecilia Marmion. Ursula greeted her as a dear friend for the sake of her "own loved Mrs. Marmion".² It was a presage of the future, for the Marmions were to become genuinely dear friends. The next day the whole party sailed up the Swan to Perth, singing hymns as they came in site of the settlement. There they were met by hundreds of curious people, who followed them in procession to the little new church of St. John the Evangelist.

But, alas, their arrival was earlier than expected and the sisters literally did not have anywhere to lay their heads, until lodgings were given them in the house of a Mrs Martha Crisp. Mrs Crisp was a Methodist, and Catholic nuns were strange to her. However, they stayed with her for a fortnight and, in that time, developed a lasting and warm relationship.

From Mrs Crisp's, they moved to a rented house in St. George's Terrace, the first Convent of the Holy Cross.³ It was a very elegant house, Ursula wrote home, "too nice indeed for Sisters of Mercy", and only five minutes' walk from the Church. Perth seemed very pretty with the whole countryside like a lovely garden. The river looked beautiful, the colonists' cottages were neat and surrounded by laden fruit trees and vines, and the geranium grew in the open air without cultivation. As the summer heat waned other flowers bloomed. Still, the house was in the most public part of the town, between Government House, the Barracks and the Church of England conventicle. They could not play the piano at recreation without having a crowd around the gate, or speak or laugh without its being heard and commented on. Their trunks, kept on the verandah because of want of space, were broken into and contents stolen.

On 1st August, 1846, the day after the death of Mother Catherine Gogarty, the sisters moved to other rented premises, in Lord Street.⁴ These consisted of three buildings forming a square. A long low thatched cottage of two rooms formed the main section, and the two side buildings acted as kitchen refectory and chapel. They were more in keeping with their desire to live simply, and only about two minutes' walk from the church where the school classrooms were. There they remained until 1848, when they were able to shift to permanent quarters in Lord Street (later called Victoria Avenue), attached to the church. The first stone of the new convent was laid on 3rd May, 1847. Building was costly and slow and could not be completed before they took

over. But the thought of anything deserving the name of a cell or private bedroom was enticing. So it was a welcome first day of May, 1848, when they commenced removing all their goods and chattels for the last time. On the second, they took up residence in their new Convent, and on the third, the Feast of the Holy Cross, the bishop solemnly blessed the new dwelling. The Perth Gazette called it "a great ornament to the Town of Perth".⁵

We have little in the way of personal descriptions of these pioneering Australian Mercies. Because a hierarchical society largely honours those in high places, we know the most about Mother Mary Ursula Frayne. Moreover, Ursula wrote frequently to her Superior and her friends at Baggot Street. She had a gift with her pen and wrote long letters full of graphic detail. Writing was obviously a form of renewal of spirit for her, and of solace in their early troublesome, homesick days. Pressing needs in Perth also made such letters a necessity. Fortunately for us, many of these letters have been preserved from the first few years in Perth. They are mainly to Reverend Mother Cecilia Marmion, but the collection includes some from others of the pioneers. There are several to Mother Mary Vincent Whitty, former novice mistress to some of them, and companion-nurse with Ursula when their foundress, Catherine McAuley, was dying. No doubt these letters helped inspire Mother Vincent to go in 1861 to Queensland.

Ursula's letters have a more direct note than her memoirs, written years after the events from the distance of Melbourne. The latter, nevertheless, also display her touch with words, her eye for catching detail, her sense of the slightly ridiculous, and her interest in the new country with its strange beauty. The memoirs, in particular, show her much more taken with the land's native inhabitants than she was with most of its imported ones, at least those who aspired to being its "polite society". Altogether the letters and the memoirs give us a picture of a courageous and strong woman, with some touches of human weakness.

Ursula Frayne

Born Clara, on 15th October, 1816, in Dublin, Ireland, Ursula Frayne had entered the new Institute of Mercy at Baggot Street, Dublin, on 2nd July, 1834, just three years after its official beginning as a religious order. Her father, Robert, was a prosperous business man and a Freemason, who had been converted through the persuasion of his eldest daughter, a Sister of Charity. The Mercy foundress, Catherine McAuley, had herself become Clara's religious guide, leading her to permanent profession of vows on 25th January, 1837 as Sister Mary Ursula. In 1841, Sister Ursula, in return, had the precious privilege of helping to care for Mother Catherine during her final illness. It was Ursula who wrote the Notice of Death and Requiem to the various Mercy convents.⁶ She was named in the codicil of Catherine's will, 11th November, 1841.⁷

We are told by those who knew her later in life that she was rather tall and well-built, fair of complexion with blue eyes.⁸ Well educated according to the standards of nineteenth century Dublin, she was also expert at the piano. Her letters from Perth show her to be genuinely simple and single-minded, clear headed and articulate, keenly interested in people and places, a lover



Left: Entry for M. Ursula Frayne in Baggot Street Illuminated Register.

Below: Entry for M. Catherine Gogarty in Baggot Street Illuminated Register.





Left: Monument over grave of Pioneer Sisters at Victoria Square.

Below: Pavement Block in St. George's Terrace, Perth to honour M. Ursula Frayne.



of the abundant natural beauty around her, very affectionate and loving. She was also practical, even to the extent of being the first to succeed in making bread in the Perth convent. The later memories recall her as charming and gracious, unfailingly gentle. That this gentleness was partly learned is also shown in her letters, where on occasion she displays quick human touches of impatience or intolerance. That she was aware of this tendency is evident in her choice of motto for her ring: "But Jesus was silent".⁹ One hot-tempered priest in Perth was to describe her as "the great, independent, self-willed and master-minded Madam Mary Ursula".¹⁰ She was, in fact, astute and perceptive, with a well-honed sense of humour that carried her through many a sticky situation, quite often manufactured by clerical gentlemen. She had a good eye for the ridiculous and much common sense and energy.

In Ireland, Ursula had already experienced the birth of new things. In 1837, she was part of the first Mercy convent at Carlow with Mother Mary Frances Warde, who was later to be the great American foundress of Mercy. In 1838, she was sent to commence a house for convalescent sisters at Booterstown on Dublin Bay, where she remained until late 1840. Then, in May, 1842, Ursula was appointed leader of the first contingent of Mercies to move out to the New World, to Newfoundland. This foundation had been agreed to provisionally by Catherine McAuley herself, but was not executed until six months after Catherine's death. Mother M. de Pazzi Delaney, Catherine's successor at Baggot Street, put Ursula Frayne in charge of the group of three sisters.

Her Newfoundland experience was to give Ursula an initiation into handling conflict, which was to stand her in good stead in Western Australia. One of the group of three pioneers, Frances Creedon, was from Newfoundland and had been sent by the bishop of St. John's, Michael Fleming, to be trained as a Sister of Mercy by Catherine McAuley. On their arrival in North America, he appointed Frances as superior. Moreover, for the first six months they were accommodated in the bishop's house. With such a duplication of authority and, perhaps, lack of privacy, trouble was to be expected. Trouble apparently did occur. Ursula was no meek and mild young woman, despite her commitment to the charity which Catherine had bequeathed as her legacy to the order. After sixteen months of a harsh physical and perhaps psychic climate, Ursula and Rose Lynch, the other Irish sister, returned home. Only one postulant had joined them to this date. The bishop's continued pleas for further members were ignored and this at a time when the order was eagerly expanding at home and abroad. The Mercy Annalist remarked:

Extremes of climate and difficulties of another nature which, however, are not of public interest were great, and rumor more than troubled them.¹¹

Ursula was not daunted about going again on new foundations, all the same, and readily volunteered to go to Western Australia with Bishop John Brady. Brady was Irish by birth, but the greater part of his life had been spent in France or a French colony, a factor which was to lead him into much misunderstanding of Irish nuns. However, this was in the unknown future when he arrived at Baggot Street in early September, 1845. There he painted

a moving picture of the wretched state of the colony just sixteen years old and progressing very slowly in comparison with the eastern colonies and, in particular, of the 4000 children "with no one to break for them the bread of instruction" His heart yearned especially for the Australian Aborigines whom he described as roaming the bush in a most neglected state, without any of the benefits of Christianity or European civilization. In fact, one of the reasons Brady had been chosen for the newly created diocese of Perth was his previous experience with and obvious concern for Aborigines in the area around Sydney.

Mother Cecilia Marmion, as Reverend Mother of Baggot Street, agreed to send a group of sisters as part of the bishop's large party of priests, religious, and seminarians. Half of these were Spanish, Italian, and French and spoke little or no English. Even the bishop, because of his French upbringing, found difficulty with English. The Mercies were the only women. They had just a fortnight in which to get ready and depart forever! Writing later for some forgotten articles, Ursula muses about how strange it was "that so much was remembered, that ever memorable day of hurry" In St. Edward's Convent of Mercy, London, to which Mother Cecilia had accompanied them, Ursula was made superior of the new community and given, as her assistant, Catherine Gogarty.

Catherine Gogarty

Mother Catherine (Anna Maria) Gogarty had been in weak health when she was chosen for the Perth mission. Doctors had declared that her only chance of ultimate recovery was a milder and a more settled climate.¹² It was thought that the sea voyage and fresh warm air of Australia would improve her condition. She was obviously very homesick leaving Ireland, but could write "Australia is my home until I go to the dark land" In fact, she was sick throughout the voyage and did not recover. Her illness was a constant source of anxiety to the others, especially as they could not procure the necessary food and medicines for an invalid. Such delicacies as arrowroot, sago, barley, etc. were invariably expected "by the next ship" a matter of many months!

Notwithstanding, Catherine was a patient invalid. "Greatly pained at being what she calls a useless burden", she was lovingly tended and her last days were made as comfortable and happy as her companions could make them. Ursula dreaded losing her, in reality, depending on her advice and presence. She went "to the dark land" she had been awaiting, on July 30th of her first year in her new home. She was not quite thirty years old. Bishop Brady wrote that she had been "a fruit ripe for a better life. Her very presence and example prevailed and instilled piety and the fear of the Lord into all who knew and saw her" In the same letter he expressed concern that Mother Ursula would "have no one now to see that she takes care of herself. She is very attentive to all the Sisters but she does not nor will not take care of herself."¹³

Anne Xavier Dillon

Her place in the leadership of the little group was taken by Mother Mary Anne Xavier Dillon. Ursula was surprised at how much support she now received from someone about whom she had had no great expectations.

Ursula and Anne were to become close friends, first in Perth and then in Melbourne, where they both went in 1857 to found the Order in that town. Margaret Dillon was born in County Tipperary in 1818. She had entered the Institute in 1842, just after Catherine McAuley's death, but with so many novices and postulants at Baggot Street, she and Ursula did not really know each other. Hence Ursula's surprise that such an unassuming person could become such a comfort and assistance to her in the stormy days of Perth. Of delicate health, Anne Xavier nevertheless performed capably and creatively, complementing Ursula's more manifest leadership qualities. She was joined later by her young sister, Ellen, who arrived in Perth in December, 1848, to join the community at the age of eighteen. Ellen's merry laugh and her valuable potential quite impressed Mother Ursula.

Ignatia de la Hoyde

The one mature-aged woman within the party proved to be the least adaptable. Catherine de la Hoyde, born in County Louth in 1804, was still a novice when she came to Perth. Her profession in the Convent of the Holy Cross, Perth, took place two and a half weeks after arrival. It was the first Mercy ceremony in Australia, 25th January, 1846, and a very moving affair for those present.

There was a Pontifical High Mass — and an exposition of religious life in general and the duties of our Order in particular, by the Bishop, for the instruction of the Protestants who were there in crowds. The little Church was densely crowded within and without, and yet the most perfect silence was observed. If you (Mother Cecilia) had been present you would have been proud of your child. She performed her part with such self-possession and pronounced her vows so distinctly, that all present, even the officers of the Garrison, were affected to tears, at one time the Bishop was scarcely able to speak so great was his emotion, but his tears were those of joy and gratitude to God. Only your six children remained unmoved.¹⁴

Life and death seemed very real for the participants when the little church, decked out in the morning for the profession ceremony, was swathed in black the evening of that same day, to receive the remains of the twenty-four year old French priest, Maurice Bouchet.

Ignatia did not settle easily into her new land. Before the end of their first year, Ursula wrote to Mother Cecilia:

Poor Sister M. Ignatia has been suffering from what I would consider a dangerous temptation, that is a wish to return home. From the first week of our voyage I could perceive that she regretted the step she had taken. When the time of her Profession came she was miserable; she felt the want of a cell to be a real cross. Going out to Mass, especially going in her veil was a still greater one; not having a House of Mercy or even having a prospect of one; not being able to visit the sick, when these duties were so much the object of our Institute, she could not reconcile herself to it all. She said that all of us who were sent by you had the merit of our obedience, but that she asked to come and consequently was deprived of all merit.

Ignatia remained depressed for some time. "She had frequent fits of sadness, probably for a week together and would not speak three words at recreation." She continued to believe she was being punished for having asked to come

out. Much of her difficulties she projected onto Ursula, who would have been quite happy for such a discontented member to return home, if funds could have been procured without detriment to the mission. She found Ignatia "very peculiar, even singular in her ideas and when she cannot have things just as she would like she evinces her discontent by silence and gloom" Ursula added:

Now I deeply feel my incapacity to guide myself or even a child, much less Sr M. Ignatia, but since Almighty God has placed me in this charge I would not think it right to yield to her on every occasion, great and little, and as she is miserable when found fault with I now leave her almost entirely to herself.

Bishop Brady wrote to Reverend Mother in Dublin that what was needed was "more religious kindness on the one hand and more religious confidence and suppleness on the other."¹⁵

Ignatia seems to have grown a little more contented, especially during a sojourn in Fremantle, though we know little about her after the initial years from which letters have been preserved. She appears to have become the first permanent cathedral sacristan and was one of the sisters sent to the first branch convent, St. Francis Xavier's, Fremantle, officially opened 3rd December, 1847, and to the second, St. Teresa's, Guildford, begun in August, 1855. Evidently she settled down tolerably well in the end, for she never returned home but lived at Victoria Square until her death nearly thirty years later. She became more fully involved in visiting the poor and sick people in the neighbourhood. This seems to have been her forte, for almost forty years after her death her memory was still alive among the people of the area, where she was "worshipped of the poor as an instructress and benefactress".¹⁶ Two weeks before her death, in her seventy-fifth year, she was still giving religious instruction to young and old.

Aloysius Kelly

The second novice, Eliza Sister Mary Aloysius Kelly was also a Dubliner. Eliza was twenty-four when she came to Australia, and a novice for less than a year. She was professed in Perth on 25th March, 1847.

It was a very nice quiet little ceremony in the Church of course; refreshments were prepared at the Bishop's request in the school rooms adjoining, of which the whole congregation partook. Being Thursday in Passion Week, they were not very costly, simply coffee and biscuits.

Sister Mary Aloysius was an excellent community member, according to Ursula.

(She) is a real good child and most anxious to be useful as well as good; in her I see a striking proof of what a true call to the religious state can enable one to do. She has learned to make bread, to milk a cow and to perform many other such duties, which of all things are the most opposite to her natural inclinations. But she is blessed with humility and good sense and therefore can see the necessity of suiting herself to all the casualties of a missionary religious life.

She had two brothers, Edward and William, Jesuit priests, who sent her over the years manuscripts of retreat lectures and sermons they had given.¹⁷

Aloysius herself had a flair for writing in a popular entertaining style. So Ursula gave her the task of writing letters home. Unfortunately none of these survive, except one in which she describes the arrival in December 1848 of their first three reinforcements. In this, however, she says she cannot think "of a droll story" and would not think of telling her correspondent, Sister Philomene, a serious one. What does survive are a couple of poems she wrote in later life. In her time, the *Record* stated on her death in 1896, she was regarded as "a highly cultured woman, a linguist, a poet and a writer of no mean ability".¹⁸ One sample of her work is preserved in J.T. Reilly's *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Western Australia*.¹⁹ Reilly regrets that "no care was taken of her literary work" and "only a few of her poems can be found to attest her skill and ability

as a writer" Her writing is very "feminine" in its themes, dealing with people in their joys and sorrows, in their life and death.

But Aloysius Kelly's celebrity as a writer and even more so as an administrator was far into the future in 1848. When Mother Ursula was seeking someone to put in charge of the new branch convent at Fremantle, she confided to Rev Mother Cecilia Marmion that she had consented,

tho' reluctantly, to let Sister Mary Aloysius go in charge.... Sister Mary Aloysius, holy and amiable as she is, has all the will, but little of the capacity to discharge such a duty....

Despite Ursula's misgivings, Aloysius seems to have done a good job in Fremantle. In a very short time, she and her companion, Ignatia, had exerted much labour in getting the convent in order, and improving the school, which had been languishing under the care of an inexperienced young laywoman. In addition, both Catholic and Protestant women were coming to them for religious instruction. Mary Aloysius was launched on her career of administration.

With a later arrival, Sister Mary Francis Goold, Aloysius was to help establish what was virtually the first secondary school in Western Australia, at Victoria Square, 3rd September, 1849, some years before the government entered this field. She was to contribute significantly to leadership in subsequent years, becoming Mother Assistant in mid-1857 and Reverend Mother from 1862-1883 and again from 1889-1892. During her term as Reverend Mother, the present convent at Victoria Square was built; the first orphan girls from the workhouse were received and the care of the orphan boys at Subiaco was assumed; her sisters departed by bullock dray to establish a convent at York. In 1882 she went on a recruiting trip to Europe, returning with three professed, one novice, and ten prospective members. She became their novice mistress until she was re-elected as reverend mother.

Baptist O'Donnell

The third novice, Mary Baptist O'Donnell, was to take Ursula's place in leadership in 1856, when the latter resigned before going to Melbourne. Born in 1816, she had entered at Baggot Street in January, 1845, and received the habit 2nd July, 1845. Ever on the lookout for more funds, the bishop had wanted to anticipate her profession in order to obtain dowry money of 200

promised by her brother. Ursula "positively refused" to give her consent. However, as soon as the votes of the professed members had been passed in favour of Mary Baptist's profession, the bishop was again demanding the money which he wanted for the purpose of getting a convent built. The money was already on the way out, and the first stone of the convent was laid on 3rd May, 1847. Baptist was professed on 2nd July. Ursula described the day: the ceremony was held

in the Church, of course, and in the evening the Bishop invited them all to a temperance party at the house of a very good pious woman who indeed has reason to be grateful to God for sending missionaries to this place. Up to the period of our arrival she had a shop in which she sold spirits in small quantities, but we prevailed upon her to give up such gain assuring her that Almighty God would not allow her to suffer, but would send her some other means of supporting her family. She accordingly gave up the public house, took the pledge, and is now one of the most edifying of our people. Her house was crowded with guests on the evening of Sister's profession who availed themselves of his Lordship's hospitality in honour of the happy event.

On the same day two women were received into the Church. One a Protestant of the Church of England, the other, I know not what sect, so that it was in every way a feast-day.

Baptist herself wrote that she had "nothing to desire now as by (her) holy Profession all the wishes were fulfilled" The Bishop was commencing a school house adjoining the new Convent and she had been told that as she would have charge of the school she would be accountable for the expenses. She queried: "Will it not be too bad if they send me to prison until it would be paid for?" Instead of going to prison, she next writes of being nurse instead of school mistress for there was scarcely a child who had not got the whooping cough but still insisted on attending school. Later she was sent to swell the community of two at Fremantle.

There seems to have been some misunderstanding between Ursula and Baptist in the 1850s, when Brady's successor, Dom Joseph Serra, was proving an even greater trial than Brady. By 1856 Ursula had decided to leave to establish the Sisters of Mercy in Melbourne. Accordingly, she resigned in June of that year and Mother Mary Baptist O'Donnell was elected in her place. Ursula remained in Guildford until her departure in January, 1857, with Anne Xavier and M. Joseph Sherlock, who had come out in 1851.²⁰

Explaining why she was leaving to her long-time friend and supporter, Bernard Smith, Ursula wrote that she had been driven from Perth

by a series of persecutions, and the Sisters by a positive order either to confess to persons in whom they had no confidence or else to quit that Convent. ...as Sister Mary Baptist, not only permitted that persecution, but even assisted in it by urging them, either to conform to Dr Serra's will, or quit the Convent, they cannot place any confidence in her or regard her as their Superioress, besides having elected her against their consciences, their wills, their better judgments.

Probably Baptist was unequal to the demands of leadership thrust upon her in such difficult circumstances. She had further trouble when the nun who

had been elected her assistant, Francis Goold, a cousin of Melbourne's bishop, having been refused permission by Serra to accompany Ursula and the other two, went, more or less on her own accord, in June of the same year. Never very strong, Mother Baptist soon

fell into a declining health induced partly by a delicate constitution, accelerated in good measure by the sufferings of mind she had gone through in the trying period after her election. She endured her pains of mind and body with enduring patience and, before the end of her second term of office, she died the death of the just on 9th March, 1862 in the presence of the very Rev. Martin Griver and His Lordship, Bishop Salvado.²¹

Despite the difficulties of her period of office, a commentator in later years, writing about the various foundation sisters, found this to say about Mother Baptist O'Donnell. She "won a place in the veneration of the people which has never been eclipsed".²²

Catherine (Evangelista) O'Reilly

The final member of the founding group was Catherine, Sr M Evangelista²³, O'Reilly. She was born in Co. Cavan in 1824 and came with the first band as "the postulant not wearing a cap". She was to be the fourth Reverend Mother of Perth, and at the time of their Golden Jubilee was superior of some seventy Sisters of Mercy. During her first period of office, four new branch houses were set up: Geraldton and Bunbury in 1883, Newcastle (Toodyay) in 1884, and West Perth in 1888. She herself had gone to help set up the branch house at Guildford in 1855; had been in charge of establishing a convent in York in 1872 (while acting also as Mother Assistant of the total group); and from 1879 to 1883 had been responsible for St. Vincent Boys' Orphanage, Subiaco.

But in 1846, until she received the postulant's dress shortly after their arrival in Perth, Catherine played the role of servant to the community. In Ursula's words, she

submitted to all the labour of that state, not only without a murmur, but with the greatest cheerfulness, and without the least hope of being allowed to enter religion, as I thought it better not to give her any encouragement until I should have an opportunity of judging her vocation. On the morning that she got the dress, the Bishop said Mass at the Convent, after which he addressed a few appropriate words to the postulant. He said that she had then a proof of the fidelity of God in rewarding those who humble themselves for his sake, that if she had not submitted to those duties, mean of their own nature but honourable from being performed in the House of God, and for his consecrated Spouses, she never would have been allowed to assume that garb or aspire to the dignity of being herself his Spouse.

She is to be a Choir Sister as I think she would be much more useful in that state than as a lay Sister. She has had the advantage of a very good education and is smart and active but not strong.

Ursula added that there was another young person

most anxious to join us but I think it more prudent to wait for some time until she shall have a practical knowledge of the duties of our holy religion before embracing a more perfect state.

Ursula must also have been doubtful for a while about the appropriateness of Catherine O'Reilly's "embracing a more perfect state" and was also contemplating her becoming a lay, rather than a choir sister. She wrote in March 1848:

Our only novice, Sr. Evangelist, is apparently very anxious to give satisfaction, but she has much to overcome. We must hope that Almighty God will give her the necessary graces. How much I wish we had ...some... good professed lay Sister who could teach her by example what a lay Sister ought to be.

Ursula, however, was not averse to using Evangelista's practical skills, styling her "our old carpenter"

In a second letter to Mother Cecilia that touched on Sr Evangelista's vocation, December, 1848, Ursula clarified the reasons for her doubts.

From the very peculiar and trying circumstances in which we were placed during the first months after our arrival I had not time to attend, as I should have done, to the postulant. I saw that she was active and most anxious to be useful. I saw that her manners were exceedingly plain and that she was very ignorant, but I hoped she would have had good sense enough to see her deficiencies and try to improve; and at the time I had no doubt of her vocation, remembering the many painful and humiliating things to which she cheerfully submitted during the voyage. She was received and went on for twelve months, at the end of which period she was not in the least improved. On the contrary, I discovered several serious faults which were unnoticed before. The principal were many breaches of truth, which, although I hope were developed more from a bad habit than from malice, were nevertheless most disedifying. She took reproof so badly that it was a real pain to point out any fault to her, and she said several times that if she had means she would return home, lamenting bitterly that she had ever come; to be sure she spoke thus in anger and expressed great regret afterwards.

Added to all this was an absolute incapacity for the duties she might be called upon to discharge as a choir Sister, at the same time that she would be deeply mortified if passed over. These considerations determined us to try her as a lay Sister and we have since found her a very great assistance. She has laboured in earnest to correct her faults and thanks be to God, has succeeded in a great degree. She very rarely yields to temper, although tried much more than before and when she chances to say what is not quite true she corrects herself immediately. Since her holy Profession she has been a real comfort to our little community.

The influence of Catherine McAuley is evident in Ursula's indecision in this matter. While Catherine's primary aim had been to seek the God who was the beloved of her soul and to help the poor who needed aid "today, not next week", she had nonetheless placed importance on refinement of manners. A creature of her age and inheritor of her mother's charm and graciousness of manners — a legacy which stood her in good stead in her years of dependence within other families — Catherine observed that "a perfect Religious is a perfect lady" and that "good manners add to the value of good works". One of Catherine's original additions to the rule of the Presentation Sisters where she made her novitiate, was on the subject of this graciousness

of manner and courtesy of conduct. In it she advocated a "cheerful yet reserved manner" an "ever serene and cheerful countenance", and a "sweet religious gravity... never lost by loud laughter, hasty and noisy words... hurried steps or precipitation."²⁴ Ursula's own upbringing inclined her strongly to agree with Catherine. She may have been, owing to her more privileged upbringing, somewhat overconscious of class distinctions, for there seem to have been a relatively large number of lay sisters in her time in Perth.²⁵

Catherine O'Reilly's education could not have been too minimal, for — though born in County Cavan — she was educated in the capital, Dublin. In the end, Mary Evangelista was professed as a choir sister — which enabled her to serve all that time as Mother Superior. She continued to be "a real comfort" for some fifty odd years, dying a much respected Sister of Mercy, three months before the close of the century.

The Order of Mercy

Just what was the Institute or Order of Mercy to which these young women belonged, and through which they had come so far to perform its "works of Mercy"? Their foundress, Catherine McAuley, whom some of them had known and who to the others was a very fresh vibrant group memory, was a truly remarkable Irish woman. Born 29th September, 1778, to a prosperous family, she had imbibed a sense of care and concern for people less fortunate than herself through accompanying, as a small child, her father as he tried to help destitute persons. Then, on his premature death, she had herself experienced poverty and a humiliating dependence on friends and family, most of whom were — like her mother — either contemptuous of, or outright antagonistic to, her determination to persevere in her Catholic faith and devotion. At the age of about twenty-five, she had moved in, as a kind of adopted daughter, to live with Catherine and William Callaghan, a retired childless couple. She spent almost twenty years caring for them and they grew to love her very much. The years were also very formative for Catherine, for the Callaghans did not discourage her efforts to help young women in distressed circumstances around their home in the village of Coolock on the outskirts of Dublin. She also grew in spirituality as she learnt to be contemplative in a house where panels of the door became the only cross on which she could meditate, but where the bible became a great source of inspiration as she read it to her Quaker adopted mother. She learnt there, especially through care of the invalided Mrs Callaghan, to show "great tenderness in all things". She emerged from this long period of mixed blessings as a wise, tolerant, practical yet fun-loving woman of "tender courage" and great strength of character.

The Callaghans died, each having separately embraced Catherine's religious faith, and leaving their considerable wealth to her, knowing she would use it well. Use it well she did, for with it she built, in 1827, the first House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin. Designed to be a house where she and her associates could live, where young women in distressed circumstances could find refuge and vocational training, where poor children could be educated and orphans housed, it attracted much attention in the fairly affluent neighbourhood. It also looked like a traditional convent, something Catherine

had not at all intended. Rather otherwise. She felt that the lifestyle of an order of nuns was too restrictive for the kinds of works she saw as direly needed. Already she had added home and hospital visitation, care of the aged, instruction of adults and a variety of social services to her commitments. She envisaged her House of Mercy as attracting young women as volunteers during the period between leaving school and marriage.²⁶

The possibility of forming a religious institute was there, nevertheless. Though she herself was well into middle age by now, she had attracted many women to her work. Some of them, Catherine included, began to live in the House and adopted a simple rule of life and plain dress of the time. The tongues began to wag and Catherine was advised by Archbishop Daniel Murray that she would need to turn her group into a religious congregation if her work was to survive as a church agency. So, against her inclinations, she submitted herself to undergoing a postulancy in the Presentation Convent of George's Hill, Dublin, with a couple of her first companions. From their profession on 12th December, 1831, is dated the official establishment of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy.

The social conditions in the slums of Dublin and the poverty in other parts of Ireland were extremely bad in the first half of the nineteenth century. A number of particularly severe famines had worsened the impoverishment of the majority of the nation, developed through centuries of English repression. Penal laws had begun to be lifted but great discrimination of every kind still existed. Thousands of young Irish women were much at risk and these, in particular, were causing Catherine anguish. From the thought of helping them she moved also to that of educating children, especially girls, so that they would be able to help themselves move out of their often desperate plight. Her sisters were to walk the streets of the cities and towns and villages, visiting the sick poor in their homes, nursing in public hospitals in time of plague, accompanying Florence Nightingale to the Crimean War.

They were a new phenomenon in the ecclesiastical world, the first Irish group to escape monastic enclosure — enough, at least, to be termed “the walking nuns”. The nickname was, at first, made more often in criticism than in admiration. But Catherine's work persevered and grew, and she herself came to be called by contemporaries “the saintly Miss McAuley”. And ultimate accolade for an Irishwoman — she was hailed as supreme successor to St. Brigid!

The spread of the Order of Mercy throughout Ireland, then into England and then into the New World, especially North America and Australia and New Zealand, was truly astonishing. Catherine herself lived for only ten years as a Sister of Mercy, dying 11th November, 1841. Yet her organisation did not collapse. Built on a decentralised organisational model, each house was to become independent as soon as it could look after itself. In a very short space of time, it flourished and multiplied, until it was the largest group of English-speaking Sisters and the second largest in the world after the French Daughters of Charity.²⁷

So Catherine McAuley's memory was still very much alive and fondly revered when the first Sisters of Mercy arrived in Australia. They settled

in amazingly quickly, doing the works of mercy, instructing adults in the faith, and opening their schools. They were, indeed, merciful women, hearts filled with compassion for the poor Catholics who were among the most deprived of a struggling new colony; and for the Aborigines who seemed to them beautiful with many natural virtues but also needing to be civilized and christianized.

The Catholics were almost all Irish, not very many in number, and almost all servants and labourers. They had little enough money to look after themselves and their families, without having to support the large number of priests and monks and nuns brought out by the new bishop, Dr John Brady. The sisters managed admirably, however. Writing home to Dublin, Ursula assures them that they have plenty to eat, good milk and bread and tea, fresh vegetables and fruit and meat.

Ursula's letters show her to be older than her twenty-nine years. She was quick of mind and spirit, energetic, alert to and interested in all that was going on about her, able to learn from mistakes caused by inexperience, but not always able to control her reactions or her tongue when faced with injustice and petty restrictions or hostilities. She exhibited the skill to guide the little group through many difficulties while establishing and running smoothly schools for the poor and the rich and a Benevolent Institution for Aboriginal and European girls.

But at tremendous cost! What was the power which kept these pioneer sisters operating so well — despite illnesses wrought by harsh climate and isolation; despite the death of one of their members within months of landing; despite irrational and unwarranted mistreatment by those from whom they were entitled to expect encouragement? Their central symbol was Mercy, an unfathomable source of energy and strength.

Catherine McAuley had opened her Dublin House of Mercy on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 24th September, 1827. She had taken Mary as Our Lady of Mercy for patroness, and the practice of Mercy as the work of the Order. Ever conscious of our own need, as limited human beings, for the mercy and compassion of God, especially revealed through the passion and death and resurrection of Jesus, Catherine saw Mercy as the motivating force of the Institute. She spoke of "the spirit of the Order" as "the true Spirit of Mercy flowing on us" and of "all these offices of Mercy, spiritual and corporal, which constitute the business of our lives."²⁸ In her Rule and Constitutions she wrote that

Mercy is the principal path marked out by Jesus for those who desire to follow him. (par.8).

In biblical faith, Mercy is a pervasive and compelling image by means of which the Israelites attempted to capture something of the way in which they viewed their God. Contemporary scholarship, in particular, has pointed out the essentially feminine nature of this metaphor for God, expressed above all in the Hebrew word the Israelites very frequently used, *rahamim*. We translate *rahamim* by mercy or compassion or loving-kindness. *Rahamim* is the plural of the word for womb, and its use — in all historical periods and

in all sorts of circumstances expresses the Israelites' conviction that God yearned for them in the same way as a mother cares for the child of her womb.²⁹ Some scholars link Mercy with Sophia, another feminine image, the Wisdom of God.

Thus Mercy as a linguistically feminine or female metaphor for God is a peculiarly appropriate symbol for a group of women committed to the inner search for God, through the following of Jesus Christ in community, especially in the exercise of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. It is probably an historical anachronism to claim that Catherine McAuley or Ursula Frayne and their companions were aware of such linguistic ramifications of the biblical concept of Mercy as womb-compassion. But they were women extremely sensitive to the cries of their wounded world. They responded intuitively to Mercy as a timeless symbol of the divine and a basic quality in the life and personality of Jesus. Heiresses to its tradition in scripture, they were able to experience it in their own lives.

But Mercy, as with all metaphors, can be ambiguous. In it lies the danger of an imbalance in the active giving of Mercy. Jesus, the incarnation of God's Mercy, was the one to whom the nun was espoused, it was his church to whom she belonged, and for whom she worked extremely hard and with great commitment and devotion. Jesus was her soul companion, the one whose friendship made all the hardship and all the loneliness of exile worthwhile, and with whom she could be united more closely in this life through her prayer and through her compassion for other human beings.

A good Sister of Mercy, it thus stood to reason, is always active, engaged in care for others. Catherine's saying was influential in forming attitudes: a Sister of Mercy looks for rest only in Heaven. Unhappily, there could be at times less stress on one's own need to receive Mercy from God, others, and oneself. While the need to be forgiven spiritually by God in His loving Mercy was a persistent underlying theme, the emphasis in the apostolate lay on the sister being a channel of God's Mercy for others less advantageously circumstanced than she was.

There was an apparent unawareness of one's need to receive it from those with whom one worked. The notion of mutuality in ministry, with each person both giving and receiving from the other, because each is equally in need of compassion, was not to be articulated clearly till the renewal period of post Vatican II, in the 1960s or even later. While there was a recognition that all were sinners, there was little expression of a common desire for help or freedom from oppression. Even when Ursula writes to Dublin describing how they share in the great poverty of their mission, the account of the sharing usually tends to be somewhat onesided. On one occasion she explains that she sends this lengthy account because

As we belong to the poor, and all the Catholics are of this class, we must hear what they have to say *if we wish to be useful to them.*³⁰

The notion of those who are more privileged, helping the poor in order to learn from them had not yet re-entered the mainstream of Christian consciousness.

The Tasks are Urgent

There is no doubt that they were faced with tasks of great urgency. And they did not wait to be told what to do. A contemporary analysis of the Australian Mercies describes their organisational culture as a role culture, that is, one not so well adapted to the change and chaos of modern society.³¹ It is normal for organisations to develop role characteristics as they grow bigger and older. But the first group of Mercies in the continent were far from being enmeshed in the deadening effects of "role". They were clearly devoted to doing whatever had to be done. They were responsive to the diverse needs around them and used their meagre resources effectively. It was the "extraordinary success" of their schools that caused the Government eventually to grapple seriously with the problem of education in the colony. Moreover, the Sisters "rapidly won popular approval among the lower orders, for they educated boys and girls at little cost to the parents and with little concern for class distinctions."³²

There was a tremendous sense of "getting on with the job" in these opening days. A certain note of impatience comes through in Ursula Frayne's first letter to Dublin from Perth written a few days after landing in the country.

We have not commenced the duties of our institute as yet. The Bishop wishes us to become a little more accustomed to the heat which is intense. We expect to have three schools; one for the poor, one for the rich and one for the dear natives. We hope to have Mass in our Choir on Saturday next, our dear Father promised to come on that day to bless the house and place the Blessed Sacrament here. From that day we may date the foundation of the Convent of the Holy Cross.

However, religious life tradition and Mercy customs (despite the youthfulness of the Order) were very significant. Her next letter about a month later, told that she now had

the pleasure of informing you (Rev Mother Cecilia) that we are quite settled and going through all the conventual exercises as if we had been here always.

Speaking of Ignatia's ceremony of profession, shortly after their arrival, Ursula reminisces in her memoirs how

determined to keep as far as possible all our good customs, we prepared in the Convent a grand entertainment for the Bishop and the clergy... after the ceremony.³³

When a school was opened on Monday, 26th January, 1846, it presented a charming display of creativity on the part of Sister Mary Anne Xavier, sister in charge. She had

a supply of school books, copies, slates which the Bishop had brought from Europe; but school room, table, desk or form we had none. To requisites which seemed indispensable, my (Ursula's) reply was "do the best you can". Thus authorised, the Sister like an obedient, good religious, as indeed she was, set to work. Once more the packing cases were called out of their hiding places (having already done duty as tables for the aforesaid "grand entertainment") and did duty as desks. A few planks placed on bricks which we picked up about the grounds served for seats and a verandah back of the convent would make a very good school, at least during the summer of that delightful climate.

One girl presented herself!

However, by the end of the day there were six and the end of the week sixteen. This was still

rather discouraging to persons who had come a journey of 16,000 miles in order to teach some at least of the four thousand little ones, who, we were told, "had no one to break for them the bread of instruction."

"I very innocently asked the Bishop", Ursula wrote, "where were the four thousand children, and received the answer that out of stones Almighty God could raise up children to Abraham"

Ursula believed, however, in the dictum that God helps those who help themselves. And they had come a journey of 16,000 miles in order to teach some at least "of the four thousand little ones..." Those early sixteen had been obtained not at home sitting "with our hands folded doing nothing", by Ursula's account.

As Catholic children would not come to us, we determined on going to seek them... evening after evening, sallying forth walking some miles through the bush and not leaving a single cottage unvisited.

As a result of these exertions the number of pupils soon increased to fifty or more.³⁴ Moreover, they were attracting the protestant as well as the catholic children and thereby exerting pressure on the colonial government to be more active in providing schooling than hitherto.

There was a strong note of mobility for the sake of the mission or task in the early writings. Ursula wrote to Dublin that the number of children in the school was "miserable", the population was very scattered.

If we had more Sisters I think we would not be allowed to remain long together. The Bishop is most anxious to have branch houses in two of the other districts, and if I am not greatly mistaken we shall be obliged to separate before very long. It will be a second leaving dear St. Catherine's (Baggot St Dublin), but if the glory of God requires it I dare not oppose it nor would I be inclined to do so. The great sacrifice once made, every other must seem trifling.

Sr M Baptist O'Donnell, writing to her cousin in February 1848, spoke about their expanding mission:

The aborigines are the chief object of our good Bishop's zeal... We have some children under our care... Our little portion of the mission is prospering... school at Fremantle... too few to have a branch convent but house is ready... A very good school here (Perth) requires our entire attention children of different denominations. We are seldom without converts requiring instruction... We are all this time without a convent, at least without a good house. Our present abode is little less than a cottage in the bush. Convent just being finished. Still I do not know who will live in it for I am sure as soon as Sisters arrive they shall be sent to other parts of WA to extend the mission. We are feeling the heat a good deal, though not as much as we felt it the summer we arrived. Too much cannot be said in praise of the climate... no coughing... very little sickness of any kind, so not much to do on the visitation of the sick.³⁵

Efforts towards recruitment of new members were active and unceasing. Almost every letter to Dublin begs for sisters to swell their numbers and help them expand to do the work so abundantly there to be done. At times they even named people.

I earnestly hope dear Rev. Mother will be able to send us the long wished for Sisters before the end of this year. Never were any beings more anxiously looked for. But should you hear of any vessel ready to sail before the dear Sisters would be prepared to come, may I request you will endeavour to send Ellen.

Ellen was Ellen Dillion, sister to Sister Mary Anne Xavier, and not yet sure that she wished to enter the Sisters of Mercy. Ursula wrote:

Ellen need not make herself uneasy about means to establish herself in business. She can, and I am quite sure will, be most useful to the Mission in many ways; even if she should not feel herself called to the religion.

Ellen did eventually come and did enter, becoming Sister Mary Magdalene.

Other Foundation Women

Ellen Dillon and Anne Strahan were the first of many young women to come from Ireland after the original group. They accompanied Sister M. Francis Goold, a twenty-eight year old novice from Baggot Street.

Born Laura Goold of County Cork, 18th September, 1822, Sister Mary Francis was a remarkably able woman. She had a particularly fine voice. The three newcomers had arrived in Perth in the December of 1848, and most of the people of the town had the pleasure of hearing her sing for Christmas. Ursula wrote to Dublin:

What a fine voice she has! The Sunday after her arrival she sang at last Mass and again at Midnight Mass and the last Mass on Christmas Day. The people are all astonished and delighted. Crowds of Protestants came to hear her.

When she died many years later, *The Record* reported:

In the early days, the central attraction to the Cathedral was the singing of Sister M. Francis. She had a truly magnificent voice, perfectly trained there was no voice in Perth that could for a moment be classed with it.

However, singing was only one of her many accomplishments. She had a wide culture and great and versatile talent. On her arrival, Ursula thought:

Sister Mary Francis is just the Sister suited to this Mission. She seems to be a person of very strong mind and talent as well as solid religion...

I think Sister M. Francis will be particularly well suited for the school. She is to be Sr. M. Baptist's principal assistant; in this colony it would not answer for a Novice to have the charge.

Her health, however, was of some concern; she had "some sort of fit or weakness" at times, when she became "quite cold, trembling and speaking incoherently" Ursula feared it may have been an illness similar to Catherine McAuley's, who had died of tuberculosis.

It would be a real affliction were she obliged to leave religion. It would do incalculable mischief, particularly in this colony where there are so many evil-minded individuals.

Strength and good health were necessary qualities in Perth "where there is so much to be done and so little time to spare"

Happily, within a year of arrival, Francis had settled down. She was

becoming quite a missionary. We hear very little of her delicate health now. She takes an active part in all the duties. She seems most anxious for her Profession, but I tell her always to have patience. I hope in time she will be an edifying religious; she has yet much to correct, but she seems to make great exertions to give satisfaction.

Her particular duties included "the work for both schools teaching music to the young ladies and a class in one or other of the schools as appointed." She also had cleaning duties the pension school room and also the "Noviceship" "which honourable title is given to a table at which the Novices sit during morning lecture and on which their desks³⁶ are arranged"

Francis was truly versatile and undertook her various duties "with great activity" She was particularly interested in the little Aboriginal girls and deemed it a privilege to be permitted to teach them sometimes. She could print and illuminate but had no knowledge of drawing, a lack bemoaned by Ursula trying to respond to parents' requests in the pension school. Still, Francis' ability to illuminate came in handy when altar charts and other objects were being made. She wrote to Baggot Street begging for paints, pieces of parchment, and designs for lettering. In these letters she also begged for "a cobbler's awl and all the utensils requisite for mending" shoes. Seeing there were only two cobblers in Perth and these had refused to do any more cobbling for the Sisters, whose shoes they regarded as "rubbish", Francis thought she would try her hand.³⁷

Her two companions on the voyage out, Ellen and Anne, were also immediately put to various tasks. Ellen, within three months of arrival, was community baker. Six months later she was teaching "a very troublesome little class in the school" and assisting in "teaching work and writing", was "in charge of various apartments in the convent, and besides this general messenger to the Mothers" Ellen had a joyous spirit which led her to laugh outright to herself at inappropriate moments. Dominic Urquhart thought the novice, Sister Mary Magdalene, was too much "flesh and blood", too much "actuated by mere human passion, human feelings, and human attachment."³⁸ However, Ellen was able to survive a second separation from her sister, Anne Xavier, when the latter left for Melbourne in 1857. As Sister Magdalene, Ellen entered wholeheartedly into the ministry in Western Australia. She died less than two months after the opening of a new large convent at Victoria Square in 1871. She was forty-four.

The third member of the party, Anne Strahan, was six years older than Ellen. Born in County Wexford, Ireland, she was thirty when professed in Perth. A quiet retiring person, as Sister Mary Catherine, she chose for the motto on her ring: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. It was a motto consonant

with Mother Ursula's first impression. "Anne appears to be truly pious and humble" Ursula wrote, "and I have no doubt we shall find her a very great assistance." As lay sister working in the kitchen, refectory, laundry or wherever, she gave forty years of unassuming and cheerful service. Though quiet she was remembered as loving and able to make people laugh. She grew into "dear old Sister Catherine whom it was an education in benignity and Christian simplicity and cheerfulness to know."³⁹

It was these ten foundation sisters who came to Perth during the 1840s and those six who joined them during the 1850s and early 1860s⁴⁰ who sketched the original vision of Mercy here in the West. They were women of their time and they were women of steadfast kindness. In a peculiarly feminine fashion, they

transplanted the Mercy charism of Catherine McAuley, in a way that was effective for its purpose. They enabled the tremendous expansion that was to occur over the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

A Feminine Economy

Their femininity manifested itself, above all, in the way they funded their works. We might say that their social conditioning as women was used constructively to amass the necessary money.

Both Bishop John Brady (1845-1850) and his successor Bishop Joseph Serra (1850-1862) proved wanting in one of the roles nineteenth century society and church expected them to play, viz. "protector" of these women religious who had come to work for the church in Western Australia. Rather the two men found it hard to relate normally to such resourceful women, who knew what they wanted to do and were determined to do it. Both of them reacted by standing on their episcopal dignities and their official "protection" became a hindrance rather than a help. The women survived and prospered, almost in spite of the men. There were a number of lessons in human relations which were extremely disagreeable, but did stimulate the capacity for independent action within the women.

The bishop controlled the finances of the mission that came from central funds and from local contributions of the faithful. Neither Brady nor Serra gave much real financial help in providing for the sisters' educational endeavours, the cost of which soon expanded beyond the meagre personal resources of the Order.⁴¹ Ursula did her utmost to obtain finance from the colonial government as also from the church, but both sources remained insufficient. A bank draft from the mother house in Dublin, with the suggestion, "Come dear, bring them home", brought blinding tears to their eyes but also the decision not to retreat. This money was put into the building fund to enable them to add to the new convent and construct a small house for native girls. But how to furnish these?

"A good bazaar would furnish it", suggested Sister M. Baptist. "A bazaar among Catholics - 30 Catholic families, some of them very poor and not more than 500 whites in the whole settlement. Besides what have we to work on? "There's the rag bag" remarked one. "Bring it here", said Reverend Mother. Now this was no ordinary rag bag. Pretty beginnings and no endings...



St. John the Evangelist Cathedral (1844) and first Convent of Mercy (1848).



Most Rev. John Brady, first Bishop of Perth, (1845-1850).

EDUCATION.

THE Sisters of Mercy, possessing every facility, have arranged to open, on the 3rd of September, a distinct Day School for a limited number of young Ladies. Besides a solid English Education, comprising Grammar, Geography, History, Writing, Arithmetic, &c., &c., the French Language will be taught; also Music, Drawing, and Plain and Ornamental Works.

Parents wishing to avail themselves of this opportunity, and be informed as to the terms and other details, will have the goodness to call at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, Perth, on any day from this date until the 5th August, and from the 16th August afterwards, Sundays excepted.

July 25, 1849.

4. Advertising the school in the Perth Inquirer, 1 August 1849



Above:
Advertising the
Pension School
in the Perth
Inquirer.

Left: Bishop
Salvado.

a piece of Berlin Wool work half done a mounted dragoon. But the worker had found that the canvas was too short for the head... Let us stand the dragoon beside the horse, suggested a sister artist, and this will be a dashing fine piece No. 1. ... Then there were new pieces of cloth. I'll make little boys' caps out of these, said the sister who was great at patchworking.⁴²

And so it went on. The bazaar was held. It was considered a marvellous success! Everything was exchanged in one day for the handsome sum of 65 pounds. A kind-hearted Jewish Merchant's and the Governor's donations raised it to 70 pounds net.

Bazaars became a good way of getting out of financial trouble. Catholic lay people and "unprejudiced Protestants" helped provide the goods. The 1849 Bazaar also gave Ursula an opportunity to encourage a despondent, suffering Sr M Ignatia in her efforts to settle into the country. Ignatia devised a new plan for the bazaar, and called it "misericordium" Ursula gave her her head. The result was rather "miserium", proceeds being much less than expected. However, Ignatia had been encouraged in her enthusiasm and they learnt from the experience.

They all became adept at begging. Ursula wrote:

I ought to be, and indeed am ashamed to be begging from you who have been so generous to us, but I, as a missionary, must lay aside all such feelings and tell you simply that anything in the way of fancy card, Bristol board, gold paper, bits of silk, in short odds and ends of all kinds would be most thankfully received and could be manufactured into most valuable articles for a bazaar by the good Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. You will be amused when I tell you what dear Mother Mary Anne has just said: "Oh, if they would only send us the rag-bag regularly every three months, what a treasure it would be; besides it would get such a name for our bazaar"

In the same letter, she talks about their overseas friends and agents, the Rev. Mr. Heptonstall and the Rev. Mr. Smyth, who might themselves advance "a few pounds to purchase materials for making into bazaar things which would be more useful to us here than money" Or they might "procure a small sum from the Propagation of the Faith funds for that purpose, or else from charitable individuals."

The classic example of refusing to be drawn into the fruitless path of role definition and hierarchical posturing is found in the sisters' absorption in their work at a time when the men were diffusing their energy in factionalism. It was 1852 and Rome, in response to reports about Brady's inefficiency, had requested his resignation. He, however, had returned from Europe against orders and the small Catholic community had divided between those for Brady and those prepared to accept his newly appointed successor, Serra. While the clergy and many of the lay people were wrangling over who was truly their leader, the Sisters were quietly remaining neutral and organizing a musical entertainment for the drawing of a lottery, proceeds "to procure accommodation for their little pupils of the Free School" The advertisement for it appeared on the front page of the *Inquirer*⁴³, admission 2/6d.

Beverley Kingston in her chapter in *Women Faith and Fetes*⁴⁴ raises the intriguing question of the role of the lamington drive, welfare bazaar, fete,

or flower show in the socio-economic history of Australia? Kingston says their essential nature is the same

the conversion, by the application of intensive female labour and the use of very particular female skills, of inexpensive ingredients into saleable items.

She comments that the "ultimate relationship between fetes and faith may be... at the very heart of questions about the nature of religious experience and religious activity"

With an Irish Mercy precedent to inspire, dire necessity led the early West Australian Mercies to perfect this peculiarly feminine economy. They were among the very first of those nineteenth century churchwomen who contributed substantial social works, including schools, homes, and hospitals. Helped by scores of volunteer women, they were usually forced to establish them in the absence of government and often church aid and of wealthy devout women who could endow their work through the proceeds of bazaars and other peculiarly female ways of raising money. Small domestic artefacts of many kinds the result of the somewhat despised women's crafts helped secure the groundwork of what was to become a mighty system of education and social welfare.

For the nonce, the Perth Mercies vigorously went about their vital fundraising activities. These included an annual collection, leading to about 20 per month not much but invaluable in desperate situations. Their persistence in this collection led at a later stage to trouble with Dr Serra. A letter to Queen Victoria brought no result. Letters to the Propagation of the Faith were more successful, though Ursula felt a bit ashamed at those asking for help towards the building of their new convent. "The bishop had told her to write," she excused herself. She seemed to have no hesitation, however, when it was others' needs for which she begged. A number of attempts to establish a Pension School or School for Young Ladies, the fees of which would help provide for the orphans and poor children, did not succeed until finally it was opened on Monday, 3rd September, 1849. The first pupils to enrol were the two nieces of the Protestant clergyman's wife, "whose wrath is great".⁴⁵

There are numerous other small but telling accounts of their creativity in making do. They made themselves a bathroom in the backyard near a well. It consisted of a wall of bamboo canes, the bath a packing case lined with tin. The shower was a tin colander and a stepladder outside enabled another sister to pour water over the occupant.⁴⁶

Ursula's recollections have more than one tale of setting up the chapel or the small church for special feasts... a place of beauty could be created by

a Sister who was great at making up altars out of slender materials... scraps of gold paper, pieces of white netting, some white calico, etc.... an abundance of flowers and lights... a very devotional image of our dear Blessed Lady brought with us from home.

Ursula's independence of temperament and lack of docility in organising buildings and finance was irksome to the male hierarchy. Urquhart, acting as Vicar for Bishop Serra, found her "too clever... too self-sufficient and above

all counsel", qualities he found inappropriate in a woman, "especially a Religious"⁴⁷

On the other hand, *The Fremantle Herald*,⁴⁸ praised the Sisters for giving up their own convent to receive female orphans. Praise was due to the Roman Catholics, the *Herald* continued.

While Protestants were arguing about the principles upon which Charitable Institutions should be based, the Roman Catholic priesthood and missionaries have practically carried them out, and in a manner far beyond the means at their immediate command. Lay and clerical Roman Catholic missionaries, by the rigid observance of their vows and the indefatigable discharge of their missionary duties, obtained, from a comparatively poor community, means to effect a greater amount of social good than the whole body of the Protestant clergy, to say nothing of a wealthy Protestant community...

Too much work?

The emphasis on task which is evident in the available written documents of the foundation and early expansion period, had some possible negative implications. One was the danger of spending too much time on work. Given the emphasis in nineteenth century spirituality on the quest for perfection or excellence in the spiritual life, it would not be unexpected that women religious might become addicted to work. The message given was certainly work hard and you will be rewarded, if not in this life, assuredly in the next.

In the pioneering conditions of the 1840s and the succeeding decades, failure was never very far from the door and hard work had, of necessity, to be the order of the day. "Our duties are not very numerous", Ursula wrote in 1847,

yet they fully occupy all our time leaving us few, if any, intervals of leisure and we only await the time appointed by Divine Providence for increasing our number and means to commence other and more urgent duties, by which I think the glory of God would be much promoted.

In the same year, Sister Anne Xavier wrote that they felt "the want of a few more Sisters, the health of those who came is sinking fast from over-exertion" Certainly, an unusual number of illnesses seemed to strike the small community, partly due to their crowded living conditions of the first years when the six of them lived and slept in a two-roomed thatched cottage. The floors had to be washed daily because the two rooms did duty day and night.

Ursula added to this picture:

I must tell you that the health of the Sisters is by no means robust. ...all from time to time suffer more or less from illness. We feel very much the want of exercise, having little or no visitation of the sick and no ground about the Convent in which we could walk comfortably. The continued trot in which we are from morning until night cannot be called healthful exercise which is even more necessary in this climate than elsewhere on account of the listlessness induced by the intense heat.

The opening of a convent in Fremantle had the added attraction of being somewhere where the Sisters could gain change of air, and for Ursula a luxury

of a cell to herself. However, as time went on, and despite reinforcements, they were still wanting Sisters, as their labours seemed to increase daily.

It is hard at this distance in time and with fairly scanty records to decide if there was too much attention paid to work, or whether their lack of leisure documented in very many of the letters was genuinely unavoidable. If we examine the early documents in this light, we find more than a hint of work for the greater glory of God assuming an undue position in their lives. Moved to compassion, they undoubtedly overextended their often frail energies. Their lives exhibit a discipline and a self-sacrifice that we attribute to holy people. The awareness of any compulsion in their efforts to serve others no doubt varied with the individual.

There are also hints in the documents that they were able to take circumstances as they eventuated, and work within that framework peaceably. There is, for example, no touch of reproach or impatience in Ursula's letters about the mortal illness of Mother Mary Catherine Gogarty, who was to be a continual burden on the small and impoverished group until her death on 30th July of their first year. She had taken her last illness very soon after they went on board the ship, and on arrival, had been confined to bed from the day they landed. Being unable to make the slightest exertion she was at once given in charge to one of the Sisters who could do little else than attend her, so there were two out of their number, small enough in the first instance. While Catherine herself felt "greatly pained at being what she calls a useless burden", Ursula felt that "her very presence in the house must draw down the blessings of God for in truth she is a holy creature, a model of patience and resignation." Rather she bemoaned the thought of being without her. While she realised she may have depended too much on Catherine for advice and support, she wished to be resigned to God's will about her death, but feared her heart went not with her words.

Some of the early letters mention merry recreations, "laughing over the events of the day" playing the piano, lighting a good fire which "served to promote recreation very much" numerous and long walks through the bush. Though these walks seem to have been mainly for purposes of visitation, they were obviously enjoyed, and afforded time to observe the countryside, detailed descriptions of which appeared in the letters home. What letters that have been preserved are long and detailed, "much ado about nothing, but the only earthly comfort" they now felt they had. It was important to them to preserve relationships with their dear sisters in Ireland.

How I long to hear from you! Will you not write by every opportunity the slightest circumstance relating to my dearest Sisters. This would be most interesting to us.

When some of the sisters were living in Fremantle, both groups wrote weekly.

Retreats provided periods of refreshment between labours, and of spiritual growth. Daily spiritual exercises according to rule took five or six hours, and Ursula protested against the bishop's imposition of extra services in the church. They were upset when Brady obliged them to assist in the church at High Mass and Vespers on Sundays, a situation they were not accustomed

to. According to the bishop, it was "necessary for the edification of the people that (they knelt) there" But even more so, it was

principally for the purpose of attending to the conduct of the school children whose place is just before us and I assure you that it is by no means an enviable office to mind them as it leaves us no time to pray for ourselves; his Lordship says that it is the best prayer we could make.

Withdrawal?

A concentration on the task was also reinforced by the religious lifestyle which, at that time, meant even for apostolic congregations such as the Mercies a fairly strict monastic cloister. While the sisters welcomed the opportunities that did come their way to visit families in the Perth area, and came in contact with many parents and parishioners and government officials through their ministry, they kept themselves to themselves in the convent as much as possible. It was according to rule that they refused numerous offers to socialize. Ursula was rather intolerant, in fact, of "the so-called ladies of Perth", considering many of them either "silly" or "stupid" and intercourse with them as taking from their primary tasks. She heartily disliked their calling her My Lady or The Lady Abbess. They were encouraged in their withdrawal by Bishop Salvado, who gave a definite "Negative, not only for this time but for always a fixed No" to her invitation for him or any of the Reverend Fathers to breakfast at the Convent after Mass.⁴⁹

As a group they became a self-sufficient community. The Sisters of Mercy were independent, one of them wrote. Nevertheless, Ursula was prepared to compromise for the sake of the mission when the bishop asked and when Reverend Mother Cecilia of Dublin had advised so doing. Part of the desire "to be like St. Catherine's" was, no doubt, due to the intense homesickness that they suffered. "It is such a comfort to us to be like St. Catherine's", wrote Ursula, describing how they had used the contents of a case from Dublin to improve their refectory and other rooms.

When the chance of a genuine friendship arose they did not despise it. A number of friends outside the community are referred to in the correspondence, including the Smiths, the Marmions, and the Littles. Richard Madden, an Irish Catholic, (92) was appointed Colonial Secretary in 1842, in an effort to improve the bad relationships in the colony between Catholics and Protestants. Madden's wife was a convert to Catholicism and became a good friend. The ceremony of reception profession on 21st November, 1853 was to be quite private, "with the exception of two or three very particular friends."⁵⁰ Bishop Salvado remained a staunch friend and he was the recipient of little gifts such as "convent-made jam" from their grapes.⁵¹ On leaving the colony, Ursula wrote to Mrs Bernard Smith⁵²:

It would be my desire to take a special leave of my good friends the Catholic Women and many also amongst those who differ in religion... I shall not forget to pray for them, as I shall always retain a lively interest in their welfare.

Nevertheless, unpleasant experiences in her relationships with Brady and Serra had led Ursula to concentrate almost completely on Mercy life and work. In 1853 she wrote to Ireland:

I know nothing about the affairs of the Mission now. I find it quite enough to attend to the community and various duties. Bishop Serra tells a thousand details when he comes, but after my experience of the past, I decline all part.

Certainly with a new school building opened on 24th September of 1853; school enrolments at 279 by the end of that year; and activities covering an infants' school, free and fee-paying elementary classes, and a higher-grade girls' school, as well as a Native Benevolent Institution, the sisters' energies would have been fully used within their own Mercy sphere of activity.

The attitudes set in the early decades persisted throughout the subsequent years. In many ways, and in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley, these foundation sisters were in the forefront of culture. Like Catherine they had more than just a charity approach: education was for social reform, to lift the poor from their poverty, to rescue women, especially, from their devalued and often degraded place in society. They themselves were women of their time, often denied equality in the church to which they dedicated their lives, yet led by their very repression to an often heroic ministry. If, at times, harsh circumstances under which they had to live and work resulted in some negativity, their response remained feminine and, on the whole, tender.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE GOOD SISTERS"

The Woman and the Nun

From its beginnings, Australia has been one of the most sexist societies in the Western world. Inheriting from Europe an ideology of men as the stronger and women as the weaker sex, an ideology formed to support the male monopoly of political and economic power, Australia soon possessed its own species of androcentrism. Women as well as men readily internalised the ethos of the developing masculine, even macho (ocker), society. The world was seen almost completely in terms of the experience of the Australian male.

In the Western ideology of sexism, the feminine was devalued in most areas of life. It was symbolized as the temptress Eve or the spotless Virgin Mother. As unconscious compensation to this denial of their individuality, respectable women were put on to moral pedestals as the loving, nurturing, self-sacrificing Mother, whose home-making powers kept the moral fabric of society in one piece. Australian writer Anne Summers shows this ideology working in the early days of Australia, encapsulating its symbolism in "Damned Whores and God's Police." In the eastern colony the former stereotype prevailed until the 1850s, when the role of the family in creating moral and social order became more and more insistent and the second stereotype took over.

Western Australia was founded not for convicts as in the east (which gave some substance to the Damned Whore label) but for men of money, who wished to engage in private enterprise and so make more money. Thus its ethos was one peculiarly formed by the struggle for money, power, and social standing. In 1847 the *Perth Gazette* wrote:

It was ordained from the beginning of the world that there should be different denominations and classes of people, in order that each nation should preserve its own internal peace. It was ordained from the beginning that there should be masters and servants...¹

What the *Gazette* omitted to include was the belief of the masters that the world was also ordained to divide human beings into male and female, into those the men strong enough to wield public power, and those the women too weak to do so.

These early gentry valued "respectability and comfort" They intended a Christian society, dominated by Anglicans. They also believed that their serving classes were given to loose moral behaviour. Added to the indentured servants and labourers were "black lascars, orphaned and delinquent children, Hindoos from India, and Chinese from Singapore." Between 1850 and the early 1880s, male convicts and women of the servant class increased their number. The "Damned Whore" stereotype would have been much in evidence. But, in the unsettled colonial situation, where about half of the adults were unmarried, and there were nearly three single men to one single woman, it was imperative to promote the opposing stereotype. Convinced that the middle class family was the most suitable form of social organisation,



Above: Sampler completed in October 1858 by Elizabeth Dearden, pupil of Sisters of Mercy Pension School.



Right: Mr Bernard Smith, pioneer lay Catholic.



*Mr Thomas Little,
pioneer lay Catholic.*

*'Agnus Dei' blessed by Pope
Pius IX in 1853.*



the role of wife and mother became indispensable. As Mother, the woman was pure, almost asexual, nurturing and caring. The stereotype of God's Police symbolized the woman's moral guardianship of society, whose goal was to curb restlessness in men and to instil virtues of civil submission in children.

The Catholic Church had an additional category for its women. Apart from the "fallen women" (including the repentant Magdalens), it divided the "respectable women" into mothers, spinsters, and nuns. The first were eulogised extravagantly, so as to encourage them to persevere with their God-given task of bearing and rearing the human race. The second were more or less ignored. The latter were the most favoured of all women. They were the chosen ones, the specially beloved of God, the virgin brides of Christ and His Church. They were God's Police of another kind. They were, in reality, the ones who most bore, as a group, the day-to-day burden of establishing the church in this land. They were "the good nuns", the "ladies of Mercy" inculcating "gentle and salutary lessons" both by word and example.²

Classic statements of this tradition can be culled from *The West Australian Catholic Record*. The journal was apt to praise the way in which the Catholic Church had given scope to "the full vocation and dignity" of women during the ages through the institution of convents. In one lengthy article tracing the history of power in the hands of the great Abbesses, dating back to the 6th century A.D. at least, *The Record* claimed that nuns had chosen a way of life which "fostered some of the best sides of intellectual, moral and emotional life. Besides this, it was for several centuries a determining factor in regard to women's economic status" It was, too, a way of keeping women in their "proper sphere" and from straying into such "Protestant aberrations as clergywomen".³

In even ancient history, a virgin while not necessarily celibate was a woman who was self-defined. Her entry into some kind of a religious order had given her independence from patriarchal reliance on husband, father, or brother. It also freed her from societal expectations of woman as wife and mother. In the Christian period, women who wanted to retain their independence or personhood in their own right could find a "safe place" in a convent, and there have the space to become a kind of career woman, be it in mysticism, artistry, music, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, or whatever.

That was the ideal and for many it became a reality. Yet the freedom to pursue this ideal has often been illusory, too. In many ways the life became one which denied nature rather than transformed it. In some periods, especially the period we are now considering, the obligations of religious life and the pressures of apostolic works combined to leave little or no space in the nun's day. The early West Australian Mercies accomplished much. They were, by any definition, successful women. And, in many ways, they asserted their independent status. But, seen from another standpoint, they were also prisoners of their womanhood and of their roles as nuns.

Contemporary observers of religious life have become more conscious of this gap between image and reality. Given the human condition, there is of course

an inevitable dissonance between mission and institution between, for example, our concepts and visions of Mercy and the ways we put them into operation. But nuns are especially suffering, today, from centuries of having been put onto pedestals. At a more profound level, they may be seen to be living in two worlds, to possess a kind of dual identity. While doing valuable and necessary works, they are seen to be persons ultimately living within "a safe environment" to which even the most outwardly active can and must retreat. Their role as celibate woman can prevent their embracing their full personhood.

In contemporary terms, such a double lifestyle defeats their goal of Christian service in as much as it appears to lead to a lack of real solidarity with the ones to whom they minister. Contemporary Australian Mercies, research has indicated, tend to see themselves as "the worthy helper" (alias "the good nun") and the ones they are helping as "the exotic other." In its turn, this mindset can lead to a failure in a true living of marginality with the poor and oppressed, with the ones with whom their mission calls them to identify.⁴ The question this chapter raises is whether such a "failure" is embodied in the very foundations of the Mercy vision in West Australia. If not, how did such a gap between ideal and reality develop?

The foundational Sisters of Mercy in Perth were undoubtedly subject to the dangers of having to live up to their own and others' expectations of a good nun. Yet how big a gap was there between the reality of their mission, their own religious ideals, and the images projected upon them? Seen as women by themselves and by others who stood for those on "the underside of history", did they in fact stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in colonial Western Australia? Were they more devoted to playing the role of the nun, to preserving their privileged status within the church, to protecting their sacred space, than they were to performing the works of Mercy to which they had pledged themselves? Did the set-up of their religious living, coupled with the role they were forced to assume, mean that, in fact, they really lived in two worlds?

Foundational Realities: "Poor Catholics" and "Young Savages"

Available documents and oral tradition indicate that the foundational Sisters were in very many ways genuinely for those unfortunate people described as being on "the underside of history." The people to whom the sisters came to minister were definitely second class citizens. Visiting and helping one another in times of sickness and poverty was very much part of their Irish culture, where people had to rely on one another for help, the poor receiving graciously, the more fortunate giving readily. There was none of the Lady Bountiful touch to an Irish woman helping another family in distress. The early sisters, though coming on the whole from better-off families, related easily within this tradition.

On the other hand, these women religious were also the creatures of their time and imbued with nineteenth century cultural attitudes of benevolence, Christian charity, and stereotyping of women in general, and nuns in particular. Writing to Reverend Mother in Dublin towards the end of their

second year in the colony about their great need for reinforcements, Ursula Frayne says:

There is not a single individual in this Colony that I would admit under the roof even as a servant. As proof of this, we last September sent away the young woman who acted in that capacity and have ever since done her work in addition to our own, laborious though we find it to be. You may be sure we had good reason for this proceeding or, under our present circumstances, we would not have done it. As for the school children, although they are very good, interesting little creatures, they are not good enough to enter religion. Less than two years ago they were in a state of semi-barbarism and their parents immersed in ignorance and vice, so that even if they were disposed to enter, I would not think it right to admit them for many years to come...⁵

A letter of a few months afterwards tells of her relief in finding that Mrs Madden, wife of Dr Richard Madden, the new Colonial Secretary, was not a Protestant but a fervent convert to Catholicism. "She seems to be a very nice, quiet person, very different from the so-called ladies of Perth."

However, the Sisters had not come to work with the "so-called ladies" but with "the poor people" They came to work predominantly with the "poor Catholics", mainly "bog Irish" in the colloquialism of their English landlords, and the "black savages" A simple yet revealing dialogue reconstructed between "the Reverend Mother" and "the Postulant" is recorded as having taken place not long after their arrival in Perth.

The Sisters have now moved into a four roomed cottage until negotiations shall result in a real conventual establishment. We are limited to four rooms, each opening into a broad verandah called a goat house. We must have a school-room and poor M.M. Catherine (who was dying) must have that quiet end room to herself. "We must have a refectory" said the procuratrix. "Could we not have one out of the goat-house?" suggested the genius of the postulant. "Fancy having to make our own bread, and our own soap and candles, and all for the love of those poor things in Fremantle, the few Catholics who have turned up here, and those frightful blacks that always bring to my mind hell-fire!" says the irreverent postulant. "Yes, dear," responds the Reverend Mother. "Nor is it necessary for us to know the 'whys and the wherefores' We form part of the Divine Plan let us be content!" "With the convicts?" "Yes, dear." "And the soldiers? And the ticket-of-leave men? And a handful of white children?" "Yes!" "The blacks, of course." "Yes!" "When shall we be favoured with some of the aboriginals, I wonder?" "Saucy Miss!" says the Reverend Mother. "Sisters, we must go out tomorrow after those poor Catholics who are too shy to present themselves, having fallen away for years and years. And every evening after school a couple might go through these endless tracks and hunt up more children."

"And what about the sick?" exclaims Sister M. Ignatia. "A whole week here and no sick call! They say we have the only case of sickness in the place; if so, what a climate."⁶

"The Poor Catholics"

It was not very difficult in 1846 to find "the poor and oppressed" Practically all the "poor Catholics" were among them. Founded in 1829, Perth was

designed for free colonists, middle class settlers from the "county society" of England, Scotland, and Ireland.⁷ To serve these masters, servants and other indentured labourers, bound by "contracts of servitude", were brought out. They had little protection from the government or judiciary, the senior officials being of the same class as their masters. Most of the Irish Catholics were among this indentured class.

The first West Australian government census in 1848 shows the number of whites in the colony to be 4,622 and of these 337 claimed to be Catholics. There was considerable anti-Catholicism. The *Perth Gazette* of 20th January, 1844 described the laying by Brady of the foundation stone of the first church in Perth and added these words:

Dr Brady then went on to express disapproval of the uncharitable attempt which had been made to influence men's minds against them... and even the children as they passed through the street, were taunted and abused by persons calling upon them to fall down and worship their idols. This was not the kind of reception he anticipated in a Christian land.

The arrival of Brady's large missionary party of twenty-seven from Europe, Ireland and Great Britain was "totally unexpected by the Romanists here"⁸ and further unnerved the Protestants. Mrs Camfield, the wife of a future Postmaster-General in the colony, Henry Camfield, wrote her sister-in-law on 19th May, 1846, there had been

an inundation of Jesuits from Ireland practising their subtle arts with great zeal and activity... They have in their company six Sisters of Mercy indefatigable in drawing children from Protestant Schools; they were too successful.⁹

Colonial Secretary Madden, himself an Irish Catholic, wrote 27th September 1853:

On my arrival in the Swan River Settlement... I found Dr Brady... contending single handed against the entire local government, every member of which, with two exceptions, was bitterly opposed to Catholicity. The colony was administered by Irish Orangeism for the interest of Orangemen, and with the views of Orangeism.¹⁰

Social and religious prejudices entangled to create this antagonism. One could count on one's hands the more prosperous among the Catholics. Among these were Captain John Scully, formerly of the 80th Foot Regiment, and then farmer and Magistrate in the Toodyay district. Scully was a relative of Mother de Pazzi of Baggot Street convent. Thomas and Eliza Little, the founders of Dardanup, were described by their neighbour, the Anglican Archdeacon Wollaston, in terms coloured by the widespread bias:

The Littles are such excellent benevolent people that I regret every time I see them, more and more that they are Papists.¹¹

Bernard Smith held a responsible government position as Staff-Clerk and was later a member of the first Perth City Council, a position he held for many years. Charlotte and Patrick Marmion of Fremantle, whose hospitality the first group of Mercies had appreciated so much, owned the Emerald Isle Hotel for a number of years. Patrick was also prominent in the early whaling industry in the West.¹²

But such influential Catholics were few and far between. On 10th September 1846 Ursula wrote to Ireland bemoaning that

there is not the slightest prospect of our being joined by any person in the colony as the inhabitants, that is the Catholic portion, are either poor tradesmen or farmers, or the families of soldiers stationed here for a time, or else permanently settled on being discharged from the army. The respectable people, as they call themselves, are with one solitary exception, Protestants.

Writing of the Perth Catholic congregation in the early 1860s, J.T. O'Reilly says that they were

literally the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. With a few exceptions, they occupied the humblest positions in society. The great bulk of the Perth congregation was comprised of the bond class, pensioners, their wives and children, and Irish emigrant girls. The Catholic people, strictly speaking, had little or no influence... Protestants of the day were so intolerant that they could not brook the idea that Catholics could be on an equality with themselves, and it was only after many years of combating deeply-rooted prejudices that the press and non-Catholics abandoned the notion that Catholics were only living here on sufferance, and were not capable of asserting and exercising social and political rights as well as members of the other sections of the community.¹³

During 1850-1868, convicts were brought to the colony in an effort to overcome labour problems. The Irish were relatively fewer among the convicts, though their number reached almost to one thousand. Some two thousand serving women were brought to the colony also, during the 1870s and early 1880s, in an effort to redress the imbalance of the sexes. Survivors of the Irish potato famines or the English slums and cotton mills, these women found themselves more often than not in desperate circumstances in Perth, whose isolation had been concealed from them before their departure.¹⁴ Women were an endangered species in more ways than one in this masculine frontier society.

As the colony expanded beyond Perth, this pattern of poverty repeated itself among the rural Catholics. An 1856 letter of Thomas Little to Polding says that at Bunbury, in the southwest, the congregation of a hundred Catholics consisted almost entirely of pensioners and ticket of leave men. At the Convict Establishment at Fremantle, the number of Catholic prisoners was considerable, over three hundred, chiefly young Irishmen.

The pattern of prisoners and pensioner guards was repeated at Guildford, the most important convict depot after Fremantle at the time when the Sisters went there in 1855, and at York and at Toodyay, where Hiring Depots were established in the 1850s also. A number of ticket-of-leave men also settled in these country towns and surrounding areas. Consequently a number of the Irish women immigrants were sent to these districts. Many of them married pensioner guards and ticket-of-leave and pardoned convicts, the men not always Catholic but producing Catholic families through their Irish wives.

J.T. O'Reilly writes that the Sisters of Mercy were "distinguished for their care of the poor, the sick, and the distressed" Serra, writing in 1853 about

the new Mercy school house praised the "great exertions" of the sisters to collect money for its erection. "They have great hopes in the friends abroad" he added, "as their friends here are very poor".¹⁵ When the seriously ill Dr (Rev) John Coyle, just excommunicated in August 1852 by Archbishop Polding for his part in the Brady schism, was in hospital, it was the sisters who visited him and brought various delicacies arrowroot, eggs, broth, toast, cake, and scapulars.¹⁶

Among these very poor friends, they had special care for women, as befitted their origins. With the still considerable imbalance of the sexes and the large number of unmarried men, women and children were particularly at risk in the colony. The women were often desperate and the children running wild. Stannage claims that Perth earned a reputation for being a town of wife-beaters. Twenty-five per cent of drink cases in court in the foundational decades were of women. There was a growing number of half-caste children on account of the "alleged 'gross immorality' of the Aboriginal women."

Among the servants and convicts, the Catholic Irish, the "bogmen", were seen as primitives by the ruling colonists. The English had had a long history of despising the Irish whom they had kept as a peasant race for many centuries. Miriam Dixon¹⁷ says that WASP prejudice in early Australia was not only extravagant but ubiquitous. The language the English used towards the Irish was so emotionally charged it revealed their part envy of Irish life, with its sense of wonder, charm, humanity, other-worldliness, and intense and persevering faith. The ruling colonists spoke of "the dirty Irish", "ignorant Irish papists", "low papists" It was the greatest insult, quoted one woman, for it to be said of any girls "Oh, they are Irish" The "sweepings of Irish poorhouses" were coupled, in the minds of the West Australian gentry, with those who came from "English brothels".¹⁸

Immigrant girls were sought at the wharves by householders looking for domesticservants, or by others seeking wives or mistresses. To protect them from exploitation, the girls were often put up by the convent in the Goderich Street area, until they could get jobs. A Young Women's Association of St. Anne was formed in 1855 "for young immigrant women of the best character" It aimed

to impart religious instruction to members, together with the feeling, that in this distant land, there are persons deeply interested in their moral and spiritual welfare... The Bank will receive their savings through the Sisters of Mercy in "The Immigrants Saving Fund"

This kind of care, similar to that given by the first House of Mercy in Dublin, continued. In 1883, for example, the *Record* reported the arrival of twenty immigrant women who, "according to the kind arrangement of the Government, were located on the premises of the Sisters of Mercy. Nearly all have obtained suitable situations." At the request of the Colonial Secretary,¹⁹ this group of immigrant girls had travelled to Perth on the *Lady Louisa* with six prospective Mercy postulants and two professed volunteers. Of the latter, Sister M. Gertrude O'Meara acted as official government chaperone to the immigrants. Gertrude had come from the Mercy community

in Birr. She was over 30 years professed at this time. The postulants called her their "Floating Abbess"

A ship diary kept by the youngest of the postulants, eighteen year old Mary McEnroe, illuminates some of the class distinctions of the period which affected even the nuns, or at least the would-be nuns. At Gravesend on the Thames, Mary and a couple of her companions, sent to do business for Sister M. Gertrude, who was herself unwilling to leave her government charges, went to Mass in the chapel there. The congregation, Mary recorded in her diary, "were all of the better class" On board the *Lady Louisa*, the distinction between the "young ladies" and the "emigrant girls" was clear. To preserve order at the dinner of the latter, two of the young ladies were deputed to carve for them. The young ladies followed as much of a convent timetable as they could, together with the professed sisters, whereas the emigrants seemed to have been more restricted.

Mary wrote that on

fine evenings the Emigrant girls assemble at the end of the deck and sing nice songs and hymns, under the direction of Sister M. Kate and wind up with the Litany of Our Blessed Lady which they sing really well. On the water the voices sound beautiful, and the Captain and Chief Officer seem pleased with it and often give them an extra half hour.

On the evening of St. Patrick's Day the Emigrant girls were allowed to remain on deck longer than usual. "They enjoyed themselves to perfection, singing and dancing to the air of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" Mary did not record if the young ladies joined in the revelry.

Another of the "Young Ladies" who came out to enter in 1883 later made St. Anne's Society particularly effective as a means of training young women in the works of Mercy. She was Mary Sr M John Evangelist Stewart. Mary was among those who had travelled on a second ship, the *Australia*, in the care of Mother M. Aloysius Kelly and Sister M. de Sales Byrne, who had been recruiting abroad. She was then twenty-eight years old, having been born in 1854, the year the bishops of Ireland and John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman had commenced the Catholic University in Dublin. Her father, James, a Church of England clergyman, had converted to Catholicism through the influence of Newman and had followed him to Dublin to teach at the University. After his death, she received from Dublin a copy of Newman's *Apologia* presented by the author to her father. With it was a letter from Newman to his friend on the occasion of his daughter's departure for Australia. "Mother John" became well known in Perth for her charitable and educational work. She encouraged the young girls of the Cathedral parish to visit and help the poor and the sick, through her re-organisation of the Children of Mary and also St. Anne's Society as a society of Catholic women to visit and succour the sick and poor of Perth.

The support of these women was to help her later when she became the first headmistress of the West Perth school and especially when she became first superior of a newly independent congregation formed around the Guildfordbranch house. One of the foundation members of the new St. Anne's Society and of the Children of Mary was Miss Susie McArdle. Susie had

come from England to Australia at a very young age. Educated at Victoria Square, from the age of nineteen, she had resided at the convent there with her invalid sister Annie, who died in 1930. She organised the Children of Mary to watch the sick at night, and she herself visited the Old Men's Home and the Old Women's Home in Murray Street. Susie became an exceedingly generous benefactor, living austere with Annie in two small bedrooms near the convent chapel and a third as their dining room. She donated stained glass windows to the Cathedral and numerous other bequests everywhere. It was a special responsibility of the novices at Victoria Square to care for Susie in her own old age. Made a "Dame" by the Holy Father, she finally died in 1948, aged 90 years.

The foundational sisters had thus set a pattern of actively seeking out women in need of help. An early letter of Ursula's tells how they wanted to see a poor woman who lived four miles from Perth. Soon after leaving they found it impossible to take their cart any further because of a large tree prostrated by a storm. So they determined to proceed on foot.

The walk was long and fatiguing ...and was spoken of with wonder by all classes; no other persons in Perth would have gone except for temporal gain and they knew our object was to gain souls to God.

In the same letter, Ursula describes how a poor Aboriginal woman came to the Convent everyday to have her arm dressed, which was bitten in a most painful way by a woman of her own tribe.

Correspondence at the Colonial Secretary's Office shows Ursula Frayne interceding for women in a variety of distressed circumstances. One letter (19th March 1852) pleads on behalf of a poor woman who is afflicted with insanity. Another (30th Dec 1853) begs for pardon and enlargement to a poor woman detained in the Lock-Up on charge of burning a house. Another recommends that a Mrs Spence be given Government Allowance.

She is in great distress, being unable to do laborious work, and having no one to provide for her since her son went to the Gold Diggings last September. She has two young children to support.²⁰

She also wrote farther afield, to Archbishop Goold asked for his help for "two poor women" whose husbands had gone to the goldfields of Melbourne, requesting an advertisement in one of the newspapers. She adds that if His Lordship would send three or four postulants to make their novitiate in Perth, she would send in return the same number of sisters to form a branch at Melbourne. She would be grateful for a small collection throughout his Diocese for them in Perth, "the poorest as to natural productions as well as population." Bishop Serra allowed them 200 pounds p.a. from funds from the Government and the Propagation of the Faith, for nine sisters and six native girls. The pupils of the Pension School were all Protestants, but most government officials were far from wealthy. Serra had lent them the money for the school house (cost was over 800 pounds) but they seldom saw him that he did not remind them they owed him 300 pounds.²¹

Ursula's memoirs relate at length one incident where the sisters tried to help another unfortunate woman. In September 1855 they visited a woman who

had been arrested and jailed in Perth for the murder of her husband. After she was convicted the sisters were requested to visit her, which they did every day, going early in the morning and staying late at night. She was a Catholic in name only, so they instructed her how to make a good confession and communion. This she made two days before her execution, eventually ceasing to deny her guilt. The last night of her life the Sisters scarcely left her. The account continues:

They clothed her in decent garments ... and never left her in the morning until the Sheriff and his officers came to fetch her away. When they attempted to fasten her hands behind her she flung herself into the arms of Mother Mary (Anne Xavier) and besought her to intercede that she might be spared that last ignominy. The scene was heart rending... The tears rolled down Mother Mary's cheeks. The poor creature's request was however complied with in a degree for her hands were loosely fastened in front; more than this Mother Mary ... reminded the poor repentant creature that our Divine Lord suffered Himself to be bound with cords that He might

free us from the bondage of the demon, and besought her to bear this last trial for the love of Him. The Sheriff told her that even so much indulgence was not usually granted to criminals and would not be allowed on the present occasion but for Mother Mary's intercession.²²

By special privilege also her remains were conveyed to the Church and interred by her son in the general Cemetery, instead of the usual custom of interring them just where they died.

Despite their frequent visits to women prisoners, the sisters were not in favour of introducing female convicts into the colony. In May, 1857, Serra wrote to Governor Kennedy that both Mrs Frayne and the present superioress disapproved of the transportation of females from the Dublin Refuge. What were required were virtuous women, who could help in the reformation of the male convicts. If the Sisters of Mercy were to concur with the proposal they would be involved in the

general anathema which would probably be pronounced by the public of W.A. against all those who would in any way have cooperated in the introduction of female convicts, if in any shape whatsoever it would be carried into effect against their own wishes.

"Worthy Helpers" and "Exotic Others"²³

This may be an appropriate place to examine in a little more detail how the attitudes of these nineteenth century sisters were conditioned by the prevailing image of "the good nuns" Given the position of Catholics in the colony and her further situation as "an unfortunate woman up in the country" the woman prisoner visited by Anne Xavier Dillon was indeed a victim of society. Moreover, she was "ignorant of the very first principles of Christianity" She would have undoubtedly been of the "Damned Whore" ilk to the gentry of the colony. We are not told what actions of husband caused her to commit murder, yet in many ways, her punishment must have been unmerited. Through the intercession of the sister, however, special concessions are granted to her, and she moves from a degraded physical life to a happier eternal life. The sister has been for her a channel of God's mercy, a means into spiritual

growth, and is herself rewarded by a sense of having helped bring about the repentance of the woman, who then received the sacraments. This sense of achievement is heightened by the granting of concessions to the woman and her son, allowing the woman to die and be buried with a little more dignity.

We are able to hear in the telling of this story — some years later, it is true, and not by the actual participant — something of the sense of living in a double world that forms the basis of the contemporary critique of nuns. The sister of the incident was obviously very moved by the plight of the woman, and expended her energy and tender sympathy lavishly. Yet the language of the tale sounds to our twentieth century feelings somewhat untouched by the real life of women such as this one.

Coming as the sisters did quite often from the relatively better off and better educated, it is almost as if their very genuine concept of Mercy was contaminated by the prevailing stereotype of the good nun, herein translated as the benevolent helper, the spiritual Lady Bountiful. The sister's heart is touched by these victims of an unjust society, but her life does not — in actuality, it cannot — match theirs in all its desperation. There is an underlying sense of keeping within one's privileged space, of retreating to one's safe environment, which is reinforced when the storyteller relates that it was "two of the reverend clergy" who "accompanied the poor creature in her last sad journey and stood by her on the scaffold" Convention — societal and conventual — denied this poor unfortunate woman the intimate presence of her own sex at the last moment of her life.

A feeling of retreat to a safe conventual environment is present in the following story also, taken once more from Ursula Frayne's memoirs.

Meanwhile time sped on — every day brought some new pupils to our school, but still we were not sure but that there were other Catholic children to be brought under instructions, so we continued our rambles of discovery.

On one of these occasions we called at the cottage of a very respectable Catholic woman, whose husband was a Methodist. Their two daughters had been brought up in their father's creed, but the mother had, though not without considerable difficulty, obtained his consent that they should be instructed and received into the One True Church. They had attended the school for some weeks, but about this time they had been absent for a day or two and we called at their house to inquire the cause. We found that the Mother was absent attending a lady who lived about four miles in the country, and that the father had taken the opportunity to ingratiate himself with influential persons of his own sect by compelling his daughters to return to the Wesleyan school. Finding it useless to reason with such a person, we resolved to go next day in search of the Mother, and inform her how matters stood.

The memoirs then go on to relate how the bishop sent them a conveyance to go the long distance, a conveyance which turned out to be a common farm cart without springs. The horse was extremely reluctant to go the journey and eventually stood stock still. After an hour they decided to walk the remaining distance, and did so, enjoying the beautiful scenery and the fine cool weather and the novelty of their situation. They arrived eventually, saw the "good woman" arranged their business satisfactorily, and started to walk

back home, exceedingly tired. To their amazement, man, cart, and horse were still in the same place. This time they did not despise their "rustic conveyance" Not quite to the convent however. For the horse again stopped dead, in front of the military barracks, and could not be prevailed upon to advance one step further. Ursula concludes:

Next day we felt more than repaid for all, when we saw our two poor lambs in their usual places at school. Soon after this we took them entirely under our charge, for their Mother was often absent from home, and their father, a person of no religious principles, was not to be relied on.

In this tale the sisters are again the worthy helpers. The husband, who appears as a bigoted Methodist, is the villain. The two children and also to some degree their mother are the victims. The villain father has prevented his daughters from attending the convent school, and has done this in the absence of the mother.

While the sisters have only a primitive cart for their journey and are forced to walk a good deal of the distance, their world is relatively beneficent. The bishop has sent the cart as their conveyance; the driver of the cart waited five or six hours for them being afraid to face the bishop should he desert them completely. But these hardships only made "the repose of our little bush convent seem very sweet after our fatigue."

The reward for the worthy helpers is outlined in the closing paragraph of the tale. The two young girls are taken into the safe environment of the convent boarding school. They are given a share in the privileged position of the sisters. There does not appear to be any questioning of the assumptions underlying this position, especially in terms of how they might be "for the poor" for those on the underside of history. This family was obviously not very well off, the mother frequently away on account of her work. They were disadvantaged also through the conflict engendered by strong religious differences. Ursula's concern does not appear to extend to the Methodist father, who showed no signs of interest in the Catholic faith.

Neither of the two tales show any awareness that the Mercy charism might be calling them to engage politically with the structures of exploitation in the West Australian society of their day. It would be unfair to expect such a twentieth century awareness from these nineteenth century women who laboured long and hard. It would be to ignore how much we are the creatures of our own class and time, and how difficult it is, even when we are aware of our differences, to engage in genuine cross-cultural communication. However, to examine the founding myth in this way may, hopefully, help raise our own awareness of its inadequacies as with any myth and aid us in reaching the small, essential truth at its heart.

Despite their poverty in Perth, the sisters were advantaged through education, upbringing, and church connections. While humility may be attainable, it is extremely difficult to learn the other's language so that the "worthy helper" and the "exotic other" can lessen the distance between each other, can walk together in genuine solidarity. In the initial story, Anne Xavier shows some solidarity with the "unfortunate woman" whose name we are

not told. She couples with the woman as a sinner, needing the Mercy of God, but does not appear to recognise herself as part of the society which leads to the woman's deterioration. There is a sense among the sisters of an obligation to act towards changing oppressive structures, but this is to be through education of children, spreading the knowledge of the truths of the faith, and helping women to find their feet in an alien and often harsh land.

Social Reconstruction through Education

A not unworthy goal in any century! In the nineteenth century, when women had still a long way to go to reach whatever political, legal, social equality they have so far attained, the sisters had set themselves a formidable, if to our eyes somewhat limited, agenda. Given the history of Ireland and the deprivation of schooling to the Irish people under the English penal system, it is not surprising that most of the sisters' energies went into establishing their schools. They planned, in Ursula's words, a school for the poor, one for the rich, and one for the "dear natives". The former was necessary if the poor Irish Catholics were to improve their living conditions and also be able to learn the truths of their faith. The second was also necessary since there was no other school — that is, in the context of the class separations of the time — to which the more well-to-do Catholic might go (money from which, one of Ursula's letters claims, they did not, at that time, keep for themselves but gave to Bishop Brady for completion of the church.) And the third was necessary if the Aborigines were to be civilized and christianized.

Accordingly, on their arrival — and at other times in the decades to follow — they traipsed miles through bush and sand looking for pupils, mostly unwilling. Armed with their census of the Catholics of Perth (many with the letters O.B. beside them — if they are not Catholics, they "ought to be"), they met with much initial reluctance, but fairly soon, enthusiasm. They sought assistance from the governor with persistence, stating, for example, on 30th December 1853, that they hoped he would be pleased to take into account the numbers of years they have spent in this colony, entirely at the service of the poor, the ignorant and the distressed of whatever creed or denomination.

"Also," they added, "that it may be said we were the first who commenced in the colony a System of Superior Education for the poorer classes..." It certainly does not seem chance that it was not until after the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy with their dedication to education that, after seventeen years in the Colony, the Colonial Chaplain (Anglican) should call the first meeting of the Swan River Education Committee, in 31st August 1847.

In a bold move, in January 1847, Ursula also wrote to Queen Victoria for assistance. In the letter she talks about their free school, which already had 60 pupils but there were many more too poor to attend; the need for a House of Mercy for well disposed young women who from poverty are compelled to accept situations dangerous to them; and the poor Aborigines. The Account Book (1847-60) gives April 1847 as the opening of the Benevolent Institution for the reception of the children of European settlers who, from being at a distance, or other causes, were deprived of the opportunity of attending the

free school. It was also for the reception of the female children of Aborigines.²⁴ In 1849, the number of these latter increasing, and the funds of the institution being small and uncertain, it was judged more prudent to return the white children to their own homes and to reserve the Establishment almost exclusively for Natives. Three or four of the most destitute European children, orphans of Irish parentage, were retained. The house was supported partly by the Mission, and partly by the voluntary contributions of a few benevolent individuals.

"The Dear Natives"

This act of limiting the Benevolent Institution to the Aboriginal girls, shows a predilection of the foundation sisters for the poorest of the poor. For in the colony's social scale, even lower than the Irish were the Australian Aborigines. Much conflict had taken place between the British invaders and the Aborigines and by the time the Sisters arrived, in the late 1840s, there were only about one hundred Aborigines left in the Swan area and about twenty-five in Perth itself. Bishop Brady had lured the Sisters to this other side of the world with vistas not only of helping the female European children of his new diocese, but also with a strong representation of the neglected state of the Aborigines and the joy of bringing the rising generations to Christianity and civilization.²⁵ When Mother Ursula asked him where were the four thousand children, he had promised them, he replied dramatically — if enigmatically — that "out of the stones Almighty God could raise up children to Abraham".²⁶

Brady seems to have had a vague plan that the Sisters would join the missionary priests and brothers and educate the native children when they could be gathered into one or two places. The reality of the situation became clearer on landing and this plan was abandoned. However, it was still difficult for the new missionaries to know how to proceed. In an 1882 report to Rome, Salvado wrote:

We did not have the slightest idea, nor could we find anyone who would enlighten us, as to the life and customs of the Australian Aborigines. Having landed in Australia we immediately found out that opinions about them varied widely among European settlers.²⁷

The French missionary priests who went south, the Spanish priests and brothers who went inland, and the Italian priest Confalonieri, who sailed for Port Essington up in what is now the Northern Territory — all had traumatic experiences in trying to help the Aborigines. Father Confalonieri died in the far north in 1848. The French priests gave up in frustration, sailing to Mauritius in the same year. Only the Spanish were able to persevere, eventually founding the famed monastery and mission settlement of New Norcia.

The injustice of the colonists' treatment of the Aborigines soon became evident to the Catholic missionaries. The greed of the new settlers was leading them unremittingly to grab the country and its resources for themselves. Moreover, the self-righteousness of the Europeans kept them from seeing much that was beautiful in their new land, including the culture of the people already inhabiting it.

One extreme summary of prevailing views claims that

the West Australian aborigine stands right at the bottom of the class to which we belong... The native black has no intelligence... He is, as a general rule, brutish, faithless, vicious, the animal being given the fullest loose, a natural born liar and thief, and only approached by his next-of-kin, the monkey, for mischief... The Australian black may have a soul, but if he has, then the horse and the dog — infinitely the superior in every way of the black human — cannot be denied the possession of the vital spark of heavenly flame.²⁸

This may now seem an outrageous expression but it reflects attitudes that were typical till well into the twentieth century. They were attitudes from which even the Catholic missionaries were not quite free. These were the Good Fathers, the Good Nuns, unconscious Lords and Ladies Bountiful, bringers of gifts — it is true — but with little real awareness of the riches already possessed by their proteges. The influence of the Protestant work ethic and its attitude to material achievement, while somewhat foreign to Irish culture, nevertheless affected all in European society. The Aborigine's close spiritual relationship to the land and consequent disregard of possessions was an unknown mystery to the white settlers, a discovery not to be made by most Australians for many, many decades.

The great missionary Rosendo Salvado gave as their "charitable and heartily wished for end, viz., the conversion and civilisation of the aborigines",²⁹ an aim in which the sisters heartily concurred. Serra, whose aim this was also in the beginning, came to look on them as a constant drain on the resources of New Norcia. During the period he was administering the diocese of Perth, he dismissed them from the mission.³⁰ The saintly Martin Griver, third bishop of Perth, considered that the preservation and prosperity of the diocese merited greater attention than the mission of New Norcia which was concerned with the conversion of only a few natives.³¹ Because of their nomadic nature it was almost impossible, he considered, to instruct and impart Christian morals to the adult Aborigines. But the children, if fed and housed at the mission stations, were very amenable to both social and religious instruction. Griver did desire a mission in the Kimberleys, where the Aborigines were said to be more numerous and Europeans few.³² Griver's successor, Matthew Gibney, also a tolerant man and one who tried greatly to help the Aborigines, spoke of "the knowledge and practices of our superior enlightenment".³³

The Sisters became convinced of the necessity of establishing

houses for the reception of young children of the Natives and beginning with them... These houses should be conducted by Religious persons. They should be furnished in a European fashion and funds secured for their support... Ample playground should be afforded to them, otherwise their health would suffer. They should be allowed abundant amusement before and after school.³⁴

While the sisters were thus conditioned by the current attitudes of their culture and time, they did find the Aborigines different from what had been reported. Ursula's first glimpse of some led her to write back home, describing their

arrival in Fremantle, and how the whole population was there to meet them... hardly thirty.

Among them were two or three aboriginal natives, who in their bokas or short cloaks of kangaroo skin looked really majestic, as if they felt they were lords of the soil.

Their response to these indigenous people was in some ways unique at the time. The Aboriginal people whom they met were very visibly "exotic others" in the literal sense of the term. They proved a source of delight and fascination and allowed a glimpse into Aboriginal customs and values.

Reflecting later on her years in West Australia, Ursula Frayne recorded with palpable affection some of her memories of the Aborigines she had known then. She recalled:

From the very first week of our arrival in Perth the natives seemed to take to us in a peculiar manner. One native man constituted himself our man of all work. He would chop the wood, draw water, carry messages to and fro by means of "paper talk", i.e. written directions, and most faithfully he fulfilled such commissions. On one occasion this man was employed as running post to convey a letter to a friend, Mr Little, who lived at such a distance that at least a week should elapse before his return.

Before setting out he brought his wife and son and begged to leave them in charge of the nuns lest they should be stolen in his absence. Of course we undertook the charge and allowed the woman and her picannini (sic) to camp down within the Convent grounds. One day I heard a great noise between mother and child and I went to see what it was all about. I found the boy beating his mother with all his little might and in real sharp earnest. You may be sure I hastened to the rescue and administered a few smart strokes on the little fellow's fat shoulder, when what do you think! Mother and child turned on me and nearly gave me the worst of it. The man returned home in due time and claimed his property.

I think we must have had a vague notion that by seeing the ceremonies of our Holy Religion, this poor man might get some knowledge of it, so we took him into the Chapel to be present at Holy Mass. He would place himself close to where I knelt and imitated my every movement. This went on for some time, but at the Elevation when I bent low in adoration he also bent low, but with his face turned towards me with such an extraordinary grin that I had to hurry out of the Chapel lest I should disgrace myself and distract the Sisters. Mr. Native hurried out after me and I need not say was not permitted to return.

It is in stories like this that one remembers Ursula's comparative youth when she landed in Australia.

Another of her tales concerns people from Moore River who often came to the convent.

Amongst them were the King and Queen of the tribe and the princess, their daughter. No matter how often they came the Queen demanded a white frock, that is to say, one of our tunics, which she would put on over her boka and all her other belongings. One day she took a fancy to a pair of boots which I wore. She actually took them off my feet and tried to drag them on to her own. Failing in this she called to her Royal Consort and

one of her Lords in waiting to assist with the operation. A couple of the Sisters also volunteered their services and at last succeeded in clothing the poor feet in unaccustomed boots. I leave you to form a picture of the scene.

More than once Queen Durgeon honoured us with her presence and would even condescend to sing and dance a Corroboree for our amusement at recreation. In return for which kindness we always offered her some little present. A piece of ribbon — no matter how old or faded — quite won her. We had a special motive in this cultivation of the poor savage. She possessed immense influence in her tribe and she could, and did, use it in furtherance of our great aim, the cultivation of the native children.

One Sunday, as usual, the Moore River Natives came to see us and while the men of the party followed their own pursuits, whatever they were, Mrs Durgeon and her daughter — a grown woman — came to the Convent and were rewarded with a large dish of rice and meat. They seated themselves after their usual fashion on the ground with the dish between them when, by some awkwardness the daughter broke it. Nothing could equal their delight at the broken pieces, which they looked upon as so many toys, but soon their merriment ceased, for when dear M.M. went to take away the dish and looked serious on finding it broken, Mrs Durgeon began beating her daughter. The latter, pretending to cry, thinking I suppose that we could desire nothing more. No sooner had M.M. gone out of sight than shrieks of laughter recommenced. This proceeded from their natural cunning, or rather, I should perhaps say, their innocence. They had no thoughts of offending us.

Ursula also commented on the "considerable intelligence" the native Australians possessed. She describes an incident about the fourth year after their arrival. The Sunday roast had caught fire and the house was in danger.

...suddenly we heard loud screaming and saw the kitchen girl rushing over to us and wringing her hands and crying out, "the house is on fire, fire, fire" at the very highest pitch of her voice. Some of us hastened to the kitchen and there we saw one native woman scrambling up on the roof like a squirrel — not in the least impeded by her gota filled with water which she meant to pour down the chimney and, entering the kitchen, we found a second native woman holding her boka (cloak of kangaroo skin) up against the fire place to keep in the flames upon which she had thrown a quantity of sand. Finding that all danger was past I began to think of ...dinner and, looking about I saw the meat laid nicely on a dish and covered with a clean rubber to preserve it from the smoke and dust. All this was the work of Australian savages, who quietly did what was necessary, without instructions from any person while the European stood wringing her hands and screaming. What feeling influenced them to be so careful about the meat intended for the nuns, while so utterly regardless of cleanliness in their own eating? Observation, of course!! They came so much about the convent that imperceptibly they had learned our ways.

Finally, she relates a story of kindness from a gentleman in the bush.

On another occasion during our business rambles in the bush we came to a narrow creek which we had often passed dry foot, but which from the late rains was now deep and difficult to pass. While debating whether to return home or continue our journey by a longer route we heard the bush signal "Oooooo" Looking around we saw a native man who invited us by

signs to move on a little farther. We did so and found a place across where he had laid lumps of decayed wood. Mr Native, who had accompanied us on the other side, now extended his spear of which he retained a firm grip. We seized the end near us and in this way he conveyed us across the frail bridge in a manner that would have disgraced the most polished gentleman, nor did he willingly accept the little piece of silver which we offered in return for his kindness. I had to put on a displeased look before he would take it. Strange that though ready enough to ask for what they wanted or even to help themselves if they saw things lying about — they did not care to receive payment for any little service they rendered us.

The sisters were gaining an insight into a culture that was not based on buying and selling.

The children whom they began to teach and to care for in Saint Francis Xavier's Benevolent Institution also gave the nuns much joy, even if intermingled with times of anxiety and even sorrow. The Institution was officially begun in April 1847 for both European and Aboriginal children.³⁵ It was reserved for the latter in 1849. They were gratified to be able to say that at the first public school examination, there seemed to be no difference between the white children and the Aborigines, except that of colour. Sister M Francis Goold, in charge of the school at Perth, found them "very quick" They wore blue uniforms and white pinafores to school, which they attended with the white girls. They also took part in the procession for religious reception of two postulants in 1849. For this they were dressed in white muslin frocks and little net caps. Each carried part of the religious dress to be donned by the postulants during the ceremony. The sisters were exceedingly thrilled in August 1849 when out of seven classes in the free school of seventy-four children at Perth, Aboriginal girls topped two of them. This happened in both religious instruction and secular education. Now, Ursula gloated, "I hope the colonists will no longer say the natives have no souls!"

Yet cultural learnings die hard. Writing to Dublin not long after coming to Australia, Ursula said:

I am sure you would be greatly pleased with the Aborigines. They are extremely intelligent and by no means disagreeable in appearance. Some are even handsome and all are stately and majestic. There are chiefs among them who walk with an air of dignity not surpassed by our own Victoria... They come to us every morning to chop us wood for which we give them bread or flour. ...They seem to have some vague idea of the Resurrection because they say, "White man's come from the land of Good Spirits, and when black man die, he jump up white man" This is a tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of the Europeans.

Like the clerical missionaries, the sisters were convinced that the children needed to be taken away from their parents to receive the benefits of this superior European Christianity and culture. Baptist O'Donnell wrote that the native children ... are going on well. They are dear good-natured little pets. They have almost completely forgotten their native language which we hope will secure them from joining their own people.

Ursula Frayne declared that

it would not be safe to let them see their parents too often; they would

certainly return to the bush as the natural affections are as strong in the savage as in the civilised European, perhaps even stronger from being unrestrained.

She added that she would gladly walk from Perth to Dublin to "beg means to bring hundreds of these fine creatures to the knowledge of God."

Within this culturally circumscribed understanding, the sisters at once set about providing what they saw as essential help for Aboriginal girls. Their first protegee was Cochina who came from New Norcia to Perth, nearly one hundred miles, on Dom Rosendo Salvado's back, dressed in a smock made from his own blue cotton handkerchief. Mary Christian Cochina, as she became when she was baptised, was not quite six and the last of her tribal group, it seems. The priest had snatched her from death by burning and eating by some members of another tribe who did not wish to care for her. Francis Gould tells us that she loved Salvado and would jump excitedly on his lap whenever he appeared, seizing his long beard.

Cochina "this precious little atom of immortality" became the first of a number of small Aboriginal girls brought to Perth to be educated by the sisters. The register lists Mary Christian, Mary Clare, Mary Rose, Mary Anne, Mary Cecilia, Mary Lucy, Mary Catherine, Mary Ursula. There are detailed reports on their conduct, and each child is rated under a variety of headings.

Rising and Dressing; Example; Attention at Prayers; Truth; Diligence; House Maids' Duties; Cooks' Duties; Laundry Duties; Obedience to Superiors; Honesty; Personal Neatness; Respect and Civility.

Then there were general observations on each child, under the headings Good and Bad.

The report of Mary Christian (Full Blood) gives a delightful picture of a lively little black girl being introduced to the strange world of European women.

Good

extremely good
generally very good, acts from principle
very good natured
fond of obliging
obedient and respectful
diligent and willing to perform her duties well
generally very good

Bad

cannot be believed
sometimes idle
very idle on cold mornings
remarkable for spoiling her clothes
wastes her time prying after the hens
told an untruth
Removed the nest egg out of the nest
and caused the hen to make a new nest
spoils and tears her clothes

Mary Rose (Tilbyjean), a half caste, was the second admission, January 1848. "A very engaging intelligent child" she also "tears her clothes and mends them carelessly. She plays with the cat when she should be employed in appointed duties" One of the difficulties with caring for these children was their propensity to roam. Mary Rose once tried to run away. Ursula wrote to Bishop Salvado:

She was found this morning clothed, ready for a walk, but fast asleep under one of the beds, where we supposed she placed herself, being unable to open the door.

Mary Rose was sent to His Lordship to be dealt with as he thought fit. The sisters would take her back again, but it would be made out to be a great favour, so that Mary Rose would value it and the other children would receive the warning.³⁶ On a happier note, Ursula sent Salvado needlework (samplers) done by Mary Cecilia and Mary Lucy and a hymn written by Mary Anne. These were prepared for the annual examination and had been considered "tolerably well done".³⁷

Mary Catherine was especially intelligent and lovable. When Ursula and Mary Anne Xavier went to Rome in 1850 with Bishop Brady's party, to give an account of the affairs of the Perth Mission, and also for recruiting and fund-raising, they took her with them. The journey over was enlivened by the reactions of Mary Catherine and of Placid, the seven year old Aboriginal boy whom Brady had brought. Going down the Nile and then into the canal between Cairo and Alexandria, a bumpy passage, many of the passengers became very scared. Ursula recounted an incident in connection with "our dear little dusky charge" Waiting till the crowd had left the cabin, she prepared to follow when

I felt some rather large living thing move under my feet. Somewhat startled, I looked hastily to find what it could be, when lo! Dear little Mary Catherine emerged from where she had lain for several hours. In great distress I asked why she had not moved or spoken sooner. She replied "because I thought you were sleeping, and I would not disturb you."

Is it any wonder that we should love those interesting children?

In Naples, they visited the Convent of Oblates. There the priest was giving a sermon. Every ten minutes he paused while the congregation sighed and moaned and exclaimed *miserere nostro*(sic). This went on for quite a while, the groans and moans got louder and louder. "During this time our little black girl gave such unmistakable signs of fright that my dear travelling companion, taking her by the hand, quietly withdrew"

They left Mary Catherine in a convent school to be educated, near London, that of the Faithful Companions, Isleworth. The Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury had undertaken the cost of her education and had promised that the countess and her niece and ward, the Honourable Miss Talbot, would frequently visit her. There she continued to do well in her studies, being able to play a tune on the piano for Ursula and Anne Xavier when they revisited her before their return to Australia. But before the end of her second year she had succumbed to what was doubtless an unbearable strangeness and

loneliness. "Little dusky" Mary Catherine Palamira³⁸ died in 1851, victim to the cold of northern Europe.

"Civilization seemed to be more than they could bear, they all died young" the sisters mourned years later.³⁹ Mary Christian too had showed promise in her studies, but died at the convent on 15th October, 1854, about thirteen years old. Mary Rose died in September, 1859. Mary Ursula had "an edifying death from consumption, invoking her Saviour in a most touching manner. She bid a last adieu to the Sisters, her earthly mothers." She died May 1863, the fourth to do so of these "black but beautiful" children of nature.⁴⁰

Commenting on this a couple of decades later, the *Record* wrote:

The sisters continued to receive native girls into their establishment and had the comfort of training a good number of them... many very intelligent, fond of music, very quick in learning knitting and other kinds of fancy work. But, as a rule,... an extreme dislike to labor of any kind, and if compelled to work against their inclination, developed ill-temper and were very stubborn. However, their dispositions in many cases were wonderfully good for creatures so utterly uncultured. Time sufficient to form a correct judgment on the matter, proved that close training in towns or in civilized life, did not suit the aborigine of W.A. Having devoted great labor and attention to educating and training the native girls, and seeing them make more than a fair progress in school and domestic matters, the Sisters had the affliction to see them fail in health, and eventually sink into a species of decline, and found it difficult or more so to effect a cure... They could rejoice in fulfilment of their mission in this respect — they rescued them from total ignorance of the truths of salvation... They had lived some years as Christians and Catholics in His service... and prepared for a holy death by the reception of the Sacraments. This object being attained all else was valueless...⁴¹

Bishop Brady did little to help the sisters care for the children. He continued to express concern for these lowest members of his flock, but ultimately abnegated any responsibility for their support. Towards the end of 1847 the bishop had opened a school in Fremantle, which was placed under the care of an inexperienced young woman, Miss Cresswell. To Fremantle also were transferred the black and white children of St. Francis Xavier's Benevolent Institution. By December of that year there were twelve children in residence.

The sisters were obliged to visit Fremantle weekly or fortnightly, a dangerous task in certain weathers, particularly since it involved crossing the wide Swan River over which there was still no bridge. The wages of the young teacher, the cost of her provisions, and her inability to cope with sickness among the house-children led the bishop to dismiss her and send the sisters there permanently in September 1848. Sisters M. Aloysius and Ignatia were the members of what was thus the first branch convent.

In an apparently impetuous move, the bishop ordered their return and the return of the house-children in May 1849, telling Ursula that

a sort of half-enclosed shed, which (she) had noticed being put up inside one enclosed fence, and which (she) had thought was meant for a store, was intended for them — that, when finished and furnished, it would be far better than many bush huts, better even than the Episcopal residence.

In this "little hut constructed of mud in a corner of the Holy Cross grant (lived) the four natives and three of the most destitute European children... All the other European children are gone home to their relations" Brady's biographer, Martin Newbold, concludes, by comparing the account books for these years, that the bishop planned, through this step, to shift the expense of maintaining the children completely onto the sisters.

The sisters were equal to the burden. By early 1847 it had already become quite clear that they would be responsible alone for financing the project. In her unprecedented letter to Queen Victoria begging for help for the poor children, both European and native, under her care, Ursula stated:

What can be said of the poor Aborigines? They have rational and immortal souls, created to the image and likeness of God, and yet they are wandering around like the wild animals which afford them a miserable subsistence, ignorant and unmindful of Him who died on the Cross for their Redemption. ... Some of them who are parents could easily be induced by kind treatment to give up their children into our care; these children instructed first themselves, would in time draw others to share in their newly found happiness, and thus hundreds, as yet ignorant of every moral and social duty, would be brought to the knowledge, love and service of God, consequently to be faithful subjects of Your Majesty, and useful members of society. ...

We plead not for ourselves, although our own privations and discomforts are many, we plead on behalf of Your Majesty's European and Native subjects of Western Australia. In their name we beg a site on which to raise the necessary building, a portion of land fit for cultivation, and some pecuniary assistance towards accomplishing the projects we have in view.

She also wrote to the Propagation of the Faith in nearly the same terms.

There is no record of a response from the Queen, but Ursula was not nonplussed.

Perhaps she (the Queen) was too much astonished at our presumption to vouchsafe a reply, but no matter, we can write to her again; if she will not hear us because we are her friends, perhaps she would be rid of our importunity.

There seems to be no record of a second letter to Her Majesty.

The mission did provide the children with food. And more substantial funds could be used. The bank draft remitted from Dublin for their fares home enabled them to build a small cottage for the Aboriginal girls. They also, in true Mercy fashion, regularly held bazaars which usually turned out to be a marvellous success. Dr Serra returned from fundraising in Europe in December 1849 and allotted them 200 pounds, which Ursula used for the Aboriginal girls' quarters. One prize drawing realized 38 pounds, which was expended on various articles "for the little blackies of which we now had about twelve"

While giving almost no help in their maintenance, Bishop Brady continued to express concern for the natives. He protested officially in 1848 against harshness to Aborigines and suggested means by which they could be best gained to civilization.⁴² Then, in November 1849, the bishop wrote Salvo

to tell Serra (then both in Europe) not to bring any more nuns for some time. The Sisters of Mercy would be sufficient for the female portion of the children of nature.⁴³ Beset by numerous difficulties, Brady obviously had no notion of extending this aspect of the church's ministry.

Then, while Ursula was in Europe she heard with horror that Dr Serra, back in the colony and appointed administrator of the diocese in Brady's absence, was trying to prevent the completion of the house for the Aboriginal girls. By now Serra's interests were centring on the diocese rather than the mission to the Aborigines, which he had come out to pursue. Ursula wrote to Bernard Smith, her agent in the matter, making it clear that he was to act under her instructions. "Remember you are not to obey Dr Serra if he orders you not to get the children's Cottage built, he has no authority to give such an order" She learnt also that the Vicar General Dominic Urquhart, then fighting with Serra for control of the diocese, had written to the Reverend Mother in Dublin, accusing her of arranging for a house for Aboriginal girls for an extravagant sum of 175 pounds without consulting him. Ursula remained firm in her intention and the new house was completed and named St. Mary's School for Aborigines.

It appears that Ursula, when in Rome, made efforts to have Serra deprived of the temporal administration of the convent. This was to be one source of much later friction.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, while ecclesiastical squabbling continued around them, the Benevolent Institution continued to gain in stability.

The Sisters announced that any "respectable person" was welcome to visit the place any day between the hours of ten and three Saturdays and Sundays excepted. Various visitors came and were favourably impressed. The newly arrived Wesleyan Missionary, Samuel Hardey, wrote in June 1855 to his superiors in London:

The complete abandonment of the Native Department and the breaking up of all religious instruction by us seems to have been doomed. No one seems to have any heart to make trial for their temporal or spiritual welfare. The children of our schools have returned to the bush life and their former habits, others wander among our houses as children without a home. Not one of them is now seen to frequent any place of worship, except for the Romanist Church, for the Sisters of Mercy are still attempting something on behalf of the Aboriginal girls. Otherwise no one seems to care for their souls or bodies.⁴⁵

The Guardian of Aborigines, Charles Symmons, reported to the Colonial Secretary on 1st January, 1855, that

the progress made during the past year by the Native female students at the Roman Catholic Institution of this town is on the whole, very satisfactory. Their acquirements in reading, writing, geography and Scripture history appear to me much on a par with those of white children of a similar age, but that which I deem very far the most valuable portion of their education, is the systematic training they receive in the various departments of housewifery fitting them thereby to earn their future livelihoods as domestic servants.

The Lady Directors of the Establishment avail themselves of this opportunity of gratefully acknowledging the gratuity recently received from the Colonial Government in consideration of the present high price of provisions.⁴⁶

The Colonial Governor was somewhat nearer at hand than Queen Victoria, and Ursula wrote a series of letters in 1853 asking help from Governor Fitzgerald. The letters reveal her persistence and acumen, and her growing ease in awkward situations. Placed in the position where the Government was prepared to grant 60 per annum to the Native Institution,⁴⁷ on condition that an officer appointed by His Excellency, be permitted to visit the Establishment occasionally, a condition rejected by Bishop Serra. Ursula begged His Excellency to

be pleased to order that the money be placed in the Bank to our credit, there to remain accumulating until we shall be at liberty to draw it for the use of the Native children who would be the sufferers were the Grant to be withdrawn.⁴⁸

The impasse was resolved, fortunately, and the grant received.

As costs of living rose in the struggling colony, Ursula continued to apply for government aid:

...in consequence of debts contracted for these poor children during the past year, to discharge which, the small means granted by the Mission is quite inadequate, owing to the high price of clothing, furniture and provisions in this colony... We cannot apply further to that source until August, 1854.

This was in October, 1853, and she reminded Governor Fitzgerald that in the course of the preceding seven years they had provided for ten Native girls.

The Mission granted nothing for them but the bare necessities of life in the shape of food. For every other requisite we depended upon our own resources, and assistance from our friends at home. The latter aid is no longer forthcoming as these friends are gone to another and a better world, which circumstance in particular, obliged us to apply to Your Excellency.⁴⁹

The Government obliged at this time, though not for several long anxious months. In January, 1855, there was a special donation of 12 pounds, on account of the price of provisions.

The Mission annual grant, received in August 1854, was 60 pounds. In that year, there were to be cared for: twelve Sisters of Mercy; Mary Spillane, a domestic aged twenty years (who later became Sister M. Teresa); six native girls (eleven to fourteen years); and four orphan girls of Irish parents (three and a half to ten years).⁵⁰ There was also the free school which now had some two hundred pupils.

It does not seem that Bishop Serra was dealing fairly with the Sisters in this allocation of moneys. On 17th August, 1855, Ursula wrote to Bishop Salvado acknowledging the receipt of 200 pounds for the maintenance of the Convent and Native Girls Institution for the year ending August 1856. She adds, however:

Did the Society of the Propagation of the Faith refuse to grant what we named... at the very lowest calculation... viz. 12 pounds p.a. for each native

girl and 180 pounds per annum for nine Sisters of Mercy? With that we could manage without Government aid for the Native girls or poor schools. The community could not live more economically than we do...

Kindly represent to the Right Rev. Dr. Serra that we expect to receive the sums we asked for... We are no longer to receive Government Grant.

In November of that year, Ursula wrote to Goold in Melbourne saying that during the past three years, besides the 200 pounds from the Mission, for nineteen persons in all, we received from the Government 40 pounds per annum in aid of the Native Establishment. This year Bishop Serra commanded us to transfer to him the 40 pounds as he would no longer permit us to have it.

Serra had also demanded "a written document declaring that (she) would not ask him for any additional aid for Guildford. (She) thought such a document disgraceful to a prelate and a community of Religious Sisters..."

Serra continued to be an embarrassment for Ursula's successor, Mother Baptist O'Donnell, in the relationship between the Benevolent Institution and the Government. This letter dated 14th April 1857, from the Guardian of Aborigines to the Colonial Secretary tells a painful story.

Having been informed that the Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr Serra, has recently obtained from the present Superioress of the Sisters of Mercy a procuration to receive all moneys payable from the Colonial Governor and has been within these few days making enquiry at the Public Offices relative to the stipend allowed for the Convent Native School, I have the honor to report the same for the information of His Excellency the Governor, further to state that I some weeks since received a private note from the Lady Superioress expressing her regret at her inability through the Bishop's injunction to avail herself of the liberality of the Colonial Governor in the manner originally proposed.

His Excellency will, doubtless, recollect that in an interview which I had the honor of having had with him on the subject, it was expressly understood and determined that the quarterly stipend was to be paid solely on the condition that it was to pass directly into their hands and to be devoted to the special use of the Convent ladies.

The Bishop appears determined to put all moneys received from any source into his private purse to be doled out when and how His Lordship may think fit, and as for shame's sake, no greater privations can well be heaped upon the Convent ladies and as certainly no amelioration of their lot is likely to accrue to them by Bishop Serra's receipt of the Government allowance. I respectfully and earnestly trust that His Excellency will not be induced to alter his former resolution on the subject.

The Account Book of the Benevolent Institution for 1860 still records a Government Grant. There are indications, however, that white children were now being received as boarders. It would seem, from this time on, that occasional Aboriginal or, perhaps, half-caste girls may have continued to be taken at Perth and later at the Orphanage at Subiaco. But the demand to send girls to Perth no longer existed as Bishop Salvado's plans for educating the Aborigines at New Norcia became more and more a reality. And, as experience had now shown, their health suffered, often fatally, in confinement

in Perth. The missionaries had realised that close training in towns or in the civilised life did not suit the Aborigine of W.A. Most of those who survived returned to New Norcia or worked on farms.

Spiritual Motherhood

Just as nineteenth century ideas of charity and benevolence affected the Mercy understanding of ministry, so, too, their religious symbols were part product of the environment. Some facilitated the growth of a gap between image and reality.

Mercy symbolic life is very strong, providing much spiritual, emotional, and psychological nourishment. For the foundation sisters, separated as they were from their loved ones by thousands of miles, and living in a strange and sparse environment, both within and without the convent, nourishing symbols were a requisite for retaining one's sanity. Religious images provided enrichment which was both emotional and intellectual of a non-rational, intuitive kind and a framework in which the personal experiences of the sister could be made meaningful.

On the other hand, all symbols have a flip side which contain aspects of negativity. The most potent symbol for the Institute, that of Mercy, can we have seen encourage activism. The figure of the nun as a dispenser of God's Mercy is readily reinforced by that of the nun as spiritual mother, nurturing compassionately God's poor, the "little ones" with whom Jesus especially identified. The power of such imagery is tremendous. It can also foster any tendency to play a role.

The early sisters felt a great urge to be of service to their poor compatriots in a new land and to the original and to their eyes extremely disadvantaged inhabitants of that land. This urge could feed on the picture of nun as a spiritual mother. There is not much documentation to show that the foundational sisters were passionately caught up in this symbolism, but it was certainly propounded to them by the male clerics.

Unquestionably the feminine values of compassion and of nurturing care drew forth from them a womanly response to the needy people around. Having renounced the opportunity to become a physical mother — the most fulfilling role for nearly all nineteenth century women — nuns could find some consolation in the concept of spiritual motherhood. Just as most women could be birthers and nurturers in the physical order, they could be birthers and nurturers in the order of grace. In the same way as women were conditioned by society to sacrifice themselves for their families, to be the spiritual and emotional base of their families, so, too, nuns were conditioned by the church to spend themselves totally in the service of God, their divine spouse, and the human beings who were their spiritual family.

This ideology of women's selflessness could be readily spiritualized by women religious, already heavily into the cult of self-denial for the sake of God and others. The glorification of sacrificial motherhood was especially strong in Ireland, whence they came. It was reinforced by devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary, both virgin and mother, with a son who had caused her pain,

could easily be seen as a special protector and friend of women. She, according to the gospel, could easily manipulate her son.

So, too, could the nun be a special friend and protector, whose prayer life gave her privileged access to Jesus. The idea of spiritual motherhood was, therefore, a serious one. One public expression occurred on the feast day of Sister M. Aloysius Kelly in 1877 when she was Reverend Mother of Victoria Square. The pupils were urged to pray for "favours for her who is their spiritual mother, and is charged to give an account of their souls."⁵¹ A heavy responsibility!

But, then, so was the responsibility of any woman. The same journal, on August 6th, 1877, printed a semi-humorous par about "What to do with your Daughters" It outlined what they were to be taught — mainly preparations for running a household. This included a long list of how to's: how to make bread, how to make shirts, how to wash and iron clothes, how to darn stockings and sew on buttons, how to make their own dresses, how to wear calico dresses like a queen, how to obtain accomplishments — music, painting, drawing, how to cultivate a garden... The piece concluded thus: Teach them the essentials of life — truth, honesty, uprightness — and at a suitable time let them marry.

Let them marry. This was the anticipated destiny for all women. In sum, as Adrienne Rich⁵² succinctly puts it,

to fill both the part of the Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House, and also of the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse.

For the nun we might add: Guardian of Souls.

Motherhood could overcome the implicit corruption of the female body. All women were natural successors to Eve, the "devil's gateway" Woman's femininity was the source of confusion, chaos, emotional disorder, and temptation to men. Motherhood could dispel these regrettable effects. But a mother could beidealised and sentimentalised, in the same way as could the notion of "home" where the male ruled in his own private domain and felt compensated for any subordination he experienced in the public world. Caring for the home in its private aspects, standing behind the man in his public toil, guiding their children in their growth in virtue and religious faith as much as human development, is the figure of the Mother, archetype of all that is loving and nurturing.

At an 1879 profession ceremony in Victoria Square, the preacher spoke of how motherhood was excluded by virginity, but the Lord's promise was of a hundredfold.

The very idea of a Sister of Mercy current amongst those familiar with her labours is the idea of one whose life is inseparably interwoven with the lives of children. We think of her but as the central figure around which are grouped circling crowds of little ones... the orphan, the poor, the ignorant, the tender and the young. These are those of whom we say they are more than mothers by the love they bestow on those who claim it by no law of blood. Full of meaning as the expression is at all times, it becomes of luminous beauty in its application to the Sister of Mercy.

The Sister of Mercy girds herself for the work. She summons the little ones around her, makes them her children in gaining their attention and their love and then labours to prove herself a mother, in imparting intelligence to their minds, in instilling virtue into their hearts and in developing above all every special grace of soul.

As the mother, so too the child. Faith shows itself in the ... attention to religious duties; purity in the modest reserve of maidenhood, the quiet seclusion of the wife, her attachment to her husband's house and her care of her husband's children... churches crowded... homes happy in the hallowed love of devoted wives and unwavering zeal of self-sacrificing mothers...

The Sister of Mercy renounces hope of children sprung of flesh, and she receives them born of God... To her the inheritance given by the Lord is offspring, to her his reward the fruit of the womb, to her he proves the great tenderness of his goodness and the greatness of his power by making her to dwell in her home the joyful mother of children.⁵³

The point was further elaborated in an article in the *Record*.⁵⁴ A specific comparison was made between the role of women in general and the role of the nun.

The Catholic Church has always recognized the importance of the mission of her women. The Sisters were as a devout and tender mother among her children, in her own home, rather than as charitable ladies who condescend to visit the poor. The Sisters may not always be the best instructors, but everywhere they are the best educators.

The Apostles used the services of women. A number of holy women followed Our Lord. There was an immense Apostolate for women, which men cannot do. Few men have the devotedness and long suffering, fewer the time. The Sisters' mission is one which pervades the whole society. For example, there may be two or three in the school, the rest are ministering among the poor or sick and dying or looking up children and parents.

Men and women prefer the services of the "good Sisters" with their gentleness and charity.

It is the influence of the mother and the sister preserved by religion over the whole population.

The *Record* bemoaned the fact that at present "our Sisters are much more in the schools than among the people." This was a great loss to pupils after leaving school. There were not enough Sisters. Their numbers were wanting.

Many mothers find it hard to let one's children go, hard to allow them to grow up. As with any helping relationship, the symbolism of spiritual motherhood despite all its positive aspects can promote a kind of matriarchy. As such it presents the danger of perpetuating a kind of spiritual immaturity in the people among whom the sister works. For the sister herself, it can reinforce the role of "worthy helper" and the image of "the good nun"

CHAPTER FOUR

GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

Consolidation and Expansion to the Turn of the Century

The departure for Victoria, towards the end of the 1850s, of the founding superior and her assistant, Ursula Frayne and Anne Xavier Dillon, together with that of two later arrivals, Joseph Sherlock and Francis Goold, heralded a temporary slowing down of Mercy growth in Western Australia. The 1860s were shadowed by the loss of these four very capable and mature women and by the premature death of Ursula's successor, Mother Mary Baptist O'Donnell, in 1862. The novitiate was empty between 1865 and 1869. The branch house at Guildford, opened by Ursula in 1855, had to be closed at the time of Baptist's illness. But a new era of vocations began in the next decade. Between 1870 and 1880 thirteen young women finished the novitiate training, ten from Western Australia, and three from the eastern colonies. In the following decade, twenty-three women completed the novitiate programme, nine of them from the West, one from the East, twelve from Ireland and one from England. During the last decade of the century, twenty five persevered to profession, in a somewhat similar pattern of origin: seven from W.A., three from the East, fourteen from Ireland and one from England. The Mercy vision would survive.

So the 1880s, in particular, comprised a decade of growth, made possible by the success of Reverend Mother Aloysius Kelly's 1882/83 recruiting trip to Ireland and the increasing number of Australian vocations. Nonetheless, there had been development during the previous decade of the 1870s, with progress at Victoria Square convent, movement just outside the then city's confines to Subiaco, and up the river into the Avon Valley to York. In the 1880s, Guildford branch house was re-opened, the Sisters sailed north to Geraldton, south to Bunbury, and further up the Avon to Toodyay. And, finally, in 1888, they crossed the railway line to what was then called North Perth.

In 1896, this last branch house became a new and immediately flourishing Congregation in its own right, the West Perth Sisters of Mercy. Bunbury followed on that path the following year and also blossomed. In 1900, Guildford, York, and Toodyay also tried to go it alone for a few years, but without the success of West Perth and Bunbury. In the last years of the century, the Western Australian Mercy scene was enriched by two new and vital groups who came from outside the colony. The Adelaide Mercies sent a group in 1898 who settled in Coolgardie, and as that year changed into 1899, another small band — this time from Derry, Northern Ireland and also intended for the goldfields — finally established themselves, instead, at Victoria Park, in Perth, south of the river.

In the Heart of Perth — Victoria Square

Victoria Square, where the Convent of Mercy, Perth, is now situated, was very slightly away from the centre of the town, towards the area of East Perth.



Relatives and friends gathered to celebrate the Golden Jubilee (1914) of Sr. M. Vincent Brennan, (centre), first Australian born lady to enter the Sisters of Mercy, Perth.



Convent of Mercy, Victoria Square (1871).



Above: Stained glass windows presented to the Sisters of Mercy by Governor Frederick A. Weld.

Right: Section of Convent staircase showing skill of Fenian workman.



The first permanent Convent of the Holy Cross was actually built as an attachment to the small Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, which fronted Lord Street, leading into the southern edge of the Square.¹ The Schoolroom was built on the corner of Lord Street and Hay Street. Both the cathedral and the convent were re-dedicated in 1854 under the title of the Immaculate Conception, following the declaration of this doctrine. By 1856 the little cathedral had been extended to double its original size and a portico added.

On the corner of Lord Street and the Square the priests lived in one of the grandest residences in Perth, Bishop Serra's "Palace", built in 1855/56 by Benedictine brothers who tramped in each day from Subiaco. In the middle of the Square was a sizeable block, originally surveyed as the focal point of the settlement and the site of the Anglican Cathedral. That, however, had been erected a bit to the west in St. George's Terrace, and Victoria Square became slightly off-centre in the growing town. The block remained vacant until 1859, when Bishop Serra obtained it in grant for the Catholics of Perth. Six years later, a new Cathedral was blessed and opened in the centre of "The Square"

Before the new School House was completed in 1853, there had been established four distinct yet intertwined educational establishments. They were Our Lady of Mercy's School for pension or fee-paying students, St. Joseph's School for older poor children, St. Mary's School for Aboriginal girls, and the Holy Angels' School.² The building had been erected by "ticket-of-leave" men and was a source of much satisfaction. Ursula wrote:

After this example, let no one yield to discouragement or be deterred by difficulties from at least attempting good works. In less than twelve months, what seemed an impossibility became an accomplished fact. The schools were built and paid for with money collected in poverty-stricken Perth.³

The pension or select school was in a Mercy tradition already set in Ireland before Catherine McAuley had died. While the object of the order was "the service of the poor, sick, and ignorant", Catherine had not been against fee-paying schools. They were often an imperative, to help finance the poor schools. Moreover, in them the better-off children could be taught the faith, and it was from such middle-class establishments that most vocations to the Institute would come.

Their first attempts to attract pupils to a pension school had failed, but, by July 1849, they were desperate enough financially, though with little prospect of success, to make another effort. They inserted an advertisement in the *Inquirer*, stating that such a school would open on the 3rd September of that year.⁴

The Sisters of Mercy, possessing every facility, have arranged to open, on the 3rd of September, a distinct Day School for a limited number of young Ladies. Besides a solid English Education, comprising Grammar, Geography, History, Writing, Arithmetic, etc., etc., the French Language will be taught; also Music, Drawing, and Plain and Ornamental Works.

Much to their surprise,

one of the most respectable ladies in the colony came to arrange for her two daughters. They are nieces to the Protestant clergyman's wife whose wrath is great at the idea of her nieces being sent to the "nuns' school"

Schooling began with those two and another little girl but within three weeks numbers were up to seven. Ursula commented that "but for our wish to keep it very select we might have more. I have no doubt we shall have all the nice children in the form, after a little time." She concluded this account with a wry remark:

How good Almighty God is to bless our efforts with success; just at the time we most wanted it. Probably had we been able to open such a school at the time we first attempted it might long since have been given up, like the branch Convent, but we are likely to be *permitted* to carry out a work from which not only spiritual, but also temporal advantages can be derived.⁵

This was, in truth, the beginning of secondary education in Western Australia, which was not introduced into the government system by the General Board of Education until the early 1850s.⁶ In the style of these schools, pupils ranged over all ages. For the older pupils it formed a secondary education. Once again the sisters had stolen the initiative on the colonial government.

Four years later, Ursula Frayne wrote to Governor Charles Fitzgerald begging an additional grant for the erection of their school house. She needed at least 500 pounds. While not asking the Governor for all of that, she did make justification for the cost of the building.

To those who may object that the building was commenced on too large and expensive a scale, the Sisters venture to reply, that they have in view not only present, but also future good, and if the colony continue to prosper as it has done since Your Excellency took the reins of government, no doubt in a very few years, the school house will not be found too large for the numbers who will flock to it.⁷

When Archbishop Polding of Sydney had visited Perth the previous year, 1852, to settle the dispute between Brady and Serra, heavy rain had shown the need for a new school. When he laid its foundation stone on 15th October, Polding gave 30 pounds towards its erection. Governor Fitzgerald doubled that amount. Mr Thomas Little gave 20 pounds. A gothic building of two storeys, with four rooms each 60' x 30' x 22', it cost 823 pounds and was solemnly blessed on 25th July, 1853.⁸ At the opening, the governor gave another 100 pounds and a separate donation of 60 pounds for the care of the native girls. Ursula claimed that the building was "one of great public activity, an ornament to the town, a standing monument of what persevering exertion can accomplish".⁹

Church matters in general were settling down. On 1st April 1859 New Norcia was separated from the diocese of Perth and Bishop Salvado was named its administrator. On 13th July, Bishop Serra left the colony in an unsuccessful attempt to have Rome reverse this decision. On 7th January, 1862, he resigned as Perth's bishop. His place was taken by the ascetic Martin Griver, one of those priests who had supported the sisters in their conflict with Serra. Martin Griver had come from Spain in 1849. He proved to be a splendid administrator. Even more significantly, he seems to have been the saint whom, to

quote Timothy Donovan, the colony's first ordained priest, Perth needed "to straighten things out and to give it a spiritual tone."¹⁰ His personal prayer and penance helped give the diocese a spiritual strength which operated to maintain its balance. His leadership from 1862 to 1886 (as Apostolic Administrator and then as Bishop) was the diocese's first era of real growth and stability.

The Colonial Government was becoming more accepting, too, of the Catholics. Governor at the time of the Brady Serra schism, Fitzgerald had also found the litigious Serra hard to deal with. He had perhaps partly because of the antagonism between the two men — been personally sympathetic towards the nuns. The same situation prevailed with his successor, Governor Kennedy.

While Kennedy had passed educational regulations in 1856 which placed them under many inequalities, the Catholics were, by the end of the 1860s, campaigning fairly vigorously to be given equal consideration in educational and religious matters. Stannage judges that the advent of convicts to the colony from 1850 made the Roman Catholics into an effective pressure group for the first time.¹¹ The next Governor, Hampton, was himself favourable to their petition of July, 1869 but no decision was made while he was in office.

When Irishman Henry O'Farrell allegedly tried to assassinate the Duke of Edinburgh in Sydney, March, 1868, the Western Australian colonists stated publicly their abhorrence of the deed. Martin Griver, as representative of the Catholics, took a prominent part in the public meeting. When the Duke visited the West in the following February, the Catholic children were asked to participate in the welcome and Griver was invited to the presentation of the Citizens of Perth to His Royal Highness.¹² The Duke donated 40 pounds to the Catholic Orphanage.¹³

In September, 1869, Hampton was succeeded by Frederick Aloysius Weld (1869-1877). The Catholics began to breathe more freely. Governor Weld was a fervent Catholic of old English stock. He and his wife — a de Lisle, related to royalty — became very good friends of the nuns at Victoria Square. Lady Filomena Weld was a very frequent visitor, often visiting the sick sisters in particular.¹⁴ They had thirteen children, four of them born in the colony, the girls pupils at the convent school for Young Ladies. Two diminutive cane-bottomed chairs still survive at The Square, special seats for the Governors' young children tending to wriggle during Mass in the Cathedral, to which the chairs were transported each Sunday. About seven of their children entered religion, two after widowhood. One story relates that Bishop Griver was seriously ill, when Lady Weld brought her little boy to the Cathedral and offered him to God as a future monk, in exchange for the bishop's life. Filomena, herself, on the death of her husband became a Benedictine Oblate in the English convent where her daughter was prioress.

Weld has been described as one of the ablest governors Western Australia has had. As a pastoralist in New Zealand, he had become its premier. In Western Australia, he introduced political and educational changes, including a degree of Responsible Government and an Education Act of 1871. While

the act was not as generous to the Catholics as Weld's actual bill, it did give a more equitable measure of educational support.

Meanwhile, the Sisters had to continue in the struggle to survive. The Account book for the Benevolent Institution for 1860 still records a small government grant. However, by this time, Salvado could at long last put into operation his dreams for New Norcia and his educational plans for the Aborigines. The Perth Benevolent Institution for Native girls became no longer the only avenue open to him.

While the care for Aboriginal girls faded out, care for white destitute children continued. In 1868, owing largely to the energy of Father Matthew Gibney, the Catholic girls in the government poor house were entrusted to the sisters at Victoria Square. The original convent became the orphanage until 1871, when the present convent was built and the orphans, boarders, and two schools were all housed in the building built in 1853. Sister M. Francis Goold was put in charge of these, while continuing to be in charge of the Young Ladies' School. The sisters also gave some help in the boys' orphanage after it opened in 1872 at Subiaco.

In 1883, Father Matthew Gibney, as legal manager of the two orphanages, submitted a report which shows the growth in the Girls' Orphanage at Victoria Square. The report showed 67 girls in residence, 53 of them maintained (partially) by the Government, the other fourteen by private charity. They all attended the Assisted Convent School. There they learnt the required curriculum, together with plain and fancy needlework. A large patchwork quilt at the Perth Exhibition won a silver medal for six little seamstresses.

Most of the girls reached Seventh Standard. The elder girls were also taught baking, washing, cooking, cleaning knives, boots, etc. All had charges in the dormitory, dining, study, and other rooms. Some who left and could not cope would come back and stay for a while, supported by the private funds. From the opening, there had been 242 girls, 157 "government inmates". Of these, 78 had been sent out as general servants, 76 returned to parents or friends, ten sent out as teachers, nine employed as nursery governesses, and two — who had spent only a short time in the orphanage — had died. On the whole their health was very good. Dr Ferguson, followed by Dr Waylen, had given their services gratuitously.

The work of the Sisters in the Orphanage gave the Catholic press and community an opportunity to propagate the prevailing ideology of motherhood. Since the children in the institution were deprived of their physical mothers' care, they were placed in the care of "the devoted Sisters of Mercy" who became to them "their nursing mothers". But they were also their educators in religious faith as much as in schooling. They knew each child and could "easily see to what state of life each one is best adapted, and so fit and prepare one and all accordingly"

The Sisters of Mercy will toil for us with unbought devotion... who can tell how many children will thus be saved to virtue, to society and to God.¹⁵

The sister who, in 1868, received the eleven little girls who had trudged up Goderich Street from the Government Home to the convent, each with a

bundle of bed linen and clothes on her shoulders, was Sister M. Teresa (Mary) Spillane. Teresa Spillane was to spend most of her sixty years in the community, caring for the orphanage children. Born in County Tipperary, she had emigrated to Perth in 1853 at the age of twenty, and had entered within four months of arrival. She had been dismissed less than five months after receiving the habit but readmitted six months later. Now she had to care for the orphans on "an allowance of eight pence per diem for each child... paid for their maintenance and clothing, such sum being slightly in excess of the cost for such purposes hitherto".¹⁶ When the children transferred to Subiaco, Teresa went with them. There she remained, even in death, the last sister to be buried in the cemetery on the grounds.

Teresa was helped in the beginning at both Victoria Square and Subiaco by Sister M. Vincent (Mary) Brennan. She was the first West Australian born Mercy. Born at Wonnerup, Vasse, W.A., in 1846, she joined the community at fifteen and was professed in 1864 as a lay sister. She had boarded as a school girl at the convent in Perth for two and a half years, and was the first postulant for eight years. Sister Mary Vincent was skilled in needlework, which she taught to the senior girls. In later years she helped pioneer branch houses at York, Geraldton, Guildford and Toodyay.

One of the more visible "heroines" of this period of consolidation and growth was the sister who, in 1868, was in charge of the orphan girls and also teaching the young ladies. This was Sister M. Francis Goold. Francis had departed to the eastern colonies at the same time as Ursula Frayne but had returned in 1867. Welcomed back into the fold, she went on to employ her many talents and strengths effectively.

In 1872, the Young Ladies' School provided the foundation members of the Sodality of the Children of Mary — the first to be established in the West. Francis was in charge. When, in 1881, Bishop Griver transferred to the convent the small pro-cathedral and surrounding land, the Children of Mary had an unusual meeting place.¹⁷ As witness to the first movements of the church in the colony, including the first Mercy profession ceremonies, the little building was of historic significance. The *Record* wrote that:

Sister Mary Francis has been the prime mover in the task of preserving this ancient relic of the early days and we trust she shall be successful in disengaging herself from the pecuniary embarrassments which are the usual *crux* of those who exert themselves in doing good.¹⁸

In 1876 Francis went for three years to Subiaco orphanage, where her particular style of administration and flair transformed a dreary institution. In 1883 she went in charge of the new branch house at Geraldton, where she remained until 1885, dealing efficiently with legal difficulties though unable to solve those of human relationships. In 1886 she assumed leadership in the Guildford convent and school, remaining there until 1901. For the last few years of her life, energetic as ever, she contributed to the bazaar economy some of the neatest fancy work that adorned the stalls. She died 12th April, 1909.

Francis Goold's personality and talents helped attract students to the Young Ladies' School. Ursula's words to Governor Fitzgerald in 1853 were prophetic,

for the new school house was soon found not too large. When Governor Weld attended the assisted schools in 1874, there were 158 children in the senior portion and 110 in the junior.¹⁹

As in the other Australian colonies, it was the fashion for the governor and his wife to attend exhibitions or examinations, prize givings, concerts and other school events. The *Fremantle Herald*, on 22nd January, 1870, recorded the attendance of Governor and Mrs Weld at the distribution of prizes at the convent school, Perth. A drama, *The Ides of May*, was performed. Its author was Fr. W. Kelly, brother of the superioress. Governor Robinson attended the public examinations of the Assisted Schools of the Sisters of Mercy, Perth, in April, 1876, and found 146 children "of nice appearance, extremely well-conducted, silent, and orderly". The governor thought that there was a reality about the examinations which was very pleasing.²⁰ The schools consisted of the junior and higher classes. Miss Susan McArdle received the crown for the "most amiable" child in the higher class. Susie McArdle became a great benefactress of the Sisters and boarded with them for many years, together with her sister Annie.

The "First School" or Pension School was also prospering. Governor Robinson attended prize giving ceremonies of this school, which in 1881 had 42 pupils.²¹ The school room was crowded with visitors, "many of whom were of the distinguished gentry of Perth". A musical entertainment accompanied the prize giving, and the Misses Horgan and Smith were competitors for first prize in music. Miss Little received mention for her recitation. Lady Robinson was presented with "a trifling piece of embroidery" as a token of the esteem of the pupils.

At the prize giving of the Sisters' Assisted School in the same year, Governor Robinson gave a eulogy on the sisters and expressed his support for their schools.

I always feel ... a peculiar interest and pleasure in attending the schools which are managed by those good ladies, the Sisters of Mercy, for their management, as I have found in my experience, is such as reflects the highest credit upon themselves, and such as confers the utmost advantage upon the schools in their charge and upon the community. The system of assisted schools, from which religious instruction is not excluded, has my warmest sympathy.

... I am always glad to manifest that sympathy by giving them every support and encouragement within my power... I believe this is one of the first assisted schools established in the colony, and it has gone on progressing and prospering steadily ever since, and I feel that it is doing a great work in the community. Although other educational establishments have, during recent years, sprung up amongst us, we do not forget that the Convent school, held in another part of this building, was the pioneer educational establishment, I believe, in the colony. It has been conducted admirably... and also has my warmest sympathy...²²

The buildings at Perth, were, in these decades, housing nuns, orphan girls, and school pupils (assisted — junior and senior sections; pension). Extensions were obviously needed. Both the 1849 and the 1853 buildings were becoming more and more inadequate.

As the living premises of the sisters had been gradually encroached upon by the school and the orphan girls, the foundation stone of a new convent building was laid on 11th June, 1868, by Bishop Griver. There was a hiatus in construction for some time, through lack of funds, but eventually, by October 1871, it was ready for habitation. The old dwelling place vacated by the sisters was remodelled for the use of the orphans. Bishop Griver contributed generously to the building of the new convent and remodelling of the orphanage, as did also the New Norcia monks. One contribution from Griver consisted of a bequest by a lady in Spain (at Griver's entreaty) of 200 pounds. She stipulated that the orphans say one part of the Rosary for her soul.²³

The new convent was an impressive sight. The first floor consisted of a spacious community room, novitiate, two reception rooms, kitchen and refectory. One wing of the building formed a chapel. A very lovely carved wooden staircase led up to a second floor which housed fourteen cells for the sisters' sleeping accommodation, as well as an infirmary overlooking the chapel, with folding doors and gallery so that sick sisters might assist at religious services of the community.

The staircase was a particular feature. The *Illustrated Fremantle Herald* of 27th March, 1872, described it thus:

The staircase, which is screened off from the vestibule by very elaborate tracery Gothic doors of the decorated style, is composed of three flights, each flight having beautiful massive newels, neatly panelled and enriched with tracery, and carved terminals and drops. The balustrade consists of open tracery panelled work, enriched with religious emblems, carved from various coloured woods of this colony, and beautifully arranged. The whole of the stairs is composed of native timber, carefully chosen and selected as to colour and contrast, and well arranged, jarrah being the principal wood employed.

The building was entirely of home-made bricks, and is one of only three such buildings now remaining in Perth, the other two being the Town Hall and Wesley Chapel. The style of architecture was "a free treatment of the gothic" and has been called a true example of the Irish architecture. Opinion of the day considered that elegance and stability had been achieved by wisely avoiding meretricious show. Admirably situated, in close proximity to the Roman Catholic Cathedral, and commanding a fine prospect in every direction, it added a new feature to the attraction of the city. The contractor, Joseph Nunan, one of the Fenian political convicts, deserved to be honourably commended.²⁴

Joseph Nunan had been arrested in Kerry for anti-British activity, escaped during the train journey, and re-arrested in London. He had been sentenced to seven years servitude. When pardoned in May, 1869, he and the other Fenian convicts had little more than the clothes they were wearing when taken. Joseph Nunan, however, soon established himself as a builder and architect. In 1871, he married into a well-to-do established family when he wed Maria Farrelly, daughter of schoolmaster Terence Farrelly, who had come out with the Brady party in 1846. Nunan erected many fine buildings in West Australia, the York Catholic church receiving particular acclaim.²⁵

*Joseph Nunan,
Architect-contractor
for Convent building.*



*Chairs used by the Weld children during Sunday Mass in
St. Mary's Cathedral.*



Bishop Martin Griver, 1862-1886.



St. Mary's Cathedral (1865).

The chapel in the new convent was planned to accommodate 25 sisters, but over the subsequent years often had to crowd in a hundred. It was beautified by a gift from the Welds of three very fine stained glass windows incorporating the Weld coat-of-arms.²⁶ The windows depicted Joseph, a crowned Mary, and Anthony of Padua with the child Jesus.

The *Fremantle Herald*, which reported the growth of the convent complex, was remarkably sympathetic to the sisters. The sisters had given up their own convent to receive female orphans.

Praise was due to the Roman Catholics — while the Protestants were arguing about the principles upon which Charitable Institutions were to be based, the Roman Catholic priesthood and missionaries have practically carried them out, and in a manner far beyond the means at their immediate command. Lay and clerical Roman Catholic missionaries — by the rigid observance of their vows and the indefatigable discharge of their ministerial duties, obtained, from a comparatively poor community, means to effect a greater amount of social good than the whole body of the Protestant clergy, to say nothing of a wealthy Protestant community...

The liberality (of the public) was due as much to the respect entertained for these excellent ladies as to feelings of commiseration for the condition of these neglected social waifs.²⁷

By 1893, Mother M. Aloysius was writing to the Lord Abbot of New Norcia that she was "presently building a new wing to the convent".²⁸ Growth in school numbers made it advisable to separate the two schools, "the sixpenny end" and "the shilling end" as they were beginning to be called. Consequently, new buildings were erected for St Joseph's School and the Young Ladies' School.

Both were blessed and formally opened on 15th August, 1896.²⁹ An advertisement of 1903 still calls the latter Young Ladies' College, but adds a sub-title "A High School for Girls".³⁰ However, in the style of the day, both schools educated girls in day and boarding schools from Grade 1 to Higher Certificate, an Adelaide University examination which was availed of until the University of W.A. opened in 1913. Boys in the kindergarten and primary grades up to Grade 2 were also taken.

In 1896, after the construction of the new building, the fees at the Young Ladies' School were raised to ten pounds per quarter for boarders and one pound for day pupils, with extra for such subjects as French, Music, Drawing, Singing, flower making. Five shillings was added for stationery.³¹ As state aid had been abolished in W.A. in 1895, some increase in income was imperative.

The construction activity for the "High Class Boarding school and Day school" had taken place on Cathedral Hill, on the east side of the convent and facing south. The building thus commanded a good view of the Swan River from its verandahs and balconies. On the ground floor a tiled entrance hall opened into two reception rooms (a large drawing room and the music room for the advanced students, together with a second music room). A handsome staircase of polished jarrah led upstairs. With some eighteen rooms, there were dormitories for thirty boarders and classrooms for 100 pupils. Materials were

Cottesloe freestone with Sydney freestone dressings and mullioned windows. Flooring was Jarrah timber, the roof was iron. The design was Gothic.³² The *Record* claimed that the increase in fees left "the good Sisters a very small margin (if any) of profit. We may add that ...the increased accommodation ...and the facilities the Sisters now possess of instructing the pupils, leave nothing to be desired"

The two schools were growing in splendour. Lady Forrest officiated at the 1898 annual prize distribution of St. Joseph's School in the Town Hall, and the Colonial Secretary, Attorney-General, Chief Inspector of Schools and two Inspectors all attended. Reverend Father Stritch in his address reinforced the traditional role for women.

The influence of the woman over life was infinite. It had been well said that given a good woman and the world might be reformed ... their girls so trained that each should become the queen of the household — their influence would then be felt far and wide.³³

The Young Ladies' College concert for that year seems to have been a much quieter affair. Held in the schoolroom, there was no list of VIPs as for St. Joseph's. The abolition of State Aid to denominational schools in 1895 makes the high-powered attendance at what was previously the assisted school all the more interesting.

It was important for the Catholics, at this stage in the colony's development, to show that they did not "stand aloof from the rest of the body politic in matters of common social interest" The *Record* had deliberated on such matters more than once. In 1877, for example, (6 9 1877) it had recalled that the Catholics had felt it necessary, on occasion, to protest antagonism to the policy or administration of the government. But it also wished to warmly give honour to whom honour was due and to acknowledge the benefits of the departing Governor Robinson's administration.

In particular, the representative gathering at the Assisted Schools of the Sisters of Mercy, which was assembled to witness the farewell to Governor Robinson, might be regarded as

indicative of the public estimation of the value of these schools, as well as significant of the beneficial effect of our Elementary Education system, in drawing within its influence and harmoniously blending together for the common good, the otherwise repellent members of the body politic.

Vicar General Father Gibney addressed Robinson as a fellow Irishman.

He was proud of being an Irishman. He loved his native land, and would delight to see it 'a free, prosperous and independent country' But he was nevertheless a loyal and willing British subject — and if asked — would he wish to see Ireland ruled by a French Republic... No! By a German or Austrian Emperor? No! By a Spanish Monarch? With all due respect to His lordship the Bishop, decidedly No! He would deprecate a national connection with any other European power, and remain as now a willingly loyal British subject...

The Governor, in his reply, claimed he had endeavored to mete out fair and impartial justice.



Bishop Matthew Gibney, 1886-1910.

Orphanage Register .

For the children received from the Poor house the Government engaged to pay for their maintenance and clothing the sum of 8/- per diem for each child living at the time of their transmission from the Poor house; the Articles for their use which were necessary excepting beds and bedsteads which were promised but not yet given.

1868		<u>List of things received</u>	
February	24	11	pieces of shirting
		11	Blankets
		11	Blanket frames
		32	Woolen gloves
		32	Flannel & footliners
		32	Underwear
		72	Shirts, frocks & jumpers
		11	Woolen socks
		4	Woolen caps
		4	Woolen boots
		1	Woolen nightgown
		11	Woolen trousers
		11	Woolen coats & overcoats
		1	Woolen nightgown
		1	Woolen nightgown
		1	Woolen nightgown
		1	Woolen nightgown
25	6		Blankets

Page from 1868 Orphanage Register listing items received from the Poor House.

Melbourne Australia
 Colonial Secretary's Office
 17th February 1868
 Sir,
 I have the honor to acknowledge
 your letter of the 10th instant relating
 for the information of His Excellency
 the Governor that the Sisters of Mercy
 are prepared to take into their premises
 the female children of the Roman
 Catholic Faith now in the East Port
 House in connection with the same
 and is respectful of Southern that
 visited on them on the 2nd instant.
 Yours Very Truly
 Wm. Hargrave
 Secy

Letter from Colonial Secretary's Office giving permission for female Catholic orphans to be cared for by the Sisters of Mercy.

355 Government House Perth.
 8 February 1867
 Very Reverend Sir,
 I have the honor by deers
 of His Royal Highness The Duke of
 Edinburgh to transmit to you the sum of
 forty Pounds as a Donation from His
 Royal Highness to the Roman Catholic
 orphanage.
 I have the honor to be
 Sir
 your obedient servant
 The Very Reverend
 Wm. Brown
 Acting Governor

The Duke of Edinburgh supports the good work of the Orphanage.

He must, however, pay the important Church to which he had referred the tribute of his sincere admiration of the admirable manner in which its educational and charitable institutions were managed, in every part of the Empire in which he had had the opportunity of observing them — more especially where their management was entrusted to communities of religious ladies, like the good and useful Sisters of Mercy... But in no part of the world had the salutary and refining influence of those devoted ladies been more apparent to him and productive of more beneficial effect than in this colony.

The Governor's toast to these "good Sisters of Mercy" was responded to by Mr. Smythe. Like Governor's wives and other female appendages to important dignitaries, the Sisters did not speak in public. Nevertheless, it was clear that the schools and other institutions which they admirably conducted were important instruments in the construction of a young society. And, on the whole, their impact was to unify rather than to divide. This impression is reinforced by events such as when Bishop Parry "and several important Anglicans" including Lady Leake who was a frequent visitor, toured the Girls' Orphanage at Perth and also the new convent and the schools there.³⁴

One of the long remembered names from the Young Ladies' College of this period was that of Sister M. de Sales (Esther) Byrne. Born in Dublin 1832, Esther had become a postulant with the Dundalk Mercy community but had joined Ursula and Anne Xavier on their return to Australia in 1851. She was to make an invaluable contribution as administrator and educationist for many, many years. As the first Sister of Mercy to celebrate sixty years of profession in Australia, the *Record* entitled her "The Greatest Pioneer of the West" Five years later, at her death, it asserted that she was "without doubt, the greatest woman this state has ever seen"

Mary de Sales was an exceptional teacher at both the Superior and Middle Schools, the former often recalled as "Sister M. de Sales' Ladies' School" She was looked upon in her day as the most efficient teacher in the land, according to the *Record*.³⁵ "Thousands of young girls in every walk of life sat at the feet of this Gamaliel among women" Her pupils were wizards in computation, surpassing in speed and dexterity the "Brunsviga" — the most up-to-date calculating machine at that time. Her talents extended also to other cultural areas. She is credited with having introduced the first Catholic lending library in Perth, St. Anne's Library, some of its books still remaining in Victoria Square.

Her creativity, charm, and loving concern extended to others outside her classes. A distinguishing characteristic was her matter-of-factness. She was practical in visiting the sick and the poor. Her piety was imbued with commonsense. In Toodyay (where she was for one year) and in Rottnest (where the Sisters holidayed in the Governor's Lodge, at least in the early 1880s), when no priest came to celebrate Mass, "Mother de Sales would assemble the congregation and have a "spiritual" Mass".³⁶ Despite blindness in her later years, she instructed converts and continued to care for the sick and afflicted. In this woman of "magical personality" the faith and spirit of the founding sisters could be seen alive and shining.

JULY 1883.—30th Week.

From Monday 5th to Wednesday 4th March 88
 Weather very changeable. We had to spend the
 greater part of this time in the saloon. The
 Captain sent out a wicker arm chair some
 20 minutes but in less than 10 minutes it was
 in the saloon, which seems to be one of the most useful
 articles on board. The bowl of the saloon is open

on the 24th Tuesday (206-101)
 as the it was immediately taken from one of the
 sailors who quickly repaired it with canvas & a
 polished it. We both went down & back with
 the it & it was dropped on top. I also got a piece of
 canvas & it was put on, with leather & when finished
 looked really well. We also got a cover cut for us
 much as we got a piece of canvas already gone.

25 Wednesday (206-101) S. Juan.
 have have been told that that invaluable
 canvas was offered to make others instead.
 Thursday March 5th to 8th Today we steamed
 in a little hope at a distance of about 40
 miles. We would all have been with
 us had the Lady Louisa called there, we could
 have then to our friends. We did not see a single

Portion of page from Mary McEnroe's diary kept on board the
 "Lady Louisa"

Jan 7th 1883

My dear Stewart

A happy New Year

to you and yours. I will not, please

God, forget your daughter. It must

be a welcome trial to you to lose

through

her, that you give her to God.

I am always glad to hear

from you. As to me my health is

good but I am very weak

Yours affectly

John H. Card Newman



Above: M. de Sales Byrne.
 Left: Letter from Cardinal
 Newman to James Stewart,
 father of Mother John Stewart.

Another teacher of interest in the late 1860s and early 1870s was Sister M. Elizabeth Hercy. Born in Berkshire, England, Elizabeth had gone to Baggot Street in 1842 for her novitiate and had returned to London to be professed by the Bermondsey community in 1844. Within a few years, she had returned to Dublin. Her former Novice Mistress, Mother Vincent Whitty, was Reverend Mother there at the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854. She responded to a request to send a group of nursing sisters to the battlefield. Among them was Sister Elizabeth Hercy.

Elizabeth followed Mother Vincent to Brisbane, where the latter had gone as founding Reverend Mother in 1861. However, Mother Vincent was deposed by the autocratic Bishop James Quinn and Elizabeth decided, in mid-1868, to move to Perth. There her many gifts were exceedingly welcome. Her years with the community were very fruitful in maintaining a high standard in the schools and in forming novices as their Novice Mistress. She is said to have had an exceptional sense of honour and justice in all things. Elizabeth, says Brisbane historian Frances O'Donoghue, had a "blue-chip manner", somewhat muted by the years, but still discernible when she diligently visited the poor and the sick. Gestures with her umbrella to oncoming traffic signified effectively "in that old blue-chip manner" that she wished to cross the street.

After almost ten years at Victoria Square, Sr Elizabeth returned to Brisbane, where she died in 1901, nine years after her great friend Mother Vincent. In her 81st year she had belatedly received recognition of her services in the Crimea by being awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal.

Elizabeth Hercy was not the only Brisbane Mercy who came to Perth through the old Dublin connection with Mother Vincent Whitty. In April 1876, Bishop James O'Quinn of Brisbane wrote to Griver in Perth requesting hospitality for a time.³⁷

The Sister being sent is a very lady-like person, in every respect a very agreeable Sister in community, and wonderfully successful as an Infant-School Teacher. She has a crochet, however, which she cannot overcome, viz, an ...objection to undergo an examination by the authorities of our Public Education Department.

Her Superior had exempted her but she was not satisfied with herself, and had abstained from the Sacraments. Mother Vincent Whitty was the Mother of Novices in Baggot Street when the Superior of the Convent in Perth made her novitiate. "She thinks, therefore, she can take this liberty..." By some kind of mix-up, Mother Vincent Whitty's letter to Reverend Mother Aloysius Kelly arrived the same time as the sister.

The sister in question was Gonzaga Rafter. Born Mary Teresa Rafter, in Dublin, 1839, she had joined the Mercies in Hull, Yorkshire in 1859. She responded to recruitment by Mother Vincent for Brisbane in 1872. She had tried to go to Sydney later but had been refused.

In 1883 she went to Bunbury as part of the new branch house. The new community found the people of Bunbury very kind, but there was some kind of trouble with the parish priest, Father Hugh Brady, and much suffering

resulted. In June, 1887, her great friend Sister Placida Hayes, first superior of Bunbury, died. After spending two months at the Fremantle convent, Gonzaga sailed "for the Colonies" from Albany, 7th December, 1887. She seems to have returned to Queensland, to the Congregation fairly recently established around the Rockhampton Mercy community, where she died in 1923.

Before the end of the century, another of the long reigning Mother Superiors of Victoria Square made her appearance on the administrative scene. Mother Benedict Murphy was first elected in 1898 and served as Superior until 1910.³⁸ She was re-elected a further three times, 1916, 1925, and 1928, but resigned in December of the latter year. In all she served 19 years in the position of Mother Superior.

On her death in June, 1930, she had lived in the convent at Victoria Square for 47 years. Her energy and enthusiasm, her ability to use the help of others, and her deep sense of faith had helped build "The Square" into a centre of note. She was particularly attentive to the little orphan girls in the Hay Street building, of whom she had had been given charge at Perth soon after her reception, and in whom she continued to take a lively interest when they were transferred to Subiaco. She also believed strongly in looking after the material welfare of the boarders at The Square, and was remembered for the many feastday treats she provided. She was "a Sister of great capacity and energy" with a human touch. It was written of her that

the unruly and the outlaw found in her a sure refuge, her tactful kindness invariably leading them to submission. Nor did her interest cease when schooldays were over, but she followed them to the homes they made. Among Mother Benedict's most cherished possessions were photos of family groups wherein figured the little ones whom she playfully styled her grandchildren.

As an administrator, she had that "power so valuable to superiors of discerning ability and of giving full scope to the possessor of it. Never did she refuse encouragement and aid to any project submitted to her for the advancement of education, primary or secondary."³⁹

Branching Out

From the mid-1850s, there were numbers and energy enough at Perth, to expand into the country. By the end of the century, six branch houses had been opened outside of Perth. The first branch house at Fremantle had lasted less than two years, not on account of any failure by the Sisters to keep it going but because of an arbitrary decision of Bishop Brady. The next branch house, at Guildford, was on their own initiative and, after a hiatus in its operation, became permanent.

Fremantle — A Convent Manqué

It was in 1847, when a school and for a short time, a branch convent had been established at Fremantle.

The school had been started with about twenty children in 1847 by Bishop Brady. He had engaged a young woman, Miss Cresswell, to teach, paying her forty pounds per annum until the sisters could come and take charge of

a branch-house there. Brady procured a building suitable for a convent in September, 1847, and Ursula and Anne Xavier went there for short periods to prepare it. It consisted of a centre and two wings and housed, eventually, two private rooms for the sisters, the chapel, and the school, with a House of Mercy for the orphans in an attached apartment. It was opened officially on the feast of St. Francis Xavier, December 3rd, 1847, and was named after that saint. To it went Sisters M. Aloysius Kelly and Ignatia de la Hoyde and the black and white orphan girls. They remained, however, only until May, 1849, when Bishop Brady suddenly told Ursula to bring back the two sisters and the children, as it was too great an expense.

Then, under Bishop Serra, the sisters tried to re-establish the branch convent there. Ursula wrote, in November 1855,⁴⁰ that they had been desirous for the last three or four years to establish a branch at Fremantle. It had a larger population than Perth, and was the principal Convict Station with a numerous pensioner force. They had begged Bishop Serra to let them take charge of the Girls' School, taught by a young woman. The sisters, she said, would cost less. The Almanack advertised the school as under the care and direction of the Sisters of Mercy. They did, indeed, go to it from time to time, but they had no control over the teacher. She always appealed from them to the bishop, who encouraged her to do so.

Even though the bishop refused their request to take over the actual running of the school, he wrote to the Propagation of the Faith for additional funds to run it. During his visit to Europe at this time, he brought back a group of four French Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, saying claimed Ursula "that he was forced to bring them *because (the Sisters of Mercy) had refused to go to Fremantle*"

His Lordship's introduction to the colony of French sisters was seen as further proof that Bishop Serra was "not favourable to Irish Ecclesiastics or Religious" The sisters feared that Irish women would not come to join the Perth Mercies through fear of the bishop. They had heard in a letter that Irish prelates opposed the sending of priests or religious to this colony, "because Bishop Serra was held in such bad repute"

Up the Swan River to Guildford

In 1855 there were thirteen members in the Victoria Square community. It seemed time to divide. Ursula Frayne and Baptist O'Donnell visited Guildford one Sunday to see what could be done about forming a community there. Some of the Catholics had been requesting a convent school. At the entrance to the town they noticed two cottages which they marked as a possible residence. About a week after their visit, they received a petition signed by all the Catholics and some of the non-Catholics of Guildford, asking the sisters to open a convent there.

Guildford was the third town established in the Swan River Colony, at a spot where Lieutenant James Stirling had landed to draw fresh water for his ship in 1827. Stirling was so impressed with the richness of the countryside that later when he returned to found the new colony in 1829, it was in Guildford

where he sited his estate. He wrote glowingly of the rich alluvial river flats, the brilliant foliage, the blue mountains in the background, the bright birds.

Guildford was about ten miles from Perth. It became an important river port, with a regular ferry from Fremantle. Goods for inland areas would be unloaded at Guildford and products from these areas, such as sandalwood, would be loaded for the return voyage. Passengers travelled in flat bottom boats. Land connection was by a bush track, a far cry from the busy Guildford Road now linking it with the metropolis. But with wildflowers in spring, grapes and wheat farms beginning to spring up throughout the district, lovely views of Perth in the not so far distance, rich aboriginal lore about the dream serpent in the spring where Stirling had drawn his water, the ten miles there and back was not so very laborious for the sisters, who would sometimes walk them in a day without seeing a single person. Occasionally they might encounter ticket-of-leave men who would "earnestly entreat (them) to be allowed to carry (their) parcels".⁴¹

On going up to take possession of the two cottages they had noticed, the five sisters arrived in Guildford by boat. It was August, 1855. In charge was Baptist O'Donnell, with Ignatia and Evangelista. Ursula and another sister came to help them settle in. The two cottages they were renting belonged to a Lieutenant du Cane, the rent to be 24 pounds per annum. Du Cane promised that the cottages would be cleaned and in good order by 30th August, on which day the Sisters would take up residence.

On arrival, they found to their dismay one cottage in disuse and locked up — as it had been for months; the other cottage still occupied and the occupant in no hurry to leave. However, the townspeople came to their assistance and helped sweep, scrub and dust the vacant cottage. Two of the five returned to Perth while the remaining three prepared for Sunday Mass the following day. They recorded a rather sleepless insect-ridden night.

The next morning Lieutenant du Cane turned up and promised to send six workmen the following morning. He was true to this promise and within a week the second cottage was ready. A communicating door was inserted between two of the rooms in the cottages, which were close together, and a residence of eight rooms was the result. Half was given over to public use, the other half reserved for the use of the sisters. The front rooms became chapel (used for public Mass on Sundays), school, reception-come-community room, cell or dormitory. The others were kitchen-come-refectory, cell for two sisters, and two school rooms. School desks and forms and blackboards had to be made, and other requisites procured.

The new convent was called St Teresa's and was blessed 8th September, 1853, by Fr Salvador Ribaya OSB. In these simple rooms, school opened 24th September, 1855, feast of Our Lady of Mercy, their patroness, for infant boys and girls, and older girls. Thirty children attended. The Anglican minister, Rev. Darcus Williams, in charge of the government school, complained that the sisters had taken away almost all his girls and several boys under seven. The nuns had "the advantage of teaching needlework" The government school now had only fifteen boys and three girls.

Bishop Serra had not been at all supportive. He had refused to give any assistance, and demanded a written declaration that the sisters would not ask him for any additional aid for Guildford. Ursula decided initially against making the foundation, but this made the bishop angry. When they did make it, he continued to be niggardly. He refused to allow them a tabernacle for the permanent reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, though under pressure from the other priests, he did allow it for a limited period of three months. He instructed the sisters to come into Perth for confession every week unless they provided a confessional box. Considering that a visit to Perth frequently entailed a walk of over twenty miles, the bishop was far from generous.

Guildford became a refuge for Ursula herself in the following year when the troubles with Bishop Serra and a pressing invitation from Bishop Goold of Melbourne to found a Convent of Mercy there led her to relinquish the office of Mother Superior. Her resignation took place from 5th July 1856. Immediately after, she departed for Guildford, taking Mother M. Anne Xavier Dillon, Sisters M. Joseph Sherlock, Aloysius Kelly, Francis Goold, Magdalene Dillon and three lay sisters Catherine Strahan, Placida Hayes, and Teresa Spillane. While there they renovated the convent, got the schools already established well filled, and opened a third school, for wealthier pupils whose fees would help support their work for the poor.⁴²

Ursula and two companions Anne Xavier and Joseph Sherlock left Guildford for Melbourne 22nd January 1857. Not wishing to stay in Perth overnight, they were waiting for a boat to sail from Fremantle. When it did come, Governor Kennedy sent his personal carriage to take the sisters and their luggage to the boat.⁴³ The school at Guildford seems to have been closed temporarily.

It reopened March 1858, in a cottage rented from Mr Luke on the Perth-York road. School was taught in a nearby cottage, where also Mass was said. Sisters M. Ignatia and Teresa Spillane were in charge, while an Aboriginal girl from Perth helped in the house. Later, Sr M. Magdalene Dillon replaced Sr M. Ignatia. However, when Mother Baptist O'Donnell lay dying in Perth in early 1862, and the four institutions there were demanding attention, the sisters were withdrawn from Guildford. Mother Baptist died on 9th March, 1862.

The school was not resumed until after the railway between Fremantle and Guildford had been completed and opened for passenger transport in March 1881. Sisters Angela Costello and Bernard Brennan were the first staff. Initially, the sisters travelled by train from Perth each day. School was conducted in the church in James Street, originally Mangles Street after Ellen Mangles, wife of Governor Stirling. In 1885,⁴⁴ the building which had been used by convicts working on the roads was occupied as a school by the Sisters, the nuns living in the Head Warden's quarters in the old prison yard, the school being held in the old Convict Ward. This arrangement lasted till 1896.

In 1896, the sisters had to vacate these premises and a neat lowset brick bungalow was built as a convent in the church grounds, to the left of the church-school. It contained "seven rooms, with a front and back verandah,

and was built of local bricks and jarrah, with cement foundations. It was called St. Mary's.⁴⁵

By the Lake — Subiaco

In the 1870s, the Sisters at Perth extended their labours to a new site, two and a half to three miles west of the town. Like New Norcia, Subiaco was to become a kind of symbol for the church in W.A. Over the years, many visitors arrived, especially for the annual Corpus Christi procession which wound a mile or more around its paths. Young women entered, attracted by Mercy in action there. The notion of "spiritual motherhood" assumed, for many Mercy sisters, a more physical reality at Subiaco. Fund-raising efforts helped with community building within the whole church. Bazaars lasting several days and in one memorable year a whole month put the Orphanage in the public notice.⁴⁶ The *Record* claimed that, perhaps, no effort of Catholic charity in the colony had secured so large an amount of public favour and general sympathy as the establishment of the Orphanages.⁴⁷

Subiaco was a place of sand, swamp, bush and hills overlooking and adjoining two large lakes which were home to masses of sedges and myriads of birds. Before the invasion of the Europeans, Swan river Aborigines are known to have gathered around Lake Monger for summer feasts on water fowl and reed plants.⁴⁸ Dr Brady had bought between 200 and 300 acres of land there. When Serra took over the diocese in 1852, he decided to erect an urban monastery on the site and called it New Subiaco from "sub lago" or "by the lake" in memory of St. Benedict's first monastery in Italy. In 1853, Serra bought a further 25 acres on the shore of Herdsmans Lake. The monks lived right beside the lake in a wooden cottage with an old chapel and garden. In 1860 Griver purchased in Serra's name a further fifty-six acres.

At New Subiaco, Serra put to work most of the monk-brothers to build a monastery on the top of the hill overlooking what is now Lake Monger, and to landscape the surrounding areas and plant an olive grove, vineyard, almonds and fig trees, and vegetable garden. The project was a source of conflict between Serra and Salvado, who still held to the original aim of helping the Aborigines and resented Serra's inroads into New Norcia for diocesan resources. The massive monastic building was completed on 2nd June, 1859. By this time the property was some 470 acres.

When, by 1862, Serra's resignation as bishop had been accepted, the monks were given the choice of staying at Subiaco or returning to New Norcia where Salvado was bishop and abbot. Thirteen chose New Norcia and six remained at Subiaco. These six continued to look after the farm, vineyards, and orchards or to serve the various parishes of Perth as priests. In 1885 Bishop Griver bought more land in the vicinity. This, with a Crown Grant of 1883, brought the area to 1073 acres one rood.

The monastery had been largely empty for some time when Griver, as diocesan administrator, proposed to Salvado when he returned from Europe in 1859, that the Benedictines use Subiaco as a boys' orphanage. Salvado wrote: "I tried to make my negative answer as reasonable and palatable as I could".⁴⁹ Salvado's heart was in New Norcia.



Above: Benedictine Monastery, 1859, which for many years formed part of St. Joseph's Orphanage.

Right: Mr Stuart Patterson, generous benefactor of St. Joseph's Orphanage and St. Vincent's Foundling Home.





*Left: M. Ursula Dunne,
first Sister in Charge at St.
Joseph's Girls' Orphanage.*

*Below: St. Vincent's
Foundling Home, 1914.*



Just before Serra left Australia in 1859, he had handed over to the diocese "St. Benedict's of New Subiaco" during a ceremony that took place, in Serra's own words, "with a solemnity never seen in that country" The monastery was a three storied stone building, walls three feet thick. It was, Serra continued, "standing on a most beautiful hill and overlooking two majestic lakes" It was, indeed, a structure of great solidity. One hundred and ten feet above the level of Monger's Lake, it was a rectangular building 110 feet in length, 28 feet in width, and height 47 feet. It faced north-south, and had a shingle roof.

Although rebuffed by Salvado in his hopes for a boys' orphanage, Griver and the St. Vincent de Paul Society continued planning. And, in February, 1872, the monastery began to house St. Vincent's Orphanage for boys. Twelve boys between the ages of four and eleven years were transferred from the Poor House in Perth to Subiaco. In July of that year, among those who cared for the eighteen orphans there were, according to Griver's correspondence, "some Irish nuns. In addition the nuns have 32 female orphans." Certified manager was Father Matthew Gibney, Vicar General of the diocese.

In 1876, there was a public scandal when the lay teacher, Whiteley, had severely belted a couple of the boys at the orphanage, an action apparently condoned by Father Carreras, OSB, who still lived at the monastery. One of the boys had run away.⁵⁰ Griver asked the Mercies to take over the orphanage entirely. Sr M Francis Goold was placed in charge with two sisters, Camillus Reddin and Joseph Regan, to assist.

Camillus (Bridget) was born in County Clare in 1838, emigrated to Western Australia in 1859 on the "Hamilla Mitchell" and worked as a laundress for three years. She was professed as a lay sister in 1865. She stayed on at Subiaco until her death in June, 1891. She was the first sister to be buried in the cemetery there.

Mary Joseph (Catherine) Regan entered from W.A. in 1870. She was born in County Cork in 1851, but left Ireland aged four. Educated at Perth convent, she ended up spending most of her life there. But one of her first assignments after being professed in 1873 was to help rescue Subiaco. With "artistic hands",⁵¹ Sister Mary Joseph had great skill in needlework and embroidery. In later life, she worked, "affectionately and kindly" as Cathedral Sacristan and Convent Portress. One past pupil of the Square recalls going up many times to the back (sewing) verandah to have her "Sinn Fein" costume fitted by Sister Joseph.

The boys remained in the care of the nuns until the Christian Brothers took over in November, 1897. Mother M. Evangelista O'Reilly had followed Francis Goold after three years, and stayed there for another four. However, it was her replacement, Sr M. Angela Costello, who made her mark on the establishment. For fourteen years Angela, a Bunbury-born sister, administered the boys' orphanage with much energy and dedication. When the Brothers and boys, in their turn, moved out of Subiaco to Clontarf, in 1901, the girl orphans were transferred from Victoria Square to Subiaco. The long history of the present Catherine McAuley Family Centre had begun. Francis Goold and Evangelista O'Reilly are now buried at Subiaco, their graves

a reminder of, and a lasting link with the first difficult days of the 1870s.

The Mercies' coming to the orphanage at Subiaco apparently meant a transformation in its atmosphere and organisation. The October, 1876 issue of the *Inquirer* had given much adverse publicity to the sorry affair of the teacher and the boys. The following issue, in November, praised the Sisters with great ardour and painted a rosy picture of the future.

No other step could so completely restore that confidence which ... was so near being destroyed. We believe that under the fostering care of the Sisters of Mercy, the Orphanage will regain its prestige.

The good motives and charitable deeds of the Sisters of Mercy enjoy a world-wide reputation... we can only speak of them with the profoundest respect, and esteem them for their deeds of mercy and worth.

The editorial of the July 18th, 1878 edition of the *Record* reflected on the report of the Inspector of Charitable Institutions and the "golden opinions" the "good Sisters of Mercy" had won by their heroic devotion to the service of the poor and helpless orphans.

All the gifts that Francis Goold had displayed in the Young Ladies' School were now being devoted to building up the morale and efficiency of the boys' home. When in her eighties, Francis would reminisce that the boys were easier to manage than the girls.⁵² Under the Sisters of Mercy, spacious verandahs were added to the old three-storied monastery, and portions of these were enclosed with glazed windows. The Sisters cultivated a garden, vines, poultry, cows, and pigs. The staff was increased to three sisters, two female lay assistants, and one man. As well as their ordinary academic and religious schooling, the boys were trained in trades and farming. Regularly, on a short term basis, sisters from the mother house helped out. Soon the number of boys increased to sixty. Visitors to the monastery, such as Chief Justice Henry Wrensfordsley and his sister, or Governor and Lady Robinson, were impressed by the "elegant hospitality of the Sisters of Mercy" and by the lack of uniformity in the surroundings. The boys were, for example, comfortably and neatly clothed in every variety of tweed suits.⁵³ There was "an entire absence of anything suggestive of pauper or workhouse treatment or discipline" Father Gibney, replying to his feastday address, claimed that the Institution was so satisfactory in every way and the children comfortable and happy because the Sisters of Mercy devoted more than parental care to the training and education of the orphan children.⁵⁴ At this time, there were some 47 boys, 32 of whom received a government allowance, the rest being supported by church and charity.

Francis Goold's touch is discernible in the 1877 farewell to Governor Robinson. Present were a long list of civil dignitaries. From the boundary fence to the principal entrance of the old monastery, were triumphal arches of palms, profusely decorated with wild flowers and flanked and surmounted by appropriate bannerets. The Governor was met at the first arch by the bishop, managers, inmates and guests, the central banneret proclaiming "Céad Míle Fáilte" The farewell address was exquisitely printed in the institution on brilliant blue satin, with gold lace border and outer edging of white silk lace, and was enclosed in a portfolio richly decorated and suitably

inscribed. The address was well read by an orphan and included what was probably Gibney's observation:

The good Sisters of Mercy will tell you that we seldom or never willingly give them trouble, while we can assure Your Excellency that they are more than mothers to us".⁵⁵

When Governor Robinson was farewelled a second time, in 1883, Gibney established one free place for ever to be called "Governor Robinson's place" This was to commemorate the governor's "clemency" and "munificence" in "never rejecting any, however numerous the applications" for help.⁵⁶

The governor was not absolute, however, in his power to be munificent. During this period, Father Gibney, as Manager, decided to drain a portion of the shallow lake on the property and so reclaim a field for growing maize, oats, and other grains. The surrounding land was too sandy and poor to produce much. Having obtained Governor Robinson's permission, Gibney made some expensive preparations which all came to nought with the opposition of property owners in the vicinity of the lake. His dream of an extensive farm died.

An even greater setback occurred when an electric storm, 23rd April, 1879, did massive damage to the monastery, and struck several people in various parts of the building. Bennie the cook and one of the sisters praying in the chapel, as well as some of the children, were struck unconscious to the ground but soon recovered unhurt. Two boys in the dining room were severely struck. One of these, Francis Burns, was killed.⁵⁷ Only the massive structure of the walls helped the building withstand the shock. The lightning had struck in several places, and there had been no conductor. Everyone was devastated. Gibney immediately mounted a major appeal for help, visiting the eastern colonies and preaching "charity sermons"

In May of that year Francis Goold was succeeded by Evangelista O'Reilly. The orphanage continued to give satisfaction, it seems. The *Record* of 26th July, 1883, devoted a full page to the impressions of the Governors, Chief Justices, Inspector of Schools and other prominent people who visited it over the years. The annual report of the Certified Manager to the Colonial Secretary gave details:

Number of boys received from the date of opening, 1872, to the present month 186. Of these, 125 have been Government Inmates... 61 have been admitted and kept by private funds.

The boys usually are let out at fourteen, generally passing in IV standard. Carpentering is a necessary part of their training. Among the other industries carried on in the institution were... printing (*The Record* Printing Press), olive oil manufacturing, and gardening.

Among the boys who had left in the service of settlers, 72; at trades, 20; sent to parents or friends, 28; ... there are boys from this institution in every part of the colony. The reports that reach us are generally good...

The health of the boys is good. We have little or no sickness. There is no dietary scale. It had been debated in the early stages but the ruling was that the children should not be limited, but there was to be no waste allowed.⁵⁸

The reference to olive oil is an interesting reminder of the Benedictine origin of Subiaco. The monks had planted a grove of olive trees on the property, and for many years afterwards these produced first grade olive oil. While it was some years before it became a source of income, the oil was a valuable addition to diet — it was alleged the boys grew to prefer it on their bread rather than butter — and to hair care. It had other uses in church and kitchen. In 1881, about 100 gallons were produced and oil from Subiaco won first prize at the Exhibition, even though the “appliances for extracting were of a rude description”.⁵⁹ These “rude” appliances continued for many decades. When the fruit was ready, most of the older boys — and later girls — lent a hand. Large cloths or sacking were spread under the trees and the fruit which did not fall after giving the tree a good shaking was obtained by climbing. Then it was taken to the olive sheds, for the laborious task of crushing and obtaining the oil. The berries were cast into a machine called a crusher, in which they were reduced to pulp by an iron roller. The pulp was removed to a vat where it was pressed by heavy beams. These beams were lowered and raised by a hand lever.

In later years, people always commented on the beautiful sheen of the girls’ long hair when they performed publicly in concerts or in the town hall. Every year a dozen bottles of first class oil were sent to the cathedral for use in the holy oils distributed during Holy Week. New Norcia mission also produced olive oil, but never once, the sisters claimed, did it win the coveted first prize at the Royal Show — that always went to Subiaco. In 1886, the oil was also exhibited in London at the Indian and Colonial Exhibition, winning high commendation.

The *Fremantle Herald* described the laundry as it was then in 1883. A visiting journalist was shown a very novel arrangement for “ironing” linen. It consisted

merely of pasting washed and starched pieces of linen on a sheet of perfectly smooth zinc, then laying them in the sun. On peeling them off they are found to be as stiff and glossy as if turned out from the establishment of a first class French laundress.

The *Herald* considered Subiaco “a model Institution of its kind, and one displaying the prudence and benevolence of its mainstay, the Very Rev. Fr. Gibney, and of the good Sisters — I again repeat the term” the reporter added, “for it is one I like” Gibney was — as the *Record* wrote — one in heart and soul with the institution. His personal and private means, his zeal and self-denying charity were always able to be tapped for its requirements.⁶⁰ He also, during 1868, begged throughout the colony for the girls’ orphanage. The *Inquirer* published a list of donations collected during a tour by Messrs M. Gibney and Brady from 150 persons in the Newcastle and Northam Districts.⁶¹

Money was continually short, however. The Catholic Orphanages’ Bazaars were successful but not enough. Great effort was put into these bazaars. The managers of the orphanages involved the ladies of the Cathedral congregation in the planning and execution of the bazaars, and donations of money, goods, and needle and fancy work from their various friends throughout the colony were obtained. One bazaar, at least, that of 1876, was big enough to command the use of the Town Hall. The *W.A. Times* reporter commented: “The room

when opened... presented the appearance of a veritable fairy palace" In tones which reveal the essentially feminine nature of bazaars, the *Times* went on to say that "the hand of woman was everywhere observable" In much detail, the various articles for sale by the "lady stall-holders" of the twenty-two stalls were described. Many of these articles were such that "the names and uses of which are unknown to the genus man" The wool work contributed by the young ladies attending the Convent School received special mention. Lively music, rendered at intervals on the piano, and "delusive lotteries" made the day more varied. The *Times* questioned whether there had been a bazaar in Perth where there had been such an absence of pestering importunity, less forcing of business, and such good value for money invested. It lasted three days.

Repeated attempts to have the meagre allowance of eight pence per day per child increased at the two orphanages, Subiaco and Perth, were unsuccessful.⁶² Though several of the well-to-do Protestants of the colony had been generous in their contributions, especially to the girls' orphanage,⁶³ there had always been a degree of hostility on the part of the Church of England supporters towards the Roman Catholic institutions. The W.A. Church of England magazine for August, 1868 had accused the canvassers for the Sisters of Mercy Orphanage of deception. Canon R. Martelli, canvasser in the Fremantle area with Fr Gibney, wrote to the *Herald* 5th September 1868 which had reviewed the Church of England magazine to refute the charge. Among other things he said:

Whenever the conversation would lead to a further development of our plan, we would remark that the Sisters of Mercy had not only agreed to take upon themselves the labor and responsibility of training the children (no small addition to their other duties) but offered likewise to give up to them their own dwelling, if another was built for themselves, managing in the meanwhile the best way they could, and putting up with the inconvenience arising from such an increase as seventeen young inmates in an already well-crammed habitation.

When the Swan orphanage, under the Church of England, was commented on very unfavourably in the Legislative Council by Mr Shenton, the bad conditions there, it was said, were caused by the inadequate funding.⁶⁴ However, any increase to the Swan would have meant like increase to the two Catholic homes. In the debate of August, 1883, this latter was opposed by Sir Luke Leake, Speaker of the Legislative Council and member for Perth, who was connected with the Swan orphanage.

Things might not be so good with us (Protestants) as with the Roman Catholics. The Catholics have a great advantage over us; they have good ladies who devoted their lives to such work. (hear hear)... but we have not, and we are dependent possibly upon one individual, Archdeacon Brown.

Friend of the sisters, W.E. Marmion, M.L.C., requested a report on the money voted for Native and half-caste orphans. The report revealed that the allowance here was fourteen pence per day per child. Marmion made the most of this inconsistency and the scene was at least set for a change of direction. At a later session of the Council, Shenton again proposed help to the Catholic

orphanages through free admission i.e. from customs duties, of two boxes of boots.⁶⁵ The move was again opposed by Leake on principle. To show his personal support for the orphanages, however, he paid for such duty out of his own pocket.⁶⁶

In 1893, what is presently called the Old Chapel was erected as a discrete building. The chapel for staff and boys had previously been on the eastern portion of the third storey of the monastery. But it was too small. A new chapel was designed by noted architect Andrea Stombuco⁶⁷ and built by David Gray. It was also used as a school.⁶⁸ The chapel was "a handsome structure in Gothic style" the report of its opening stated,

well ventilated by large windows of beautiful design, having marginal lights of blue divided into small panes by radiating bars. The windows at either gable in the classrooms, are of exceptional size and being well proportioned, have a fine effect. The front of the building is of dressed ashlar stonework, neatly painted. The remaining walls are of stone coated with cement, struck out into blocks. ... The rooms are lofty and well ventilated throughout. ... Externally the effect is pleasing, and, as a school, it is suitably designed to admit an abundance of light and fresh air.

When the Sisters handed over St. Vincent's Orphanage to the Christian Brothers on 27th November, 1897, there were 81 children on roll, the largest household of boys in Western Australia. It was free of debt, and actually had 50 pounds in hand. The sisters returned to Perth, and the Subiaco branch house was temporarily no more.

It was reopened when the boys moved to Clontarf in 1901 and the girls were transferred from Perth to Subiaco. St. Joseph's Girls' Orphanage dated its beginning at Subiaco from the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 24th September, 1901. Actually the sisters came on that date, and the girls followed on the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 21st November. Three sisters, Miss Teresa Bufton, and ten children went out to prepare the place. The account book states that it was quite destitute of furniture. Everything had been moved by Brother Ryan with the boys to Clontarf.

Nevertheless, Subiaco seems to have gone from success to success. In 1904, its school was first of the Catholic schools in the annual examination by the Government Inspector, with its 83 per cent. The 1905 report was "equally gratifying" In needlework every standard was classed excellent.⁶⁹ One of the pupils passed the primary examination of the Adelaide University.

A perusal of an Orphanage Diary from 1908 to 1923 makes interesting reading. Just about each item begins with "No absconders! Health good." Entries show a variety of outings and entertainments were provided for the children — the Senior girls visiting Perth; a Gramophone or a moving pictures entertainment; a holiday treat of lollies and cakes; a trip to the beach "reward for good conduct on the annual examination day"; an exhibition of needlework (plain and fancy) for which they received small sums of money as rewards; a picnic at the Zoo, or at Peppermint Grove, or at King's Park and much more. An October, 1908 entry "The Institution received first prize at the R.S. again this year for the olive oil" In January, 1911, about 24 children visited the convent at Victoria Square where they had met their

little brothers from Clontarf Orphanage. In a statement characteristic of Mercies everywhere, the last item in the diary reads:

No absconders. Health good. Several small improvements have been made to the grounds and Institution. Work going on as usual.

Further up the Swan — Avon Valley Towns

York 1872

The Avon Valley was the first area of inland expansion out from Perth, Fremantle and Guildford. It was an agriculturally rich area on the fertile river flats of the Avon River, which was in fact the upper part of the Swan. It had been so named by Ensign Dale, not knowing it was the upper segment of the Swan river. Dale aged 21 at the time had crossed the Darling Ranges during the wet winter of 1830 and had come upon a valley which he described as "the most fertile land I have ever seen" Its settlement was thus early in the history of the colony. Eventually a number of small⁷⁰ but important towns sprang up in the valley York, Northam and Toodyay (called Newcastle at one stage of its career) were the most significant. The Sisters of Mercy were to settle at both York and Toodyay-Newcastle.

York was the first township in the Avon Valley. The early settlers grew wheat and barley and bred sheep. With the discovery of gold at Southern Cross in 1889, York had a brief period of prosperity as a jumping off point for the prospectors setting out on the long journey eastwards. Today, York is still set in prosperous farmland, and is itself a small historic town with a charm its own, especially during its annual York Theatre Festival. If you pay a late afternoon visit then to the cemetery on the edge of the town, you will be rewarded with a glorious view across lush farm and grazing lands, the hills peaceful in the distance.

The first baptism recorded in the district was in 1852 and was performed by Archbishop Polding. The building of the church began in 1859. It seems probable that some of the Benedictine monks had given some Catholic education in some school buildings built by laybrothers from New Norcia. Then Mrs Johanna Whiteley and later Miss Gailey ran a school in these buildings under the supervision of the Catholic priest, until the Sisters of Mercy went there on 20th April, 1872. The Elementary Education Act of 1871, a first step towards compulsory education, was scarcely six months old.

There were three of them on the bullock dray that brought them to York

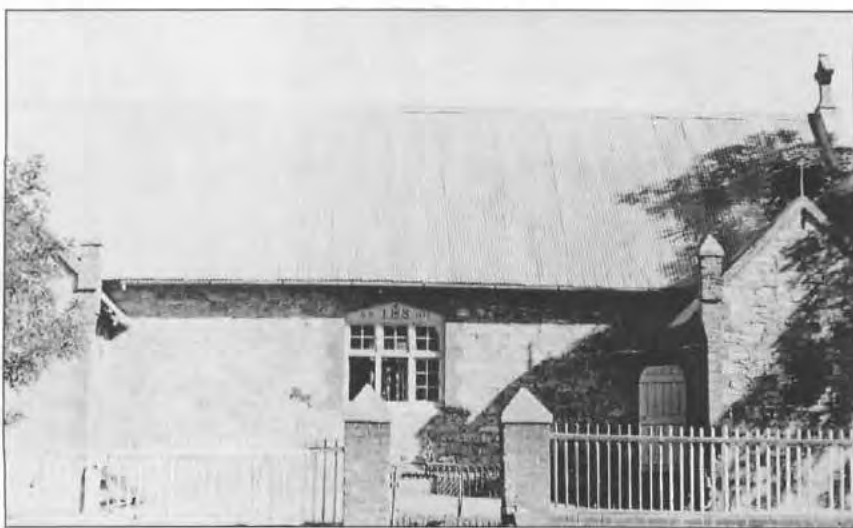
Evangelista O'Reilly, Camillus Reddin, and Vincent Brennan. As was the custom, Vincent Brennan seems to have alternated as the lay sister in the convent with Camillus Reddin. Sister M Baptist Joseph, who was preparing for profession at that stage, was also part of the early teaching staff.

Evangelista was also, at this time, the Mother Assistant in Perth, travelling every so often to Perth to help with the administration. She remained in charge of the York Branch House until 1879. Sister Baptist Joseph was born Matilda Palmer of Western Australia, daughter of a Pensioner Guard. She had boarded at Perth for five years. Her final school report stated that "she had closed her school career very creditably, having given very great satisfaction



*Left: Sr. M. Ignatia
Ryan, foundation
member of York
Community (1900).*

*Below: York Convent
School, built 1873.*





*Above: Sr. M. Cyprian Cooper's
last lesson at St. Patrick's York.*

*Right: Sr. M. Berchmans Bourke
who gave a lifetime of service in
St. Patrick's School, York.*



and edified all who had to deal with her by her docile, amiable demeanour" Admitted as a choir postulant, she was just short of nineteen years of age when she was professed on 24th September, 1872.

In the very beginning the three sisters lived in a small tent just in the field below the school. All their money was needed for food. The parish priest, Pat Gibney, gave them his three roomed presbytery and himself retired to a hut. The convent was called St. Patrick's.

York gained the reputation of not being an easy place to teach. Several gangs of convicts worked in the district, including on the road from Guildford. A Convict Hiring Depot was established in 1851, and ex-convicts continued as a distinct group till the end of the century. The area was never particularly Catholic.⁷¹ "York is the second eldest daughter of Victoria Square", one wrote many years after the foundation, "and the most difficult to manage" There were "the blue bloods" and "the red bloods" The "little things" were what counted the most. Still another wrote that if ever her heart sank in her shoes it was when she went to York, as the first thing she saw was a wall leaning over as if it intended to fall at any moment, and she wondered what on earth was this place. The wall, however, was still standing the next day! The sister, too, remained.

The tradition of York being a difficult place was set early. When Father Pat Gibney gave over his presbytery to the sisters, it was too small for sleeping quarters. They used several attached stables with mud floors as cells; most of them preferred to sleep on the front verandah. Even when extensions to the convent and school were built, they had to make do in various ways. For a dressing table or washstand, boxes were fitted out with a little curtain on the lid. Little tables were made from all sorts of materials. One that survived was contrived from cotton reels with plywood bottom and top, and, varnished, served for many years as an ornamental corner table.

School began in the church. It remained there until a building was erected in 1873.⁷² Mrs John Henry Monger laid the foundation stone. Her husband was then M.P. for York in the Legislative Assembly and helpful to the Catholics. Through his assistance, Fr Gibney secured from the Government the grants of land on which the Church, presbytery, convent and school stood. The *Record* in 1874⁷³ wrote of "a handsome convent and a pretty school house". A presbytery was built on the site of the school buildings of the Benedictines. A new and "elegant" church was erected, the design being due to Joseph Nunan, architect of the new convent at Victoria Square.⁷⁴ It was "a gem of pure Gothic architecture".⁷⁵ The old church was then used by the sisters for a high school.

York may have had its difficulties but the sisters were really part of the Catholic community there. On September 14th, 1894, the foundation of the new St. Joseph's Presbytery was laid in a private ceremony by Sister M. Ursula Dunne.⁷⁶ Copies of the *Record*, *Chronicle*, and *West Australian* newspapers were placed under the stone. A new presbytery was necessary because its predecessor had been dynamited at 3 a.m. May 3rd, 1894. Father Gibney had narrowly escaped injury.



Convent of Mercy, Toodyay.



Dr. Mayhew's house (the "Ship") purchased through the generosity of the O'Connor family for use as a boarding facility.



Students at St. Aloysius High School, Toodyay, 1945.

Superiors followed one another in fairly quick succession during the early days of York. It is impossible to learn whether this was because of changes elsewhere or because York was too hard for a protracted term of office. The Catholic Year Book shows that, while the community remained constant at three members until the beginning of the twentieth century, there were ten changes of superiorship between 1886 and 1898 (though some names are repeated; there were six women involved). Sister M. Augustine Comerford died in York at the age of thirty on 31st October, 1892 and is buried in the York cemetery. She was in the ninth year of her religious profession. Sister M. Camillus Power, aged 74, who died on 29th April, 1948, is the only other Sister of Mercy in the York cemetery.

Toodyay 1884

The second town in the Avon Valley where the Mercies settled was Toodyay. Toodyay is a town first established on one spot, then moved to another. In so doing it changed its name to Newcastle, and then reverted to Toodyay when confusion with Newcastle in New South Wales caused inconvenience in mail and other matters.

It is easy to wax lyrical over the natural beauty of Toodyay, at least in the wetter seasons. One writer claimed it would be hard to exaggerate Toodyay's charms. Coming into the hills of Toodyay, like the valley in Moore's song, the town lies smiling before you. Today, looking back down the hill as you drive up to the present convent in Duke Street, you see the old convent buildings nestling among trees in the hollow, the red brick and gables of the convent itself possessing something of an old world grace.

Old Toodyay, as the original settlement came to be called, flourished as a small village in the 1850s. In 1856 Catholics in York and Toodyay reached 300 in number. Their church, opened in 1859, was on the corner of the now Picnic Hill Road and West Toodyay Road, and was called Santa Maria Chapel. Though Catholics in Toodyay, as in York, were on the whole poor, the building of the small church was forwarded by voluntary labour. A number of Pensioner Guards lived in the area also.

However, because of dangerous flooding of the river, in 1861 the town of Newcastle was gazetted two miles upstream where the pensioner guards and their convict charges were settled. All settlement gradually shifted there. In 1911 Newcastle changed its name to Toodyay. For many years Old Toodyay was a ghost town, but now houses are springing up there once more.

The name of Toodyay came from the Aboriginal word for the place — Duidgee, Place of Plenty. A number of Aborigines lived in the area and many of the adults became labourers on the farms and other homesteads.⁷⁷ The ground around was one of the best agricultural and pastoral areas in the colony. Wheat and wool were important. Sandalwood was cut by poorer farmers to supplement their incomes. Transport was a problem but that was fixed by the making of a good road to Perth and eventually a railway linking York, Northam and Newcastle to Perth and Fremantle. The discovery of the Eastern Goldfields gave a burst of progress, though Northam was the one to benefit most. Today it is largely sheep, cattle, and horses raised.

The district became populated by a fair number of ticket-of-leave men and pardoned convicts. Irish women immigrants married many of these. Many of the Pensioner Guards or their wives were also Irish and Catholic. Almost every household in the district employed an Irish girl, most of whom were proficient in needlework and lacemaking. In 1852, the resident magistrate in Toodyay complained that only one Irish needlewoman had been sent to Toodyay. So the situation was remedied by sending several emigrant families. The girls were employed as servants for sewing; they could also sell their hand stitched lace and broderie anglaise for extra income. Some ended up marrying well-to-do men in the district. Nevertheless, the Catholic percentage of the population in Toodyay — as also in York — was nowhere near as church-going as it was in Perth or Fremantle.⁷⁸

The Mercies went to Toodyay in 1884, at that stage called Newcastle. In contrast to York, Toodyay was a relatively easy place for the sisters. In the early days Bishop Salvado had travelled among the Catholics in the area. In 1856 Canon Rafaelo Martelli was appointed parish priest and his ministrations were welcomed. His attitude helped to contribute to the marked history of religious tolerance in the district. Martelli remained there till 1880. He was very friendly with the Anglican priest, Rev. W.H. Pidcock, who later became a Catholic. Pidcock also was friendly with the monks at New Norcia.

When Newcastle had been gazetted in 1860, land was given to the Catholic church on the south-eastern outskirts for a church and presbytery and cemetery. The foundation stone of the church of John the Baptist was laid in 1863 and the blessing and opening by Bishop Griver took place at the end of the following year.

Schools had had a short existence in Toodyay/Newcastle — as in York — until the 1870s-1880s. Girls were often sent to the Convent of Mercy in Perth to complete their education. An unofficial catholic school operated in Newcastle, with about thirty children. Opened by the wife of the local smithy, it was held in a room at the rear of the church.

Finally, in 1884, two or three sisters of Mercy, including Sister M. de Sales Byrne, came to establish a convent school.⁷⁹ For three months they lived in the upper storey of a house in Folwood Road, the residence of a local family, the Hassells.⁸⁰ They then bought a bungalow in the town from W.G. Leeder, at 96 (now 94) Stirling Terrace. This had been built in two stages. The front part, built in the early 1870s, housed the nuns. The back two-storey section, built in the later 1870s, was used as a school until 1902. The property went down to the river bank at the back.

The sisters took over the pupils being taught — now by Miss Keefe — in the rear of the church and encouraged many more Catholic families in the district to send their children to the school. A photo of pupils of the convent school conducted in Leeder's house shows thirty-two girls of varying ages.⁸¹ The parish priest in their first years was Fr William Bernard Kelly, 1884-1888. Son of a pensioner guard stationed at Newcastle, Kelly became, in 1889, first bishop of the newly formed diocese of Geraldton.

**Select Young Ladies'
DAY SCHOOL.**

UNDER THE CARE OF THE
Sisters of Mercy, Geraldton.

THE Sisters of Mercy purpose opening
the above School on **MONDAY,**
the 2nd July.

Parents wishing to send children to
this School, may know the terms by ap-
plying to the Sisters of Mercy Geraldton.
June 13, 1883.

Advertising the opening of a Select Young Ladies' School of Geraldton.

Conditions were fairly grim at that time, owing to drought. Even drinking water was being carried long distances. The sisters not only taught all day but also walked long distances throughout the area visiting the sick and the poor in their homes and encouraging lapsed Catholics to return to church.⁸² Of these latter, there was probably a fair share. One page listing offences for October 23rd, 1901, at Newcastle Gaol, names 24 offences. Eleven of these are by Roman Catholics — all with Irish names, though most Australian born. As elsewhere, music teaching extended to other pupils beyond those in the school. Irish lace and broderie anglaise were among the accomplishments taught young women in the superior school. According to entries in the Catholic Year Book, Newcastle remained a small school to the end of the century.⁸³

Sailing North to Geraldton 1883

In 1883 an influx of members from Ireland allowed the Victoria Square Mercies to open two new branch houses in the same year. No time was wasted. The newcomers arrived in early April, and by the next month

four Sisters of Mercy by the s.s. Franklin, left Fremantle for Geraldton, to open there a New Convent of their Order and a School. ... The Sisters sent on the new foundation are SS. Mary Francis, Stanislaus, Bernadette and Gertrude.⁸⁴

There had been public calls for the Sisters of Mercy to establish a school in Geraldton for some years. A letter to the *Victoria Express*, 5th May, 1879, declared:

There are many girls in the district whose education requires to be looked after, that I think desirable that there be a branch of the Sisters of Mercy from Perth located in Geraldton. Not only would the young years benefit by such a course but the more elderly ones, under the restraint of moral influence of the kind Sisters might be led to comport themselves somewhat differently, and pay more heed to them, than I fear they do their Pastor.

Another correspondent claimed that nuns were:

ideal teachers. They gave security. The plain and beautiful symbolism that surrounds the day, plus prayers... provides a sense of well being. Their ageless experience, single-mindedness, self-sacrifice, devotion, humility of manner and calm trust identify them.

Geraldton, some 270 miles north of Perth, was fast becoming an important port for the shipment of ore and wheat, and an outlet for pastoral areas behind it. A boarding school was needed for the children living on isolated sheep stations and other properties. And so the adventurous Francis Gould was on the move again, at the age of 61. She would need all her talents and energy and great strength of personality in the ambiguous situation that lay ahead.

She and her companions wasted little time in getting on with their plans. An assisted school for the poorer children was begun, classes being held in the church and in rented premises. A Select Young Ladies' Day School Francis's forte was scheduled to open Monday, 2nd July. Progress in the latter was, however, slow, hampered it would seem by dispute among the Catholics as to the need for a convent school.⁸⁵

It was August before a meeting was held which issued a warm greeting to the sisters and set about the necessary business of raising funds to establish a convent. Father Gibney, as Vicar General, chaired the meeting and "in a very interesting and pointed address" persuaded his hearers to be "in good humour" in providing for a convent school. The sisters' pupils were distinguished by the effects of their training. If there was not unanimity among the meeting, he would bring them where he knew they would find it. Geographically, Geraldton was the first place on the seaboard. It was costly and inconvenient to send children to Perth. People would leave the children at the convent if there were one.⁸⁶

The meeting carried unanimously Yes. They hailed with pleasure the sisters already in their midst and would get accommodation for them and their charges. A committee was established. At a second meeting a fortnight later, a bazaar was planned for the October.

The two schools were in operation by October 1883 at least, when Lady Barker Broome, wife of the governor and friend of the sisters, inspected them both and gave a donation of five pounds to the new convent building.⁸⁷ The bazaar of 25-27th October sold a large quantity of the sisters' useful and fancy needlework as well as other articles and grossed 335 pounds. But Gibney's petition for a land grant for a school and orphanage was denied.⁸⁸

In late 1883 a house and two blocks of land was purchased by the Sisters from Mary Ann Gale. It was on the corner of Lewis Street and Marine Terrace. In it were housed sisters and boarders as well as schoolrooms. A shed bought from a local blacksmith also acted as classroom. One of the first pupils to occupy the shed was Charlotte Youard, aged about twelve, daughter of a local storekeeper. A non-Catholic, he extended the nuns twelve months credit on certain goods.

The Building committee agreed to pay the interest on the loan necessary for the acquisitions. Fr B. Delaney, parish priest, did not like this proposal, fearing that subscriptions to the convent fund might affect school fees to the assisted schools. However, he soon withdrew his objection.

In March of the following year, 1884, the foundation stone of the new convent school was laid by Mr W. H. Gale as "a friend and as Chairman of the District Board of Education ... and as Chairman of the Municipal Council". Dormitories for boarders were included in the plans. Already there were four or five "first class" boarders and more could have been taken but for lack of space. A declaration concerning the foundation of the convent, which had been read to the citizens at a public meeting, on 28th February, 1884, was placed in a bottle together with copies of various papers published in the colony, and deposited under the foundation stone.⁸⁹ The new convent was to face Marine Terrace.

Unhappily, difficulties were arising between the building committee, the parish priest Fr Delaney, and Sr Francis Goold over property being acquired by the sisters. By June 1885, Francis was back in Perth and expressing on paper to Fr Delaney her chagrin over false reports from the committee. A Mr M.J. Williams had presented them also with two grants of land at

Dongarra, which she was supposed to have given to Mr Kenny. In actual fact, the grants had never been transferred to the sisters and she had given the papers concerning them to Mr Kenny to peruse in his role as secretary of the building committee.

In November 1884, Kenny, as secretary, had informed the Vicar General that the committee now existed in name only.⁹⁰ As they no longer had any direct management, members no longer felt responsible for any arrangements previously made. The committee was reformed, however, with Stephen Earle becoming secretary. A debt of almost 1,500 pounds existed on convent and school. Bishop Griver arranged to pay off half the debt. Mr Reilly, as Treasurer, took charge of collecting the promised subscriptions. The nuns stepped up their fundraising activity. The Geraldton correspondent for the *Record* reported that

the Sisters of Mercy are using every effort to reduce the debt on the Convent building here. The amount still due on this property, I am given to understand, is considerably high. The building is suitable and apparently a very comfortable dwelling, owing to the great improvements that have been made since it was purchased by the Sisters. ... To assist in reducing the debt, two very successful and pleasant entertainments were held on last Thursday and Friday in the schoolroom.⁹¹

The parish priest or the building committee must have really suspected the sisters of double dealings because Father Delaney had also queried their sale of a horse and trap presented to them by Rev. J.A. Lecaille. Francis replied that she had sold them, with the approval of the Mother Superior who had visited them, as they were perfectly useless to the Sisters.

Despite such misunderstandings and other difficulties,⁹² the schools prospered. Francis' place was taken for a few months by M. de Sales Byrne and then, in July 1885, by Mother M. Stanislaus Morrissey, one of the four pioneers. Her family were living in the district. Michael Morrissey and his brother had arrived on the *Ganges* on 15th October, 1841. His wife Mary followed nine years later with their four children. Mary Anne (Sister M. Stanislaus) was the eldest of three children born in Australia. By this time, her father had taken up a twenty thousand acre lease, Mount Erin, in the Champion Bay district.

Mary had gone to Victoria Square as a boarder in 1860 and had remained there for eight years. In 1871 she had returned to join the community, her Reception being the first ceremony in the chapel of the new convent. It was held on 25th January, 1872, and was probably timed to coincide with the twenty-sixth anniversary of the first Mercy Profession in Australia, that of Ignatia de la Hoyde, on 25th January, 1846. Mary Anne is recorded as having been a very cheerful person. She inherited the hospitable spirit of the Morrissey home, where mindful of their own early days of hardship her parents warmly welcomed the many who called.

Tenders were called for the new buildings in 1886. Bazaars, Tea Meetings, Concerts and other ventures helped swell the building fund. There were considerable increases in the numbers of pupils, with one hundred and twenty children present at the Inspector's Examination of the senior girls and infants

assisted schools in December 1887.⁹³ Dr Peter Tannock in his *History of Catholic Education in Western Australia* states that "their school for girls and infants in Geraldton was the largest Assisted School in the Colony outside Perth and Fremantle, with Inspector's reports more than favourable." According to the *Record*, there were "a great many more getting a higher education at the Sisters' hands".⁹⁴

However, by 1887 Gibney, who had succeeded Griver, the bishop who had arranged for the sisters to go to Geraldton, now wanted the Mercies to withdraw in favour of newcomers to the diocese. These belonged to the Australian-founded order of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart. To them the new bishop wanted to give all the schools in the Victoria District.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart arrived in Western Australia at the end of 1887, going first to Northampton. When the Josephites were able to take over in Geraldton, the Mercies returned to Perth in August, 1888. The extra staff thus made available was welcome, for West Perth school had begun the previous month. However, the Sisters of St. Joseph did not stay long in Western Australia, owing to conflict between Gibney, who wanted them to become diocesan-based, and Mary MacKillop, their foundress, who was determined they would remain centralised. All of them returned to the east, except Mother Ursula Tynon, the first superior, and two postulants who had joined. These three were the nucleus of the Black Josephites in the West. They went to Northampton, leaving Geraldton vacant.

The Mercies stepped into the breach once again and returned to the town in February, 1890.⁹⁵ They remained there until July, 1891, when nine Presentation Sisters (four professed and five postulants), who had been invited by Gibney, arrived from Ireland.⁹⁶ Once again, they handed over the schools they had established and nurtured, to newcomers. The *Record's* comments were as under:

On Saturday a great many of their pupils and several of their parents went to bid God-speed to the good Sisters who have endeared themselves, not only to their youthful charges, but to the many bereaved and afflicted in the town.⁹⁷

Sailing South to Bunbury 1883

The next undertaking was in the south-west, that place of breathtaking natural beauty, a combination of ocean beaches, giant forests, fertile fields. Bunbury, the chief town of the area, was approximately 180 kilometres (112½ miles) south of Perth. It was situated on the coast near the mouth of the Leschenault Inlet into which empty two rivers, the Collie and the Preston. The French had explored the coastline in 1805, and the area was again investigated by Dr Alexander Collie and Lieutenant Preston of H.M.S. Sulphur. These had given ardent reports. In 1830 a military post had been established there, but later abandoned. The first land had not been leased till after 1839, and the town not laid out till a decade later. However, during the 1850s there was an inflow of convict labour while explorers opened up agricultural and timber country. Bunbury grew as a port and commercial centre.

In June 1883, the *Record* chronicled that three Sisters of Mercy took their passage from Fremantle in the S.S. Otway for Bunbury. They took two days. These three were Mother Placida Hayes, Sister Gonzaga Rafter, and Sister M. Augustine Comerford. The *Record* gave a brief curriculum vitae for each. Mother Placida was the first Australian (i.e., resident of the colony) to enter the Perth community — Elizabeth Hayes, aged sixteen.⁹⁸ Placida had acted as Superioress of the Perth Convent all the time of Rev. Mother's (Aloysius Kelly) late visit to Europe. Sister Gonzaga's skill in teaching was well known and appreciated in Perth. For several years she had had charge of the Sodality of the Children of Mary. Sister M. Augustine was an accomplished musician. Only the arrival recently in Perth Convent of so many accomplished ladies from Europe could enable the Community to spare three of its best members for Bunbury.⁹⁹

For fourteen years the Sisters lived in a two-roomed ivy-covered cottage and taught in a small schoolroom situated behind the church — a gallery had been added on. "The dear homely people of Bunbury" were very kind to the sisters, but they do not seem to have found the parish priest so kind. Parish priest was Father Hugh Brady. He had come to Australia in 1864, and was reputed to have a genial and kindly disposition with a fascinating optimism which won him many friends. Yet correspondence between Sister Gonzaga and Bunbury parishioners hints at "real suffering" for the sisters there, at least initially. "We tried in every possible way to hide it... the least that is known of his treatment to us the better."¹⁰⁰

The port of Bunbury was growing and so did school attendance. In 1885¹⁰¹, a fairly large church-school was erected (later known as St. Joseph's Hall). It was, at the time of its construction, according to the State Inspector, the largest schoolroom in the colony. By the late 1890s, there were some 100 pupils.

Mother Placida (Elizabeth) Hayes had been born in Australia of Irish parents, in 1827. Her father had been drowned near his home close to Northam, and his wife had died two weeks later. When the eldest of their two daughters married, a Mr McCourt befriended her and sent her boarding to the convent in Perth, where his own daughters were. At the age of sixteen, Elizabeth entered the Mercies, and was professed 14th September, 1853. She was then able to repay Mr McCourt by showing many kindnesses to his daughter by a second marriage, when she, too, became a boarder at Victoria Square. Mother Placida Hayes died in Bunbury in 1887, at the age of sixty. She was mourned greatly by her very affectionate companion of those hard first days in Bunbury, Gonzaga Rafter.

Across the Railway Line — West Perth

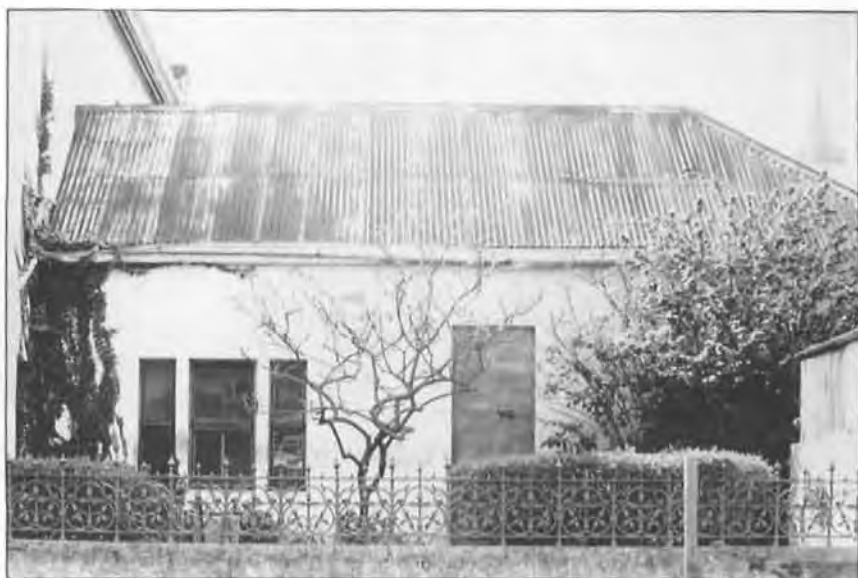
The last movement outwards from Victoria Square during the nineteenth century was in 1888. In that year the sisters started a school across the railway line in what was then called North Perth, but later considered West Perth. The school was named St. Brigid's.

The town of Perth was growing surely if slowly. The first gold was just starting to make a difference. Responsible government had been granted in 1886. Urban settlement was spreading outwards. However, the area around St.



*St. Brigid — from
stain glass window.
Original is situated in
Sacred Heart Church
in Highgate.*

*Original 'Cottage'
Convent St. Brigid's
West Perth. Stone
and iron fence was
erected at the expense
of Colonel and
Mrs Campbell.*





'New' convent built in 1896.



St. Brigid's Convent Chapel as it was originally decorated.

Brigid's was, in 1888, a locality neither attractive nor economically promising. The sisters were well in tune with their founding myth when they responded to a plea to set up a school there.

The parish of West Perth, which began on the same day as the convent school of St. Brigid, was the sixth parish formed in the diocese. It was not yet independent, being administered from the cathedral until 1901. The new St. Brigid's lay at the western limits of the town, a couple of miles away from Victoria Square. The first Convent of Mercy there was centred on a small four-roomed cottage at the corner of John and Fitzgerald Streets. It was the end of the town. There were no roads west of the Barracks in Malcolm Street. Newcastle Street was constructed only as far as William Street. The area north of Newcastle Street and west of Wanneroo Road (now Charles Street section) was virgin bush. It was not until 1891, three years after the opening of St. Brigid's, that the short section of road from James Street to John Street was constructed.

The land and the cottage which became the nucleus of convent, school, and parish had been bequeathed to the sisters by a young man James Conroy¹⁰², hanged in his early twenties for shooting another man. The land in question was one of four grants to pensioner soldiers of Irish descent, those soldiers who had escorted convicts to Australia. Conroy's land was Lot Y144 on the town plan. Its original grantee was John Doyle, and Conroy had become possessed of it on 5th July, 1884. At the time of transfer to Sister M. Berchmans Deane, it was in dense bush. On it was to stand the convent, Conroy's old small house, parish hall, and infants school. Adjoining land was bought by the church and over the years there developed a thriving parish complex. Lot Y145 was Martin O'Dea's land, on the corner of Aberdeen and Fitzgerald Streets. It was to be the site of the church, presbytery, and primary school. The first Mass at West Perth was celebrated in Martin O'Dea's old house. Lot Y146, connecting John and Aberdeen Streets, became land for the High School buildings and playground, its original grantee being Michael Mack. Part of the adjoining Lot Y147, grantee James Callaghan, provided space for tennis courts, the original house remaining inhabited by descendants of the first owner. The total acreage of one acre, three roods, 4.2 perches eventually occupied by the church embraced the external boundaries of these four lots.¹⁰³

School opened 16th July, 1888.¹⁰⁴ The initial staff was two Sisters, the enrolment thirteen children. The number must have increased very rapidly, for the *Record* claims 58 children were enrolled on opening day. Sister M. Berchmans Deane was assistant to Sr M John Evangelist Stewart. They were both five years in the colony, being among the large group of entrants from Ireland in 1883. O'Dea's house served as school as well as church.

At the first Sunday mass, 9 a.m., 21st July, 1888, Bishop Gibney, in flight of oratory, explained why it was desirable to have the school before the church. He said that the school would be an abode of learning and sanctity. St. Brigid came from a period the early Middle Ages when the Irish were the instructors of the English, French, and Germans, in science, painting and architecture. She represented what was most generous, enduring, and

compassionate in that society. A large share of sympathy and respect had been the portion of the Sisters of Mercy for many years in Perth. Children would be trained by them in their duty to God, to their parents and to society, as well as to secular knowledge. When they had grown up, they would build churches as needed.¹⁰⁵

A story that has gone down in legend relates how one mother asked how much would be the "wages" for her son Paddy King. Sr Berchmans knew Paddy's reputation and said "I think 5/-d per week" "All right, Sister," was Mrs King's reply, "when the police 'ketch' him, he'll be yours" Paddy came but had to mend his ways and doubtless at much less than 5/-d per week.

The *Record* relates the blessing of foundation stone of a new school building on 1st February.¹⁰⁶ It, too, was to be a church school. Children of all the Catholic schools mustered strongly, with processional cross, Cathedral Choir, Children of Mary, Sisters of Mercy, etc. The bishop this time gave a lengthy address on the life and work of Saint Brigid. Born in Dundalk in 453 of royal blood and Christian parents, she had taken vows as a nun at the age of sixteen. To the Irish, Brigid became the typical representative of mercy and charity. This had been the characteristic of her virgin followers ever since. She became after St. Patrick the greatest saint in the Irish church. And of Irish nuns, wherever they are, St. Brigid was the chaste head.

St. Brigid was also particularly suited to be patron of a school, the bishop asserted. Patrick had erected monasteries which had become centres of learning, sanctity, and missionary work. Then had come the nuns, in Brigid's train, who rivalled in numbers, and in learning, and in sanctity, the great monastic institutions of Patrick. All the larger monasteries had schools attached. These were open to all and attracted scholars from all over the continent. The convents kept pace with the monasteries. The mighty men of old who ruled over the vast monastic institutions had all received their early education at a convent.

In St. Brigid's schools there had been an abundance of books beautifully decorated. The famous *Book of Kildare*, the four Gospels adorned with as many richly illuminated figures as it has pages, shows the rich style of manuscript ornamentation which attained in Ireland a perfection almost miraculous. It possessed extreme delicacy, wonderful precision, extraordinary minuteness of detail. The monasteries and convents were noted also for their skill in music and in sculpture. The bishop hoped that St. Brigid's at West Perth would also be an abode of learning and sanctity.

From the initial thirteen, the pupils rapidly multiplied. Within six months there were between fifty and 100 pupils, presaging the eventual growth by the beginning of the next century to almost 500 pupils. To cope with the swelling school population, more sisters joined the teaching staff. Sister M John Evangelist returned to Victoria Square after a year in charge of the new school, her place being taken by Sr M Ligouri Gilchrist until mid-1896.¹⁰⁷ By 1896, the year in which West Perth became a separate Congregation, there were six sisters in the community. Lay teachers also began to be employed as numbers grew. St. Brigid's became separated from the Cathedral and a parish in its own right in 1901.



Mother Berchmans with students at St. Brigid's, West Perth, 1899. Students included, back row from left: 2nd Monica O'Driscoll (Mother Augustine); 3rd Frances Byrne (Sr. Laurence); 6th Kitty Wells (Mrs McAdam); 9th Kathleen Shine (Mother Philip); 10th Jessie Reilly (Mother Agatha); Margaret Byrne (Sr. Evangeliste d1907). Front row: 1st Marion Cooper (Sr. Imelda); 6th Muriel Stanley (Mrs).



Breakfast for Children of Mary, St. Brigid's, West Perth. In the background can be seen the three postulants, Srs Laurence Byrne, Philip Shine and Agatha Reilly in 1907.



Diamond Jubilee Celebration 1971 Mother Philip Shine, Sr. Laurence Byrne and Mother Agatha Reilly.

::: An Hour of Song :::



In Honour of

*Most Rev. Dr. Prendiville,
Coadjutor Archbishop of Perth.*

by

The Singing Students

of

St. Brigid's Convent, West Perth.

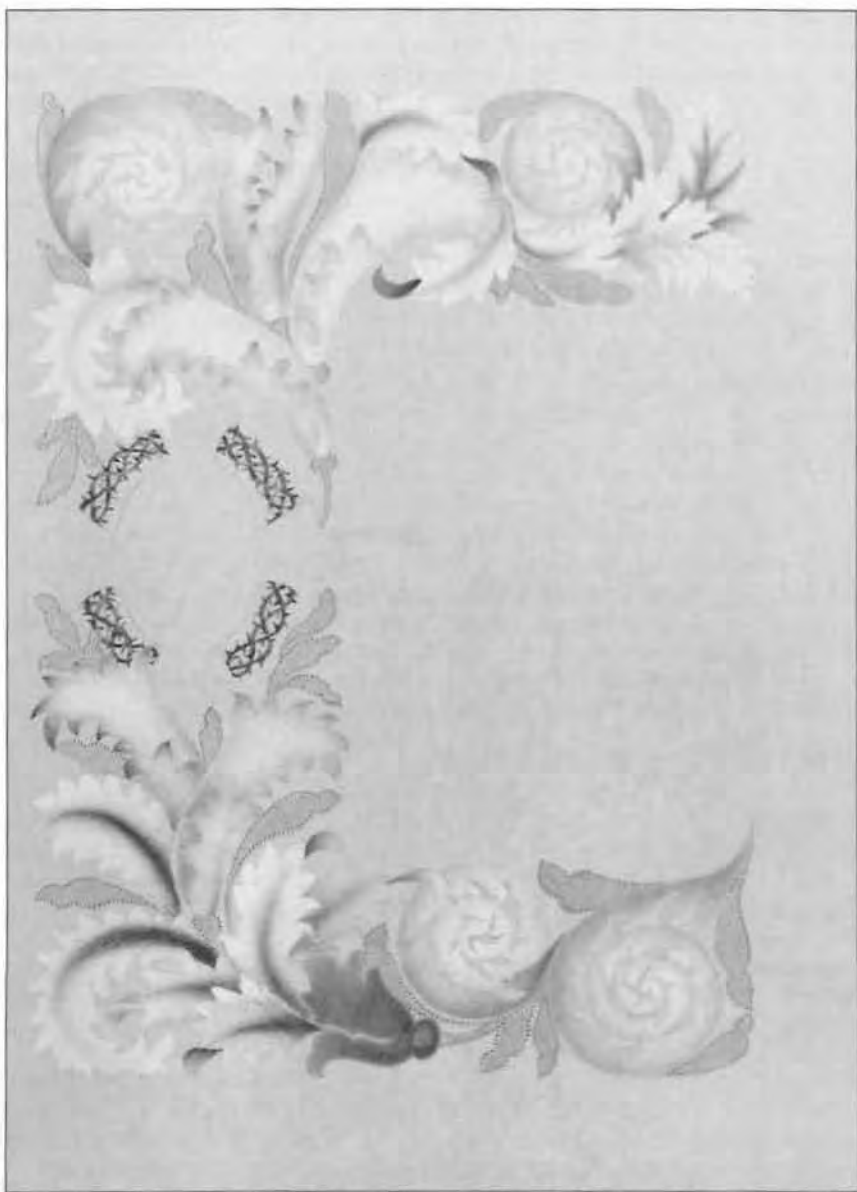


Accompaniste

Alice Heyen.

NOVEMBER 14th, 1933, at 8.15 p.m.

Concert Programme 1933.



Sample of Illumination (letter C) painted by Sr. Ursula Stanbury. The Sisters were instructed in this kind of work by the monks of New Norcia.

Conroy's small house continued as the convent. Additions were eventually made to it in the form of chapel, refectory, some sleeping accommodation, and a few music rooms.¹⁰⁸ At the time of the establishment of West Perth school, the colonial government was giving some aid to private schools under the terms of Weld's Elementary Education act of 1871. It was not much, one pound seven and six pence per child per annum, or 6d per week for 46 weeks of each year. Even this small grant was denied to the new school until 1890 and was abolished by the Assisted Schools Abolition Act of 1895.¹⁰⁹

The sisters were greatly helped in early days by the Campbell family. Colonel and Mrs Campbell and family had occupied Conroy's house as tenants during 1884 and 1885 and their son J.R. Campbell, a government official, later erected at his own expense a stone and iron fence in front of the Convent. In the initial stages when resources were few and there were no lay sisters to help with out-of-school duties, the health of the sisters would have been sadly undermined but for the Campbells.

The first priest in charge of St. Brigid's was Anselm Bourke. He was to be a lifelong friend to the Sisters of Mercy of West Perth and they to him. On the day of the opening of the school he was appointed Vicar General to Bishop Gibney, an office he retained until mid-1911. He contributed generously to all of the projects of the Sisters and the parish out of his own funds. In his later brief account of the beginning of the parish, he states, with respect to his purchases:

Some of these I put down here *in writing* so as to admit of careful testing and I do so, not by way of careful testing, nor that I seek a recompense, but solely at the request of His Lordship Bishop Gibney. As for myself, at my age of nearly 86 years any return has become impossible. I am only thankful to God for accepting the savings of a long lifetime.

"The Careful Instruction of Women"

By the end of the nineteenth century, a pattern of Mercy provision for the education of girls had been set which, if not yet operating in all of their centres, was to do so within the next few decades and was to endure until changed social conditions introduced new mores and pointed out new needs. The Mercies did not confine themselves to teaching girls. The "free" schools in the various parishes all catered for boys and for a while they ran the boys' orphanage at Subiaco. Later, the "pension" schools, as they turned into "high schools", in many of the country districts were also co-educational. But the original intent of their Institute was towards women. Catherine McAuley had always stressed the value for society of "the careful instruction of women". Wherever a good woman presided, she claimed, peace and good order were generally to be found. Catherine's own background also led her to stress good manners. She told her followers that "a perfect religious is always a perfect lady". In the unstable conditions of colonial Australia, the concept of ladyhood was rapidly becoming less rigid but the notions of what was proper for a woman and a lady remained, in essence, unchanged during the nineteenth century.

When Ursula Frayne and company founded their schools in Perth, they provided the only type of education then open to women. In these schools

they gave a solid education in the rudiments of the day. However, they were themselves the creatures of the schooling of their time, and — for economic as well as social reasons — they preserved the class distinction of the day. Thus, in some respects, they taught the children of the poor differently from the children of the wealthier.

The pattern is seen most clearly at Victoria Square itself. There, on the same grounds — at first, within the same building — were the two kinds of school. In one, the pupils in the Young Ladies' School were taught "lessons for ladies"¹¹⁰ That was "the shilling end" In the other, St. Joseph's School, "the sixpenny end", the less well-off pupils learnt skills more appropriate to their socio-economic situation.

Both sets of skills were "female" For the sisters were also socialized into preserving gender as well as class differences. The basic curriculum was supplemented for the girls in the assisted school with housework and dressmaking skills. The ability to do plain and fancy sewing, including lacemaking, was a very valuable one for women in the colonies. Stations and other establishments in the outback and near country towns often wanted girls with such competence. The "young ladies", on the other hand, were offered "a solid English education" together with French, music, drawing, "plain and ornamental works".¹¹¹ They learnt embroidery and other sewing crafts largely as a medium of female recreation. They were introduced to at least the notion of culture through another language and were trained in the appropriate social graces. Till well into the twentieth century, young women were exhorted to act as a lady, partly by practising all the little behavioral graces — such as curtsying to their teachers — which would help them gain poise of manner in moving within polite society and in presiding over a home. They experienced the health-promoting aspects of calisthenics and games suitable for females, and the delights of painting, drawing, speech, drama, music, singing, illuminating, and the other arts.

Music assumed a special kind of aura in Mercy schools — and Mercy story. Much instrumental music was taught on an individual basis. While the love of music was genuine among the sisters, it, too, had a strong economic rationale, on many occasions being the main source of income. Nevertheless, music was essential to a lady's education, and held a central place in the curriculum of the superior schools. As the families of the students at the lower schools — Catholic and government — began to move up the social ladder, they also sent their daughters — and at times their sons — to the music sister at the local convent. In country towns, the convent became the music centre, and played no small part in developing musicians of both sexes throughout the state. For the really talented, learning music could be much more than acquiring an accomplishment.

In the hands of the sisters, the lessons for ladies were not all showy and meretricious. In these "select" or "superior" schools, young women were often given an introduction to learning which enriched their lives and encouraged them to further scholarship, which if not academic was none the less real.

Speaking of the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Laadan Fletcher¹¹² claims that their leadership in educating

Catholic and Protestant girls was long unrivalled — really until 1902¹¹³ when the Anglican Sisters of the Church founded Perth College. Heather Vose¹¹⁴ stated that, when examining every Catholic school register, she was struck by the number of non-Catholic children — a tremendous feature of Catholic Education in Western Australia. As secondary education came to mean post-primary education, the schools for young ladies were an already existing and adaptable basis for post-primary tops, junior high schools or full secondary colleges. Similarly, the teaching within the assisted schools formed the basis for the primary school — largely parochial — network which eventually prevailed.

Few questioned that a woman's role, whichever school she may have attended, was predominantly that of homemaker. Even in the school for young ladies, the curriculum was limited, but talented teachers could make it interesting. It could also be extended by visiting teachers with expertise in particular areas. The university — which at least broadened and deepened the academic curriculum wherever it was established — did not become a reality in Perth until 1913. Yet some students at Mercy schools did take the opportunity to sit for examinations conducted by the University of Adelaide. From the 1890s, an advanced syllabus was available for those staying beyond the normal seventh grade. This led gradually to the establishment of high schools. The first government high school was Perth Modern in 1911. The pupil-teacher system, which operated from 1862, was another avenue to advanced education.

There was no prescribed syllabus for the assisted schools until the Elementary Education Act of 1871, which introduced a dual system of schools on the British model. A kind of "payment by results" system then prevailed, with emphasis on attendance and passes in inspectorial examinations. The few Catholic assisted schools in the colony did well in these, but the system ended five years from the definitive Elementary Education Act of 1890, introducing "free, compulsory, and secular" elementary education. Western Australia was thus later than the eastern states in the typical Australian educational pattern where comparative Education Acts were passed in the 1870s.¹¹⁵

From these small beginnings at Perth, Subiaco, West Perth, and a few country towns, was laid the foundation for a future blossoming of Mercy education — an education that became increasingly more demanding and more holistic. The tiny institutions at Victoria Square were the genesis of a large number of the primary parochial schools of the state and several colleges for girls, whether "young ladies" or otherwise. Mercedes College on the original site, Santa Maria at Attadale, St. Brigid's at West Perth and at Lesmurdie, St. Mary's at Leederville, Mercy College at Koondoola, Sacred Heart High School and Bunbury Catholic College, can all trace their origins back directly to those hard and uncertain beginnings in the heart of Perth.

As the nineteenth century progressed, and turned into the twentieth, the high schools — still essentially of the "select school" genre — began to pay more attention to subjects that would help students gain entry into areas of employment that were becoming increasingly available for women. Women, by the late nineteenth century, were beginning to find jobs not only as teachers

and shop assistants, but also as nurses and as office workers. In the Perth of the pre-goldrush era such positions would have been limited. But as it grew into a city, the urban setting encouraged increasingly demanding academic study and occupational training. As public examinations conducted by universities became available, vistas of professional training opened up also.

Moreover, the Australian colonies were developing politically and socially. Australia moved into an era of liberal democracy and led the Western world in some aspects of social reform. Women in Western Australia, in the 1890s, won the right to vote and to hold property if married. The movement towards universal schooling gained momentum throughout the continent. And as the Irish Catholics moved up the social scale, more and more parents of professional or commercial or landed wealth desired a more polished and/or a more solid schooling for their daughters. As girls entered more and more into public examinations and into paid occupations, women were being prepared for entry into the public arena.

While the social mobility of the Irish was slow, and the entry of women into the public arena even slower, the Irish ethos in Australia, on the whole, valued learning and did not oppose its application to girls. Much of the motivation may have been for economic reasons and the pull of moral and religious instruction was extremely strong. But the myth of ancient Ireland as a land of saints and scholars could still prove telling. As elementary education became a reality for all, there was a move away from the concept of schools for young ladies and these gradually became open to all as they were transformed into secondary schools. In addition, the sisters opened their country convent homes to set up small boarding schools, which aided the transformation of pension into secondary school. Thus were extended the benefits of post-primary education to a wider number of girls. These country boarding schools and some of the city ones often stressed the healthiness of their location.

Such convents often played a pivotal role in rural communities themselves. The schools took part in a wide range of activities and parents often became highly involved. They and others also looked to the sisters for pastoral guidance and spiritual help. The convent school was usually a decidedly cohesive and wider educative element in the country town.

With their devotedness to education, albeit limited by their epoch, the nuns were often able to instil some sense of power into the girls they taught. As with any group of human beings, there were good teachers and bad among them. Some were cultured and well-educated; others sisters could not quite throw off the effect of earlier impoverishment in their family situation. Yet, establishing and running their own institutions, sometimes without much real support from those men in power in the church, these women religious taught the prevailing ideology of wifehood and motherhood but also taught another ideology with their lives. A number of women who, in later decades, were enabled to move into pioneering roles in government, administration, and other public areas have acknowledged the positive effect of this paradoxical role modelling on their own sense of vocation.

In indirect descendancy from those abbesses and their nuns of earlier centuries, who left a legacy of skill in administration and various branches of learning and the arts, the sisters demonstrated unconsciously to their pupils, what women could do as they worked outside of the sex roles society had designated female. Thereby, probably unwittingly to a large degree, they undermined the prevailing sense of women's mediocrity. While the products of Catholic convent schools do not seem to have played much, if any, part in the early women's movement in Australia of the late nineteenth century apart from the activities of these religious sisters themselves in teaching, nursing, and social work they did produce many of those "colonial ladies" described by Chambers:

The colonial lady was not the epitome of ultra-femininity whose image has been described by Anne Summers: "the ultra-feminine woman is a bland creature who has acquired the ultimate in passivity: she does not act, she merely reflects" Rather, the colonial lady had achieved an equilibrium over her motherhood functions, her domestic chores, her expression of sexuality, her social and cultural life. She could be a propagator and a provider, as well as a priestess in the home; and she often had physical and mental tasks that tested all her bodily and emotional reserves.

Ronald Fogarty, in his study of Catholic Education in Australia, claims that girls' convent schools, following an English trend, began from as early as the 1870s to pay less attention to accomplishments and more to subjects that would help earn a living. The practical bent of the Mercies would have facilitated this change. The original Mercy Rule is not all that different from the dictum of Louisa Lawson, early Australian feminist. Writing in her paper *Dawn* in 1891, Louisa advocated higher education for girls. Training in a vocation would not lessen her talent as housekeeper but rather enrich it.¹¹⁶ The Mercy Rule states:

No work of charity can be more productive of good to society or more conducive to the happiness of the poor than the careful instruction of women.

CHAPTER FIVE

RETELLING THE FOUNDING MYTH

Five Branch Houses Become Autonomous

Appleyard¹ says that the 1890s were a watershed in Western Australia's economic history with a trilogy of circumstances — discovery of large deposits of gold; granting of responsible government to the colony; able political leadership. It is not unexpected, then, when one finds the 1890s to be a watershed also in Mercy history in the colony, and for a similar trilogy of circumstances. The discovery of gold led directly to two new independent Mercy foundations, the first centred in Coolgardie and established from South Australia. A second group, from Derry, Northern Ireland, came out destined also for the goldfields, but established themselves at Victoria Park, Perth. Apart from these new and independent foundations, other Mercy houses received independence in government from the original foundation at Victoria Square. So that by 1900, there were eight independently operating groups of Sisters of Mercy in W.A..

Victoria Square, founded as an independent congregation from Dublin in 1846;

West Perth, founded as a branch house of Victoria Square in 1888, became independent in 1896;

Bunbury, founded as a branch house of Victoria Square in 1883, became independent in 1897;

Coolgardie, founded as an independent congregation from Adelaide in 1898;

Victoria Park, founded as an independent congregation from Derry in 1899;

Guildford/Midland Junction, founded as a branch house of Victoria Square in 1855, became independent in 1900;

York, founded as a branch house of Victoria Square in 1872, became independent in 1900;

Toodyay, founded as a branch house of Victoria Square in 1884, became independent in 1900.

Thirdly, several of the foundational superiors of the 1890s proved very able leaders. We remember, in especial, Berchmans Deane of West Perth, Antonia McKay of Coolgardie, Clare Buggy of Victoria Park, John Stewart of Guildford/Midland, and Angela Costello of Bunbury.

Growth in the Mercies was mirroring growth in the colony. And, with each new foundation, there was as it were a retelling of the original Mercy vision, a remaking of the founding myth. With some of the groups Guildford, York, and Toodyay the telling lasted but a decade, and many contemporary Western Australian Mercies are not aware that these were once separated from Victoria Square. But with the others, the remaking of the myth was more durable, surviving — even with those groups that have now rejoined Victoria Square — until today. For West Perth, the retelling is even more

vital, for it is the sole one of the eight groups to have retained its own separate being.

West Perth Assumes a Separate Identity 1896

West Perth was declared an autonomous foundation on Whit Monday, 25th May, 1896. Six sisters transferred permanently from the Perth Congregation, to form the nucleus of the new. All of them had been on the staff at some time. The six sisters were:

Sisters Mary Berchmans Deane — first Reverend Mother; Ligouri Gilchrist — Mother Assistant; Anthony Woods; Borgia Clune; Claver Stewart; Aquin Gilchrist.

The first postulant, Brigid E. Burke of Ballarat, received the religious habit on the same day, Foundation Day, as a lay novice. She became Sister M. Michael Burke. The *Record* related that Mrs J. A. Campbell gave the splendid bride's cake. Colonel and Mrs Campbell and Mr and Mrs Gugerri sat down with the Bishop and Father Anselm Bourke at luncheon. The school choir, which had sung at the ceremony, ate in the classrooms.

The newly appointed Reverend Mother, Berchmans Deane, was to become an important part of the founding myth of the West Perth Mercies. Not only was it her concern for prisoner Conroy that had led to the first gift of their property, but she was the only member who had been part of the community right through from the beginning.

A Founding Tale

The prison tale associated with its establishment is thus a highly significant part of the West Perth story, as distinct from that of Victoria Square to which it still belonged when the event took place in 1888. It is always retold as part of the West Perth founding myth. It concerns a young man — Jim Conroy — condemned to die unjustly, and the sister who comforted him in his final days — Sister M. Berchmans Deane, later named founding superior of the West Perth Congregation.

The story goes like this. Conroy was refused admittance to a dance in Fremantle because he was not in evening dress. He reacted vehemently to this rebuff, crying out "Let me in or I will shoot you" Another man, waiting for admission also, taunted Conroy with the words "You wouldn't be game" Conroy took up the challenge, went home and returned with a revolver. He shot Snooks, the man who had denied him admission, in the ~~leg~~ ^{FACE}. Snooks died, but not till three months later and then from pneumonia. Conroy, however, was arrested, tried, found guilty of wilful murder, and condemned to death. Such a travesty of justice appears to have been caused partly by the judge's having been denied entry at Conroy's Hotel in Guildford. "My house is for decent people" had been the answer given the judge from a top window at 2 a.m., the hour the judge had presented himself.

The prison was at that time on the corner of Beaufort and James Streets. The condemned were hanged in the open. Sister Mary Berchmans Deane paid regular visits to the prison from Victoria Square. The Conroys were probably known to the sisters; in any case, she regularly visited the young

complication from the gun shot wound.

man, got to know him as a person, tried to instruct him in the faith, and to console him. To do this, she once told him he was much better off than others, for he knew the day of his death. For her and for most of us it was an uncertainty. Conroy's response to this was: "Would you change places with me, Sister?" Berchmans was honest enough to say, "Perhaps not, but if I could, I would undo your fetters"

Conroy was apparently helped by her visits. For he left her his property on the corner of John and Fitzgerald Streets. Some money was also attached to the bequest.

Conroy's hanging led to a public protest meeting in the Town Hall with about a thousand people attending. There is no mention in the founding myth that the sisters were involved in the protest meeting or appealed to the authorities against the hanging. Indeed, their conventual rule would have prohibited attendance at the meeting. They must have been present at the hanging in the open air, however, for the story indicates that Sister Berchmans tried to have a word with him on the morning of the execution. However, the elderly Italian priest, Father Martelli, who was assisting at the death, called out in distress, "Keep away, my child, keep away" Conroy would not forgive the judge for his injustice. Finally, however, grace prevailed, the story says, and the judge was forgiven by the man he had unjustly sentenced.

If we attempt to analyse this tale as we did with two of the early stories connected with Victoria Square, we find a similar pattern where the sister plays the role of the "worthy helper" and the one she helps that of an "exotic other". This is not to decry the genuine group and individual nourishment found in the myth but also to reflect that attitudes towards and images of "the good nuns" had not changed much by the end of the century.

The one who has to be helped, the victim, is Conroy, whose deterioration consists in being sent to prison, though this time for a crime he really did not commit. The worthy helper is Sr Berchmans, who visited him and tried to comfort him in prison. The victim is again led to an improved state through the services of the "good sister". The improvement once more is not in release from prison and the revoking of an unmerited sentence. It is rather to be found in the growth in grace of the prisoner, his acceptance of death, and his eventual ability to forgive his wrongdoer. For the sister as the worthy helper, there is the reward of knowing that her efforts have helped save Conroy's soul and the more material, if unexpected, reward of being the beneficiary of his will. With the latter's bequest, St. Brigid's School at West Perth could be established.

As we have received it, there is no account in the story of any attempt of the sisters to redress the injustice to Conroy by appeal to authorities. The story depicts Sr Berchmans as encouraging Conroy to a passive role. "She did her best to console him and to get him to accept God's Will". On his part, he was "pleased and grateful" for "her kindly interest and comforting words". The story seems to show that she acquiesces with the contemporary view that there was a need for the sister — and the woman — to preserve her safe distance.

Nonetheless, these nineteenth century cultural limitations do not lessen the value of the story in recalling that the West Perth Mercies were founded on a grateful response to a loving devoted act of compassion towards one of the oppressed persons of early colonial society. The block of land and its four-roomed cottage became the nucleus of the Catholic school and convent of St. Brigid's, West Perth. The legend includes the belief that the then bishop (Gibney) took the land for the church — it had been bequeathed to Sister Mary Berchmans by name, and although she would not have been able to accept it personally, there is a good case that it should have gone, as it did eventually, to the Order.

The deed of transfer to Bishop Gibney was made out on 9th July, 1888. Deeds for the various properties which were relevant to them did not pass to the Sisters of Mercy till much later. The initial Lot, 144, was transferred 12.9.1932. Lot 145 (site of church, presbytery, and primary school) remained with the diocese. Lot 146 was divided into four parts. Parish priest Anselm Bourke bought one part in 1901, the Sisters of Mercy the three other parts, in 1910, 1913, and 1918. In 1907 Bourke transferred his portion to the Sisters. Of the remaining original Lot, 147, two portions remained with the original owners, the other two were transferred to the sisters as of 1922 and 1931. According to Anselm Bourke's own account written later in life, he bought and gave to the sisters these lots at West Perth.

The Wrong Side of the Railway Track

While the West Perth nomenclature may today suggest that the Mercies had moved into a more upper class area, and hence away from their founding myth, this was not so. Stannage says that West Perth was 90 per cent developed by 1904 and comprised two sections — one closer to the railway line, one higher and more desirable. The latter was, especially up the top of King's Park, the haunt of the more wealthy, the houses were larger, the addresses had more status. St. Brigid's was near the railway line, and on the wrong side of it — at the other extremity from King's Park. After school, many visits to poor and distressed people were made in the area, often at long distances through heavy sand. A small but cohesive Catholic community developed in the neighbourhood of the church.

When, in 1903, they branched out to their second school and convent, Arranmore², in Leederville, the Catholic population — and the Sisters — were so poor that Anselm Bourke paid for the convent out of his own funds. The convent and grounds from Mrs Bridges cost 869 pounds, and additional grounds from Mr Harry Brown 400 pounds and from Mr Clinch 200 pounds. He paid half the cost of the new school. The Mercies paid for the other half.

Recruitment

Despite their poverty, the new community at West Perth grew rapidly. During 1897 seven women joined them, two the following year, and five in 1899. Professions were especially important in the early years as the number of professed members of the new community was only six, one less than the constitutional seven required for a new foundation.³ Accordingly, the

usual practice at Victoria Square of keeping newly professed sisters under the charge of the Novice Mistress for a couple of years was waived for some time.

Many of these entrants were quite young. Moreover, many were of interstate origin. The community started a vigorous recruiting programme, persuading young women — often still teenage girls — to join them from all over the eastern part of the continent. In this they were to be helped by the Redemptorist Fathers when they came to the diocese and lived nearby. The Fathers often wrote letters on their behalf.

An early diary recounts two such candidates being admitted for religious reception. They were two schoolgirl friends from South Australia, Annie Sheedy and Mary Gerhard. The latter had not yet completed her sixteenth year and the former was "but little more advanced on time's pathway. Reverend Mother called them cronies... The two babies in religion soon won all hearts by their bright, happy ways". They became Sisters M. Stanislaus and Gertrude. On their arrival they had presented a very juvenile appearance; the habit was their first introduction to long skirts. With them was also a South Australian, who became a lay sister under the name of Sr Alacoque. Her bright and kindly disposition made her a great favourite, said the diarist.

The Foundress — Mother Mary Berchmans Deane

Mary Frances (Minnie) Deane was born 24th May 1863, in Ballyhaderin, Co Mayo. Both parents had died in her infancy and she had been cared for by a very wealthy aunt Mrs Fox — owner of the woollen mills which manufactured the famous Fox's Serge and gave employment to hundreds of orphan girls. Her uncle — or at least a close relative — was Sir John Dillon, the Irish patriot. On her voyage out to Australia in 1883, she had met him in Malta, where he was trying to regain his health after prison. Minnie had been sent by her aunt to board at "one of the best" Irish schools and then later to one of the "grand" schools across the Irish Sea, one conducted by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Blackburn, England.

Minnie Deane was nineteen on leaving Ireland, sailing in Rev Mother Aloysius Kelly's party from London on 1st February 1883. She arrived in Perth 24th March and commenced as postulant on the same day. She received the religious habit 24th September 1883, aged twenty years and a half, and was professed 24th September 1885. She was sent to Bunbury 25th Jan 1886 and then to help open West Perth 1888. By then she was twenty-five.

As Sister Mary Berchmans, Minnie grew into an excellent educationist. St. Brigid's School attracted many non-Catholics, including Colonel Light's daughter. It was a sign at least of good order and, perhaps, schooling. Tannock claims that the success of the Catholic schools which drew pupils from government schools — and he singles out St. Brigid's — brought to a head the struggle over aid. St. Brigid's, under Mother Berchman's indomitable leadership, gained a high number of scholarships granted by the government — in one year, St. Brigid's won six to the State Schools' two.

In the beginning equipment was very inadequate but Berchmans was great at innovating substitutes for devices beyond their purse. She is said to have



Left: Mother Berchmans Deane. First Superior of Sisters of Mercy, West Perth Congregation, d.1928.

Below: Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Shrine — Memorial to Mother Berchmans Deane.



possessed that "intuitive foresight that makes for easy conquest of difficulty. People found her attractive because she sparkled with wit and humour peculiar to her race, yet had a charity for the poor and afflicted not bounded even by circumstances"

The first *election* of congregational leadership took place in 1902. Berchmans was chosen Mother Superior. Thereafter, she took turns with Mother Brigid Watson, one of the early entrants, to lead the community over many years. In a pattern not confined to West Perth Mercies, Berchmans and Brigid alternated "like musical chairs" or "like the same flowers in different baskets", as the wits put it. It was not till 1928 that another person ended the dual leadership, when Mother Aquin Gilchrist became assistant to Brigid Watson. By then the basic underlying ethos seems to have been set. Mothers Aquin and Ligouri, who began the next leadership in tandem, maintained what Berchmans and Brigid had established. It was not until Mother Ignatius Stritch took charge that there was again an initiator.

Circumstances were not very easy in the first decades of the new foundation. In 1905 the Inspector of Catholic Schools, Dr Todd, wrote that St. Brigid's School

still holds first place as to numbers on register, 413 (seventeen fewer than last year). I am convinced that in no other school in the metropolitan district is work carried on under circumstances which so greatly tax the strength and patience of the staff.

Yet Berchmans did not stint in getting help for the sisters. As the years went on, they were taught "art of speech by a man who had taught the King in England;⁴ Professor This for French, Professor That for ... and so on", reminisced Sr M Francis Hughes. Sisters were always allowed to update. *And* they always had a holiday in summer vacation. She had at heart, says one of her successors in office, the things that mattered. When she died "all the nuns were crying for a fortnight. They felt they had lost their leader" stated the brother of one of the sisters.⁵ This same brother was called James Berchmans. Mother Berchmans was his godmother. He was eight years old when she died but, as an adult, he remembered the day well.

Mother Berchmans had, it would seem, the qualities of a good administrator. She was a keen observer and could shrewdly estimate the characteristics of those she governed, whether they be pupils or members of her community. With a strong personality, she could be strict and could correct when necessary, but she had a warm heart and so did it with kindness. She also could be direct when appropriate. In correspondence with Dr Todd over a certain inspection which she felt was unjust she was quite blunt, and later when confronted with the possibility of another inspection by him she wrote "You are not required there (Leederville) so please do not come"

The ditty composed for her on one Holy Innocents Day when she was in her late fifties, is revealing:

Tricks are not at all in your line,
This is an art where you do not shine,
So try today to be a sport,
By playing tricks of every sort.

She would have enjoyed this youthful frivolity. Her interest in what was going on in both schools and convents stayed with her all her life, despite a final long illness. At the time of her death on 11th May, 1928, there were some forty sisters and several lay teachers in St. Brigid's high and primary schools, with some 600 pupils. There were also schools at Leederville (over 200 pupils) and Osborne Park (over 100).

One of her obituaries said that in the course of her long association with the convent and school, she had trained many men and women who were then holding big positions in Perth's business and social circles.

She had indeed been a mother to the children committed to her devoted care. And of her it can be honestly said that none did better than she the greatest and noblest of all works... She had been the widely loved first superioress of what is now one of the biggest convents in Western Australia. Given the cramped grounds and the indifferent buildings, the success of St. Brigid's, West Perth, was phenomenal.

The obituary concluded that this success was partly due to the parish priest, Fr. Bourke — gentlemanly, scholarly, saintly — whose heart was in the school, but the dynamic force was supplied by Mother Mary Berchmans.

Whenever there was sickness or trouble she would walk long distances to visit, the obituaries continued. She was a great organiser, with a big heart, indomitable will, untiring energy, perfect faith, unfailing hope, and abounding charity. "A woman who towered above the ordinary in everything that counts" was the first feeling of P. O'Connor who had met her 32 years previously, just before she became Reverend Mother of the new congregation.

We need to be wary of eulogies when people die, but Mother Berchman's are confirmed by Mercy tradition. More significantly, she and her companions laid the foundations for a closely knit community not only among themselves but also with past pupils. They built up a very great rapport with these and with parents and friends. The latter supported them greatly throughout the years, and the past students could not, in the eyes of some of their male relatives, "see beyond West Perth"

West Perth and northern suburbs became the area where the congregation concentrated its work. About the first St. Brigid's there gathered an attentive group of supporters from whom future members of the congregation came. The first three postulants from St. Brigid's School entered in 1904. The pattern of entrants shows almost all those who were West Australian were educated by the West Perth sisters.

By World War I, the parochial school was enrolling 500. By World War II, numbers had dropped to just over 300. It stayed around this number until at least the early 1960s. In 1970, it was down to 274.

St. Brigid's High School, West Perth, began as a Young Ladies' School in the manner of the day. Its foundation date was 24th May, 1901.⁶ The school offered English, French, Italian, art and those subjects considered socially essential. Protestants were in a majority, a factor contributing to the breakdown of religious and cultural prejudice. When the pupils began taking University entrance examinations⁷, the curriculum became increasingly

academic. Numbers, in the 1902 Catholic Year Book, included ten boarders and 26 day pupils. They rose quickly, the peak being about 150 in 1928. In the following year Lesmurdie opened and the boarders were gone. After that, the numbers gradually declined, to 55 in 1970.

A pupil who started school in the late 1920s is perhaps typical. She wrote that St. Brigid's was always a happy busy place. School was a joy. The teachers truly complemented the family influences. The infants' classroom was partly canvas-walled and bamboo-sheltered but what mattered, it was presided over by Sr M Imelda, whom "we all loved very much" This student entered herself after her leaving year, in May of the following year.

Archbishop Clune had been "much struck" over the years of his episcopate "by the spirit of union, contentment and religion that pervades the community".⁸ His successor, Redmond Prendiville, thanked them for their noble and efficient work in the schools and commended their "splendid religious spirit".⁹ More contemporary observers have noted that the West Perth Mercies are aware of the needs of people for whom they work and are progressive in trying to fulfil these needs. They are seen as a relatively small, hardworking group with a vibrant sense of Mercy and a deep spirit of prayer, evident especially when in difficulty. There is a strong sense of their own identity. Yet, while very caring and loyal towards one another, they are also very hospitable. "Mother M. Berchmans Deane is a lodestar they speak much about her still."

Anselm Bourke

The sisters found a second "lodestar" in the first parish priest of West Perth, who grew to be a very dear friend and supporter. Anselm Bourke possessed a deep fund of sanctity, trust in divine providence, and personal charm that seems to have drawn people to him. Born in Dublin September 10th 1834, and christened Nicolas, he took the name of Anselm on his arrival in Perth with Serra in 1855. He made his religious profession as a Benedictine in 1856. Two years later he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Serra in the little church of St John the Evangelist near Victoria Square. He resided at the urban Benedictine monastery at Subiaco and taught school in Perth at the bishop's palace. This rather pretentious name for the building never ceased to amuse him. There were no tracks at that time and so he had to tramp daily through three miles of deep shifting sand. After ordination he continued as school master with other duties at the "palace" and attended to the parish of Guildford.

He did not continue as a Benedictine. When, in 1859, New Norcia was made into a separate diocese from Perth, monks began to return to New Norcia. So did he. But his withdrawal caused such a loss to the diocese that Bishop Salvado advised him to remain in Perth. He found it difficult to attend to priestly duties and remain faithful to his monastic vow of poverty. Thus anxious, he wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda for either release from his vow of poverty or permission to return to the monastery. Bishop Salvado, when consulted, said he was one of the worthiest monks of Western Australia, scrupulous and delicate of conscience. His vow of poverty was



Left: Monsignor Anselm Bourke, Vicar General of the Diocese and benefactor of the Sisters at West Perth, as he was in 1911.

Below: Details of property purchases as recorded by Mons. Bourke in History in its Beginnings.

*Cost of the Lands and Buildings
of which the Little Seeds are at
the Convent in Sisters name*

<i>Land next to Convent</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Guthrie</i>	<i>220.0 = 0</i>
<i>Convent and Grounds Leederville</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Bridges</i>	<i>860.0 = 0</i>
<i>Additional Grounds Leederville</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Harry Brown</i>	<i>220 0 = 0</i>
<i>Additional Grounds Leederville</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Clench</i>	<i>200 = 0 = 0</i>
<i>Cottage & Ground Aberdeen St.</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Hyde</i>	<i>800 0 = 0</i>
<i>Cottages & Grounds John Street</i>	
<i>Bought from Mr Guthrie</i>	<i>1000 = 0 0</i>
	<i>£ 3280 0 0</i>



"Pax Window" stained glass taken from the door to Mons. Bourke's rooms at West Perth. The Pax symbol features the motto of the Benedictines.



Memorial plaque placed near the main altar in St. Brigid's Chapel, West Perth where Mons. Bourke spent many hours.



*Above: St. Brigid's Tea Set,
West Perth.*



Right: Carved table, West Perth.

Below: Antique vases, West Perth.





Above: Rosary beads worn by Mercy Sisters till 1960s and Constitutions.

Right: Clock from the Novitiate, St. Mary's, Leederville.



suspended and he remained in Perth. For many years before going to West Perth he was stationed at York and there also served Beverley, Northam, and Toodyay. When the parish of West Perth was separated from the Cathedral, he took up residence in an old cottage then doing duty for the Children of Mary. It was Martin O'Dea's house, the first church-school.

Anselm Bourke was appointed Chamberlain by Leo XIII on 18th December 1896 and Domestic Prelate (Monsignor) 2nd August 1911 by Pius X. He had fallen out of favour somewhat with Bishop Gibney in the last years of the bishop's administration. Gibney had made Father B. P. Keogh Vicar General and Administrator of the Cathedral when West Perth became a separate parish. The bishop relied heavily on the young priest Keogh, but this was unwise financially and the diocese got into heavy debt, resulting in Gibney's forced resignation mid-June 1910. The whole situation was very painful for Bourke as well as Gibney.

Gibney's successor, Archbishop Patrick Clune, CSSR, again relied on Bourke as his Vicar General, but relieved him of administration of the parish in 1911. He remained attached to St. Brigid's, however, till his death at the age of ninety. During his closing years he divided his time between the parish church and the convent and school. In his old age he lived with the sisters, who divided off part of the boarding school for him. They included in the divider a stained glass window incorporating the Benedictine motto of Pax — Peace.¹⁰

A good scholar, Father Bourke devoted himself to the study of the classics and general literature. A perfectionist, he was meticulous to a degree — a "dot i's and cross t's person" Legend says he would "report" the Sisters to Reverend Mother when they did not work at the Latin he taught them in his later years. He served as chairman of the Perth District Board of Education for three years and took a prominent part in the late nineteenth century education debate leading to the abolition of the dual system. He had a keen business head, and was also a musician of no mean order.

Kindly, gentle and courteous, he was held in affectionate regard by all who knew him. He loved the company of children. It was no unusual sight to see a half dozen of them clinging to his arms in the playground. With a quiet Dublin accent, an essentially retiring disposition, yet a Celtic type of humour which he could use to great effect, the older Anselm Bourke became known as Perth's popular Monsignor.

He continued to value the friendship of the Sisters at West Perth and would often go to North Beach with them on holidays, acting as their chaplain. At such times, he would write back to the West Perth sisters in verse, relating simple tales of holiday fun. One such letter still in existence is full of homely details and is addressed at the bottom to Sr Teddy Bear, The Zoo, Perth. Another is a verse about Six Tom Tits Crying Ho!! for the Long Vacation. It is accompanied by a picture of six birds opening up their beaks voraciously and with appropriate names written beside each. North Beach was where he celebrated his last Mass, on Easter Sunday, 1924.

Cult of St. Brigid

Another feature of the founding myth unique to West Perth was the cult of St. Brigid. A tradition of using her name arose. As time went on, a new convent and high school at Lesmurdie, the chapel at a new administrative centre at Craigie, the business company formed to organise the congregation's financial responsibilities were all named for St. Brigid. It started with Bishop Gibney, who would put the Irish saint up for emulation at various ceremonies. His rhetoric about Brigid helped ensure that the educational and religious accomplishments of her nuns became a kind of paradigm for this small group of women religious in the Antipodes.

The legend of St. Brigid — who may or may not have existed as a distinct individual — had great potentiality to become a myth-making legend for the West Perth Mercies, just as she was for their Irish forebears. She was a container of rich historical truth, a powerful moulder of future reality. A strong woman, yet full of compassion, the figure of Brigid could inspire those who looked to her with courage and love and a self-esteem not always easy for women in patriarchal societies.

In keeping with its separate status and to house the expanding community, a "mother house" had been built in 1897. The new convent of St. Brigid's was adjacent to the offensive railway line. Despite this, it was as impressive as the designers could make it. A two-storeyed structure, mantled in cream rough-cast, it was described

as a fine specimen of architectural beauty. Its wide-sweeping arches, above and below, were supported by substantial pillars that gave an air of pretentiousness and finish to the whole facade, which was richly decorated with ornamental cement works and bore, in ribbon like formation, the words SANCTAE BRIGIDAE 1897.

Apart from this imposing and attractive frontage, the spacious convent was "fitted up with every modern convenience, stopping short however at being lit up by electricity or gas light" The floors were of jarrah, rubbed and polished. The sisters could not help contrasting their spacious and airy new community room with the crowded recreation in the old cottage. The novices, too, now had a separate room for themselves. Outside the community room was "a pretty little oratory where the sisters could come for their goodnight visit to Mary."¹ Architects for St. Brigid's Convent were M.S. and J.C. Cavanagh of Perth.

The diarist tells us that the sisters' first concern, when settling into the new convent, was to beautify the chapel appropriately. It was a large apartment in the upper storey of the left wing. At its upper end was a recess for the altar framed by stained glass windows. A life-sized statue of Our Lady stood on pedestal to one side of the altar. Opposite was a statue of St. Brigid. A gallery at the other end of the chapel could be used by a choir or by parishioners attending daily Mass.

Hospitality a Value

Hospitality became a key characteristic of the West Perth Mercies. Brigid would have been pleased. Celtic hospitality is as legendary as the saint herself

who in her own time set a perfect example of warm Irish openness. We are told she could milk her cows three times in one day to provide for unexpected visitors. Indeed, according to one poem attributed to her, she mingled spirituality and hospitality in charmingly earthy fashion.

should like to have a great pool of ale for the King of Kings;
I should like the Heavenly Host to be drinking it for all eternity.
I should like the men of Heaven at my house;

I should like for them cellars of mercy.
I should like cheerfulness to be in their drinking.
I should like Jesus to be there among them.

In 1898, Mercy Sisters from Adelaide en route to their foundation in the goldfields stayed nearly a week and experienced true hospitality. Though comparative strangers, the friendliest terms were soon established and these persisted. At the end of the following year, 1899, Berchmans and Aquin joined forces with Reverend Mother Antonia and Sr M Gertrude of Coolgardie on a visit to Adelaide. This was helpful because several of the West Perth novices were from Adelaide or thereabouts. They then visited Ballart, Geelong, Melbourne, and other Victorian Mercy convents, together with Albury, Goulburn and Sydney in New South Wales.

With the Adelaide-Coolgardie sisters in 1898 had come a possible entrant, Nellie Rielly, a past pupil of the Mercy school at Angas Street, Adelaide. She stayed at West Perth and became Sr M. Teresa. The diarist described her as eighteen years of age but looking younger. However, Nellie had an old head on young shoulders. Quiet, reserved, self-possessed in manner, she gave promise of being a capable teacher. Yet a certain mixture of childishness endeared her to all in a special manner. With Nellie's arrival and that of other new members, novices now formed the larger portion of the community.

Two postulants for Coolgardie stayed a short while at St. Brigid's. In October 1898, Bishop Gibney brought out 21 aspirants from Ireland, landing them first in West Perth, whence he distributed them to various convents in his diocese. Three were destined for St. Brigid's, Bridie Cronin, Rose O'Reilly, and Hannah Murphy, and received the postulant cap the following morning. Some were for Victoria Square. Ten of the remainder were for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boulder City, whose superioress Mother Ursula Tynon arrived to take them during the day. Mother Berchmans Deane made a big impression on the postulants. The chronicler wrote that to know her was to love her.

The next month, November, 1898, West Perth was a half-way house again for the Sisters of Mercy from Derry. It was not until the first month of the new year that the Derry sisters left St. Brigid's to begin at Victoria Park. Very friendly terms were also established between these two convents, with continuing mutual visits and interchange of feastday gifts. This was despite the fact that one nineteen year old prospective Victoria Park member, Cecilia Diver from County Donegal, became so enamoured with the West Perth sisters that she refused to move over to Victoria Park. She entered St. Brigid's Convent on 28th December, 1899, and received the name of Sister Mary Gerard.¹²

This openness continued over the years. Other orders tended also to seek their hospitality. The Geraldton Presentations, for example, stayed there rather than with the other group of Presentations at Iona in Perth. The Dominicans also were often visitors. The original St. John of God Sisters and the Sisters of Nazareth also landed first in West Perth. A letter extant in the West Perth archives from the Dominican Sisters reads: "Our older sisters speak of the West Perth Mercies with great affection and gratitude."

Relationships with the Benedictine monks of New Norcia were very cordial. This was partly due to Anselm Bourke's affiliation with them, and their frequent visits to the West Perth presbytery. Later, a Benedictine priest always stayed at the North Beach holiday house when the sisters were on holidays to act as chaplain. The sisters also went at times to New Norcia for a holiday. The early diary gives these details:

Christmas 1898 Sister M Borgia, recovering from an illness, and three novices — Stanislaus, Gertrude, and Teresa, went to the Benedictine Monastery for holiday... all the novelty ...their many letters that were almost little newspapers.

M. M. Ligouri Srs M Anthony Claver and two novices went to North Beach where a cottage conveniently situated was placed at their disposal by a kind friend. pleasure of several visits from Rev Mother and sisters. August 1899 M. M. Ligouri and Srs M Anthony and Borgia went for a month to New Norcia, in need of a holiday all three. Christmas 1899 four sisters visited New Norcia during the holidays.

A reading of more contemporary correspondence shows the West Perth sisters continuing to encourage good relationships with various benefactors and friends. A former M.P. of West Perth for many years, Sir Ross McDonald, and his sister remained friends of the Sisters for long after his political career had finished. Beautifully worked tablecloths were among the annual Christmas gifts presented to them, a gift Miss McDonald was proud to display to her visitors. In return, their friends were also their benefactors. Mother Philip Shine, in particular, seems to have been skilled at writing gracious Thank You letters for various services rendered to herself and to other sisters.

"The Dear Natives"

The connection with New Norcia led to a renewal of the initial intent to bring Mercy to the "natives" so dear to Ursula Frayne. In May 1901, the abbot of New Norcia asked Reverend Mother Berchmans for a community of sisters for his mission, offering to have a convent erected within the year. She agreed readily to undertake the work of caring for the Aboriginal girls of the mission and declared her willingness to go herself. To express concern for the welfare of the original inhabitants of their new country had been such an integral part of the original Mercy vision in Western Australia.

This mission never eventuated. Bishop Salvado had died in December 1900, and Fulgentius Torres acted as temporary administrator from the time when he left Europe for Australia in March, 1901 until his election as Abbot in 1902. The boarding school originally intended by Abbot Torres for the Aboriginal girls was re-conceived by him as a College for white girls, and

opened as St. Gertrude's College in 1908. It was staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph.¹³

Relations with Victoria Square

There seems to be some ambiguity at this time in West Perth relationships with the Victoria Square convent, of which they were the offshoot. Some stories have it that the Victoria Square sisters resented the loss of some of their best members, at a time when they could ill afford it. The loss, this tradition claims, was engineered by the bishop. He, moreover, is said to have told the West Perth sisters not to rely on help from the Square. They had to make it on their own. Probably it was, as another tradition emphasises, that West Perth — struggling to establish themselves in the educational arena, in particular, and to forge their own identity as a relatively small group — were determined not to allow themselves to be swallowed by the larger and long established group at Victoria Square. This latter attitude did persist throughout the ensuing decades, somewhat heightened by outside observers commenting on the presence of two groups of Mercies in the one area. There seems little doubt that when moves towards re-amalgamation were being pursued by the bishops in the 1920s and 1930s, West Perth sisters experienced an anxiety that "Victoria Square would finally win and take over" Victoria Square, on the other hand, probably experienced some anxiety at having to absorb so many new and largely unknown members. It is indicative, perhaps, that when two kinds of Australia-wide unity did come, finally, in the 1950s, Victoria Square joined one group (Union) and West Perth joined the other (Federation).¹⁴ This difference in national association served to emphasise the separate identities.

Nonetheless, there was no real rupture of connection. Sister M. Paul de Carne's diary of 1900 mentions visits of Victoria Square sisters to various convents (and vice versa), including West Perth. We read that the first death of a professed sister at St. Brigid's occurred in 1907, and the Victoria Square sisters came down at 11 p.m., one hour after her death, to lay her out. She was Sr M Evangeliste (Margaret Mary) Byrne of Dublin, who had come to Australia with her family in 1901 at the age of nineteen. She had entered St. Brigid's on the feast of its namesake in 1902. Professed in 1904, she died of T.B. on 4th December, 1907, "one of the fairest and most promising of the youthful members"

The Other Founding Five

Mother Berchman's five companions in the new foundation at West Perth included two Gilchrist sisters — Mary Ligouri and Mary Aquin. Ligouri had replaced John Evangelist Stewart as head teacher at least by 1890. She remained in charge until 1896. Bishop Gibney appointed her Mother Assistant to Berchmans on Foundation Day, 1896.

Mary Gilchrist, "of this colony" had entered Victoria Square convent 8th December, 1879, aged seventeen years and a half. Professed in April, 1883, she had been sent to York. She had returned to Perth for a while before being sent in charge of St. Brigid's branch house. As Mother Ligouri, she was not only the first Mother Assistant of the new foundation, she was also its first

Novice Mistress, a post she held for many years. Besides teaching school, in later years she taught music with remarkable effectiveness. She died in 1931. She was one of three sisters to enter, the other two being designated as from Newcastle. Elizabeth Gilchrist became Sr M Aquin of West Perth. Christina Gilchrist became Sr M Patrick of the Perth community.¹⁵ Mary — the eldest — has been described as “a model of perfection” and “one of those silent hidden workers”. She led a life “of unobtrusive piety and devotion”. Somewhat severe in personality, she could be intimidating to school girls and novices — at least until you got to know her. One of her novices wrote:

I was afraid of her. I used to look with one eye and run for my life rather than meet her. Anyway, as time went on we got to understand one another.

Her severity may have been due partly to her chronic ill-health, and, perhaps, to the loss of her mother when she was only six years old.

Elizabeth, Sister Mary Aquin, was fifteen when Mary left home. She did not enter Victoria Square until 1891, at the age of twenty-seven. She was sent from the novitiate to St. Brigid's in April, 1895, where she remained. Mother Aquin has been described as a gentle soul, with significant influence on some of the school girls. She was to become the third Reverend Mother of West Perth foundation, but seems to have lacked the administrative vigour of her predecessors Berchmans and Brigid Watson. She inherited a very heavy burden of debt¹⁶ incurred by her immediate predecessor, Brigid. She died in 1957.

Sister M. Anthony (of Padua) Woods, Bridget Woods of Dublin, had been one of the party sailing from London in 1883, on the Lady Louisa. Bridget was then 26. Professed on the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24th, 1885, she had gone to West Perth in August, 1890. The other two who made up the founding group were both West Australian born and quite young. Jane Stewart (Sister M. Claver), from Bunbury, entered Victoria Square in 1890, aged seventeen. She went to West Perth to assist, July 1894. Bridget Clune of New Norcia entered in 1887, nineteen years of age. She was appointed to West Perth in July, 1891.

An entry in the early diary shows the trust that had developed among these original sisters, who went on holidays leaving five very new members to care for the place, under the fatherly eye of Father Bourke of course. The diary records that the sisters were sent by the bishop for a holiday.

They went to a house at Fremantle belonging to parents of two of the sisters. Rev Mother and her five black veiled companions were to spend the Christmas vacation at the seaside. They took with them Sr Michael, the first Sister received at St. Brigid's. The five “caps” left behind ...said office, etc. with due gravity... recreation commenced after mass and ended with night prayers. Mass was said in the chapel by Fr Bourke — from the first the father, support, and never failing friend of the new foundation. Several times Rev. Mother and some of the Sisters came for a peep and were warmly welcomed and regaled with home made sweets.

An Early Heroine — Mother Brigid Watson

Mother Berchmans' successor as Reverend Mother was Mary Brigid Watson.

One of new foundations's very early entrants, in November 1898, Ellen (Nellie) Watson was an Australian¹⁷ of charming manner and refined culture. While no photograph of her remains, she has been described as striking in appearance — beautiful, tall and plumpish in body, with a long face, green eyes, dark olive skin, big beautiful hands, and very regal bearing. Yet her face was kind and motherly. As Mother Brigid, she became a guiding light to the community for thirty years, filling every office, it is said, with a distinction and tact that is rarely excelled. Her career as administrator had begun early. Having entered at the age of twenty-five, she was professed in April, 1901, and left the Noviceship in May, 1902, "being elected to fill the office of Mother-Bursar".¹⁸

Brigid had several qualities which enabled her to administrate so effectively. She was a charismatic leader in many ways. She loved people and was able to inspire love in others. She was just, yet prudent and discreet, but able to challenge and confront when necessary. On the other hand, she was observant of the needs of her charges, both Sisters and boarders. Described often as very motherly, she would particularly note the lonely and homesick. She was prepared to welcome pupils of other faiths than the Catholic faith, and counted many non-Catholics among her friends.

She was a woman of great strength, particularly valuing — as did her colleague for so many years, Mother Berchmans Deane — the autonomy of the Sisters. From time to time, she had differences of opinion with Monsignor Fagan, Parish Priest of West Perth. She was not afraid to take to court a foundry begun in 1927-28, in John Street, across the road from the school. The noise was deafening and classes could not continue, but negotiations failed with the proprietors. Mother Brigid herself attended court for cross-examining — an unheard of action for nuns of those days. She won the case. She persistently sought to preserve the independence of the West Perth Congregation against the efforts of Archbishop Clune to force amalgamation with the other Mercy groups in Western Australia. Thus, with great force of character and sound judgment, a very attractive personality, a good intellect and a deeply spiritual outlook, Mother Brigid Watson was a power for good. For many, during her lifetime, she was the very soul of the convent.

Throughout she was also the soul of the music for which St. Brigid's became famed. Possessed herself of a glorious contralto voice, she was largely responsible for the enjoyable concerts given by St. Brigid's in His Majesty's Theatre prior to World War I. Her lasting memorial was to be the new St. Brigid's High School at Lesmurdie in the Perth hills, purchased by her in 1929. Brigid did not have long to live after this purchase, dying of breast cancer at the age of 58 in 1930. Even on her deathbed, she thought of Lesmurdie, telling Mother Teresa Rielly, Superior there, that she would like the girls to be taught Grecian dancing.¹⁹

In the days before her death, Brigid asked to be moved into the Sisters' Community Room, where she sat before a wood fire, seeing each Sister individually, giving her one last message appropriate to her. Her words to the novices are remembered. She said:

In heaven you shall all be like to bunches of flowers, known each by your name, and tended by Our Lord. A certain great writer wrote a most exquisite account of the beauty of the Beatific Vision. Upon reading it, a saint exclaimed: "Oh, the beauty of God's Face, you would faint if you saw it". You cannot imagine it, Oh, the beauty of God's Face, His Beautiful Face. I was never so close to God as in my last Confession.

In your last Confession be as close to God as possible. I hope you will be as happy as I was, and experience the joy that I had when I was anointed.

Take your work seriously as you are to do for others what we have done for you. If ever you hear of someone sick, do whatever you can for them. Tell Rev. Mother, no matter who she may be, that it was Mother Brigid's dying wish that you do your utmost for them, whatever little it may be.

If little scrapes come, don't mind them, and the more the better. If you should think that you have not time for three quarters of the work allotted you, don't mind, do it all cheerfully, for how much it counts when you come to your death bed.

I'll take you all with me, and I'll watch every one and everything you do, and every step you take I'll be with you. I'm tired now. I shall say goodbye, for tomorrow I may not be — if it be God's Holy Will — His Holy Will.

Like Catherine McAuley before her, Mother Brigid reminded her companions to see that the Sisters had "a comfortable cup of tea" after the Requiem Mass and before starting out for the cemetery.

Music a Key Value

Good music and St. Brigid's became almost synonymous. Many of the sisters were excellent music teachers and many of the school teachers could also instruct in music. Sisters Therese Murray, Alphonsus Linnegar, Gertrude Keane, Agatha Reilly, and Philip Shine were among such excellent music teachers. A parishioner in the 1980s, after researching the history of West Perth parish, commented on the excellence of their music. This reputation extended to St. Brigid's in the hills when it was established in 1929.

"A dearly loved figure around the school", Mother Agatha, granddaughter, Jessie, of J.T. Reilly author of *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Western Australia*, was born in Geraldton and entered in 1909. Very proud of the fact that her family was one of the old pioneering families of W.A., she herself was an accomplished musician, a capable teacher, mistress of novices, and superior. She became very well known in the music world, teaching violin, cello, and piano.²⁰

Sister M. Alphonsus (Rosamund Linnegar) was another well known name in Perth musical circles. Born in New South Wales, she entered the West Perth Mercies in 1902. She was endowed, it is claimed, with rare gifts as a singer and, as a teacher, was able to develop the tiniest voice to full tone. She was especially noted for her success with adult choirs and students. Her ex-students are said to have adored her, and to have regularly visited her until her death in 1943.

Possibly the musical star of them all was Nellie Murray — Mother Therese. As a secondary school boarder at the Convent of Mercy, St. Arnaud, Victoria,

Nellie Murray had distinguished herself on the violin and was part of the orchestra composed of old collegians and townspeople. She trained as a primary teacher and entered the Ballarat East Mercies in 1915. In 1914, Reverend Mother Xavier Flood and Mother Mary Alacoque had gone overseas, taking with them three young ladies who were likely postulants. One was Nellie. The sisters had intended to leave her with the Healy Sisters for a while in Berlin — Gertrude Healy was receiving tuition from one of the world's top violin teachers. But the Healys had fled from Berlin to London with war impending. On October 14th, the convent party got back to Australia though the war had broken out.

Through damaging statements made untruthfully against her, Nellie, as Sister M. Cecelia, did not receive votes for profession. The bishop of Ballarat suggested to her that she go to the West Perth Mercies. In West Perth, she took the name of Sr Marie Therese. She had tremendous success as a music teacher, and a great influence for good on those she taught. One past pupil, reflecting on her experiences as one of Therese's music pupils, found she "could appreciate what an extraordinary woman Mother Therese was and how she was held in high regard by people well up in the University Music scene and indeed in the Western Australian Music arena." She believed in perfection in everything you did, and took many steps to help you achieve it. Very gifted and inspiring, she was singleminded about all to do with music. As a person she was experienced as kind and caring, "a real teacher and friend".²¹ Today, the congregation still receives royalties from a theory of music textbook written by Mother Therese Murray. For the first eighteen months of Lesmurdie, she travelled to it weekly, giving music lessons in the evening and a theory lesson in the morning, before catching the 7.30 a.m., bus back to Perth. She taught music to her last day, 25th September, 1973, though in failing health.

The West Perth archives have a music file which contains some interesting items, and which pinpoints its significance in the West Perth story — as in that of all the Mercy groups of the time. There are teaching notes from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama; various scores, programmes, and other music memorabilia. There are lists of entries for Music Exams from St. Brigid's during the 1920s and analyses of music results from 1900 on. The latter show a very large number of fellowships, licentiates, diplomas, exhibitions, scholarships, and prizes from Trinity College, London and the Australian Music Board.²² One souvenir shows an ambitious programme for "An Hour of Song" in honour of Archbishop Prendiville, in 1933, the year he became coadjutor bishop of Perth, by "the singing students of St. Brigid's Convent, West Perth"

The *Record* in 1912²³ headlined the West Perth music success. The examiner was Trinity College, London. Pupils of St. Brigid's West Perth, the *Record* stated, scored brilliant successes. The examiner was particularly interested in the singing of two pupils, whose voices, he said, were more than ordinary ones. It was noted also that another student was the first candidate in the state to take honours in the advanced grade singing. The musical tradition was also being passed on to the West Perth branch houses. Thirteen pupils

of Our Lady's Convent, Arranmore, Leederville, were examined with very pleasing results (twelve passed).

Music had other uses besides entertainment. It remained a source of much needed income. Sisters gave lessons after school to pay for petrol for sisters driving from Leederville or later from Osborne Park to Wanneroo or Gwelup, where schools were established in the 1930s.

Branching Out Leederville 1904

St. Brigid's, West Perth established a number of branch houses, mostly in the northern suburbs of Perth. The first was on the Leederville property bought by Anselm Bourke.²⁴ The six-roomed cottage destined to be the convent was called "Arranmore", and it kept this name for some time. Its official title was "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour" From Arranmore, one got a beautiful view of Lake Monger.

The first Mass was said there 27th May, 1903. By April of the next year a new church-school building was ready for use, and the sisters were able to come and live in the cottage.

Convent and school were very much intertwined in those early days at Arranmore. Children drenched on the way to school in wet weather would be taken into the convent kitchen and dried before the fire, eating biscuits and cake meanwhile. Next to the kitchen was a shade house, used as a classroom, covered with purple bougainvillea. It had a dirt floor, hessian walls and turn-over desks. The boys delighted in flicking pebbles into the milk dish on the kitchen window. The girls delighted in fitting the garments on washing day to particular nuns. School finished early every Wednesday because the sisters had to go by horse and buggy — into West Perth for confession, information apparently not hidden from their pupils.

One past pupil, Mrs Muriel Craig (nee Stanley), at the age of 93, told how she and two of her friends

used to mind the convent. Sometimes we would dress up in the nuns' habits. We got into all kinds of mischief but we would climb up on the tank stand so we could see the nuns coming and have everything right for them.

Later, when her own husband was killed at the war, she sent her daughter to board at Arranmore, which then took about twelve girl boarders. When Mother Teresa Rielly, the sister in charge, was changed, Lesley followed her to St. Brigid's and then onto Lesmurdie.

Lesley's cousin, Erica Keast (nee Bowring) also went to boarding school with her at Leederville. Erica remembered many details of their stay at Arranmore. They started school with one celluloid baby dolly each and small cane chairs. The uniform was a long-sleeved cream silk blouse, a navy blue tunic with pleated skirt and black braid around the neck. They wore a black tie with green and gold stripes, white panama hats in summer and navy felt in winter. Their dormitory was the verandah on the Shakespeare Street side of the wooden bungalow convent on the corner of Marian Street and Shakespeare. The convent had verandahs all around, plus a big hedge which made it private.



Above: St. Mary's Convent, Franklin Street, Leederville, the Convent which was eventually built under the supervision of Mons. Moloney to replace the original house in Marian Street which housed the Sisters from 1903.

Right: Monsignor John Moloney, Parish Priest of St. Mary's Parish from 1919 until his death in 1958.

Below: Boarders at St. Mary's (initially Aranmore) in 1927 first child on right is Patricia Daly (Sr. Bernardine).





First resident students en route to St. Brigid's, Lesmurdie 1929.

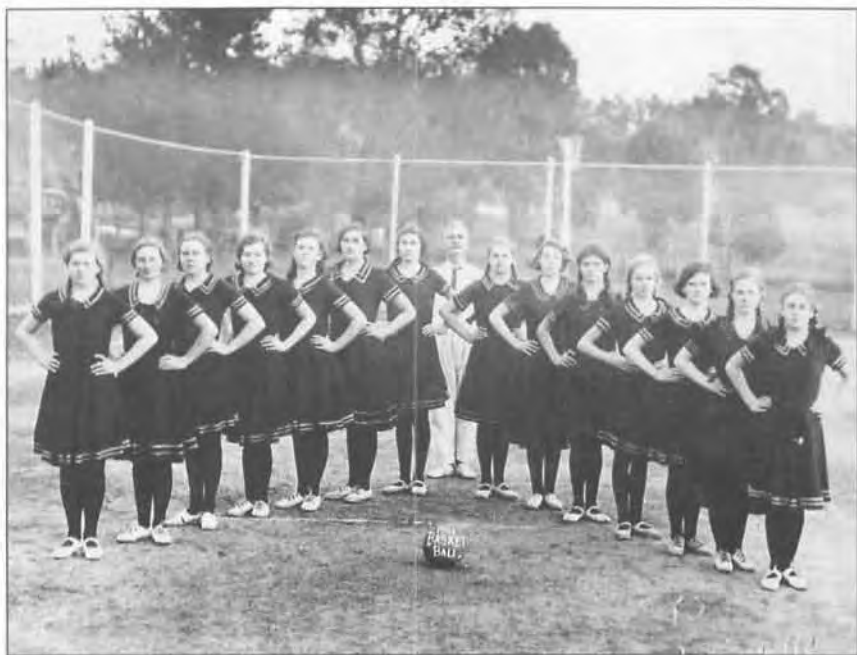


Holidays! Waiting for Crimson Bus Service circa 1930.



*Above:
Orchestral
students
St. Brigid's,
Lesmurdie
circa 1930.*

*Left: Mother
Agatha Reilly
teaching Darcy
Evans in 1969
at St. Brigid's,
Lesmurdie.*



Basketball teams, St. Brigid's, Lesmurdie 1934.



St. Brigid's College, 1950.

Hot water was a weekly luxury — in a tin tub to which hot water had to be transported. Mother Teresa made it a rule that they had to wear a robe while bathing. Too bad if you were towards the end of the line to wear the robe, which by then was very soggy. Erica always wore the robe because the eyes of the Sacred Heart picture hanging on the wall were always looking at her. Another holy picture she remembers was that of St. Teresa in the little chapel on one side of the front hall. The sisters had done beautiful scroll painting around it.

School fees were sixpence a week, but children who could not afford so much were still kept at school. They were very poor in the convent when Lesley and Erica were small girls boarding at Arranmore. But the sisters saw they always had enough to eat. The convent grounds were full of fruit trees — fig, mulberry, orange, and grape vines. At Christmas jam was made for the year. At mid-morning recess, each girl had a slice of bread and jam — not so appetising without butter! At lunch time, they had their hot dinner. The sisters did all the housework as well as teach and mind the boarders, although the latter had their charge, too. Soap and floor polish was homemade. Wood had to be chopped, often by the sisters.

Contessa Filippini taught singing. The pupils admired her lovely face and clothes as much as they learnt to sing. Though Mother Agatha's jabs in the back helped that process a little. Miss Olive Flint taught dancing — Irish and Scottish — until Agatha found her teaching the girls the splits. Mr Wells taught sport and Mr Carmody marching. The latter skill was displayed on St. Patrick's Day, when all the Catholic schools marched through the streets of Perth. Discipline could be strict and the cane was frequently used. "You couldn't muck around" Erica got six strikes on each hand once for talking to the brother of one of the girls at the fete. However, she remembers her childhood at Arranmore as "beautiful" with a lot to be thankful for and to many people, the Sisters and her boarder friends. Her mother went to Arranmore, she went to Arranmore, her children went to Arranmore and also her grandchildren. The good things which were so much part of her life as a child seemed, in her older years, now so special and anything that seemed bad at school had been forgotten.²⁵

The sisters were also part of the lives of the people who lived around the convent — the Goughs, Mrs Nellie "Auntie" Brown, the Cubbages who had a commercial laundry behind their house, the Rise and the Power families. Granny Gough lent her sewing machine to the Sisters up the Street (Marian Street). Grandfather Gough kept an eye on the convent when the Sisters were in at West Perth or up at North Beach, milked the cow and fed the fowls. Sr. M. Philomena, who among other things looked after the dining room, was Tiger Tim to generations of children. Sr Margaret Mary taught the upper infants "the correct way" to eat an orange.²⁶

There is an unusual story told about the purchase of a tabernacle for the Leederville convent in 1933. Sister Margaret Mary Pombart was celebrating her Silver Jubilee of Profession, and a collection was being taken up to buy a tabernacle. The collection was some five pounds short. One day, the mother of Sr. M. Francis Hughes was in the Royal Perth Hospital and Margaret

Mary accompanied Francis on a visit. After they left, a woman in a nearby bed asked if the small sister was one of the Pombart sisters who had had a school in Coolgardie about the turn of the century. Mrs Hughes confirmed that this was so.

The lady then told her that she had been employed by the two Misses Pombart in a domestic capacity and had once, through necessity, stolen five pounds from the household money. She had been worried about this over the years, and had wanted to restore the money but did not know how to go about it. When told of the tabernacle collection, she at once contributed ten pounds. Sister Margaret Mary remembered the disappearance of the money, and — it is said — her orderly soul would have rejoiced at the long-delayed tidying-up.

Osborne Park 1920

The second branch house was at Osborne Park. The primary school there, St. Kieran's, was to grow — by 1976 — to be the largest Catholic primary school in W.A. The sisters started coming out from West Perth by tram to the school from 1920, when it opened with fifteen pupils in the church. They would take a tram from West Perth to Mt. Hawthorn, then a second to Osborne Park. To do this and teach music before school, they had to leave each day just after 7 a.m. If they missed the one tram on the line they had to walk. They did this until 1939, when a convent was built.

The people of Osborne Park were very mindful of the needs of the sisters. One old lady, Mrs Ryan, remembered "the old nuns were 'rail'²⁷ nuns". Every day she had brought them soup and scones. Once a storm blew in the roof of the church, and lessons were transferred to a shed for a while. In September, 1934, a separate school was opened, facing Cape Street.

Sisters connected with memories of Osborne Park are Stanislaus (Annie) Sheedy, Magdalene (Mary) Reys, and Cecilia (Mary Teresa) Hogan. The first used to be called Mother Christmas. She had acute abilities — she could hear the grass grow and could smell if a child had buried an orange peel under the sand. Cecilia was very warm-hearted, very fond of animals, and also very kind to the sisters as their superior. She had a budgie at Osborne Park, and wherever she was, she had a dog. Earlier at Leederville she had a little terrier called Barney. At Osborne Park the dog was Spotty. Many tales are told about Cecilia and Spotty.²⁸

Spotty was a white pup with a black spot on his back. Nothing was too good for Spotty — in Mother Cecilia's estimation. He had a special kennel, special meat, special pot on the stove, special place in the fridge. If one of the other members of the community corrected Spotty in her absence, Spotty would turn tell-tale on her return, looking at the culprit and putting his tail down between his back legs.

Once two sisters took a walk down Main Street, followed, as usual by Spotty. On the way home they were given a lift and arrived home without Spotty. Immediately they were sent back to find him by a very angry Mother! The only time Cecilia was angry with Spotty was when he attempted to attack her budgie. Spotty had a friend, a little ginger dog, who used to visit him daily. You could almost set your clock by the time of the visit.

Spotty got into real trouble when he bit the hand of his mistress, who was ordered by the doctor to have him put away. He was taken to the dogs' home and Mother went to bed for a week. Meanwhile, the others had written a petition to be freed from the scourge of Spotty, and had put it behind the Tabernacle. But, it was not to be. Mother arose from her bed, went to the home, and brought back Spotty. A very different Spotty, so weak his little legs wouldn't hold him up. However, with loving care, soon "it was as in the beginning..." Eventually, years later, Spotty became sick and quite vicious and was finally put down.

Tales such as Spotty-tales added a little life and colour and humanity to the daily grind.

Pupils found the sisters at Osborne Park to be effective educators. Sisters Mechtilde Cullen, Brendan Kennedy and Patricia Callery are three individuals remembered for the good schooling they gave pupils. The teachers made sure you knew your lessons — otherwise the ruler was brought out. But it was not all slog or tears. Patricia taught Irish dances and Brendan Irish songs and tales of Ireland. Mechtilde developed a love of literature in her pupils. The sisters were very caring for all of the children at school, and also took a great deal of interest in the people of the neighbourhood. Joan Flynn, who started school at St. Kieran's, Osborne Park, reminisces about her grandfather's close relationship with the Sisters of West Perth. As a single man, not long out from County Limerick, he asked for prayers when he was going to marry Mary Kenny. Each year he took a cow to the Sisters' beach house so that they could have fresh milk during their holiday.²⁹

St. Brigid's in the Hills 1929

All the aura connected to the patroness of Saint Brigid, West Perth, surrounded also a new St. Brigid's at Lesmurdie. This school was made possible with Mother Brigid Watson's purchase of a magnificent property in the eastern hills behind Perth.

In 1921 a new primary school building had been opened at West Perth, accommodating 450 pupils and costing 6075 pounds 12s. Those who attended recalled that over 32 years ago a similar ceremony had taken place, when the first convent school had been opened. The church buildings then were a few small shingled roof cottages, one of which was equipped at an expenditure of one hundred and fifty pounds, and fitted up as a school. The next move in school building had been the construction of a hall fronting John Street. There had been various additions since, but for some years the accommodation had been far from satisfactory.

There had also been inadequate space for the High School and Boarding School. By 1929 Mother Brigid was seriously considering moving the boarders out to another site. She bought a property up in the Darling Ranges, 900 feet above sea level, at the head of the valley through which the Yule Brook flows on its way to form the Lesmurdie Falls. On it was established a second St. Brigid's, often called St. Brigid's in the Hills. Sisters and girls took up residence there in April, 1929.

St. Brigid's Ladies' College, or Lesmurdie, as it is now most commonly called, began in a day and boarding school building erected on the grounds of

Lesmurdie House by the owners, Mr and Mrs Archibald Sanderson. The Sandersons had originally built a small cottage for themselves on the property, calling it Lesmurdie after the Scottish moor where Mr Sanderson used to holiday in during his childhood. The Sandersons eventually had six children. They decided the district needed a school and they invited a Mrs and Miss Jones to begin one in the building they erected on their own property.

The school was both interesting and attractive. Begun in 1913, it was based on the style of Cecil Rhodes' home on the slopes of Table Mountain in South Africa. Sanderson's wife was the daughter of Bishop Parry, Anglican bishop of Perth and the architect, Herbert Parry, was his brother-in-law. The Sandersons erected only a portion of the total architectural design, and this was used as school until it could no longer be kept going. After World War I, it was bought by the Red Cross as a convalescent home for sick and wounded war casualties, and named St. Andrew's. From 1924 to 1929 Perth Hospital continued its use as a convalescent home.

The building had been completed, in 1921, by the Red Cross, which added two wings and the striking white frontage planned by Parry. Tiles on the original building were imported from Marseilles as ballast in wool ships. The stone used was mostly local Kalamunda stone while timber throughout was West Australian jarrah. On each side of the entrance was a marble slab proclaiming the laying of the foundation stones by General Sir William Birdwood and General Sir Talbot Hobbs.³⁰ Oak trees on the land were planted by the Repatriation Department — they came from Windsor Castle, left over from the original Honour Avenue in King's Park.

When the sisters bought it, it had been empty for ten months. The surrounding district of Kalamunda had grown rapidly in the years just before World War I, with orchardists, flower cultivators, holiday visitors, and new residents lured by the beauty of the locality. In a time of depression, the sisters purchased for £12,000, building, furniture, and 53 acres of land, estimated to be worth about £20,000. Mrs Maude Sanderson commented in her diary that it was "definitely a bargain for the Roman Catholic Community".³¹

It was a day of great excitement when 35 or 36 girls, with their personal belongings, clambered aboard a shearer's truck and bumped along the bush track winding its way up Lesmurdie Hill. Two cars transported sisters and baby boarders. The first night was anything but comfortable! The water pipes burst at bathtime that evening, and the electricity failed in half the building.

School commenced officially on 23rd April, with 36 boarders and three day girls. This kind of proportion persisted until after World War II, but in the post-war years the school moved towards its present situation of 90 per cent day scholars with about 100 to 150 boarders. In 1929, already, there were all classes to leaving. Mother Teresa Rielly was in charge. Some of the sisters would travel on a 5.30 p.m. bus, teach to as late as 10.30 p.m., and again in the morning at 6.30, returning to school at West Perth on the 7.30 a.m. bus. Visiting specialists from Perth extended the curriculum. From the very first year, the College set a strong tradition of concerts, drama, and public speaking. The ubiquitous Countess Filippini came for singing and speech; Sr Therese Murray and Miss Nell Day for music; Miss Mary O'Connor for

music from the 1930s; Sr Philip Shine for Physics and violin, until she became a full-time staff member. An orchestra was established in the first year of the college, with fourteen members by 1931, including first and second violins, viola and cello. Miss Marcia Hodges also taught singing and art of speech, music appreciation and drama classes, and trained the school choir. Mr. Wells coached basketball, tennis, swimming, and vigoro. Often a concert party was brought up from Perth on Sunday afternoon. Sister Laurence Byrne came for music, needlework and art, at one stage driven up and back the next day by Mrs Daisy Fitzpatrick, who never came empty handed for the boarders. The two did this for five years. As a young nun of twenty-one years, Sister Laurence had gained a measure of fame some years previously, when she had saved Mother Brigid Watson from drowning at Trigg's Island during the December holidays of 1909. For this she had received a medal from the Royal Humane Society of Australasia. It had been quite a feat in that Mother Brigid was a big woman and Sister Laurence very slight.

A 1933 prospectus lists the subjects taught: English, French, German, Greek, Music (Piano, Violin, Cello, Mandolin, Organ), Singing, Painting (oil and water colour), Book-keeping, Needlework (plain and ornamental), Theory of Music, Harmony (including Counterpoint). Fees for five weeks for Board and Tuition were 5.5.0 pounds. A 1930 account shows tuition in Violin and Piano as 4.4.0 pounds per quarter, Singing 5/-. In 1931, five girls sat for Leaving Certificate. All had Drawing. Six sat for Junior Drawing.

The school grew gradually. The uniform was originally the same as St. Brigid's, West Perth. Only half of the original students were Catholics. By 1938 there were over 80 boarders. In that year, a two-storey building was constructed. It served a few purposes — classrooms for Grades IV to Leaving, a science block, four music-rooms; the top storey also acted as boarders' study hall at night.

The sisters laid out three tennis courts, a basketball and a croquet court; levelled out the large grassy playing field for hockey; built a swimming pool; whitewashed the stone of the building. The courtyard was adorned with palms and ferns and a fountain in the shape of a swan. Cane lounges, chairs, and tables used by the convalescent soldiers were still scattered about. A school bell of historic interest was acquired. Made in 1869 at Fremantle Jail, it had been used to indicate that a hanging had taken place. It was eventually bought by Father E. Sullivan for 1/- and presented to the school. The table the Duke and Duchess of York dined from, when they stayed at Lesmurdie House in 1927, remained in the school.³²

Gardens and lawns were built up on the rocky ground. It is said that these were due to the stubborn hard work of Sister Francis Hughes, who told there was no hope of growing lawn there — was determined to succeed, to the point of pinning the transported grass down with hair pins. Boarders out at weekends brought back paper bags of lawn runners. Many a class or meal was disrupted by the rush of girls to shoo back the cows strolling into the gardens or lawns just set by Sister Francis. It was Francis who wrote, many years later:

It was a great break for us, coming from a large community of Sisters at West Perth to only four or five Sisters at Lesmurdie, but there was a wonderful bond with the boarders. We were all more like a family, particularly with the senior girls. Both girls and Sisters watched the growth of the College with great interest, and when the school population reached 100, we all celebrated with glee.

For some time Welshpool Road to the College was a dirt track, so muddy in the rains of winter that the bus was often bogged. To climb Lesmurdie Hill, the two back rows of passengers would have to get out and walk to the top. In sunny weather, there were beautiful walks along the country roads and through the bush. Sometimes a field of daffodils would be just round the corner.

Mother Teresa Rielly, the foundress of the college, was a remarkable teacher and organiser. Born at Clare, South Australia, she had been educated by the Mercies at St. Aloysius, Angas Street, Adelaide, and had heard from a Passionist priest that there was urgent need for teaching sisters in the vast West. At Leederville in the early difficult years there, as Mother Bursar at West Perth for over twenty years, and as founding superior of Lesmurdie, all her accomplishments bore the hallmark of thoroughness and efficiency. A memorial grotto was erected in the college grounds in her memory:

foundress and first superior, whose vision and unsparing pioneering efforts in the educational field have raised Lesmurdie to an honoured place in the front rank of the recognised colleges of this state.

Mother Teresa taught standards three and four. Standing under the clock near Mother's classroom was one of the punishments long remembered for being slack about one's household charge, perhaps. Not all memories recalled by ex-students or ex-staff about Mother Teresa are one hundred per cent complimentary. Some felt she ruled with a rod of iron.

The teachers are too numerous to mention all of them, but there are some remembered by past pupils from earlier days. Sr M. Augustine O'Driscoll taught sub-junior and junior, and was first school principal. Sr Francis Hughes taught standards five and six, and sub-leaving and leaving; Sr Imelda Cooper infants and standards one and two. Imelda also organised memorable concerts in the 1940s. Sister M. Evangeliste Byrne was a dynamic language and literature teacher to the juniors and seniors. Sr Augustine was replaced by Sr Philip as principal in 1930, Sister Augustine returning to her beloved and much-missed West Perth, where she remained as principal until 1966. At different times, Sr M Sebastian Clifford and Benedict Taylor also joined the Lesmurdie staff. Sisters Veronica Docherty, Josephine Mulvale, and Dominic Barron looked after the kitchen and laundry. In fact, the Docherty family helped run the boarding school. Sister Veronica's two sisters, Sisters Monica and Rita were also on the staff for long periods, Monica 1930-1949, Rita 1950-1979. Mr Docherty and son Jim were the first gardeners at the college. By hand and bullock carts, they built the site of the old tennis courts, clearing land and levelling a hill. A boarder of the 1930s remembers that the sisters looking after their domestic needs worked incredibly hard and long hours, "to meet Mother Teresa's unbending standards"

Boarders recalled the damask tablecloths and table napkins and fine china. Their use taught them to appreciate and take care of nice things. Sister Veronica was well remembered by the boarders (1929-1951) for her big buns, loving heart and welcoming face. One young sister found that Veronica had a way of making you feel whole again when times were difficult. When things were cold, lonely, and confused, her presence gave a feeling of security and warmth.³³

Sister Josephine and later Sister Agnes Butler figuratively worked themselves to death in the laundry, as well as looked after sick children. As the laundry was a little old building way down the path near the creek, it was a long distance to walk many times a day. Sister Josephine did die years later, in 1958, through trying to fix the gas for the hot water in the bathroom at West Perth. The gas was leaking, and she died in a few moments with her face down the meter box. Sister Veronica suffered much for years when she was injured by the food lift falling on her at Lesmurdie.

During the 1930s and the 1940s, Lesmurdie was primarily a boarding school. It was staffed almost entirely by Sisters, who taught during the day and looked after the boarders in out of school hours. The Sisters slept upstairs in cubicles at the school end of the dormitory, and had to pass the boarders' beds on their way out. There was no privacy for them at the end of a long day's work. However, a close bond developed between teachers and students.

Sister Philip Shine who came in the second year of the College was to have a twenty year association with it, as teacher, principal, or local superior. It remained her first love. Born June 18th, 1890³⁴, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, of Irish parents, her mother died while she was very young. She lived with her grandmother and aunts in Dublin until the age of five, when, with her two older brothers and her father, who was a school master in the British Army, they went to India. In 1909, the family came to Western Australia, in an unsuccessful search for her father's aunt — her father felt that Kathleen needed a woman's refining influence. They settled in Aberdeen Street, opposite St. Brigid's Church, West Perth. And so Kathleen commenced school in Australia at St. Brigid's Convent School. She was a good scholar, especially in Mathematics and the Social Sciences. She was a music pupil of Mother Brigid Watson, learning the violin and the cello. She was one of a trio of excellent musicians who entered the Sisters of Mercy, West Perth, together in 1909. On the night before their entry, they Kathleen Shine, Jessica Reilly (later Sister M. Agatha) and Fanny Byrne (Sister M. Laurence) had performed in a string trio at a St. Brigid's Feast Night Concert in His Majesty's Theatre, Perth. There was much surprise the next morning when each of the three appeared dressed in the long black dress of the postulancy, with cape, white cuffs and collar, and frilly white bonnet, black net veil attached. Later, in 1918, as Sister M. Philip, she received her B.A. from the University of Western Australia. Later, she also studied Physics at University level.

In the beginning, Sister Kathleen Sister M. Philip taught several subjects, but eventually concentrating on Maths and Science, with, however, also teaching violin and cello and directing the school orchestra. She was very patient with her pupils, especially the less able or less committed, and made

a gentler impression than did Mother Teresa. They thought her "wonderful" very well educated and very lovely.

It is said that organisations are often haunted by the shadow of their founders, especially if the latter do not move away. This seems to have been so for some of the members of the community, who found Mother Teresa and Mother Philip's "possessiveness" of St. Brigid's, Lesmurdie, difficult to contend with. The lay sisters, "though overworked" were also in "the inner circle" Thus the 1949 canonical visitation recommended a change of community, and Mother Philip and Mother Teresa went back to West Perth. In that year, too, 1950, Philip was elected Mother Assistant to Reverend Mother Augustine, fifth superior of West Perth. There she taught for eighteen years. In December, 1952, she was herself elected Mother Superior of the Congregation, a post she held for many years. It was she who led the West Perth Mercies into the Australian Mercy Federation in 1955, and had to deal with the multi-faceted effects of Vatican II on religious communities. However, she did not completely give up teaching but continued to prepare students at West Perth for the Junior and Leaving Certificates in Mathematics, Physics, and Geography. Mother Philip retired in 1969, but continued to take great interest in her ex-students, especially those from Lesmurdie. She lived there briefly, after West Perth convent became unoccupied in 1974, moving to "Mercyville" Craigie, in 1976, where she died two years later.

Lesmurdie continued to develop as "a homely school" but one which turned out girls well trained academically and otherwise. It taught its pupils how to acquire knowledge for themselves. It also taught them, in its own practical way, various social and cultural skills. Courtesy, good speech, grooming and deportment were considered important. At some periods, every student learnt at least some theory of music. Lesmurdie choirs were renowned not only for their music but also for their verse speaking.

Wanneroo 1935

Sixteen to twenty miles from the city was the district of Wanneroo. Catholics in the area were mostly Italian in origin. From 1924 onwards, the sisters offered religious instruction after Mass. A Catholic school was built in 1935. The school was called St. Anthony's, and his feast was celebrated annually with true Italian exuberance. His statue was carried in procession along the flower strewn roads with much fanfare and fireworks. Special buses ran from the city for the occasion, and the Italian consul always attended. Archbishop Prendiville, who had gone there for several years to say Mass before the church was built, celebrated the Mass.

The land for a school and church at Wanneroo had been donated by John Brown of Leederville West. Brown was not a Catholic but he had been impressed by Catholic missionaries caring for lepers in the Pacific Islands. He visited Mother Ignatius Stritch at West Perth to express his wish to help the Italian and Slav migrants who worked for him and lived in the Wanneroo area. They had been settled there after World War I by the government on reclaimed swamplands and had made market gardening a speciality in the area.

Mother Ignatius responded to John Brown's plea for help for his workers. She herself blazed the trail by joining in the visiting of the people over the widespread territory, partly on foot and partly in horsedrawn vehicles when Mr Brown or others would drive them. Off the road, set well inland among the bush, they would find productive farms and many Italians or Slavs who claimed to be Catholics but had not practised their religion for years. The Italians, in particular, were very hospitable to the sisters, and became the backbone of a thriving school.

Sister Alphonsus' adult choir of West Perth helped out with evening sing-songs in aid of school and church and parish priest, Charles Cunningham, cut costs by doing some of the building himself together with an out-of-work friend called Frank. When the school opened in 1935, with 58 children, Sr Stanislaus Sheedy was principal and Sr Brendan Kennedy drove the two or three sisters in an old Chevrolet worth 75. Sr Stanislaus paid for the petrol with her music pupils. During World War Two, an army camp was established just down the road. The sisters had to produce their identity cards to get to school. At first there was no running water, no sewerage, and no ice chest or fridge. Mrs Della left a bottle of fresh milk at the road gate every morning after their milk soured, one day, at the fifteen mile peg. Other families provided the sisters with vegetables and fruit.

Gwelup 1937

The same mix of Italian and Slav children existed at Gwelup, established 1937 with a church-school in Balcatta Beach Road, but no convent. This time the patron was St. Therese (The Little Flower). Her feast was celebrated with a procession also, and a roast pig.

The sisters journeyed daily, first from Leederville and then from Osborne Park. Again music was taught at out-of-school times to pay for the petrol of an old T Ford. The 2/6d. helped swell funds. School fees were 6d. a week but Monsignor Moloney had forbidden the sisters to ask for it. The old Ford was often contrary. Many a morning the nuns had to leave their breakfast to help push it out of the garage and down the hill to get started. At the other end, to get up the quarry at the school, the boys were not so helpful, often pretending to push while trying to pull it back. Dr Goody³⁵, as assistant priest there, christened it Leaping Lena.

One day it refused to go altogether, and the sisters had to walk home. The bus stopped to pick them up. They had no money but the driver told them to "hop on"

Sr Pius Stanley relates how she was commissioned, before her final profession, to open up the school at Gwelup. She did not feel very well qualified, but in true Mercy fashion she rose to the occasion. She had done some religious instruction on Saturday mornings in the area, but now she had to round up children for the school.

She was terrified as some of the people were supposed to be communists and one had threatened to throw the priest, Monsignor Moloney, into the lake. Monsignor drove the sisters out but then left them to it. Pius and her

companion, Sister John, started crying. They had to walk miles down the garden in a place to find anyone there. Only to be mostly told they had promised the head master of the state school...

Finally, very hot, they sat under a gum tree and ate sandwiches with meat paste. On returning home, they were upset to be reminded that it was a Friday; though Mother Carmel was more upset they had been told. Another day they were offered afternoon tea, which they accepted, though at that time the sisters were not allowed to have even a drink with their parents. Mother Ignatius, the Reverend Mother, was very strict. When they got home and were questioned... the band began to play! (adapted)

School started at Gwelup in February, 1937 with an enrolment of 34, all barefoot and scantily clothed, with fingernails filled with soil. The sisters thought them "wild but beautiful" Besides not asking for school fees, Monsignor had also proscribed requiring the children to wear shoes or uniforms. But, as time went on, Gwelup became a real family school. As in Wanneroo, the parents kept the nuns supplied with vegetables. Situated high up with pleasant sea breezes and next door to a lake, St. Therese's grew into a likeable school community. Boys stayed on to Grade VII, an unusual situation at that time.

Gwelup school was transferred to the Dominican Sisters when the West Perth Mercies were asked to open a school at Kojonup, 169 miles from Perth, in 1951. Enrolment figures in 1947 were 100.

Scarborough 1948

At the same time, the archbishop also transferred the school at Scarborough to the Dominican sisters. Legend says the local baker gave the local Mercies news of the change! Scarborough Catholic School had been in the care of the Mercies for two years, since 1948. The area was much more progressive than Wanneroo or Gwelup. It seems that Reverend Mother Augustine O'Driscoll stipulated that they be relieved of the two city schools, if they were to take on Kojonup. Victoria Square Mercies were then asked to take it on, but declined.

Havelock Street 1938

In 1938 a small school was handed over to the West Perth Sisters of Mercy, St. Patrick's of Havelock Street, West Perth. It had been opened to take some of the junior pupils in the area who had been going to the state school. The grounds of the school, along with a stone church, were purchased by the archdiocese from the Presbyterians. Three, and then two, sisters travelled each day from St. Brigid's, until 1959, when it became an annexe of St. Joseph's Primary School, Victoria Square.

Kojonup 1951

Kojonup has been the only truly rural convent of the West Perth congregation. It received a staff of four sisters. School began in April 1951 in St. Bernard's church, where it was held until the following year when a school was built. Very many of the children lived miles out of the town. In 1952 a school was built. The substantial brick convent developed from a house purchased in the area.

Kojonup was always a bit of an atypical convent for the West Perth Mercies, concentrated as they were in a particular section of Perth. It was difficult to find volunteers; superiors were worried about the effects on the sisters there of lack of community life (as then understood in terms of common life), the loneliness, and the strain and anxiety from the constant demands on the two or three members. The school was small (68 children in 1967) but not even the offer of the convent as a gift, made in turn to the Highgate Sisters, who were in nearby Katanning, the Sisters of St. Joseph at Fremantle, and the Brown Josephites, could persuade one of these groups to take it over, either as school or motor mission. In 1969, the Order wished to close the school; it survived, however, under a lay principal and with a completely lay staff. In 1991, there was just one sister living in the convent and working as parish assistant.

One of the Congregational rhymers penned these rather poignant words about "The Kojonup Missionaries":

'Tis the Lonely Heart of Jesus, Who calls you far away
For in a Southern Chapel He now desires to stay
His Martha and His Mary, He wishes you to be
In hardships, joys and sorrows unto Eternity.

The sacrifice you're making, He knows its total cost
Who felt the pang of sadness when dying on the Cross
The olive leaves in the Garden glistened with silent Tears
As He trembled with sorrow and anguish — and bled through human fears.

But there's many a joy He will grant you and happy will be your days
For God Alone is faithful and loving in all His Ways
He will treasure the work that you offer — the souls that you gain for Him
In linking the Kojonup people to Christ, their Lord and King.

Mother Ignatius Stritch

During the period when the schools at Wanneroo, Gwelup, and Scarborough were being developed, and the Havelock Street school was taken over, the fourth Reverend Mother was in office, Mother Ignatius Stritch. She was in charge for a long time, in tandem with her predecessor, Mother Aquin Gilchrist. As Mother Assistant, she travelled Ireland for new members, with success. In fact, she had been instructed to get twelve "girls" but ended up with sixteen. She waited till they were in England before cabling Perth, knowing the four extra could not then be sent back to Ireland. The cable caused a flurry of re-arrangement. She fervently supported Monsignor John McMahon's "Bushies" scheme to give religious instruction by correspondence to children living in the bush. She herself later worked in this scheme.

Delia Stritch was born in Kerry, Ireland, of an extended family that produced the noted American Cardinal Stritch, the Jesuit Father J. Stritch, and several Mercy sisters working in Australia. She was twenty-four when she joined the West Perth Mercies. It was her Kerry connection that made her so successful in recruiting in 1933, bringing out sixteen postulants then, who also attracted four others later, sisters to some of the sixteen. The new members were predominantly Kerryites.

All but three³⁶ of the original sixteen persevered in Perth, and became successful teachers under Mother Ignatius' firm hand and forthright manner. She herself was a well-read woman, very capable in the teaching of literature. Some of her young proteges came to feel that she was too hard on them, perhaps even unjust. However, less involved observers considered that she was working in their best interest, wanting them to be good educationists and well-trained professional teachers. Coming to Australia at a very early age, and not being able to return to their homeland for wellnigh thirty years, and given the enclosed situation in religious communities at that time, they were not really conversant with either Irish or Australian culture. Yet, commentators say, they adjusted very well. Mother Ignatius' apparent severity had borne recognisably good fruit. All still living, there is a distinct and attractive note to their personalities, perhaps born of the sometimes painful struggle to attain to Ignatius' high standards while remaining themselves.

It was not only her co-Kerryites who felt her presence a little intimidating. One Australian-born sister wrote that she "always dreaded Mother Ignatius." However she added that "on working closely with her (she) found her very kind, gentle and humble".³⁷ During her second period of leadership, in 1947, Fr Austin Kelly, S.J., as representative of the bishop, canonically visited the West Perth Congregation. He commented favourably on the atmosphere of the community. "The vast majority were very happy. The standard of religious observance was high. Though five or six were not satisfied that this was the case, (the visitor) judged that the charges (they made) were not sufficiently substantiated to require any action" In 1949 a second visitation occurred, this time by Fr. T. Barden S.J. He thought there was some dissatisfaction among the community due to lack of firmness on the part of Reverend Mother. She had been very ill for a few years, it seems, and not able adequately to perform her duties. Barden described her as "a deeply religious woman and the soul of kindness. Probably once a very efficient administrator. Now ill health contributed to a lack of decision." Mother Ignatius resigned from office, December, 1949, five months before her term expired.

Bunbury Also Re-creates the Founding Myth 1897

In the last years of the nineteenth century, St. Patrick's Convent of Mercy, Bunbury, also seemed sailing towards a fair future. So, a second time, in accordance with the Rule and advice from Bishop Gibney, a new Mercy Congregation was formed from a branch house of Victoria Square. It was 12th December, 1897.

Sister Mary Angela Costello was appointed Mother Superior and Sister Mary Xavier Read her assistant. The other members chosen for the new community were Sisters Mary Brigid Cregan, Gertrude Whitely, and two novices Sisters Mary Agnes O'Malley and Cecilia McNamara. Parish priest was Aloysius Maria (Luigi) Martelli.

Once again, a new convent was built to signify the new status of mother house and to accommodate the increasing number of sisters. Father Martelli supervised its construction. The memorial stone was blessed by Bishop Gibney on March 27th, 1898³⁸ with a large attendance. The bishop spoke about the

work of the Sisters of Mercy all over the world, and especially of their skill and tenderness in nursing the wounded, as at Crimea. On July 30th, 1898, the community moved from the old convent to the new one. On October 7th of that year, three postulants arrived from Ireland Mary and Jane McNamara and Mary McCann.

The *Record* of November 5th wrote that the new convent, built to house 25 sisters, was one of the largest and handsomest buildings in town. Boarders could now be taken. A large dormitory over the whole of one wing was for their accommodation. Boarding pupils were first admitted with the opening of the superior school for boarders and day scholars, Monday April 17th of the following year, 1899.³⁹ Numbers were quite small for the first few years, after which they gradually increased.⁴⁰

The new convent fronted Wittenoom Street. Two storey verandahs gave an ornate facade with bay windows extending to both levels at each end, with gable sections above and attractive arches fronting the first floor verandah. The building was of double red clay brick Flemish bond. Tongue and groove jarrah floors were on both levels. The ground floor comprised an entry hall and central corridor off which there were eight rooms. The first floor had fifteen rooms, eleven used as bedrooms.⁴¹

The *Record* described the appearance of the new convent as being very effective on the exterior. There were two wings with Oriel bays, recessed arcaded balcony over the main entrance and carried on octagonal columns. The windows were mullioned. The main entrance had light columns flanking the jambs, with a four-centred arch and square label, and carved spandrels. The gables were finished with moulded copings, with foliated crosses on the apex. In the centre of the main roof was a bell turret. The cost was 3,500 pounds and the architects were Messrs. Cavanagh. "Sancto Patritio Hiberniae Apostolo" was inscribed over the front portal. The whole establishment proved a proper setting for the ceremonies of reception and profession which soon began to take place.

Foundress: Mother Angela Costello

Mother Angela Costello (Ellen) was born of Irish parents in Bunbury itself, 31st August, 1855. In the then tiny settlement, Ellen was taught until the age of nine by her parents. At the age of ten, she became a "second class" boarder at Victoria Square convent. The annual fee was three pounds. Her father's yearly pension amounted to 8.8.0 pounds. John Costello was one of seven Pensioner Guards who volunteered to go to Bunbury to replace the Regular Army. He was granted land in Stirling Street, and over the years held the positions of Lighthouse Keeper, Tide Waiter, and Cooper in the Customs House.

At Victoria Square, Ellen Costello became "the most distinguished pupil" in the Mercy School examination.⁴² After school days, she obtained her certificate for teaching, through qualifying as a monitor. In 1871, she taught at the Catholic school in Dardanup, where she remained until the end of 1877.

Having entered Victoria Square community on 20th January, 1878, she was professed 8th September, 1880. For several years she had been working at

*Right: M. Angela
Costello, first
Superior of Bunbury
Foundation, 1897.*

*Below: Convent of
Mercy, Bunbury.*



the Orphanage at Subiaco, where she was in charge from May 1883 until November 1897, when the Christian Brothers took over. There, too, she had been given charge of boys from the courts. At the orphanage she had also cared for the aged and sick Bishop Martin Griver.

Mother Angela was noted for her asceticism and penitential spirit, her love of prayer and her work for the poor. To some of her students she appeared rather prim. To others she appeared kind and motherly. Her photo indicates a pretty, amiable woman, not quite the person described as walking along with her eyes down but not missing a thing! Perhaps her contact with the ascetic Martin Griver had influenced her spirituality in this direction. And she may have taken her responsibility as founding superior very solemnly. Certainly, she had a reputation as an accomplished teacher and firm disciplinarian. She made a meticulous annual examination of the schools in her care, and this helped keep their academic standards high.

Oral history gives a hint of over-seriousness about the Bunbury congregation. Some try to describe it as a more individualistic tone with a less tangible feeling of bonding than existed amongst some of the other groups, Coolgardie in particular. And yet the Bunbury sisters grew very close to the people, especially through their unwearied visitation. Among themselves, they displayed a McAuleyan type of humour — adopting Catherine's habit of lightening the moment through rhyme.

Mother Angela's spirit of integrity and her administrative ability were obviously much appreciated by her own community, for they re-elected her after each three year term in office, either as Reverend Mother or Mother Assistant up until 1928. This was two years before she died, in Bunbury on 4th October, 1930. She was the fifth Sister of Mercy to be buried in Bunbury cemetery.

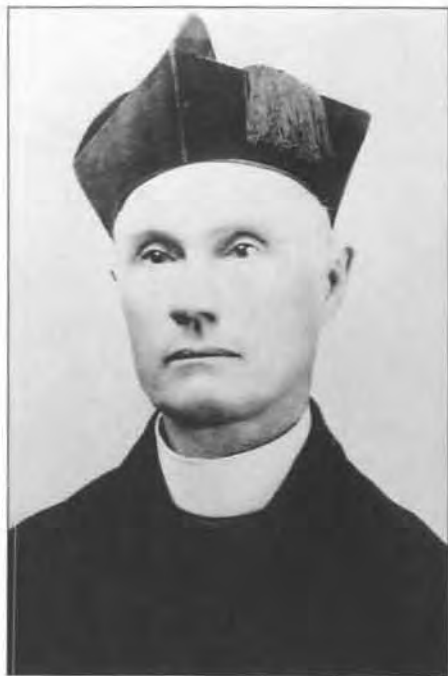
The Other Pioneers

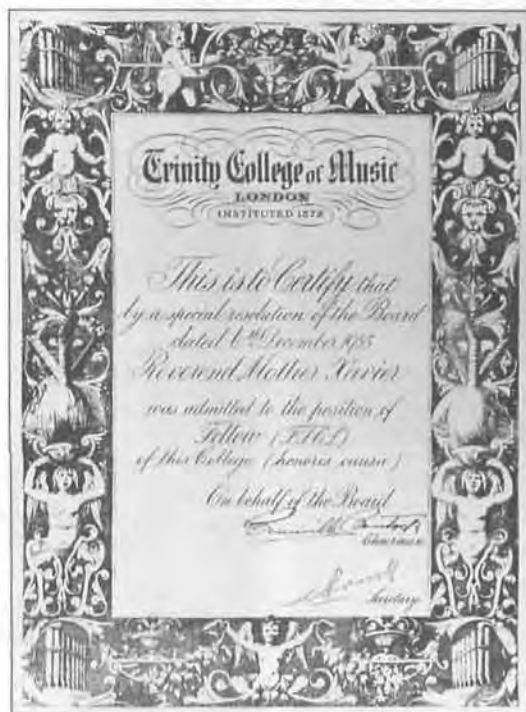
The Reverend Mother Assistant, Sr M Xavier Read, (Mary Josephine) was from Dublin. Born 20th May 1859, she had been one of the large group who had come from Ireland to Victoria Square in 1883. She was sent to the Bunbury on 25th January, 1886, just after her profession on the previous feast of Our Lady of Mercy. She was sent a second time to Bunbury Branch House 21st January 1897 and appointed mother assistant at the time of the separation in December that year.

Xavier Read was a talented musician, as were all the Read family, who ran a prestigious music school — Read's Academy — in Dublin until the 1960s. Her father was an Irish Protestant who, after putting his Catholic wife and children into their family coach — complete with coachman — to go to Sunday Mass, would walk off, top hatted and tailed, to his own church. Memories such as that made Mary Josephine Read appear "a real snob" to her colonial companions.

At the time of Mary's move to Australia, she was a highly qualified musician with some years of teaching experience. Her musical and teaching skills were important factors in the survival of the Bunbury Mercy community. Xavier Read was as generous in passing on her skills to young sisters as she was

*Right: Dean Luigi Martelli,
lifelong friend and benefactor
of the Mercy Sisters, Bunbury.
Below: M. Xavier Read.*





Above: Stained glass window of Our Lady from the Bunbury Convent.

Left: M. Xavier Read admitted as Honorary Fellow of Trinity College of Music, London (1935).



Pupils of St. Joseph's School, Bunbury, 1926.



Sr. M. Baptist Hassell with members of the String Orchestra, Bunbury Convent, 1954/1955.



*Sr. M. Teresa Miller, associated for many years with
St. Joseph's School, Bunbury.*

to her pupils. She was indefatigable in persuading reluctant or lazy pupils — helped by her large knuckles and a fifteen inch ruler, according to one past pupil. This same pupil, Cecilia Lucey, hid the ruler one day in the coal scuttle, having been forewarned of Mother Xavier's current mood. Notwithstanding, Cecilia remembered her as "a wonderful person" who got "the most marvellous results" Under Xavier's tutelage, she won a Trinity College medal (one silver, two gold) for singing, three years running. Later, she was billed as "Bunbury's favourite soprano"

Bunbury became another great convent music centre. In 1935, the year of Xavier Read's Golden Jubilee of Profession, she had the joy of receiving an Honorary Fellowship from Trinity College, London, in recognition of a long and very successful connection with the College. Among the many Jubilee gifts she received from past pupils were a Grand Piano for the parlour and a new Organ for the Chapel. Mother Xavier Read died on 6th July, 1938 and is the sixth sister of Mercy buried in Bunbury.

Of the other four pioneers, three were Irish born. Ellen, Sister M. Brigid⁴³ Joseph Cregan, came from County Cavan. Admitted to Victoria Square community, 2nd July, 1889, she was sent to Bunbury Branch House in April 1896, and remained there as part of the new foundation. The two novices were also Irish, born in County Limerick. Ellen O'Malley was twenty-four at the time of the foundation and Ellen⁴⁴ McNamara was twenty. They were sent to Bunbury on 9th December, 1897. Sr M Agnes O'Malley became Reverend Mother of Bunbury in 1919, but died not quite two years after her election. Sr M Cecilia McNamara was elected Mistress of Novices in 1910 and again in 1919. She was sent in charge of Greenbushes in 1922. Eventually, there were five McNamara sisters in the Bunbury Mercies: Ellen (Sister M. Cecilia), Mary (Sister M. Joseph), Jane (Sister M. Patrick), Bridget Teresa (Sister M. Alacoque Joseph), Margaret Mary (Sister M. Augustine Joseph). They are remembered, years later after re-union with Perth, for being lovely women and "very nice to Victoria Square sisters" who were transferred to Bunbury. "The only thing wrong with us, was we came from Victoria Square" They were noted also for being great at visiting people who needed help, especially Sister M. Patrick.

Sr M Gertrude (Catherine) Whitely, the other of the pioneers, was born in York, Western Australia, of Irish parentage. She was admitted as a lay postulant in Victoria Square in January, 1878, was a foundation member of the Geraldton convent in 1883, was sent to Bunbury branch house in January, 1896, and remained on the foundation.

Irish Recruitment

Direct Irish recruitment became a characteristic of the Bunbury congregation. In all, there were 66 entries in the Bunbury register, including the original foundation members. There was a heavy concentration of entries from Ireland.

Between January 1899, when the second lot of three more Irish postulants arrived, and January, 1910, date of the first Australian postulant who stayed and was professed, there were eleven Irish postulants, all of whom stayed except two, and four Australasian postulants of whom only one stayed.⁴⁵

Amy Isabella Urquhart — the one Australian who persevered — was born in Jarrahdale, 23rd October, 1892, and entered the Bunbury community on 23rd January, 1910. She was received as Sr M Alphonsus Joseph of Mary Immaculate. She made her profession on 21st December, 1912. She died 7th December, 1952, aged sixty years.

Numbers of Irish young women continued to respond to invitations to join. In 1914, Mothers Agnes and Xavier — “as different as chalk and cheese” — visited Ireland questing for helpers. Thirteen months later, on October 30th, 1915, they returned with nineteen postulants for Bunbury, having been pursued for two hours by a German submarine on the way. The ship’s captain, on this occasion, had asked the sisters to pray for their safety. They began a continuous Rosary, in which many of the ship’s complement joined.

Consequently, when, on the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, 24th May, 1916, Sister Mary Philomena Joseph Collier made her profession in the presence of Archbishop Clune, eighteen postulants also received the habit. That was the largest ceremony ever held in Bunbury.

An Unusual “Heroine”

Sister Mary Philomena had a long ministry as a teacher in Bunbury and South Bunbury. Born Irene May Collier, Beechworth, Victoria, in 23rd November, 1891, she was a niece of Philip Collier, one time state premier. Irene had visited her aunt and uncle in Bunbury and was attracted to the Sisters. She was admitted to the Mercy community in Bunbury on 17th March, 1913.

Philomena Collier became something of a Bunbury institution. For some she was a “heroine”; for others, something of a “rogue”. She got to know most people through her zeal in visitation, and people knew her as an original, little deterred by rules and regulations. She was seen by her colleagues and ex-pupils as well ahead of her times in many ways. At the centenary of Bunbury convent in 1983, one woman remembered her from Kindy days in 1934. She had previously taught her aunt and was to teach her daughter. She recollected that Sister Philomena arranged their desks freely around the room, eschewing straight lines. The convent garden also brought her fame. Under her supervision, it became one of the outstanding gardens of Bunbury. Her personality was full of colour, leaving unforgettable memories. When a past pupil, just by chance, took her a bunch of iris one November 21st, feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple, Philomena decided that was her birthday. She liked the feast. Even though “Sisters don’t celebrate birthdays” thereafter the two rejoiced on that day.

Not long before the golden jubilee of her profession, she was in a road accident from which she became confined to a wheelchair. While in hospital recuperating, she continued her beloved visitation of the sick, visiting and writing letters for “some lonely old people in other rooms”. On the day of her Diamond Jubilee in 1976, a past pupil pushed Sister Philomena in her wheelchair up the aisle of the Cathedral for the ceremony. She wrote:

That must have been history’s slowest procession. With the Bishop, several Priests and various altar boys behind us, we started off well enough, but about two rows from the back of the Cathedral, people began leaving their

places to kiss her and shake hands. I looked around apologetically to the Bishop, who was wearing a broad smile, and nodded approvingly, so, with people coming from both sides to greet her, we made our way VERY slowly up the aisle. Honoured though I was, I had to feel sympathy for an old lady who said to me later, "I'd have given ANYTHING to have done that for Philomena".⁴⁶

Philomena Collier died on 5th February, 1978, aged 87, and is buried at Bunbury. She enjoyed life to the end. Once, in her old age, she would not agree to being anointed on the morrow because they were going on a picnic. At an advanced age, she crocheted a beanie for the pope, which was dutifully despatched by the local superior.

Some of the postulants who were received at the time of Philomena's profession, were also remembered at the centenary of Bunbury convent. Annie Walsh, Sister M. Bernard, from Dublin, was affable and kind to all, especially to the sick. "She had a rare sense of wit and on special occasions showed her remarkable skill as a poetess by her humorous compositions, which she willingly recited..." Her sister, Sister Mary Ignatius, entered Victoria Park at the same time.

One of Bernard Walsh's original verse was found among her papers, when she died. It shows a light-hearted response to the re-union of Bunbury Congregation with Perth, and was obviously composed for a concert, no doubt a farewell concert to the independence of the Bunbury Mercy Congregation.

Now hoist the flag, and beat the drums,
We've joined a bigger army
In a few days time the General comes
And off we go a-marching
Says Stan to me I do not care
We'll do great things I wager
We're young and strong and brainy yet
And hurrah for the Sergeant Major (Points to Mother Joseph).

Now listen to this and believe it too
Tis Gospel truth my sweetie,
We have more scope for our talents now
Since we signed the Prendiville Treaty
O don't talk like that 'tis hard to leave
Our camp fires bright and cheerie,
And tramp along a dreary road
To York, or Perth, or Toodyay.

O we're loyal sons of Rome you know
And Rome wants us my dearie
To follow where the General leads
Though the roads are sometimes dreary
Now hoist the flag and beat the drums,
be of good cheer my sweetie,
So no boo-hoo, O'Donnell Abu,
And hurrah for the Prendiville Treaty.

Bridget Quinn, Sister Mary Laurence, was from County Tyrone in Northern Ireland. She taught at Greenbushes, Bridgetown and Donnybrook, and

became Novice Mistress in 1932. She was also in charge of St Mary's Primary School in South Bunbury. She had a great sense of humour and a strong respect for duty; a prayerfulness and concern for those in need which attracted many to her. After amalgamation, she was at Bassendean and Shenton Park as head teacher, and Queen's Park as the first Mother Superior there. She died in 1980 at the age of 89.

Maggie — Sister Mary Kieran — Howlett came from Queen's County. Her lifelong work was with school children — in Bunbury, Dardanup, Bridgetown, and East Victoria Park. She made friendships also with the parents and other parishioners who responded to her interest with genuine affection. "People found her easy to talk to, because of her personal charm and sincere interest in their problems, but more because of her great spirit of faith." She exercised much influence for good. The two Brady sisters — Aloysius, who died young, and Columba — were small in stature but captivating in personality.

One sister who is remembered as having a tremendous influence on the boarders was Sister M. Rose Jones. Some of the families remember her for the jobs they were asked to do — a nail here, a screw there, the washing machine on the blink, and so on. They were hard days for the sisters but the difficulties brought them close to the families around, who willingly helped in such minor crises. Boarders recollect helping Sister Rose churn the ice-cream for a picnic at Australind on St. Patrick's Day. Or her reading them a book on table manners at mealtime. Or being taken by her for Sunday afternoon walks — all forty of them paired off according to height, from three years to eighteen years, and inspected for appearance. And forbidden to speak to the local lads, making wise cracks at this crocodile of girls. Or listening to Sister Rose and Sister Catherine sing in beautiful harmony at Sunday Benediction in the convent chapel.⁴⁷

There were to be forty-two more entries in the Bunbury register after Australian Amy Urquhart, and of these only ten were Australian born. Three of these left. Of the nineteen Irish postulants who came in 1915, only five did not remain. The Bunbury Congregation thus had a relatively high proportion of Irish-born members.

Branching out:

South Bunbury 1904

Fulfilling Catherine McAuley's prophecy that local communities would best respond to local needs, the Bunbury convent soon began to branch out into the rural areas nearby. January 26th 1904, the bishop opened and blessed a new church-school at South Bunbury. St. Mary's was about two miles from the Bunbury convent, and the sisters had, at first, to walk there and back.

Bridgetown 1905

The year 1905 also was the year for Bunbury community's first branch house. In May of the previous year, Angela had written to Gibney asking permission to proceed at once with building a convent at Bridgetown, while the people were willing to assist. When Gibney did not reply, she wrote a second letter, asking him to send a telegram if he had no time to write.

On the feast of St. Aloysius, June 21st, 1904, the trenches for a new convent at Bridgetown were dug. Bridgetown is a fruit, timber, dairy, sheep and cattle centre, southeast from Bunbury. With the help of Dean Martelli, a number of difficulties delaying the construction of the convent were overcome, and under his able and careful supervision the building was finished very satisfactorily by November 1904.

The new convent was a neat, one-storey building with verandah all around. There were ten rooms with fine, large windows giving good lighting. A wooden outhouse provided a laundry, storeroom, cow house and fowl house. At the solemn blessing and dedication to St. Brigid, on 14th January, 1905, not many people were present. Consequently, reads a sad little note in the Bunbury convent chronicle, "the subscriptions contributed on that occasion towards the convent building fund were very few"

The first members of the Bridgetown community were Sisters M. Brigid Cregan (in charge), Genevieve, Gertrude, and Alacoque (novice). The latter was in delicate health and it was thought a change would be beneficial. School opened with 33 on roll, but, by 1919⁴⁸, the number had grown to over 100. School was taught at first in the church. In 1928 a new school was built, occupying one of the best sites in Bridgetown. The convent was also extended, becoming a two-storey building. It could now take a limited number of boarders from outlying districts.

The Bunbury love of music went also to Bridgetown. The year 1921 was particularly successful, with Eileen Connell gaining highest marks (91) in Preparatory Division, Trinity College, and medal of the local centre; Veronica Lake honours and gold medal Higher Local Trinity College, and highest marks in the state; Doreen Robson highest marks (86) in Senior Division Trinity College, and gold medal of the local centre; Hannah Markey 84 marks in the Practical Diploma Examination, Trinity College.

Greenbushes 1915

The second Branch house of the Bunbury foundation was at the then flourishing tin-mining centre of Greenbushes. The Sisters of Mercy took over in 1915 from the Sisters of St John of God. These latter had established a school there, and at its peak the enrolment reached over 100. Commercial subjects were offered to those who wished to stay on after primary schooling. Embroidery was taught. However, by 1929 the register totalled about one third of that number. The population of Greenbushes continued to decline and in December, 1937, the Catholic school was closed. The community in that year had comprised Sisters Columba Brady, Aidan Cahalan, and Ligouri Menagh.

Donnybrook 1916

Thirdly, the Bunbury sisters went to Donnybrook. Donnybrook was an Irish district later with many Italians also. It was 24 miles from Bunbury, and featured dairy cattle, sheep, fruit and potatoes. On May 1st, 1916, three sisters

Mother Brigid, Sisters Berchmans and Augustine set up a temporary convent in a wooden structure erected under the supervision of Dean Martelli. Augustine was one of five McNamara blood sisters in the Bunbury



Sr. M. Stanislaus Kelly, long remembered for her contribution to the Greenbushes Convent School.



St. Philomena's Convent, Donnybrook.



Convent of Mercy, Bridgetown.



Pupils of St. Brigid's School, Bridgetown, 1941.

congregation. The new school was called St. Philomena's. Eleven children were present for the opening, but by 1929 there were more than fifty. Donnybrook was also the first convent to bring in "bushies" from distant properties to prepare for the Sacraments. These children would live at the convent for several weeks.

The Bunbury account book shows that Martelli had bought the land for the sisters in Donnybrook in 1908. He gave a horse to the sisters, who sold it in January, 1911, for eighteen pounds. This was the beginning of a fund to build the Donnybrook convent. His influence on the design of the convent that was to be built was strong, showing itself, for example, in the lack of windows in the main hall. The original convent building to the east of the current main building was often referred to among the sisters as Dean Martelli's stables. One sister is alleged to have burst into tears when told she was to go to Donnybrook — she feared living in what she had heard called Dean Martelli's stables. The origin of the name is uncertain. Martelli may have kept his horse on the site in earlier times or it may have been because of the inadequacy of the buildings or because of the shape of the rooms, rather small and narrow, just like stables. Given that there were old "stables" in part of the York convent and a building still called the "stables" at Subiaco which could never have accommodated a horse, one or other of the two latter explanations is probably nearest the truth. Another account claims that the buildings were originally built to house Aborigines. The Aborigines had been transferred to New Norcia. One room had been built with sky-lights in the roof so that they would have plenty of light to do their art work. This became the chapel.⁴⁹

What the various accounts of the origin of Donnybrook convent seem to have in common is its lack of comfort. Dean Martelli lent 1800 in 1916 for the convent. The money was to be repaid to Bunbury to help cancel the debt on the chapel. Only 500 had been repaid in 1935, when there was need to extend the building with an east-west spur. Mother Finian Gaffney, the then Reverend Mother of Bunbury, wrote to Archbishop Prendiville, complaining that money was not put to the best advantage at Donnybrook convent:

although with the income available and the revenue derived from entertainments, things should not have fallen into such disrepair.

Finian suggested that part of John Gavin's estate — a gift of about 1,000 pounds — be put to the renovation of the Donnybrook convent. Since the sisters at Donnybrook were under the impression that the obligation to repay Dean Martelli's loan died with the Dean, she also suggested to Prendiville that it would be advisable for him to name a definite sum for the repairs.

Donnybrook convent was a quite remarkable building.⁵⁰ Made of timber, it was impressive for its size alone. The main hall now is 42 squares while the convent at the rear is another fifteen squares. With the parts that were demolished, it must have totalled seventy squares, the equivalent of about five ordinary houses in floor area. One story is that Dean Martelli dreamt of having a novitiate in Donnybrook — it was built just after the big influx in November 1915 of postulants from Ireland. The first local Sister of Mercy from Donnybrook was Amy Atherton, Sister M Bernadette, professed 1932.

When the need for more renovation occurred in 1958, "the old stables" part of the convent was demolished. This section was in a very bad condition. The demolition workmen found that all that was needed was to loosen the tin on the roof and it just about collapsed of its own accord.

One of the names connected with Donnybrook is that of Sr M Anthony Foley, "a wonderfully rich and outgoing personality" It was Sister Anthony who was suspected of not using money cautiously, and it would seem there was reason for this. As Reverend Mother, Anthony had bequeathed a rather fragile financial situation.

Sister Mary Anthony, born Nora Foley of County Kerry, Ireland, 12th November, 1878, was admitted to the Bunbury community 2nd May 1900. She was a tall, big boned, well proportioned woman, described as having to have been one of the largest women in Australia. Anthony was quite a character, with great potential and a most unconventional streak in her personality. She is said to have been the type that would succeed in a pioneering situation and she had scope for this in the new Convents of Mercy in the south-west. One ex-Bunbury boarder remembers witnessing Sister Anthony "the brightest thing" coming down the front stairs laughing heartily. Until there sounded three big claps from the foot of the stairs, followed by dead silence. Mother Angela waited until Sister Anthony descended.

Sister Anthony had been the second superior of the Donnybrook convent, in 1920, and again in 1932. It was she who, in 1936, had extensions and improvements made to the buildings. Boarders were more easily accommodated, up to thirty or more. Anthony was also an expert music teacher, her pupils doing very well year after year. In 1937 her class all passed the practical examination with honours, and were rewarded with their photograph in *The Record*.⁵¹

Donnybrook was made a parish in 1937. Sister Anthony had persuaded Archbishop Prendiville to send a resident priest, pledging the district's support, including meals at the convent. Hence a presbytery was built without kitchen and dining room!

Anthony was also good at getting money, even though in the opinion of others she may have spent it somewhat unjudiciously. She wrote to Prendiville in 1937 about the success of their ball. She had just had a ring from a Protestant lady who had proclaimed that "we must take off our hats to the Roman Catholics ... no denomination can run a ball like them" The archbishop replied that it was certainly a marvellous success. It netted £70.2.0. Another time, while a reluctant parish priest, Fr O'Grady, was away, Sister Anthony painted the church herself. On his return she told him a hobo had come by looking for work and she had employed him to paint the church. Fr O'Grady said, "How much?" "Twenty pounds" she replied, and on receiving the money, promptly bought candlesticks for the altar.

Sister Anthony would brave any situation. Once, when a sick sister required a dose of brandy, Anthony went to the local pub and unheard of for those days "breasted the bar" in deathly silence from the other customers and demanded: "My good man, give me a bottle of your best brandy." At another time, when Reverend Mother refused to let the sisters go on a boat trip up

the river during holiday time, Anthony warned her: "Reverend Mother, when you die, you will stand before God in judgment because you did not allow the sisters to enjoy His creation."

Dardanup 1920

Fourthly, nine miles from Bunbury, Dardanup dairying, cattle, potatoes became the site of a branch house in April, 1920.⁵² Princep Park House was rented at one pound per week, and three sisters opened school in it on 12th April, 1921, with 21 pupils. Sisters M Columba, Finian, and Berchmans were the staff, the first being in charge. The parish provided a dwelling for the sisters. Mother Angela Costello must have rejoiced to see the school of her initial teaching days now a Mercy School.

Dardanup had been the early centre of Catholicism in the South West. Thomas Little, who was a friend of the early sisters at Victoria Square, had resided there since 1838. In 1854 he had moved to Dardanup Park, former property of Rev. J. R. Wollaston. Little was really co-pioneer with John Scott in the Leschenault District. Some say that he sponsored migration to Dardanup during the Irish famine of 1846-47 and set many of the immigrants up on 100 acres of land. Ruth McGrath queries this, saying they mostly came of their own initiative. She does say Little had influence in the district's being strongly Irish in character.⁵³ The church was built in 1857 on land given by Little. It was the first Catholic church in the country areas of the colony. Thomas Little made good wine and won gold medals in Paris. But the same year and next, he lost most of his grapes. In the 1870s economic depression followed the end of transportation and Little lost much of his wealth.

On April 24th, 1921, Mother Agnes O'Malley died while visiting Dardanup, after only three weeks of illness, and aged only 47. She was visited by all the sisters during those three weeks, the chronicler comments. On April 2nd, the following year, Archbishop Clune blessed the new convent school at Dardanup, a two-storey brick building. Though not quite finished, the sisters had been teaching in it since 6th February. In 1929 the pupils numbered more than forty.

Expansion at Bunbury

Development continued at Bunbury itself. Angela Costello continued as Reverend Mother, with varying Assistants and the replacements, from time to time, demanded by the rule after two consecutive terms. Xavier Read also continued to hold various posts, including one of Reverend Mother appointed in 1910 when no majority was obtained after three scrutinies of votes. Evidently Xavier's exercise of authority was not as firm as Angela's or perhaps the Novice Mistress Cecilia McNamara was under suspicion. The four young women who had entered between March 1908 and 1909 had all left, though the next three in her term had stayed. Whatever the cause, Archbishop Clune, in 1912, rearranged the whole authority arrangements, says the chronicle of the community:

He found the religious spirit on the whole very good, but a slight relaxation in minor matters had crept in which with the blessing of God will speedily disappear.



The first Mercy Convent in Harvey, formerly the Boys' Boarding facility at Bunbury.



The first group of students at St. Anne's, Harvey, 1935.



The Dardanup Community and some visitors photographed with Monsignor Cunningham.

Sr M. Agnes O'Malley was made Assistant to Xavier. Angela took Cecilia's place with the novices and Cecilia went off in charge of Bridgetown.

Mother Angela, and obviously she alone, had a hold on the community's confidence. She was re-elected as superior in 1913, 1916, 1922, and 1925, with Xavier her assistant. In 1928 again no majority of votes was received by any sister, and Clune appointed Sister Mary Anthony Foley. In May 1931, Mother Finian Gaffney was elected, but failed to be re-elected in 1934. With no majority occurring, Clune reappointed her. It was during this term, in 1936, that Bunbury rejoined the congregation at Victoria Square.

Bunbury convent school can claim the honour of being the second examination centre established in Western Australia in connection with Trinity College of Music, London. Instrumental music was a decided part of the curriculum. The number of music pupils were increasing so much that, in 1918, a Music Hall had been erected.⁵⁴ This was a detached building, comprising an entrance hall, ten music rooms, and one large room called the "Theory" room. Piano, violin, piano accordion, guitar, and singing were all offered. The music rooms were used continually for practice and echoed with a cacophony of varying sounds from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The boarders were often taken to violin, piano, theatre, musical comedy or opera recitals. A sister coached dancing, and other sisters would join in to show the ballroom dance steps.

The *Record* usually carried one or more columns of the music successes of Bunbury Convent. On August 31st, 1918, it reported that 31 pupils of the Convent of Mercy, Bunbury, were successful at the practical examination held in connection with Trinity College, London, a one hundred per cent pass rate. Kathleen Power obtained 96 marks for L.T.C.L. Doris Bettesworth 95 for A.T.C.L. The *Record* quoted from the *Bunbury Herald* concerning the musical career of these two convent students, outlining their various successes throughout the past few years. Kathleen Power was the first Licentiate from that centre. The *Record* of 8.1.1921 shows that Doris M. Bettesworth, aged 19 years, was the winner for 1920 of highest L.A.B. marks (173) in W.A. She had received her L.T.C.L. the previous year, winning a gold medal. The *Record* of June 7th, 1930, published a two-page spread on the Bunbury State Musical Festival and the Convent School Successes. Among other honours, there were first prizes for both girls' and boys' choirs. The elocution students were just as accomplished.

Doris Bettesworth was not a Catholic. Bunbury, like all the convent schools of this period, was open in its admission policy. Doris's mother's third husband was Robert Forrest, brother of John. Sir John Forrest's own daughter, Ethel, was at school at Bunbury convent as a day scholar.

After 1921, the old church became part of the school and then of the convent. Renovated twice, it was first used as an infant school and then as a dining-room, accommodating sixty boarders or more. The sisters' chapel was now transferred upstairs to the room formerly occupied as a dormitory for boarders and later for postulants brought out by Mother Xavier.

In December, 1924, a new wing was completed for the convent. The new building was cruciform in shape and ran parallel with the main building, with which it was connected by a gangway. It housed the sisters' chapel and the children's chapel in the upper storey, while the lower storey comprised the community room, work room, office, and six cells for sleeping. It was similar in construction to the convent. There were Gothic style timber-framed windows, several of stained glass, with ornate exposed timber roof beams. The total cost was 5,690 pounds.⁵⁵

To provide a site for this new wing, it was decided to take down the "Old Place" a name given to the little building which had been the first home of the sisters in Bunbury. Sister Gertrude, one of the originals, stood with clasped hands and tear-stained face watching the younger sisters, professed and novices, remove all the lumber of the years — what Gertrude called her "savings for new Foundations".⁵⁶

Another marathon effort took place on Christmas Eve, 1924, to prepare the new chapel for Mass on Christmas Day. The French tiles were washed, the floors oiled, everything dusted and arranged nicely, lace, vases, candelabra, chimes, and a fine brass missal stand were all procured, the missal stand a gift of a friend. But alas, owing to the scarcity of priests, the first mass had to be postponed till the following day, the feast of St. Stephen. The Mass was sweetly sung by the sisters' choir.

The chapel for the sisters had been for a long time the dearest wish of Dean Martelli. But he was no longer there to supervise its construction. In 1923, 25th October, the beloved Dean Luigi Martelli had died. Although feeble he had continued to work until a couple of days before his death. The chronicler wrote that the sisters placed a small but nicely cut celtic cross over his grave,

as a token of fond remembrance and gratitude to that saintly soul who had for many years been such a loving father and adviser to their Community. In his demise, we have suffered a great loss...

Dean Luigi had, indeed, been a good friend to the Sisters of Mercy, especially in Bunbury, where he had been appointed parish priest in 1896. Born in India of European parents, Martelli had soldiered for some time in the Indian army, and later, as served as chaplain. He had had to leave India on account of ill health and, knowing Western Australia through his relative, Canon Rafaelo Martelli, had arrived there in 1881.

Very solicitous for the welfare of the Bunbury Sisters, he had contrived to get them beach holidays annually. His use of the English language could cause amusement. One saying of his was long quoted: to a fidgeting altar boy, in his somewhat broken English, "Keep your h'eyes on the h'altar and mind the Amen." To a Sister receiving a penance during Congession: "For your crimes say one Hail Mary" Another memorial of Dean Martelli today, a mantel clock from the now closed convent at Bunbury, resides in the sisters' dining room of the restored Victoria Square convent. Martelli had a fascination with clocks. About 1909, he became chaplain of St. Joseph's Girls Orphanage at Subiaco, and stayed there for many years. Sister Francis Gool'd's diary of the Orphanage, 1903, describes him as spending "some hours settling

the clock" In all, from her diary entries, it took him five or six days to "settle" the Orphanage clock. He presented grandfather clocks to at least three Mercy convents Bunbury, Victoria Park, and Subiaco. He bequeathed his own clock to Bunbury convent, to which he was chaplain for the last few years of his life. The story is told that it chimed for the first time in many years on the night of his death.

On 9th June, 1929, a new primary school building, on the corner of Wellington and Wittenoom Streets, was opened and blessed. A Mr. Atkins had generously lent money free of interest, and superintended the work in general. St. Joseph's Primary school was, said the *Record*, now one of the most beautiful schools in the Archdiocese. It was "the culminating achievement of the Bunbury Mercy Community" and was a "gigantic undertaking. The financial burden involved was a very heavy one" but thanks to the zeal of the parish priest, Venerable Archdeacon Hayes, and the "heartly cooperation" of the people, "the enormous responsibility undertaken by the Sisters (was) considerably lightened."⁵⁷ In August 1928 Reverend Mother Anthony had written to the archbishop that they needed 7500 pounds for the primary school and already owed the bank 1850 pounds. Their security was twenty acres zero roods sixteen perches on which was erected convent, three brick and stone buildings and chapel.

The upper storey of the new primary school was to be used for the high school, and the sisters paid for its construction on this understanding. However as the number of boarders was then up to sixty, it was found necessary to use the four largest rooms upstairs for dormitories. As customary in most country convents, there were also boy boarders. The little old church was converted into a dining room for boarders. The boarding school was discontinued in 1969.

Sacred Heart High School, Bunbury

Early in 1899 a "select" or superior school had been opened. This was the only such school in Bunbury for a number of years afterward. It was patronised by non-Catholics as well as Catholics. As the Sacred Heart High School, it is first mentioned in the Catholic Directory in 1904, with twenty pupils. By 1914 it had doubled in number, and by 1934 had doubled that number, with an entry of 89 pupils. In 1942 there were 37 boarders and 48 day pupils. As with the other Mercy "select" schools, there were separate uniforms and other arrangements, such as playgrounds.

At some stages of its history, one sister taught all the main secondary subjects in the one room to all the students. Nevertheless, the school had a good academic reputation. Pupils remember learning poetry and drama "in a fun way" as well as having afternoon tea once a week at a French lady's home, when only French was allowed to be spoken. Art of Speech was also offered, and there was great rejoicing one year when three of the seniors received ninety or more in their Art of Speech Leaving Examinations. One past pupil reminisced that Shakespeare was never more exciting than when learnt with an Irish accent!

The *Record* of 23rd December 1911 printed a photograph of some writers for their Children's Page from the High School, Convent of Mercy, Bunbury. The photo comprised fifteen girls and one boy. The same *Record* published some photos of individuals who had passed various examinations, including the Adelaide Primary and the Adelaide Junior, Secondary School Scholarship, Aunt Bessy's Competition for a Prize Essay, and two groups of Aunt Bessy's Nieces and Nephews. Among these photos, there were ten boys.

The teaching of commercial subjects was a distinct speciality of Sacred Heart High School. One Sister would teach two or three lessons going on at the same time in the old weatherboard classroom. Sister Stanislaus taught pupils for the Commercial Higher Certificate in the 1920s when some five or six girls stayed on. Later, Sr. M Paul taught commercial subjects to students from all of Bunbury and surrounding districts from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. The girls who were full-time students worked as if in an office, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The school never failed — every girl was employed, irrespective of her intelligence. Banks, local stores, garages, all used the system of ringing Sister up for her to send her best girls.

Sister Mary Stanislaus Kelly was Irish and arrived as a trained teacher in Australia, entering the Sisters of Mercy in Bunbury early 1899. She was a natural teacher, a unique educator of young people. She worked for over forty years at Bunbury, Bridgetown, and Greenbushes. Her day was not confined to the schoolroom but extended after school to visiting the sick and the aged. In addition, she undertook by correspondence the religious instruction of children living in remote areas. She has been described as one of the great educationists of the South West!⁵⁸

Sister Mary Paul (Kathleen) Harrington had worked in Bunbury as a shorthand typist for some years after she had arrived in Australia from Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland. She decided to enter the Sisters of Mercy, which she did on Christmas Eve, 1929, at the age of thirty. She became responsible for almost all the Bunbury-trained shorthand-typists until her death in 1964. Her interest in her students continued after they had left her care and, very often, had obtained positions for them.

The Bunbury Sisters of Mercy, wrote one ex-student at the time of the Centenary Celebrations,

operated a school where, irrespective of race, colour or religion or wealth, each child was equal. I can remember Sisters asking for your old school uniform to give to a poorer student (but you never learnt who). The adjusting of school fees for those who could not afford to pay and the encouragement given to students to pursue further studies are things I will not forget easily. The poor, and not-so-poor and the wealthy girls learnt side by side but no one ever knew what was the position of a student's family — each student was treated on an equal basis. Each student was encouraged to fulfil her potential.

As a boarder, sometimes we saw the plight of mothers and children calling for help at the Convent. There were no "aids" or "refuge" places then and I saw the Sisters treat the bashed up mother and frightened children or the drunk's family or the aboriginal woman and children with kindness, seeking a solution to their problems.

To me 100 years of the Sisters of Mercy in Bunbury means a better world — an education of people into a committed people, into a caring community and into a community that loves the arts even more for the richness given by the Sisters.

The Sisters are the pioneers — the women that have made history...⁵⁹

Harvey 1934

In November, 1934, a fifth and last foundation was made. This was at Harvey, some 28 miles (45 kilometres), north of Bunbury. A building which had been erected in Bunbury in 1918 as part of the boarding school, but was no longer needed for that purpose, was transported on jinkers to Harvey. Sister M Cecilia McNamara was first superioress in this temporary convent building which acted as the convent for thirty-seven years, retaining much of its pristine spartan simplicity.

School began in the new year. It was not easy when, within the next couple of years, there was a large influx of migrants from Southern Europe. They were exceedingly poor when they first arrived in the district, but hard work led to success. The school tried to cater for the mix of nationalities and the range of ages in a small country town. Post-primary classes were introduced and, at one stage, Sr. M. Enda taught up to Leaving Standard when no other secondary education was available in Harvey. The High School was coeducational. Classes were taught on the convent verandah. A Back to Harvey day in 1984 revived "lovely memories" for some of Sister M. Enda's past-pupils.

Relationships with the local state school were unusual. Prior to 1976, there was no telephone at St. Anne's, and the state school principal would trot over to the Catholic school to give messages or to let them know they were wanted on his phone. One Grade One pupil decided on her own initiative to transfer from the Catholic to the State school, since the latter had swings, see-saws, bars, etc. which were absent from the former. The result — St. Anne's got an Adventure Playground.

Guildford, York, and Toodyay

Try to Repeat the Founding Myth, 1900.

In 1900, again under persuasion from Bishop Gibney, the convents along the Swan and Avon rivers were separated from Victoria Square convent. However, unlike Bunbury and West Perth, these were not in a position to grow to any great extent, and their independence lasted for just over a decade.

Guildford Midland Junction

Sister M. Francis Goold was in charge of Guildford from 1886 to 1900. In 1900 on the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 15th August, Guildford became an independent foundation, with Mother Mary John Stewart the first Mother Superior, and Sister Mary Francis Goold her assistant. The members of the community comprised Sisters Mary Stanislaus Morrissey, Columba Horgan, Alphonsus McGrath and Camillus O'Mahony. On 21st January, 1901, Francis Goold, on her own request and by agreement of the community, returned to Victoria Square. Sister Columba became Assistant Reverend Mother.⁶⁰



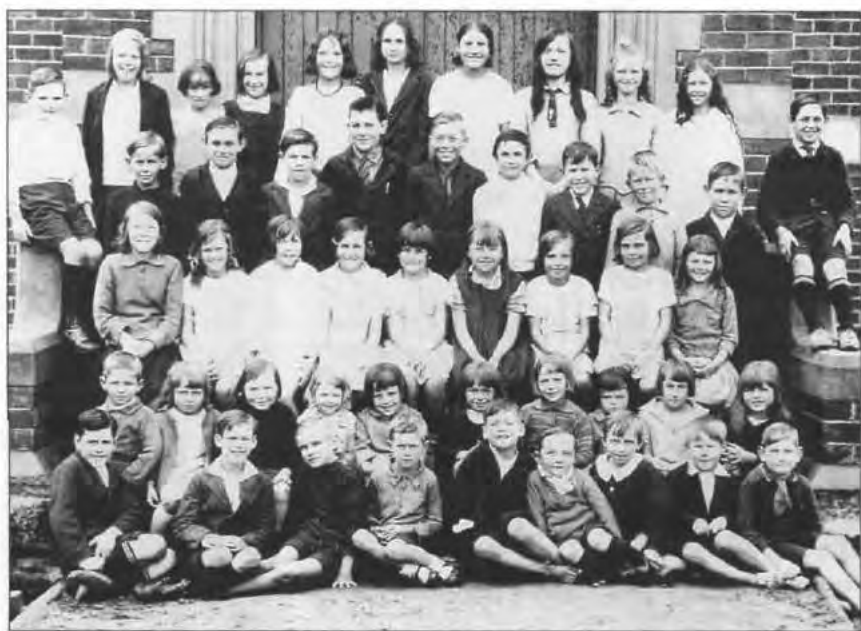
Convent of Mercy, Guildford.



Convent of Mercy, Midland.



Srs. M. Brigid Byrne and Conception (Eileen O'Sullivan) about to set out for Herne Hill School in the faithful "Peggy"



Students at St. Brigid's School, Midland, approximately 1945.

Bishop Gibney, seeking for volunteers for the new foundations, had been disappointed that Assistant Reverend Mother John Stewart of Victoria Square, had not offered. He asked her why. "Here I am, My Lord, send me" she had immediately replied, with a biblical turn of phrase. Whereupon he appointed her Reverend Mother of Guildford.

From their simple lowset convent bungalow, some postulants and novices walked to the church, over the next few years, for their ceremonies of reception and profession. The first postulant who stayed long enough to be professed was Ellen O'Mahony of London, elder sister of Camillus. She entered, aged 23, as a lay sister on 31st May, 1901 and was received as Sister Gerard, being professed in 1904. Gertrude O'Callaghan from Perth entered at the age of seventeen on 15th August, 1902, and was professed as Sister M Joseph in 1905.⁶¹ Three years later, April, 1908, she was appointed Mother Assistant by the Bishop and in November of the same year, Reverend Mother, Mary Reidy from County Clare entered in January, 1904 and was received as Sr M. Magdalen. Mary Tyrrell, nineteen years, entered from Kilkenny in November, 1904, and was received the following year as Sr M Ignatius. Professed in 1907, she was nominated Mother Assistant in November, 1908, by Bishop Gibney. The initial years of the foundation were years of loss as well as gain of members. The very first young woman to enter, Bridget Moran of Ireland, aged 26 years, entered as a lay postulant on 2nd January, 1901, but was dismissed on 28th April. Another who entered in August of the following year left within three months, while another Irish postulant, aged 31, from Cork, was received but left before profession at her own request. Julia O'Mahony, Sister M. of Mercy, having entered at 21 from Cork, was professed on her deathbed in March 1905. She did not die until later in the year, on 27th December. In addition, one of the first members of the new congregation, Sister Stanislaus Morrissey, died 30th November, 1902, and was buried in the Guildford cemetery. She was 57 years old, and had worked in diverse areas of ministry at Subiaco, Victoria Square, Geraldton, Bunbury, York, and Guildford.

Despite their small numbers and the youthfulness and lack of experience of most of them, the Guildford Sisters began to divide. On 2nd February of 1902, Bishop Gibney opened and blessed the first church school in Midland Junction, two miles distant from Guildford. The Parish had been dilatory. Sister M. John had written to Gibney in April, 1901, saying she was very anxious about the new school at the Junction

nothing has been done as yet... The Sisters think that, perhaps, it would be better if the community would take the matter into their own hands and be responsible for the money...

I dread being in debt, but for the sake of the souls of the little ones at the Junction, I think we ought to make an exertion.

She asks him to try to find one or two good teachers for them in the other States.

The school cost 1800 pounds. Partitions divided the church school into classrooms and a screen was used to separate the altar during the week. Architect E. Giles presented a handsome stained glass window.

Early staff included Mother M. John Stewart, Sisters M. Joseph O'Callaghan and Magdalen Reidy, and two lay teachers, Frank Gugeri and Miss Henderson. Enrolment was about 200. At Guildford were left Mother M. Columba Horgan, S M Ignatius Tyrrell, Miss Pombart (later S M Genevieve) and Miss C. Gugeri.

Midland Junction had been gazetted as a municipality in 1893. It progressed more rapidly than Guildford at that stage, its population in 1901 being 1568 whereas the much older Guildford had 1459. By 1911, Midland had grown to 3483 but Guildford remained at 1669.⁶² In 1901 there was an average attendance of seventy to eighty children in the Guildford school, whereas in Midland Junction there were 130 to 140 children. The sisters commuted from Guildford convent daily to the Midland school. Between Guildford and York, farther inland, a number of timber mills were regularly visited for pastoral purposes.

On 14th February, 1903, Bishop Gibney made a canonical visitation of the new foundation. He wrote that "the small community then consisted of Reverend Mother Stuart(sic), Mother M Horgan, M M Dolores (lent from Perth), S M Alphonsus, S M Camillus, S M Gerard, novice, and S M Gertrude, postulant." The bishop judged that all were "happily carrying on their great work of teaching ... most satisfactorily and (he) found everything in good order"

In 1906 the convent was transferred to Midland Junction, the sisters now commuting daily to Guildford. The Guildford convent was handed over to the parish, being used at first for a presbytery for the priest and later as the site of an aged home. As befitted the mother house of a separate congregation, the new convent at Midland Junction was quite an imposing structure, costing more than 3500 pounds. Windows and door openings were in the Tudor-Gothic style. The building was broken up into gables and terminated in crosses. Gutters were moulded in Gothic design. In the spandrels formed by the door arch and the label mould, were two carved panels in cement work, one a Celtic cross and the other a harp, both entwined with shamrocks. Opposite the front entrance was the staircase hall, formed by the intersection of four Gothic moulded arches. The stamped metal of the ceilings was specially designed by the architect, Mr T. Cunningham and was of Celtic design, being Celtic knot-work and shamrocks. The ceiling of the chapel was decorated in blue and silver.⁶³

It was named St. Brigid's Convent of Mercy. Situated on the corner of Morrison Street and what is now the junction of the Great Eastern and the Great Northern Highways, it was officially opened and blessed on Sunday, March 25th, 1906. Messrs Robert Knox (uncle of the future Cardinal) and W. Willoughby went around Midland-Guildford, in horse and trap, collecting funds to pay off the debt on the convent.

A lovely if narrow front cedar staircase, also in Gothic design, with several turns and decidedly steep stairs, wound up to the second floor of the convent. This housed the nuns and the boarders, and also the pupils of the "High School" or fee-paying section, when this was founded in October, 1906.⁶⁴ The majority of the children attended the parochial school in the church. By 1910

the entry for Midland Junction High School in the Catholic Directory stated Boarders and Day pupils 41. St. Brigid's parish school had 186 pupils while St. Mary's at East Guildford had 75.

The community was increasing fairly rapidly in 1906, so the largeness of the new convent seemed justified. The roof was of galvanised iron as a third storey was anticipated. Most of the entries were of Irish young women. Six entered from Ireland during 1906, all but one between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. The exception was 37 years old and was dismissed within six months. In 1907, Matilda Pombart, who had been one of the two Pombart sisters who had taught school in Coolgardie before the Mercies arrived, joined the community at the age of 28 and was professed in 1910 as Sister M. Genevieve. In the same year she was joined by Ethel Grave who was professed as Sister M. Annunciation of the Blessed Sacrament.

The last postulant to be received into the independent Midland Congregation was Kathleen O'Callaghan, aged eighteen, from Perth. She entered the day that Gertrude, her sister, known as Sister M. Joseph,⁶⁵ was appointed Reverend Mother. Mother John Stewart had died in office on 30th June, 1908. Her assistant, Mother Columba Horgan, had left the order the previous February. Sister M Alphonsus McGrath — another pioneer — had transferred to the York community. On 3rd April, 1908, S M Joseph had been appointed Mother Assistant and had been acting Reverend Mother since the death of Mother John.

At the twofold ceremony⁶⁶ of appointing a Reverend Mother and receiving a postulant into the order, Bishop Gibney commented that almost all the sisters were quite young, and also that many were but novices. He had a special interest in the foundation as it was undertaken at his suggestion. Consequently, after much thought and deliberation and prayer he had appointed Mother Mary Joseph. Her assistant was Mother Ignatius Tyrell; Mother Camillus Mahony was Bursar.

The postulant, Kathleen Mary O'Callaghan, had gone to school at St. Joseph's, Victoria Square. For two years in succession she obtained exceptionally high distinctions in mathematics in the Adelaide junior and senior examinations. On one of these occasions she obtained the highest marks in mathematics of any student in the State. The bishop here noted in passing that at the last University Examination a large percentage of the candidates from the Midland School passed with credit.

The *Record* commented that in a young community such as the one at Midland, the singing of the psalms and hymns was very good, very true and impressive. At the "dejeuner" provided by the community after the ceremony, the bishop drew attention to the singular coincidence that had occurred on that day. Mrs O'Callaghan (her husband Frank was deceased) had the privilege of seeing one of her daughters appointed Rev. Mother, and another enter religion as her first spiritual child.

Kathleen O'Callaghan was professed as Sister M Evangelist on 2nd February, 1911. Hers is the last entry in the Midland register. She died on 22nd December

of the same year from T.B., aged 22 years. Her older sister, Mother M Joseph, died of the same disease at the age of 33.

Mother John Stewart

The death of Reverend Mother Mary John (Evangelist) Stewart in mid-1908 had been a great blow to the young foundation. She had been a remarkable woman, one who truly seems to have had "the love, respect and deep veneration not only of her sisters but also of the clergy, the children and their parents, and of all with whom she came in contact. Her name was a household word."⁶⁷ She had the invaluable knack of making the convent home-like and a strong family spirit resulted. A "thoroughly recalcitrant" goat and a prize St. Bernard dog, Hector gifts to Mother John were retained and helped keep the novices human.

Mary Josephine Stewart had inherited a love of learning from her father, Dr. James Stewart, M.A., F.R.W.I., and had developed her own vision and maturity. While yet a novice she had charge of the Young Ladies School at Victoria Square, and was noted for her influence over the girls, as well as for her talent as a teacher. Shortly after profession in 1885, she had been sent to the branch house at Geraldton, where she remained about eighteen months. Then she was given charge of the new school at St. Brigid's, West Perth, where she remained for one year. Later, at Victoria Square, she was elected Mother Assistant, a post she held until she went to Guildford.

In Guildford and Midland, Mother John Stewart laboured well in her many onerous and trying duties, according to the newspaper report of her death. Those who lived with her spoke of her consistent charity and her extraordinary capacity for hard work despite her physical frailty. During a long illness she bore herself with that patience and fortitude which was characteristic of her. She was nursed by Mother Joseph and Sister Camillus, and indeed by all the sisters, who seemed to vie with each other in waiting on her. All the available priests from Midland to Fremantle attended her Requiem Mass. She was 54 when she died.⁶⁸

Mother John had been able to speak firmly when circumstances demanded it. Writing to Vicar General Fr. Keogh, September, 1901, she requested that either he or the bishop would *insist* (underlining hers) on the then priest at Guildford⁶⁹ declaring what he had against the nuns, also to substantiate his wholesale accusation against them. Accusations included that they were not living as they ought and that she had been *bossing* him ever since he came. "I don't think" she commented, "I know how to *boss* even if I were anxious to do so." The priest had made mischief between the sisters and the people.

I must beg that whatever priest comes he will be given to understand that the nuns must be treated with at least the respect due to *ordinary decent women*, putting what is due to ladies or religious out of the question.

On 11th January, 1912, Gibney's successor Patrick J. Clune C.SsR. held canonical visitation of the Midland Junction convent of Mercy. He wrote that it was

very consoling to find such a spirit of union and charity in a community... all are happy in their vocation... not the slightest trace of anything like serious violation of the Rule.

However, he went on to say that

the general feeling of the community is that the present staff is unequal to the school work... (and there is) danger of injuring the health of the Sisters if the present high pressure is kept up. While all are happy together in their own small community, I found a very general spirit of sacrifice among them, viz., that they would consent to amalgamation with the Convent, Victoria Square, if such were considered necessary for the upkeep and efficient teaching of the schools and the general welfare of the community.

The premature deaths of four of their number was indicative that change was needed. Two were in their fifties, but the other two were both 22 years of age. At the time of Clune's visit, the community was twelve in number. Their average age was 27 years.⁷⁰

The Midland Junction Convent of Mercy re-joined Victoria Square in 1912. As part once again of the Perth Sisters of Mercy, Midland Convent of Mercy took part in further expansion within the area.

Bassendean 1914

In 1914 St. Joseph's Convent was established at West Guildford (Bassendean), the school having about sixty pupils and three sisters. Sister M. Aloysius Cronin was superioress. Aloysius got the reputation at Bassendean of being "a great old sister" with some unusual characteristics. Sometimes during early afternoon she would ring the school bell and announce that all were to go to the convent to weed the lawn. Each child was given a patch to weed. A boiled lolly was the prize for the most weeds. Once a pupil was given a message for her father that sister wanted to see him on important business. The parent had tea quickly, changed from his work clothes, and hurried to the convent. There he discovered that the important business was to bring home a dozen Sally-buns and a dozen bananas from Perth the next day, so that the sisters could have a treat.⁷¹

Parishioners worked hard but happily for the school and convent in those early days. They helped enlarge the church school with a homemade verandah and constructed tables out of butter boxes for the fund-raising euchre parties. The Show Ball became a great event. School children, Children of Mary, and young men in the parish would vie with one another in organising fancy dress sets. At one such ball, a man failed to turn up for his part in a set called "Five O'Clock Tea". Sir Walter Dwyer, a Court Judge, attired in full evening dress, was dragooned into the part.

In 1918 a new school building was opened at Midland Junction, Sunday 7th April, with all the splendour now customary for such Catholic occasions.⁷² In 1919 the school at (East) Guildford closed, having had only 33 pupils in the previous year. However, it was reopened in 1925 with Sister Philomena Saunders in charge, Sister Perpetua Miller on the staff, and pupils numbering 57. The sisters travelled from the convent at Bassendean to Guildford. In February, 1936 a school at Herne Hill in the Midland Junction parish was opened and staffed by two sisters commuting from the Midland convent. It had 42 pupils.

York

By 1901, extensions to the school and convent at York, including a new chapel, had been erected. The total expenditure was 2087 pounds. By the following year, all but 100 pounds of this had been paid. The school building of one classroom and two porches was built of granite. The dwelling house was of sound well-burnt bricks on a stone foundation. It had twelve rooms and a hall, a back passage, and 100 feet of verandah eight feet wide. The two blocks of buildings were enclosed by a good fence — a stone wall with a strong wooded railing on the front wall. All were well-finished and said to be of a superior quality. An evaluation of land and buildings put the total value at 3500 pounds.

Such activity befitted York's new status as a congregation in its own right. On 15th August, 1900, St. Patrick's Convent of Mercy, York, also became an independent foundation. First Mother Superior was Mother M. Bernard Brennan, who had already been superioress for at least two brief terms in 1888-1889 and 1896. Her community were Sr M Ignatius Ryan, S M Malachy Patrick Burns, novice, and Sr Veronica McKenna, lay sister.⁷³ They were joined on 27th December, 1900 by Sr M Vincent Lee, from St. Brigid's Convent of Mercy, West Perth.

There were seventy pupils in the parish school. A Bazaar held by the sisters late 1901⁷⁴ netted 105 pounds. A concert by the Children of Mary, assisted by Sr M Ignatius, was a great success.

The community never expanded much, however. There were only one reception and three professions in York, two in 1902 and one in 1904. None of these three had entered directly in York. Sister M. Vincent Lee had entered West Perth. Born in 1878, she was received into St. Brigid's Convent of Mercy, West Perth, in April, 1899, and was professed in York on 6th January, 1902. Sister M. Malachy Patrick Burns, born 6th February, 1877, had entered Victoria Square and was received on June 30th, 1900, just before the foundation. She was professed in York on 29th June, 1902. The third, Sister M. Brigid (Annie) McAuliffe, had come from County Kerry and had entered in the Convent of Mercy, Newcastle on 22nd October, 1901. She came to York as a postulant five months later, aged fifteen years, where she was professed on 9th July, 1904.

In 1905, Mother M. Bernard Brennan resigned as Mother Superior of the York foundation.⁷⁵ Sister M. Conception Buckley came from the Mother House in Perth at the Bishop's request and was appointed Superior on 27th May. The bishop, on his canonical visitations, had been pleased enough with what he found in the small community of six. He wrote in the Chapter Book: "The virtues required for a foundation like this and indeed essential are — Humility and Charity. P.S. On the whole I am pleased with what I saw." The bishop had "minutely examined all the inmates and (was) perfectly satisfied that the religious (were) devoted to piety and the other duties which belong to their profession."⁷⁶

In May 1909 Mother Conception wrote to the bishop that things were "very dull". In December of the same year, she asked for permission to send some of the sisters away for a change. The doctor considered this "very urgent."⁷⁷

The number of pupils in the school never reached more than a few pupils over the ninety mark. A small superior school was opened after the foundation was separated from Victoria Square, and operated within the old church, now St. Patrick's Hall. The High School, as it was called, was founded in 1904,⁷⁸ had twenty pupils in that year, rose to thirty, but by 1909 was down to twelve. It seems to have closed in 1911.⁷⁹

The community amalgamated again with Victoria Square in 1911. A small house of six sisters continued to teach school and help in the parish. Music was a mainstay, as with all the convent schools. Numbers are not available for the earlier years, but when Sr M Cyprian taught during the years 1921-1943, there were sixty pupils learning piano and violin. Sister Mary Mercy taught the latter. Both also taught a full day in school.

Sister Cyprian's music teaching is an interesting exercise in religious authority and/or obedience. After representing her inability to put a girl for her Diploma, Reverend Mother Brigid wrote back from Victoria Square: "You don't know much, I know, but *an obedient one shall speak of victory*." Bobbie got her letters, and a proud mother, Maud Carroll, wrote a warm letter of congratulations to the sisters — via the Parish Priest! In 1933, Sr M Cyprian got another potentially unpleasant surprise from Mother Brigid, when she received a letter saying she was to take Mother Alacoe's place. "I know you will do your best", she wrote, "as you know the people and you know all the circumstances". When the school closed at the end of 1971 through want of numbers and staff, Sister Cyprian was one of three sisters who agreed to come out of retirement, in response to a call for volunteers to open the old convent. She had taught in York, her first assignment, from 1921 to 1943. Now, at the age of eighty, she was committed to "no school: just Visitation, Music and any other work of Mercy within reason".

Sister M. Berchmans Burke who taught from Infants to Junior was over forty years in York. She was much loved by all. Sister Berchmans went to York as a novice and left the year before her golden jubilee. Born Maggie Burke of Wittenoom Street, East Perth, she was admitted to Victoria Square community in February, 1917, receiving the habit in January the following year, aged 19. She was professed with temporary vows January 21st, 1920 and final vows January 20th, 1923. Much later, her sister Mary, at the age of 28, also joined the Mercies, becoming Sister Mary Leonard.

Berchmans Burke's teaching was with the younger children, from kindergarten through infants to first and second classes. She loved the children and was not at all upset by their noise. She had never trained to be a First Class teacher but she was a natural and marvellous educator, a humble woman with the power to draw the children to her and learn from her. She had a talent for art, very useful when teaching younger children. When she decorated the altars in York church, they were notably beautiful. She enjoyed gardening and worked very hard to make it fruitful. She loved all things beautiful.

Despite her love of beauty, Sister Berchmans was able to live happily in the rather uncomfortable convent. The sisters were extra poor in those days and Sister Berchmans was strongly attached to her vow of poverty. One woman in the parish saw Sister's shoes as she knelt in the chapel — the soles were

worn away and cardboard put in to replace them. They were soaking wet. The woman offered to get Sister a pair but she would not accept. Berchmans was seventy years when she died. Her companions had found her a faithful friend. She had taken on the meanest work, they recalled; she had never uttered a complaint, nor a slighting remark about anyone.

Archbishop Prendiville was not impressed with the convent. He had done canonical visitation of the convent in 1936 and had then recommended a new convent — "worthy of the Sisters who work so hard. The present building (with the exception of the Chapel) is not at all suitable", he wrote. For many years used as living quarters by the sisters, it could now be described as a "slum" dwelling. By 1952, the demolition of the "old block" was long overdue. A busy bee of voluntary workers told the sisters, who supplied them at various intervals with hot scones, sandwiches, cake, tea, and cold drinks, that they would willingly pull down the whole convent. At least 1156 pounds was collected in donations for a new south wing to the historic Gothic Victorian building.

Toodyay

The *Inquirer* of 1887, describing Newcastle, wrote that at the entrance to the town stood the pretty Roman Catholic Church and priest's house. When the railway line reached Newcastle in 1888, its terminus was near the church and a shed was built there for goods. On the other side of the street to the church was later to be built a large and attractive Convent of Mercy. Meanwhile, the convent remained in the old Leeder house in the town centre.

In 1900, on 15th August, the Mercy community in Newcastle began its brief life as an independent foundation. It was called the Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Sister M. Bernadette Agnes Lewis was the first Superior, Sister Monica Bourke her assistant. Sr Vincent Brennan was a lay sister. Sr. M. Kevin Deasy was lent for a while. Sr Magdalene Lucas alternated with Sr Kevin, until postulants came from Ireland in October, 1901. In 1904, Sister Francis Goold went to Newcastle for a while to assist in music lessons.

Sister Vincent Brennan was the Mary Brennan of Wonnerup Vasse W.A, who had been one of the first members of the Branch House in York in 1872. She transferred to the new foundation at Newcastle on 15th August, 1900. Sr M Bernadette Lewis, superior of the foundation, was Jane Lewis, from County Limerick, Ireland, born on Christmas Day, 1857. She had entered the Convent of Mercy, Cahir, Tipperary, in 1877, where she had been professed two years later. She had volunteered to accompany Rev. Mother Aloysius Kelly to West Australia in 1883. Three weeks after arrival, she was sent to Geraldton for a while. The Register shows she was transferred to Newcastle on 15th August, 1900 "by Bishop Gibney". Sister M. Monica (Ellen) Bourke was a local girl, born in Irishtown, Northam, Western Australia on 2nd April, 1871. She entered Victoria Square community on 2nd August, 1897 and was professed on 21st July, 1900. Less than a month later, on 15th August, she came on the Newcastle foundation. She was appointed Mother Assistant July 18th, 1904.

In all, there were three professions in Newcastle, two on 16th July, 1904 and one on 20th January, 1907. The candidates were all Irish. Of the direct entries into Newcastle community, four seem to have come on 21st October, 1901. The first was Ellen Curtin from County Limerick, born 10.3.1871. The second was Margaret M. Browne from County Cork, born 31st March, 1884. Both were professed 16th July, 1904. Ellen was Sister Mary Mercy; Margaret was Sr M. Alacoque (later Sister M. Angela). Two others were in the postulancy at this time, Nora Enright also of Limerick and Annie McAuliffe. They became discontented in Newcastle and asked to go to York. Mother Bernadette wrote more than once asking for permission to send Nora away as she had no vocation and disturbed the other three. Nora had another side to the story: she complained that she was not allowed to go to school or do any work. She had decided to go to America. Instead, she entered at Victoria Square 21st March, 1902, received the habit in January, 1903 and was professed 1st February, 1906. By December 11th of that same year she was dead. She was 22 years of age.

Annie McAuliffe finally decided not to take the habit in Toodyay. "She would make a very useful sister but has an obstinate will and a very bad temper, but is young", wrote Mother Bernadette. In 1902 Annie transferred to York, where she asked to receive the habit. She felt "very happy and contented" in York, where she had more work to do than in Newcastle. Sister Bernard of York wrote that she was giving satisfaction in every way. As Sr M Brigid, she was professed in York in 1904.

The next postulant was Susanna (Sr M Columba Patrick) O'Connell, born County Clare 22nd June, 1884. She entered Newcastle January, 1904 and was professed 20th January, 1907. A fourth entry was that of Teresa Bufton, who, as a lay postulant, received her votes for Reception on 15th December, 1904, but did not proceed to profession.

Mother M Bernadette was reappointed superior by the bishop on 31st May, 1906 and again on May 26th, 1909. At the latter appointment, the parish priest of the district, M. Griffin, stated in the Chapter Register that, in accordance with the bishop's instructions and because there were not the number of vocals required by the rule to elect a superioress, he had "to review the appointment of Rev Mother Bernadette for another time." Apparently, Fr Griffin found Mother Bernadette's leadership satisfactory.

However she did not find favour with Bishop Gibney for much longer. Some trouble must have developed in the parish, for on St. Patrick's Day, 1910, Bernadette wrote concerning Father Griffin: "A thousand good thanks for your kind fatherly advice" She was glad His Lordship was coming. "Please God everything will be cleared up then. I would rather die, or be turned out on the road to beg my bread than that a good Priest should suffer for any word or act of mine." In a letter on 4th April, she asks the bishop to accept the hospitality of the convent. She had heard that Fr Griffin was arranging for some people to come and cook for him. "Surely that is not necessary, your own children are here and we will be only too glad to do any little thing for you."

On 11th April, 1910, the bishop made a visitation of the Convent of six professed members, and made "careful inquiries from the individual Sisters as to how the rules were observed in the community" He found that "various irregularities were taking place, and the rules were not carefully observed" He warned Bernadette that "unless the corrections, which (he) referred to before the community were made the consequences would be serious" The bishop stated, on 10th June, 1910, that he found that his directions were ignored, and consequently he declared that Sister M Bernadette was no longer superior. In her stead, he appointed Sister M Monica Bourke. She was to see that the directions required were carried out.

There is no record of the "irregularities" but perhaps Mother Bernadette was a little too human for some. Boarders at Victoria Square in later years remember that she could easily be persuaded to give hungry girls a second slice of bread or whatever. She cared for the sick sisters, writing, in January, 1910, to Gibney for permission for four of them to go to Fremantle during the holidays, "for the Sisters need the change badly" Sister Vincent, in particular, had been ill and was not yet out of danger.

In 1911, under Archbishop Clune, the foundation at Newcastle rejoined the Victoria Square community.

The small foundation, however, had developed a healthy enough life on its own. Applications for boarders were fairly numerous and usually refused through lack of accommodation. In 1902 a request by Mother Bernadette to the bishop for permission to open a private school had not been given. Bernadette responded by saying that the bishop would have to come and see for himself what was wanted. A Mr Connor had promised help, but had now left the state.

In 1902, Bernadette took courage and admitted two boarders, 17.10.0 pounds per quarter for two. "If we had only room we could have eight or ten boarders now".

Bernadette seems to have been over-cautious by nature. In 1909 she wrote to the bishop that the fact that he had reappointed her Reverend Mother was making her determined to have enough vocals next time for an election. "They might have had a few (subjects) before if I did not despair of Newcastle being able to keep them... now shall run the risk." Perhaps her caution stemmed, in part, from the fact that the inhabitants of Newcastle, in contrast to those of nearby Northam, seem to have been apathetic and not much for progress.⁸⁰

Mother Bernadette was easily able to accommodate boarders in the large new convent. It, too, was in Stirling Terrace, but beyond the town centre. February 1903 was the date of the specifications for its erection. It was a two storey brick building. Architects were Henderson & Jefferies of Perth. Joseph Hart was the builder. A total of 1530 pounds was to be paid to Hart.

The foundation stone was laid 2nd July, 1903.⁸¹ It stood near the Toodyay Railway Station, a convenient site for the boarders who were, as time went on, to present themselves "in such numbers that both the convent and the

residence of Dr Mayhew, purchased by the Sisters, were filled to capacity".⁸² Known as "Avondown" Toodyay convent came to have a bit of style.

Legend states that the new convent was built by the Connor family. This does not seem quite accurate, given the costs to be paid, but the family does seem to have contributed generously. One account in the Mercy archives claims that they donated the land. In February 1902, Bernadette stated that Mr O'Connor (sic) had promised help but had now left the state. He had called a few times before he left and had not forgotten his promise but, she added, "I could only tell him that I had heard nothing definite from the Bishop." She referred to the permission refused to open a private school and wrote: "Situated as I am, I cannot undertake anything, so we are simply living in hope, for some change. Hoping you may be able some day to understand our position..." Money was certainly tight. In March, 1902 she complained that Father Bourke had not sent them any share of the school endowment that year, and last year they had received only half the usual amount.

In 1906, a letter to the vicar general from the then parish priest mentioned that he had received Easter dues and a cash donation, together with word of a set of vestments and a ciborium from Dublin, in a letter from Mr B. Connor. So it seems as if the Connor family took seriously their contribution to the parish.

Bernard Maurice Connor was the third son of Dan Connor, whose extensive properties earned for him the nickname of "Newcastle King"; Dan owned stores, a steam mill, and land in Newcastle and in 1883 had bought the "Shamrock Hotel" in Perth.⁸³ (Rica Ericson). He also held shares in other large companies. His daughter's husband, Timothy Francis Quinlan, became the member for Newcastle. His first two sons qualified as doctors of medicine and the third, Bernard, was established on an estate on "Wicklow Hills", just across the river from the new convent.

Bernard Connor was also an active citizen of Newcastle, being — among other things — justice of the peace, first chairman of the Newcastle Board of Health, and a founder of the Toodyay Club. It is related that the Sisters of Mercy were able to buy the old home of Dr Mayhew — district medical officer — through the generous bequests of the Connor family. Rica Erickson writes that "As a widow, Mrs Dan Connor became a paying border of the Sisters; their accounts and her Will indicate also regular donations to the Convent."⁸⁴ The family's generosity to the church continued beyond the grave, for the Toodyay parish history states that the altar and tabernacle of the new church built in 1963 "were donated by the O'Connor Estate (375 pounds) to perpetuate the memory of the O'Connors" In 1970 "a platform was built for the priest's chair according to the new rite of the liturgy and costed \$733-55 which were donated by the O'Connor and Quinlan families."

The house purchased with help from the Connors was a two storey building. Its first owner was Dr A.E. Growse, Newcastle Depot medical officer 1861-1872. Dr Growse was a member of the Newcastle Board of Education and first Chairman of the Toodyay Road Board 1871. His house is believed to have been built in the late 1860s. In 1885 Dr Mayhew — Medical Officer since 1872 — employed Joseph Wroth to renovate the building. In 1904 he

left the district and the house was sold to the Sisters of Mercy. One parish account says that Dr Growse's House (later called "The Ship") was purchased from Dr Mayhew, its last owner, and used as an infants school in the 1880s to 1890s. However, the account which puts its purchase date at 1904 seems more likely correct. It is not known how it came to be later called "The Ship" but one story is that the movement of the verandahs in windy weather or storms led the pupils to give it that nickname.⁸⁵ The house was constructed of brick and galvanised iron. Originally there was only a verandah on the ground floor. The sisters added on the upper storey as additional dormitory space.

In August 1903, builder Hart was asking for 400 pounds for extras supplied in the construction of the new convent. A loan was required from the bank. Mother Bernadette wrote the bishop that she had faith in St. Joseph who would not leave Our Lady's house long in debt. The new convent with boarders' accommodation was to be opened September 27th, within the octave of the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. Improvements were also to be made to "the old building"

After rejoining Victoria Square, Toodyay continued to flourish. In January 1921 the Superior, Sr M Angela Browne, wrote that "for the past few years requests for admission have exceeded the accommodation..." By that time, a new separate two-storey building was being constructed. Design and construction was by Mr J.D. Saunders. Cost was 6777 pounds. Classrooms and music rooms occupied the ground floor; boys' dormitories the first floor.

The place was popular with parents from Perth and the North West. Applications had come from the tropics in the north of the state down country to as far as Albany in the South; from parents in the city and adjacent. All round the new building, large verandahs reached through French windows, gave sleeping — outfacilities. These dormitories were for boys up to twelve years of age. Thus parents, if they wished, could send their daughters and their sons to the same boarding school for several years.

The sisters kept cows, hens, turkeys and pigs together with vegetable gardens. A few stories over the years centre on the workings of the farm. To distinguish between a sister and a workman, there was at one stage Stan the man and Stan the nun. At another, Sister Agatha Cheun, daughter of an Irish mother and Chinese father, and a past pupil of St. Vincent's Orphanage at Subiaco, was helping Karl, a French workman, to milk the five or so cows. The man who usually milked them was absent. The cow ended up drinking the milk product of all the cows — from the bucket. On the principle that "what went in must come out" Sister Agatha immediately set about re-milking the no longer thirsty cow.

One boy boarder in the mid-1920s was Mick Cronin who later became a prominent football personality. He was coached by Sister Columba McGuire, who quickly recognised Mick's potential and trained him in the basic skills of the game. Mick developed a famous long, raking left-foot dropkick from the centre.

In 1922 "the old convent" at 96 Stirling Terrace was vacated and put up for auction, procuring 529/10/- pounds. It had continued to be used by the school. The girl boarders had to march in crocodile line to class. The boys were allowed to go less formally. Some of the boy boarders remember themselves, however, as not very privileged. It was so cold sometimes that they had to tie hankies around their mouths to keep out the cold air. The boys had the chore of crossing the river to the farm of Bernard Connor to bring back cows for the sisters to milk. A former girl boarder remembers how they would get ready for bed in the evenings after washing in enamel basins on wrought iron stands. They would then say their prayers. There was a statue of the Madonna on the wall. At this stage (1917) there were only two buildings on the site — the convent and The Ship. The junior girls slept on the verandah of the latter. The boys slept on the upstairs verandah of the main convent building next to the chapel.

In 1928 another large one-storey building was erected for additional dormitories and a recreation room for the girls. These extensions were blessed and opened in May, 1929, by Archbishop Clune.⁸⁶ This building cost 5200 pounds. Once a year it became a ball room, a great social event advertised all over Perth and surrounds. The balls helped pay the cost of the building, put up by Sister Angela largely through her own initiative. These extensions brought the number of buildings on the site to four⁸⁷, with a kitchen and a laundry, both attached to the convent by covered way.

Angela had more than one way of creating funds to pay for her extensive building programme. There was the periodic sale of cows and calves and the occasional euchre party or concert. But it was the annual springtime ball which became famous in the district. Quite an upheaval occurred, with the girls' dormitory having to be transferred to the upper floor of "The Ship"; the erstwhile sleeping quarters then being transformed — with expert help from E. B. White of the Victoria Hotel — into a "spectacle of streamers and coloured lights"; while the boy pupils used their natural body talents to polish the floor. It became traditional to have a spare chair on hand to replace the one which collapsed under the vigorous body contortions of Mr. J. Griffin — leader of the "melodious and popular five-piece orchestra" — seated at the piano. Local farmers donated sheep, lambs, etc. to help create the "most comprehensive" menu, ranging from savoury eggs to fruit salad, "so that every palate was abundantly catered for."⁸⁸

Sister Angela was one of the postulants who had entered in Toodyay in 1901. She was Margaret Mary Browne and was professed as Sister M. Alacoe. After the amalgamation she changed her name to Sister M. Angela to avoid confusion. She was a masterful woman and a great friend of the Connor family. For her silver jubilee they had constructed a wing to the church across the road for the use of the sisters and boarders. Under her leadership, "Avondown", Toodyay, acquired style and class. Yet she did not hesitate to ply a spade, hammer, or paint brush. She was particularly proud of her past pupil, Lang Hancock, who discovered iron ore in the North West, and of his cousin Valston, who achieved command in the RAAF.

Nicknamed "the Mayoress of Toodyay" Angela is remembered for going shooting rabbits and kangaroos — or possums on the convent balcony, cats at the beach. She wore a wrist watch, in the times it was not considered conventual, long before any other Sister. She did not get on with one parish priest and showed her displeasure by pitching stones onto his roof one dark night.

In 1939 Sister Angela had more money worries. A new balcony was erected for the girls' dormitory and enclosed with sliding glass windows — the girls slept on it five months in the year. Eventually, over eighty boarders were at Toodyay convent in some years. The new buildings had given the space to expand.

In the 1904 entry in the Catholic Year Book, there were fifty pupils in the parochial school of St. Aloysius, and ten boarders and fifteen day scholars in the superior school. In 1944 there were 82 boarders, forty day pupils in the High School, and 122 in the parochial school. These figures seem to have been the peak numbers, more or less, for the various sections.

In June, 1934, Archbishop Redmond Prendiville canonically visited the Toodyay community. He "found everything in perfect order — the religious spirit among the Sisters being excellent. They are a happy and united community" Prendiville commented on the "noble and self-sacrificing work being accomplished by the Good Sisters" Their work in the school and with the Bushie children was "at no small amount of inconvenience to themselves" They were to be commended for their zeal, piety, and devotion to duty.

CHAPTER SIX

NEWCOMERS RE-CREATE THE FOUNDING MYTH

Two Mercy Foundations From Outside Western Australia

Coolgardie Foundation 1898

The Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia are a very special place Mercy-wise. As they probably are for most people who have tasted of the seething life of the goldmining towns, scattered in a vast desert-like area of mallee and spinifex and gum, sandhills and salt-lakes and semi-arid plains.

We can but marvel at the courage of those first women who left Adelaide in the 1890s to work in such an isolated place and harsh environment, with its wind swept plains and its penetrating red dust, and its scorching hot days in mid summer and its freezing nights in mid winter. The dust was a mixture of sand and mining dirt stirred up by the willy-willys. There was very little water in the 1890s — C. Y. O'Connor's brilliant plan to pipe water all the way for 563 kilometres from Mundaring Weir did not come into operation until 1903.

There were people always on the move, seeking the eldorado of gold; sometimes finding it, more often not. At news of a strike, thousands would leave one tent town and set up another, so alluring was the news or rumours of gold found through panning the gold-bearing dirt or digging in the rocks. Enormous numbers, mostly men, immigrated to the goldfields of Western Australia from other parts of the colony, or from the eastern side of the continent, or from overseas, mostly returning there when the alluvial gold had been exhausted. Meanwhile, many camps had been set up and pulled down, transported elsewhere or abandoned altogether — camps made of hessian or canvas or calico buildings or of corrugated iron or beaten out kerosene tins.

Amid all this excitement and resultant disappointment and transitoriness was much violence. Violence due to envy of another's luck; to rage at false rumours of where a new strike might be found; to deceit and stealing and theft and all the rest of human frailties. Violence magnified by the harsh climate and terrain and especially by the lack of water and the plentifulness of beer, whisky, or brandy to quench the resultant thirst. Beer was cheaper than water. A water bag was more precious than a wallet.

Women were in a decided minority in the unsettled parts of the goldfields. Many of the men were absconding from their wives and children or their fiancées, from the law or from failures of any kind. One popular ballad of the time commented on this phenomenon when it sang:

But though we plumbed the depths of many mysteries and myths,
The worst we had to fathom was the prevalence of Smiths.

Another parodied the song *Killarney*, beginning:

By Coolgardie's stinks and smells...



Coolgardie Foundation group, 1898. Left to Right: Srs. M. Gertrude Carroll, M. Gerard Byrne, Mother Antonia McKay, Srs. M. Ignatius Conlon, M. de Pazzi Briggs.



Theatre Royal purchased in January 1898 for use as a classroom.

*Right: M. Antonia
McKay.*

*Below: Convent of
Mercy, Coolgardie
(1903).*



There were also a lot of good things about the goldfields — the camaraderie and kindness and demand for honesty and justice, a reliance on one's fellow human being for help in desperate, life-threatening times. There were moments of slow discovery of the beauty of the sparse surroundings, with their unobtrusive variety of colour. The pink and red soils, the olive and drab green and blue-grey foliage in the deceptively monotonous scrub, the clear, clear blue skies. On a closer look, there were so many variously coloured leaves and barks — of the aromatic eucalyptus and other gums or of the fragrant pale grey-green sandalwood trees. There were the bright and pastel shades of wildflowers in season: the reds and black of the Sturt Desert Pea, the yellows of the broom or wattle bushes, the gay tints of myriad small flowering plants in white and pink and gold and blue. If one were patient and watched, glimpses could be caught of kangaroos, goannas, lizards of many kinds, native birds such as cockatoos or galahs, emus.

There was the entertainment of a vivid mix of races: hardworking Chinese, British (including aristocratic remittance men), voluble Italian woodcutters, Australian born whites or squatting groups of Aborigines, Germans with their rousing bands, French and Japanese ladies of the street... Most colourful of all were the Afghan camel men with their unusual clothes, loose blousy tops, sashes, and accordion pleated pantaloons, turbans wound round their heads, rings on their fingers and toes. They could be seen with long camel trains of up to a hundred camels, moving in line, the nose of each camel tied to the tail of the one in front of it... an Afghan walking alongside at intervals. The streets of Coolgardie, as of other gold towns, were especially wide for the camel trains or horse teams to be able to turn.¹

Mercies From Adelaide 1898

The Coolgardie Mercy foundation also had an ethnic colour about it. It was led by Antonia (Catherine) McKay, Argentinian born of Irish parentage. Antonia had already had quite an adventurous life before she arrived, aged 52, on the West Australian goldfields in the first decade of their existence. At the age of 23, she had entered the Mercies in Buenos Ayres², where she had been to school. This was a foundation made from Dublin by seven sisters who went there on February 24th, 1856, to work especially with the large influx of Irish farmers and their families. In a country whose climate and conditions were very different from their own, the Irish immigrants were soon suffering from disease and other distresses. An Irish priest working among them, Father Anthony Dominic Fahy, asked for some Dublin sisters to help. Initially employed in nursing the sick, the sisters also began to teach in schools for both the Irish settlers and Argentinian children. Argentinian young women began to join them. One of these was Catherine McKay, who entered the Convent of Mercy in 1868. She was professed on 5th August, 1871.

Political conditions were particularly unstable in Argentina. A series of revolutionary upheavals in the late 1870s, a break-in to the convent chapel, the burning down of the Jesuit school next door, the "most particular hatred against the Jesuits and the Sisters of Mercy", and the expulsion of the Jesuits, led the community to decide to close their two convents, at least temporarily. Two of them went to Dublin to consult with the community there and, while

overseas, met the Bishop of Adelaide, Dr Christopher Reynolds, looking for helpers for his diocese in South Australia. The Argentinian Mercies were invited to Adelaide. Accordingly twenty four sisters from Buenos Ayres came to Adelaide in May, 1880. Of these, twelve went south to Mount Gambier, where they founded a Convent of Mercy, six of them returning to resume their work in Argentina ten years later.³

One of the Argentinian-born who never returned to their native land was Antonia McKay. Antonia had spent her years in Adelaide since 1890 in charge of the St. Vincent de Paul's Orphanage at Goodwood, for which the Mercies had assumed responsibility in that year. This was to prove of significance for the future membership of the Coolgardie foundation.

In 1897 she was presented with another daunting challenge to uproot herself, when Bishop Gibney of Perth made an "earnest and eloquent" appeal to the Adelaide convent of Mercy for Sisters to come to the West Australian goldfields. A number of sisters agreed and of these Antonia was selected by the community as the superior of the new group. She could choose the remaining four from the volunteers. They were to go to the then flourishing gold town of Kanowna, originally known as White Feather, eighteen kilometres north-east of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

Kanowna began when an Irish prospector, Jerry McAuliffe, found gold in October 1895. In the 1890s it proved to be one of the richest goldmines in the colony, and was at one stage a thriving town of twelve and a half thousand people. There was, at its peak, an hourly train service to Kalgoorlie. Today it is a complete ghost town, where remain only a few broken bricks, pieces of metal, and notices to mark where Donnellan's Hotel⁴ and other significant buildings once stood — silent witness to the frequently passing nature of mining enterprises. However, by the last days of December, 1897, before the Sisters had left Adelaide, the decision to go to Kanowna had been changed to Coolgardie instead. Fire had destroyed the presbytery and newly built church-school at Kanowna and Fr Denis P. Long, the young parish priest, was greatly distressed not only because of this disaster but because of the tumultuous effects of his ambiguous role in the spread of rumours about the "sacred nugget" (a large and wholly spurious nugget) in the previous July.

Accordingly, on 11th January, 1898, S M Antonia McKay was appointed Mother Superior of the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy, Coolgardie. The appointment was made and the document was signed by Archbishop John O'Reily of Adelaide. Her Assistant was Mother de Pazzi (Anne) Briggs, born February 27th, 1864, and professed 24th September, 1891. To accompany them were three sisters:

M. Gerard (Catherine) Byrne, born August 4th, 1870, and professed 21st November, 1896;

M. Ignatius (Frances) Conlon, born November 3rd, 1874, and professed 21st November, 1896;

M. Gertrude (Agnes) Carroll, born January 21st, 1876, and professed 28th July, 1897.

Thus, in January, 1898, Mother Antonia was the only one with many years of experience in religious life. The ages of the others ranged from 31 to 22.

On that same day the group of pioneers left Adelaide on board the cargo ship, *The Gabo*, arriving in Perth on 18th January, 1898. The sea journey across the south of Australia had been so rough that, seasick, Mother Antonia had moaned to her companions: "If I die, go back to Adelaide" She was to survive another two and a half decades in as harsh an environment as the hazardous waters of the Australian Bight. After landing, the sisters at St. Brigid's, West Perth, with their usual warmth of hospitality, made them welcome guests.⁵ They stayed at West Perth for a very short time only, arriving in Coolgardie on 22nd January.

Why was Coolgardie finally chosen as the site for the new foundation? It was then in its heyday as "capital of the goldfields" the third largest town in Western Australia. It possessed some degree of permanency at this date in the later years of the 1890s. The district around Coolgardie and the twin settlements of Kalgoorlie/Boulder, about twelve kilometres to the east, was proving to be one of the richest gold producing parts of Australia. In 1892 the extremely rich goldfield of Bayley's Reward, the site of Coolgardie, had been discovered. The following year, Paddy Hannan and two other Irishmen struck it lucky 24 miles east, and Kalgoorlie and Boulder arose to form the two centres of the incredible Golden Mile. In 1899 an International Mining and Industrial Exhibition in Coolgardie ran for three months, attracted exhibitors from six overseas countries, and drew 61,000 viewers. The population of Coolgardie in 1898 was 15,000 with about 25,000 in the district. This relatively permanent population and prosperity was based on the existence of reef rather than alluvial gold. About 29 per cent of the total Catholic population of Western Australia resided in the Eastern Goldfields, that is, 12,123 Catholics.

The Mercies were not the first nuns in the area. Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart had settled already in Great Boulder in 1897, staffing the parochial schools there, and hospitals had been opened by the Irish order of the Sisters of St. John of God in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. There was typhoid on the fields then, and Bishop Gibney considered a hospital more urgent than church or school.

The journey from West Perth to Coolgardie was long and both dreary and interesting at the same time. Dreary and burdensome because of the unchanging landscape and the discomfort due to midsummer heat. Interesting because it was a novel landscape, and there were thoughts of the challenge that lay ahead. Agnes (Sister Gertrude) Carroll, celebrating her 22nd birthday on 21st January, must have had particularly poignant musings.

One story goes that they went by coach from Southern Cross, at first the terminus of the railway. An enterprising museum keeper today displays a coach, around one of the wheels of which he has written that this was the coach that brought the first nuns. Curious pupils would ask their teacher, Did you come in the coach, Sister? However, as the railway was extended to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in 1897, this question may well have been more

properly addressed to the Sisters of St. John of God, who were sent in a buggy to Coolgardie by Bishop Gibney.

The Sisters were received kindly by these same Sisters of St. John of God, who had established their hospital in Coolgardie in 1896. It was their first hospital outside of Ireland, and was followed by their second the following year in Kalgoorlie. They were to open schools also in Kalgoorlie, in the main area on 1st February, 1897 and at South Kalgoorlie, 5th October of that year. It was left to the Mercies to establish Catholic education in Coolgardie, to provide schools for the children of the families who joined the miners as the settlements stabilised. While one of the principal aims of the Order of Mercy is care of the sick, the sisters were not called to hospital work as they were in other parts of the world, including Australia, no doubt because of the presence of the Sisters of St. John of God and their hospital network. These latter also opened a hospital at Subiaco in Perth in 1898 and were later to open hospitals at Geraldton, Bunbury, and a second in the Perth area.

Staying in Coolgardie to help the sisters settle, Bishop Gibney purchased on 29th January, the Theatre Royal and adjoining premises in Woodward Street. For this he paid 800 pounds and gave them to the community for a convent and school. A statement in 1902 signed by Mother Antonia, shows that 1,934 pounds was spent in all in establishing the sisters and preparing the buildings in which to work. This debt, together with 145 pounds interest, was all cleared by 1902 and a credit of 460 pounds was on hand for building a more permanent convent. Till 1902 the church was on the corner of Hunt and Woodward Street, adjacent to the Royal. It was an unlined iron building and the whole interior was draped with light muslin which scattered clouds of dust whenever it swayed in the wind. The priest lived at the rear. The foundation stone of a new church was laid in 1902, with presbytery adjacent until flattened by a cyclone in 1928.

Meanwhile, the first students, Martin Dunne, Edward Barry, and Ada Griffin, were admitted to the new Coolgardie convent school, St. Anthony's. The school opened on 31st January, 1898. It was not the first Catholic school in the town. In 1894 Father Duff had conducted a school in the church under teacher John Delaney. In 1895 the two Misses Pombart (Matilda and Angela) had taught in the church. When the sisters began, they closed their school and worked for a while with the sisters, before going to Perth. Both eventually entered the Mercies. Matilda became Sr M Genevieve of Midland Junction. Angela became Sr Margaret Mary of the West Perth community. Both lived to a ripe age. It had been a long journey from their ancestral France to Victoria, their place of birth, to the Eastern Goldfields in Western Australia, and thence to the Midlands and Perth.

The first convent, until the Theatre Royal was ready, was a small four roomed cottage on Montana Hill close to the St. John of God Hospital, some distance from the church where the sisters were temporarily teaching school. Very soon, though, the Theatre Royal was ready for school, on 8th February, 1898, and the sisters were also able to move to a three roomed galvanised iron cottage in the grounds at the back of the Theatre. Later they added four rooms at the side of the Theatre for their chapel, parlour, community room, and two

bedroom cells. School began in the ex-theatre with very little furniture or equipment. Children were given half a mug of water at morning recess and after school, and a full mug at lunch. Otherwise, the tank was locked. Nothing could be done for the moment about the water supply, but it could about equipment. So a committee was formed and a concert held. To the dismay of the sisters — and doubtless the organisers — the proceeds were all used up by expenses.

Nevertheless, equipment was gradually obtained for the two hundred or more children who eventually enrolled. The 1902 Catholic Year Book shows an enrolment of 209 in the parochial schools and 12 boarders and 37 day pupils in the superior, that is, fee-paying school at St. Anthony's Convent of Mercy.⁶ By this time the community had also grown, to nine sisters.

On canonical visitation in February, 1902, Bishop Gibney expressed his satisfaction with the new project.

I am greatly pleased with all the members of this community of Our Lady of Mercy. I recognise the excellent work they have done and are still doing. They have had to submit to many inconveniences and make many sacrifices for which God has evidently blessed them and their works. Humility, peace and charity now dwell in this convent and I trust God will continue his favour to a community from whom I would not withhold my highest approbation (sic).⁷

Father Anselm Bourke, as Vicar General of the diocese, warmly supported in person and by frequent letters, this "excellent community of Mercy nuns" and did what he could to help their "good" schools. "It is a splendid community", he wrote to Gibney in 1898 after a visit to the goldfields, "and all things are going well there, although there is considerable depression in business matters. Their school is in splendid order. Not so the schools in other places..."⁸

The sisters spent five years living in the galvanised iron convent and parishioners began to urge Mother Antonia towards building better quarters. Antonia had had knowledge of the transiency of mining towns in the Argentine and hesitated to build the large permanent brick convent being suggested. Moreover, she was reluctant to build without proper guarantee of ownership. She wrote in April 1902 that she was sorry she could not commence building, but could not conscientiously do so till she had the deeds. She stated:

I feel I would not be doing justice to the community I am acting for. I would have nothing to fear while our good kind Bishop lives — he is everything that is good towards us but a time will come when we do not have him, and it is for then I fear and want to make provisions.

You may think it strange of me ... but (we had) a sad experience in a similar case. In Adelaide the Archbishop gave ... a small piece of land to build a House of Mercy on, but not the deeds though he promised he would. He died without doing so... (Under) the next Bishop ... we had to pay for the land because we had no deeds. It has made such an impression that I do not wish to put our community in the same predicament.

In view of the financial trouble Bishop Gibney's transactions were to cause for the diocese, her confidence in "our good kind Bishop" was somewhat displaced. Her caution was justified.⁹

Mother Antonia went on to say that they were very isolated, deprived often of Mass and Holy Communion, had very hard work, a most uncomfortable place to live in ("it does not deserve the name of a Convent") and not a bright future. "The idea occurs to me often", she concluded, "that God does not want us in Coolgardie"

However, one day when pressed to build by some of the parishioners and some of the sisters, she declared that she would do so if someone came and gave them a statue of the Sacred Heart suitable for their chapel. She would take the gift as a sign to build. A few weeks passed and then a Mrs Doyle visited Coolgardie from Widgiemooltha, 53 miles away. She was offering a statue of the Sacred Heart to the church in gratitude for her recent marriage to James Doyle, a prosperous and kindly citizen. The parish priest was rather preoccupied at the time of her visit and abruptly refused her gift. She, naturally feeling upset, was walking by the small convent and decided to enter. She was let in by Mother Antonia herself.

To her she told her story and asked would the sisters like the statue. Without explaining, Antonia left a bewildered Mrs Doyle and went and summoned the sisters. She then asked the woman to repeat her story. On doing so, she was told about the promise to build made by Mother Antonia some weeks earlier. The statue was accepted and later given a place of honour in the chapel of the new convent.

By then, Coolgardie itself was very different from its primitive state of a few years previous. Many pleasant houses and some attractive and impressive public buildings had been erected, roads levelled, even the hessian camps made more liveable with colourful linings of cretonne or baize, paintings, furniture, and other comforts. The new convent was to be the equal of any of the buildings.

The small but growing community of sisters flourished in the large and attractive St. Anthony's Convent of Mercy that was built and opened in 1903. It was situated on the corner of Moran and Lindsay streets, much closer to the church. It was to be a "convent for the Sisters, a Ladies' Boarding School and a High (i.e. superior) School for daily scholars." The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Gibney on Sunday, January 25th, 1903, "in a temperature ranging between 109 degrees in the shade and about 180 degrees more or less in the sun".¹⁰ Guests included the Coadjutor Bishop of Hobart, Dr Delany, Senator Mahon, and the Mayor and Mayoress of Coolgardie, Mr and Mrs Wymond, and Mr T.F. Brimage, M.L.C. The building was to cost 5,300 pounds. It was blessed and opened by the bishop on 2nd August of that year.

The new convent was quite a handsome structure. Built by a local firm, McCrae and Chapman, it was another design of the two Cavanagh Brothers of Perth. Its two most attractive features were the impressive facade and the ambulatory. The latter was a wide internal verandah across the back width of the building. It formed a welcome breezeway, an inside walk away from

the heat of the sun, and a meeting place for visiting parishioners and friends or for reunions of past students and the like. In it also was a recessed shrine for a statue of St. Anthony, patron saint. The exterior elevations were, according to the *Record* (June 28th, 1902), very handsome and effective. The whole building was exceedingly simple and economical in design and arrangement, well lighted and well ventilated. It was "one of the most important, if not the most important architectural effort in Coolgardie"

The Foundation Group

What do we know about the first group of sisters? One sister who taught in Coolgardie later but had not known Mother Antonia McKay personally, nevertheless named her as the most significant sister for her. "I have never forgotten her face or what they said of her. She always seemed to be there." Photos of Antonia McKay show little except that she seems rather tall, and had a calm, very pleasant, human face, the steel rimmed glasses giving it a bit of the look of a scholar, perhaps even a little austere. Her half smile is rather haunting. She was olive skinned, one sister today in her eighties, remembers from her childhood. She also recollects that she was a very clever woman, and a particularly gracious lady. Her graciousness seems to have made a deep impression on parishioners and parents still living who had known her, and on sisters now in retirement. She is also remembered as one who was very gentle, of very deep spirituality and prayer.

She must also have had a big heart. A number of her ex-Goodwood Orphanage girls were to follow her to Coolgardie and join the community there as lay sisters. Her ease of manner combined with the atmosphere and way of life on the goldfields to form a relaxed mix of hospitality and friendliness which was very attractive to the sisters who joined there and to the past students who delighted in returning.

The sisters formed a close community with a wonderful spirit, according to some who reminisce, strict enough and prayerful, but with an atmosphere felt as soon as one entered the front door. Music, concerts, skits, singing around the piano, reading aloud, sewing — recreations such as these helped the community relax. Even allowing for the rosininess of past memories, the contemporary newspaper accounts of the annual reunions for past students substantiate the claim of one present-day sister working on the goldfields. She states that there is a very positive feeling towards the school and the sisters still extant among the people of Coolgardie. Even after the early Sisters had died, a homely atmosphere prevailed, despite all the hard work. To some, the discipline may have seemed a bit wanting at times. In truth, it seems there was a "loving, easy discipline, a lovely relationship between Sisters and boarders" which had existed from the beginning.

Writing about the annual reunion of January 1921, one old scholar expressed it rather grandly thus:

Only those who have lived beneath the hospitable walls of St. Anthony's Convent, Coolgardie can appreciate to the full what delights are conjured up before those whose privilege it is to be invited to meet there each year to take part in the annual reunion. For days beforehand anticipation is rife,



*Above: Some
early pupils of
St. Anthony's,
Coolgardie.*

*Right: Papal
Blessing for
Coolgardie
Community from
Pope Leo XIII,
September 1901.*



M. Magdalene Ward.



M. Clare Smith.

*Right: Group of
music pupils from
St. Anthony's, 1907.*

*Below: Treasures
from Argentina:
silver candlesticks,
mother-of-pearl crucifix
and ruby jug with Our Lady
of Lujan enamelled thereon.*





The Community at St. Anthony's, Coolgardie, 1909.



Early houses in the Goldfields.

but no matter to what height it soars the most sanguine flight of imagination must needs fall short of reality.¹¹

From descriptions of the reunions, especially of the lunches and morning and afternoon teas that were prepared by the sisters, a Coolgardie reunion must have been quite a day!

In that same year of 1921, in August, Mother Antonia celebrated her Golden Jubilee of Profession and the *Record's* descriptions of the various events were even more eloquent. Looking back over her fifty years as a Sister of Mercy, in Argentina, South Australia, and Western Australia, Mother Antonia could say, in the words of the celebrant of her Jubilee Mass, she had "devoted herself with assiduous care and conspicuous success to the work of a Sister of Mercy. She had nursed the sick, visited and consoled the widow and the orphan in their affliction, and taught the young" About thirty former pupils journeyed to Coolgardie where they were joined by those who had remained in the district for a special reunion of past students, and once again greatly enjoyed a "sumptuous repast".¹²

Mother Antonia McKay died at Coolgardie on 3rd August, 1924, and is buried in the cemetery there. Her tombstone marks her out as the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy in the goldfields of West Australia. She was to be joined in the convent plot by fifteen other Sisters. She had been superior of the Coolgardie foundation for 21 years of her 27 years in the goldfields. For those other six years, she had been Mother Assistant. In the beginning, and while Mother Assistant, she had also acted as Mistress of Novices.¹³

Of Antonia's first four companions, one Sr Gerard Byrne — returned to Adelaide.¹⁴ She could not bear the intense heat. Victorian born Sister M. Ignatius Conlon also returned to Adelaide, but this was not until she had served forty "long, hard" years on the goldfields. Ignatius was the second youngest of the pioneer sisters who came to Coolgardie from Adelaide, being 23 years old in 1898. In September, 1938, after amalgamation, she wrote to Archbishop Prendiville asking to return to the cradle of her religious life — Adelaide, having borne the heats and burden of hard work on the goldfields. "Five of us came here in 1898" she wrote, "and now I am the only pioneer left. I always claim Adelaide as my home for when coming to the West we were told that any of the five may return" She remembered the long hard years here. She had been in every house on the goldfields. But the ties of family and original community were stronger. She had a brother a priest and a sister a nun, still living in South Australia.

Sister Ignatius had particular ties with the boy boarders of Coolgardie. The Mercy archives preserve a finely carved wooden fire guard, made by them under her supervision. One boarder in her time wrote about his days there as having been the "most exciting" of the many he attended as a school boy. He described at some length the production of an end-of-the-year play, "Mary Queen of Scots" Sister Ignatius was the play's producer, stage manager, prompter and head mechanic. She was also worried almost to death because the writer and his five small fellow assassins of Rizzio, the Queen's favourite, could not quite get the appropriate scowl. "Boys, boys," Sister Ignatius admonished at the last rehearsal, "remember you are going to kill

someone, so try and look like murderers" At the performance, as Rizzio lay dying, the busy Sister Ignatius bustled onto the stage and sprinkled his recumbent body with some red liquid which looked like blood but could be easily washed off afterwards.¹⁵

Sr Ignatius returned to Adelaide in January 1939, but though she had retired in Coolgardie, she was not to retire in Adelaide. She went to the Goodwood Orphanage where she was given the Scholarship class to teach. She was over twenty years there, dying in 1960, crippled with arthritis.

S M Gertrude Carroll was her first cousin and also a Victorian from Geelong. She was received as a novice, Sr M. Mercy Gertrude, and professed as Sr. M. Gertrude. She was the first elected Mother Assistant (in 30th May, 1901), a position she held till her death on 28th February, 1910. She was then 34 years and undergoing an operation for enlarged spleen.

The one of the original group most remembered, apart from Mother Antonia, was Sr M de Pazzi (Anne) Briggs. She was born at Koolinga, South Australia, 27th February, 1864, and professed as a Sister of Mercy in Adelaide 24th September, 1891. Her sister Elizabeth (Lizzie) entered Coolgardie not long after the foundation, on 28th April, 1898, was professed as Sister M. Josephine on 8th December, 1900, and was the first Sister of Mercy to be buried, at 48, in Coolgardie Cemetery, in 1908.

S M de Pazzi (pronounced something that sounded like "Mum de Pazzi" by Sr Gerard Bourke) is remembered as very tiny, though the photo in the *Record* at the time of their coming shows her voluminous if short. She was the first music teacher in Coolgardie and had herself a fine contralto voice, often heard with pleasure in the convent choir. Mother de Pazzi held the positions of Reverend Mother (three terms), Mother Assistant, Mother Bursar and Novice Mistress, as well as local superior of branch houses established at Menzies and Norseman. She was prayerful, spending much of her spare time in the chapel. Yet she was also "very very apostolic" with a very real practical charity. Hers was truly a Mercy spirit. To swaggies in depression times looking (successfully) for a meal, she would present them with a prayerbook and rosary and other spiritual aids. One enterprising fellow raffled his at the Saturday evening dance. She was also esteemed by her companions for her freedom from the clutter of possessions. None of these traits in Mother de Pazzi, however, lessened either her love of humour or her enjoyment of jokes made at her expense.

She died on 24th October, 1936, at the age of 72. Exactly one month earlier, on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, she had sung hymns in the chapel with a fourteen year old boarder, Mary, who had a beautiful voice, somewhat similar to Mother de Pazzi's. On the same day, Mary died suddenly in the boarders' playroom. As the funeral procession went to Coolgardie cemetery, it was she who tolled the bell for her young singing partner — and unwittingly for herself a month to the day.

The Briggs family had two other daughters in the Sisters of Mercy, apart from Anne and Elizabeth. They joined the Adelaide community and remained there as Sr M Gabriel and Sr M Augustine. Two nieces joined the Adelaide

Mercies also, to carry on the tradition. Gabriel helped out in Coolgardie for a while, in the pioneering days.

Recruits

Membership of the new foundation began to grow. Mother Antonia made a quick visit to South Australia and gained new members and temporary help. Three teaching sisters came on loan, namely, Sr M Madeleine Lill, Sr M Angela Power¹⁶, and Sr M Gonzaga Nash. They stayed a couple of years. Other helpers from Adelaide were S M Baptist Wade and S M Gabriel Briggs, who also returned to Adelaide eventually. Other young women entered and by 1903, the community had more than doubled, numbering twelve.

Antonia's visit had borne fruit in the form of five girls from the Goodwood Orphanage who eventually joined them as lay sisters. During its time as an independent congregation, there were six lay sisters in the community and five of these were from Adelaide. The relationship between these and Mother Antonia led to an unusual tolerance between choir and lay sisters. The latter were of great importance in the survival of the community, literally keeping the place going at times. Some of them have gone down in history as unique characters.

Although Mother Antonia was a skilful manager, the lay sisters were largely responsible for the smooth running of the convent in its day-to-day use. The usual household chores connected with running a home — or in this case a convent and boarding school — were more onerous and demanding on the goldfields. Ingenuity was the order of the day. The air was always filled with red dust when diggings were near and if a dust storm blew up, washing, in particular, was a disaster. Even in later years, all the linen for the boarders and sisters was done in the convent. The utensils were usually a copper or big iron boiler, soda or pieces of cut up soap for soaking, Reckitt's blue for whitening clothes, starch for table cloths and the like, flat or Mrs Potts irons for ironing.¹⁷ At other times, they would have to be seamstresses, mending the various items around the house such as bed or table linen, perhaps making or mending clothes for the sisters or poorer students. Then there was the monotonous but necessary work of cleaning the house, and the ever present chores connected with cooking for a relatively large number of people.¹⁸

A number of customs in the food line developed over the years. There was, for example, hot mince on toast for Sunday's breakfast for both boarders and sisters. Certain foods, fruit for example, had to be rationed carefully even though fruit trees were planted in the convent garden. Ginger beer and other sweets were all homemade. All the sisters working in the domestic area pitched in at times to make the three to four hundred mince pies that would be sold to raise funds at school tuckshops. These pies were so delicious that down town residents also ordered them. Another customary cooking spree that developed was biscuit making for all the Sisters who came into Coolgardie once a year for the annual eight days' retreat. When free milk was supplied to the schools, it came to the goldfields in the shape of tins of *Ideal* evaporated milk and this — fortified with powdered *Sunshine* milk to make it creamier — became homemade icecream. Peach trees in the convent grounds resulted

in stewed peaches, and peaches and icecream relieved the summer heat. Cream, skimmed off the top of the ten gallon cans of milk which came thrice weekly from Perth, made Sunday's dessert a gourmet treat. The beautiful date palm in the front garden produced delicious seedless dates which were shared with the other Mercy houses on the 'fields.

Heroines With a Difference

One of the lay sisters who has gone down in history is Sr Gerard, born Augusta Kate (Gertrude)¹⁹ Bourke, in Port Augusta, South Australia — the town was named after her, claimed Gussie Bourke. The last but one of the Greenwood postulants, she came to Coolgardie in 1905 at sixteen years of age. She became noted for her funny sayings as much as for her cooking and her devotion to St. Joseph, to whom she turned for help in all sorts of trouble.

While other sisters cooked beautiful cakes and varying dainty treats, Sr Gerard was, she would herself say, "a good roast dinner" It was Sr Gerard who initiated the often quoted suggestion that if you made the cake for the sisters' morning tea "not too well", it would last the week. It was Sr Gerard who, going to Esperance, asked for some lollies "for the train to suck" — another saying that entered into popular usage. St. Joseph was her familiar companion, being requested to hurry up and "cook these cakes" or to "make her" (the superior) give her something she had been refused. Sister Gerard had a happy death — the proverbial gift of St. Joseph to those devoted to him — in 1960, at the age of 73, at the St. John of God Hospital in Kalgoorlie.

Another lay sister from South Australia was Elizabeth McMahon, born 1882, received as novice in Coolgardie in 1908 as Sr Veronica Mary. She had been taken to the Goodwood Orphanage when her mother died. At twelve years old, she was sent to help look after the children of another family who also had lost their mother.

Mgr E. Sullivan termed her "the saint of the Coolgardie Community" for her humbleness, patience, and good nature. As quiet as a mouse, Veronica worked in the kitchen and laundry and became famous for the way she could handle the cows that were kept to supply milk. One story is told in this regard. Sr Veronica had been on holidays at Esperance and the morning she was expected home, the cows went across and stood in file in front of the Railway Station. Incredible but true — or so the story tellers aver!

Veronica was also appreciated for her wonderful puff pastry and her Napoleons. She was popular with both sisters and children, especially the boarders, for her kindness and her sense of fun and her love of practical jokes. When short and bent in old age, the primary school boarders would come and take her for a walk gently around the grounds. She died in Coolgardie aged 84 on 26th June, 1966, and was the last but one to be buried in the convent plot.

Sr Veronica had a dog, Bob, described by Sr Gerard Bourke as "the longest dog we've had" — not to picture his body but to refer to the length of his residence at the convent. Bob was a Kelpie, "part smart fella, part imbecile" He discriminated nicely between the frequently fed black and white tramps, tradesmen, carriers and the like. He is on record for only one bite, but with



Statue of Our Lady of Lujan, Golden Jubilee gift to M. Antonia from relatives and friends in Argentina.



Nora Lonergan, former student of St. Anthony's, Coolgardie, and first woman in Western Australia to qualify in pharmacy (1915).



Choir from St. Michael's, Kalgoorlie proudly display their shield.



Sr. M. Patrick Roberts and Sr. M. Berchmans Pash.

such a bark as Bob's, few would take a chance. He did, however, perform many acts of service and kindness. He daily carried the basket of eggs to the kitchen door for Veronica. When a blind lady, Mrs Willoughby, was visiting the convent and had wandered out alone, Bob, realising she was in danger, climbed the back stairs into the chapel where the Sisters were at prayers. The Sister who escorted him back down the stairs soon found out the cause of his untimely and unusual visit.

Sometimes such uncustomary behaviour was in Bob's own interest. As, for instance, the time when Sr Veronica was sick and Bob got no tea (usually a neatly wrapped parcel of bones and scraps from the evening meal, which Bob carried to the cement slab in the side garden, tore off the paper and devoured the contents). On this occasion, Bob waited till everyone was in bed and asleep and then went up to the side balcony and pulled the blankets off Sr M Martha — who promptly remedied the default. Like most Coolgardie convent dogs, Bob ended his "longest" residence there chasing cars.

Two other early Coolgardie sisters whose memory was cherished in a particular way by Sisters, priests, and people were Mother Magdalene (Annie) Ward and Mother Clare (Edith) Smith. They celebrated together, in June 1956, their Golden Jubilees of Profession. Both lived to a ripe old age. Both died in hospital in Kalgoorlie, Magdalene in 1962 at 86 years, Clare in 1966 at 88. Both were originally "t'othersiders" Annie from Ballarat and Edith from Drake in New South Wales, but came with their families to the goldfields.

Magdalene was described as a wonderful person. She had gone to school to the Loreto Sisters and Teachers' College in Ballarat. As a Sister of Mercy she seemed vital, even hyperactive — she almost ran — a brilliant teacher, creative, original in intellect. In her advanced years, Magdalene had charge of the sisters' refectory, which she kept bright and spotless. She would strip, wash and polish the snow white painted tables before going to school, where she took a small class at 8.30 each morning. Woe betide anyone who momentarily left an unfinished plate of food if Mother Magdalene was cleaning up!

Clare was "a Victorian kind of lady", who taught music brilliantly. In 1928, when no one sister received a majority of votes at the chapter of elections for position of Reverend Mother, Clare Smith was appointed by Archbishop Clune. Three years later she was elected for another term. She was also an artistic painter. At her Diamond Jubilee, she entertained her visitors at the piano. She taught music all her life but also did much for the "bushies", keeping in contact with them, and feeding and clothing and providing them with rare treats when they were in residence for a summer school. In the helplessness of old age, she continued to re-live the troubles of people she had helped years before, requesting the sister caring for her to help them.

Magdalene and Clare were both so "dyed in the wool" goldfielders that when the holiday house at Esperance was sold, they were reluctant to go to Perth for holidays. Especially Magdalene, who had never been to Perth in her life. "Real warriors, the two of them!" was the general verdict.

Another "real warrior" was Sister Antonia Lawson, who entered from Port Augusta in South Australia, at forty-eight, a much older age than was normal.

She had stayed at home to care for her father. Subsequently, it was very hard for her to conform to conventual life, especially in the intense inland cold which severely affected her. Antonio had special charge of the ambulatory. Many were the injunctions to "shut that bally door" when the breezes swept leaves and other rubbish through. When the duststorms arrived !

Moving Out to Menzies 1903

It did not take long for other eastern mining towns to attract Sisters of Mercy for a Catholic school. The first branch convent was at Menzies, just about directly north of Coolgardie by some eighty miles. In response to Bishop Gibney's wire re the Sisters going to Menzies, Mother Antonia wrote: "We will do our best for the people when we go there. Of course you know we are shorthanded but we trust God will send the help when we commence the work"

Coolgardie convent did their best for the people by being generous in sending its experienced members to establish its branch houses. Menzies was opened by the Mother Bursar, Josephine Briggs, and a special chapter was required to replace her. After two years, she was replaced in Menzies by Mother de Pazzi, who also was to establish branch houses at Norseman and Esperance.

The convent was founded on 17th May, 1903 and formally opened 18th May as St. Columba's School, Menzies, with 28 pupils. The train bringing Sisters Evangelista Rooney and Josephine Briggs to Menzies had had a mishap, but they had escaped hurt. By August, the number in the school had grown to 71 pupils, 26 of whom were non-catholic. There were already five music pupils and plans were being made to enrol students for Shorthand and Typing on the re-opening of school.²⁰

The numbers at the school see-sawed between 100 and 47 during the rest of the decade. In March 1910, the school was handed over to the "Notre Dames" The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, often called the Highgate sisters, had been brought to the diocese by Gibney in 1899.

A Mercy connection continued, however, through the Pianto family. The Pianto sisters taught the children religion during the year, after the Highgate sisters left, and brought them into the holiday school at Coolgardie, helped during the school, and then took them home.²¹ In more recent times, the Pianto brothers continued the family tradition of hospitality to priests, sisters, and bishops. They would set out the best silver, china, and linen to entertain the Mercy Motor Mission-ers on their regular visits.

Norseman 1909

The second branch convent was Norseman to the south, supposedly named after a horse which pawed up a large nugget on the site of a rich gold reef. Begun in 1895, the same year as Menzies, Norseman has the reputation even now of being a very good mine, the Central Norseman Gold Corporation, according to some the best mine in the southern hemisphere. More modest claims make it the second richest goldfield in Western Australia and the richest quartz reef in Australia. The chain of salt lakes, the surrounding hills which have proved to be also rich in colourful gemstones, the rock formations which



*Above: Kindergarten
group, St. Michael's,
Kalgoorlie,
approximately 1956.*

*Right: Sr. M.
Anthony Fitzpatrick.*





*Left: Srs. M.
Dolores and
Gertrude Horne.*

*Below: Convent
of Mercy,
Norseman.*



are among the oldest known in the world: all give an unusual beauty to the surrounding countryside.

Half-way to the border with South Australia, and half-way between Coolgardie and Esperance on the central south coast, Norseman is today the first place of any size when travellers come through from the east, on the Eyre Highway. Though about 100 miles south of Kalgoorlie, Norseman has a similar climate in terms of rainfall, temperature and humidity. By 1905, it had reached its peak population of 3,000 with another 1,000 outlying.

The Norseman Catholics complained about the few Masses they had and were ready to welcome a Catholic school and sisters. The *Record* reported on 31st January, 1909, that it had been nearly two months since a priest visited Norseman. They were then expecting a visit from Canon Robinson so as to confirm the children being prepared by a laywoman Mrs Harmdorf, who had a three and a half mile walk to the church from her home.

While founded as a separate parish from 1897, Norseman was administered from Boulder and then from Coolgardie between 1903 and the 1930s. Travelling until 1909 had to be done by horse and buggy or on horseback; in that year the railway from Coolgardie to Norseman was opened, on 22nd February, and from then on the Coolgardie priests travelled by train and remained in Norseman for a week at a time. One of them, Father Kenneally, though, preferred to make the long journey by bicycle!

In 1909 Norseman became part of the Coolgardie parish and a visit from Fr P. Lynch took place. On 4th March, a public meeting was held in the Royal Hall for the purpose of making preliminary arrangements for the establishment of a convent school. The meeting was presided over by the Mayor, who spoke of the good work done by the Sisters. Fr Lynch wanted to ascertain what was the public feeling with regard to opening the school. He had already bought four town allotments at the cost of 34 pounds, and a donation of five pounds had already been received. His duty was to report to the Bishop. A Ladies' Committee headed by Mrs Fee had already contacted the Sisters of Mercy from Coolgardie, who were considering the move. The parents generally were not satisfied with the state school education. It was the general opinion that the good sisters would confer one of the greatest boons the community had experienced since the inception of the Norseman goldfields.

By 27th March, 1909 a house had been leased for the sisters in close proximity to St. Joseph's Church. It was comfortably furnished and an excellent piano had been procured. Rev Mother Antonia and Sr M Clare visited the town in April to make the preliminary arrangements, but could not promise Sisters would be available until early June. A petition with numerous signatures was forwarded to Bishop Gibney, requesting a resident priest. Over one hundred and fifty Catholics resided in the district. On 21st June, 1909, the formal decision to open Norseman convent was recorded in the Coolgardie chapter book.

On 22nd June, 1909 Mother Antonia and three sisters arrived in Norseman by train. School was to open in St. Joseph's Church on Wednesday, 30th June. Twenty-four pupils were enrolled, but within a fortnight this number had

increased to fifty. A number of young people also attended for piano and other subjects such as shorthand and typing. Superioress was Sister M. de Pazzi Briggs. The school was first known as St. Joseph's but was later dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

1909 was quite an eventful opening year. A football match between the convent and state school clubs led to victory to the Catholics! Sunday school at the church each Sunday morning continued. The number of music pupils was also steadily growing. On 9th October, a bazaar was held to boost the funds for the convent and for the erection of school buildings, the current accommodation in the church proving inadequate. Total receipts of the bazaar reached 238.5.0 pounds. In November, the sisters were busy preparing for the annual Christmas Demonstration.

The interest of the townspeople in the school and convent did not diminish. They ran euchre parties and organised stalls for the bazaar. The support of Mrs Fee and Mrs Harmdorf and other women was greatly appreciated by the sisters. Their efforts allowed eventually for the building of a separate school building. By 1916, the school roll had numbered 98 pupils, the staff five sisters. Number in community was seven. That seems to have been the peak for the Norseman convent school, however, as numbers thereafter declined to eighty, with only four or five sisters in the school and community, until 1923 when the directory shows only three sisters and 38 pupils. From then was a steady decline in student numbers — 36 in 1924, 21 in 1925 and 1926.

Following a slump in mining in the Norseman area, and the departure of many families from the district, only about 300 people remained in the district and the school was closed in 1926. Sisters were thus freed to staff the school at Leonora, vacated by the Dominican sisters in that year. However, the latter returned to Leonora in 1939, and as conditions had changed for the better in Norseman, a new convent and school was reopened there in February, 1940. Community members were Sisters M. Brigid Willoughby (Superior), Claver Malcom, Xavier Chapple, and Martha Murphy.

By October of the year, 136 pupils had been admitted. Classes were conducted through primary to leaving standard, with provision for the teaching of music and commercial subjects. The secondary classes were for both boys and girls. The school was in a new building as the previous one had been taken to Esperance for a convent residence. The shift from one side of the road to the other had meant a laborious re-opening of the school. No water was laid on at the new convent and Mother Brigid McDonald, the Mother General of the Amalgamated Sisters of Mercy Perth who had accompanied the sisters to Norseman, helped cart school desks over the road in the thick dust and heat.

There is another convent dog story, this time about Barney of Norseman. Born near Esperance, he was given to a sister from Norseman holidaying at the Port. Barney was a pure bred red cloud, a branch of the kelpie family. He was renowned for his intelligence and the Sisters wondered how he knew so much until they noted that he spent much of his time underneath the convent building. Accordingly, he was always waiting at the right gate when a couple of them were going out.

They bred their animals smart in Norseman. Felix the cat was addicted to music. He would sit on the windowsill, his big yellow eyes unblinking, and the children would think he was watching them. Felix loved sitting on their music, and could play Three Blind Mice on the piano.

Owing to general staffing problems within the congregation, the sisters were withdrawn again from Norseman at the end of 1972 and the primary school was closed. The secondary section had already finished in 1970. There were four sisters in the community in 1972, and the enrolment was 63 for grades one to seven. The Sister Provincial offered sisters once a month for religious instruction, but the then parish priest refused the offer as "a bit of a nuisance" and not "a good financial proposition" Norseman parish is, however, served today by the Mercy Motor Mission operating in the area.

Leonora 1926

Since 1903, Leonora, 400 miles from Geraldton, had been on the railway route from Kalgoorlie and Menzies. The Dominican sisters from Dongara in the Geraldton diocese had staffed the Leonora convent school from 1911. In February, 1926, however, it was taken over by the Perth archdiocese at the request of the bishop, and Coolgardie Mercies went there at the request of Archbishop Clune. Leonora school remained in their hands until the parish was returned to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Geraldton in 1940. At that stage, the Dominican sisters resumed staffing of the school.

The convent in Leonora was an unlined galvanised iron house, with hessian for internal walls. There were varying numbers of pupils while the Mercies taught there, ranging from seventy pupils in 1927, with five sisters, to 48 pupils in 1935.

Esperance 1927

The Mercies seemingly moved from Menzies to Norseman to Leonora and back to Norseman as mining activities waxed or waned and as other religious orders were available or not for staffing. Another centre affected by these switches was Esperance, more or less directly south of Norseman but on the coast. When the Mercies had pulled out of Norseman in 1926, the convent had been taken on jinkers to Esperance. It had taken a fortnight to get there. Once there, it was enlarged, with verandahs sides and back, as a holiday house and convent school if needed.

Esperance was an exceedingly beautiful seaside resort, and had been a place of disembarkment for many prospectors coming to the goldfields. The Sisters were able to find some respite from the intense heat of Coolgardie and its surrounds by going to Esperance for a few weeks during the summer holidays. Though, in the early days, they did not appreciate the rats and snakes awaiting them. Those who lived there soon learnt the trick of putting mint in their beds to discourage the fleas. Before the railway was built as far as the coast, the journey took two days by horse and coach, with a night spent in lodgings on the way. When the railway was built, a parish priest, Fr Langmead was appointed. Even with the train, mail came once a week. The train could be heard coming for miles — "a lovely sound to three isolated nuns"

The three isolated nuns had opened the convent there in 1927. No school was begun. However the residence of the sisters meant that contact could be maintained with the Catholic community through activities such as visitation of the homes and taking religious instruction every day after the state school was out. Music and commercial work were also taught.

Swimming in the ocean in summer was a great pleasure, and the locals claimed the sisters began the swimming season. In winter, walks were popular and useful. Wood for the kitchen stove and shell grit for the ducks and fowls could be collected. Enjoying music, they could sing all the way, without meeting anyone.

During the early 1930s, Holiday Schools for Religious Education were held each Christmas vacation at Esperance for the children from the mallee farms and local families. Sr M. Philomena Cane had undertaken the work of teaching religion by correspondence in Dr McMahon's Bushie scheme, but had died in April, 1929. Her place was taken by Sister M. Ignatius Conlon, who was then resident at Esperance. She conducted three holiday schools at Esperance with the aid of staff from Coolgardie, Sisters M. Teresa Youngman and Dolores Horne. Mrs Harmdorf of Norseman helped.²²

When the Esperance parish closed, the Bushies schools were transferred to Coolgardie, and organised by Sister Teresa Youngman and later by Mother Clare Smith. The boarders' quarters made possible larger groups, and the children could come from a wider area.

It was thought that the mallee farms in the Esperance area would develop, but the soil was too salty and many farms were abandoned. The parish lost a permanent priest. The sisters did not remain long either. Archbishop Prendiville suggested, in April, 1934, that the Sisters be withdrawn during the winter months — during the summer some arrangement could be made for their spiritual care.²³ Accordingly, the sisters left Esperance except during the summer holiday period. Then they would go there for three weeks at a time, half of the community at one go. The house was retained until 1962.

Today, Esperance and its hinterland flourish. It is now part of the diocese of Bunbury, and has resident clergy, the Salvatorian Fathers. Religious Instruction is given through a motor mission run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

Kalgoorlie 1918

The tenth of February, 1918 is the date given by the Coolgardie Chapter Book for the foundation of the Convent of Mercy in Kalgoorlie.

Archbishop Clune blessed and opened this school and placed it under the care of Sisters from Coolgardie on February 10th, 1918, in Piccadilly parish in Kalgoorlie.

This was in the north-western part of the town. It was not the first convent school in this suburb of Kalgoorlie. In 1907 the Saint John of God Sisters had opened a school in Varden Street, Piccadilly, Western Kalgoorlie. Some time in 1918 this church-school, called St. Patrick's, was transferred to Bourke

Street, Piccadilly, at the cost of 150. The Sisters of Mercy, Coolgardie, took over its staffing.

In the same year, the St. John of God parochial school in South Kalgoorlie was also transferred, this time to the St. Joseph Sisters who were in Boulder. St. Mary's school, opened in 1897, in the main part of Kalgoorlie, was staffed by the Sisters of St. John of God until 1937. There was also a superior school. These were for girls as the Christian Brothers had also been in Kalgoorlie since 1906. With a hospital in Coolgardie and another in Kalgoorlie as well as schools, the Sisters of St. John of God seem to have overstretched their resources available for the goldfields. Anselm Bourke had suggested to Bishop Gibney in 1898 that it might be more effective if the Sisters of Mercy from Derry replaced them in Kalgoorlie, both for hospital and school. He had spoken to the Reverend Mother of the Sisters of St. John in Kalgoorlie about going to Perth but, at that time, she "would not hear of it" Eventually, the sisters concentrated on hospitals.²⁴

The Bourke Street school opened with an initial attendance of 53 pupils²⁵, though the Catholic Directory from 1919 on gives the attendance as 120 pupils, the superioress as Mother Catherine (Wade), and the community four sisters. Music lessons were given in the draughty porch. The convent was still in 77 Varden Street at the beginning of 1918, but a cottage in Bourke Street was procured eventually.²⁶ The Bourke Street convent cottage became known as the Haunted House since lights would switch on and off of their own accord, doors and windows would be tampered with, and strange noises were heard at night.

St. Patrick's school was to have another change of residence. In the 1920s, a former maternity hospital in 48 Butler Street was purchased. After some internal alterations, including painting done by Sisters Anthony Fitzpatrick and Veronica McMahon, it became the new Convent of Mercy, dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. An outside building of the hospital, used as a kitchen, had been the first wood and iron Kalgoorlie Post Office. Another outside weatherboard building — a cottage on the adjacent block which was purchased and moved to the rear of the hospital building — was used for sleeping quarters. To reach these, umbrellas were necessary in winter. The stations of the cross from the Kanowna church, which was closed towards the end of 1920, were given to the new convent in Butler street and erected along a corridor. Their frames were large and ornate. In 1933 when the Coolgardie chapel was extended, the small South American ones there were exchanged with the larger ones in Kalgoorlie. Both sets were reframed before the exchange.²⁷

The sisters walked down to school in Bourke street. Building of a new school began alongside the new convent in Butler street in 1921, on the block left vacant by the removal of the cottage for sleeping quarters, and in 1922 the school was transferred there. The new building accomodated the upper primary classes and also secondary classes up to junior. The infant classes were in the small cottage immediately adjacent to the convent. Music lessons were given in a small room at the front of the building.

Early working conditions would be frowned on today. One of the sisters, Sr. M. Berchmans (Constance) Pash, taught a large commercial class in the morning and violin classes in the afternoon. She did this while Sr M Carmel Fisk taught typing in the same room, which was really the parlour of the convent. An old tram also served the commercial classes. Nevertheless, the graduates of the commercial classes were easily able to gain employment in Kalgoorlie.

Sister M Berchmans Pash has left behind a name of a splendid violinist. Described as a great lady, completely her own person, a very nice human being, she was a non-conformist with a lively wit. The sisters' hours of recreation were much enlivened when Berchmans played skits on the piano. She had been a convert to the Catholic faith, and together with Sr M Claver Malcom, also a convert and a great musician, had become friendly with Mother Berchmans Deane of West Perth, who suggested they enter in Coolgardie where they would be more free from influences of people they knew. Sr M Alphonsus of West Perth, a professional singer before she entered, was quite upset at this advice. She had wanted to send the then Eileen Malcom overseas to study singing. However, both contributed to the spread of music on the goldfields. Between them they taught singing, piano, violin, viola, cello, guitar, banjo, and mandolin in various gold towns.

Sister Berchmans specialized in large orchestras. The end of the year Concert and Fair became quite an event. The stage consisted of trestles on beer barrels lent by the local brewery. The Concert was 1/- a head and drew people to the accompanying Fair.

The goldfields built up quite a tradition of Musical Festivals. In later years, the week long Kalgoorlie Musical Festival was a cultural event. St. Anthony's, Coolgardie, was particularly successful.²⁸ When the Mercy convent pupils pulled out because of other pressures, it did not long survive.

Sister M. Aloysius McGrath extended the range of classes at the school at both ends. In 1937 she introduced Kindergarten and later Leaving classes, teaching the latter after school hours.²⁹ Over the next two decades, many additions to the school buildings were made and the convent remodelled. In 1944 the house next door was purchased to be used as kindergarten and home economics centre. Sr Margaret Mary Lowry taught in the secondary section for many years. She spent twenty six years teaching in Kalgoorlie, nineteen years in one stretch. An ex-students association and a Parents and Friends Association were formed in this period. The activities of the former consisted mainly of physical jerks in the school one evening per week and an annual retreat.

In 1943 the school was renamed St. Michael's. In 1957 the first stage of a new school building was begun; this was blessed and opened on 24th March, 1960. The design incorporated the sisters' own ideas, helped by personnel from the Lake View and Star Mine. The Sisters contracted a debt of 7,170 pounds in this construction programme, building three classrooms, office, front entrance and music room. They found it more than ample after having worked previously in a corrugated iron building.

At the blessing of the new classrooms, Bishop Rafferty spoke of how

for forty years the Sisters of Mercy had devoted themselves at St. Michael's to the work of Catholic Education with that zeal, efficiency, and self-sacrifice for which they are renowned the world over. Dedicated to the service of God, without any worldly ambition or desire for material gain, a succession of gallant women, denying themselves a career in the world, had put their talents at the disposal of the Catholic parents of the district... That the parents (were) conscious of this unselfishness (was) clear from the reverence and respect paid to the sisters at all times."³⁰

Parish priest, Father Healy, was appalled, however, at the sisters' quarters and offered to refund the money spent on the school, the sisters still retaining ownership. On this understanding the sisters were able to go ahead and build a rear portion to the convent. The parish would take responsibility for erecting two extra classrooms. In actuality, the parish was unable to do this and requested the sisters to build the two rooms. Because of the pressing urgency of these school requirements, further alterations to the sisters quarters had to be left till later. The second stage of the school was completed in 1961. Altogether the sisters paid 9203.19.6 pounds.

Ten miles or so down the Coolgardie road from Kalgoorlie on the narrow gauge, was a pretty little settlement called Kurrawang, a centre for wood cutting. Free water enabled the residents to grow beautiful gardens. After several years, the work ran out and the townsite moved to Lakewood. In the 1930s, the sisters had visited Kurrawang regularly for religious instruction, chauffeured by St. Vincent de Paul men. Sometimes deciding tennis matches between Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie pupils would be played on the "neutral court" at Kurrawang.

The sisters remaining from the Coolgardie Congregation of Mercy have warm and loving memories of their days on the 'fields. They talk of hansom cabs and sulkies, and a tram line right down the middle of Hannan Street in Kalgoorlie. They recall packing their trunks each Christmas break-up, and everyone going to Coolgardie, taking all her belongings. For no one knew until the "slate went up" if she was to stay in Coolgardie or be transferred to Kalgoorlie, Esperance, or Leonora.

No country convent story would be complete without a dog tale. And Kalgoorlie has one of Pudsy Kelly, known to all in the town. A bull terrier as broad as he was long, he had one never-ending meal a day. When the sisters went by tram to shop in the town centre, Pudsy would miss them, go down to the tram stop, and hop into the tram — which had stopped especially for him, the conductor helping him up with his foot. Pudsy would sit on the back seat, ignoring the notice No Dogs Allowed, and get off at Hannan Street.

Dust storms were another feature of the goldfields. The dust got into everything. Walking to St. Mary's for Mass from the Butler Street convent in strong winds or dust storms was a true penance, relieved a little by the visitation veils worn over the usual headgear. The wearer could hang on to its front, keeping down her everyday veil underneath. In 1928 a severe cyclone tore off the convent roof. Another time the roof of the Infants Room of the

old school was flying about all over the yard. All the manholes in the Infants Room in the new school were blown out soon after the building was completed. The rains and storms also did havoc to the dirt roads, and a journey into Coolgardie could take two hours each way. Visits into Coolgardie for sports days, Reverend Mother's Feastdays, and the Coolgardie boarders' annual break-up party meant a lot to bush Mercies in the days when the tyranny of distance still prevailed.

Another fascinating feature of the goldfields were the Woodlines. These were railway tracks which stretched deep into the eucalypt woodlands of the goldfields, so as to tap the timber there. Timber was needed for firewood and construction. It was an essential element in the life of the fields, at least, until coal and diesel power superseded it as sources of fuel. Small self-sufficient communities sprang up along the woodlines. Children from these, at times, boarded at the convents, or were given religious instruction by sisters visiting the woodline settlements, or were rounded up to come into vacation ("Bushie") schools for Religious Education.

Victoria Park Foundation 1899

The Victoria Park foundation was made from St. Peter's Convent of Mercy, Derry, Northern Ireland in 1899.

Derry was the first convent founded in Northern Ireland since the Reformation. It had been established from southern Ireland, on 21st July, 1848, when six professed sisters from St. Joseph's Convent Tullamore arrived to care for the sick and poor of the city and to provide for those whom the Penal Laws had deprived of religious and secular schooling. Their leader was Mother M Anne Doyle, first companion of Catherine McAuley herself. Thus the Derry foundation was very close to the original impetus and inspiration of the Order of Mercy.

Londonderry was the home of Orangeism in the North. Bigotry and opposition to Papists were the order of the day. However, the foundation prospered and was able to send out itself, by 1859, a foundation of sisters to Dundee, Scotland; in 1871, one to Carndonagh, Co Donegal; and, in 1898, one to Western Australia. Almost one hundred years later two sisters from Derry helped form the first community of Sisters of Mercy in Iceland — a world away from sunny Australia.

Leader of the small group of six sisters and one postulant who came to Western Australia at the invitation of Bishop Gibney was Mother Mary Clare Buggy. Four of the sisters were from the convent at Derry and two from Carndonagh, its daughter foundation, which the bishop also visited seeking recruits. The professed sisters — apart from Mother Clare — were Mother Veronica Hayes, Sisters Benedicta (Benedict) Phelan, Agnes Buggy, Benignus O'Sullivan, and Mary of Mercy Gibson. They were accompanied by a prospective postulant, Miss Angela Mullen.³¹ One of the priests also coming to Australia, Fr. McLaughlin, was appointed their chaplain. Bishop Gibney was so pleased with his success in obtaining volunteers, that he had given the Derry sisters a week's recreation — a welcome break from their customary rule of silence. He had not underplayed the difficulties the newcomers would



Convent of Mercy, Victoria Park.



Chapel in St. Peter's Convent of Mercy, Derry from which Victoria Park was founded.



Silver teapot presented to the Victoria Park foundation Sisters by their Community at St. Peter's, Derry (September 1898); set of silver cruets from West Perth Community — souvenir of Silver Jubilee of arrival of Victoria Park Sisters.



Papal Blessing from Pope Pius XI on occasion of Golden Jubilee of Profession of M. Clare Buggy.

face, telling them they would be lucky if they had a canvas tent to live in and a post against which to scratch when the mosquitoes drew blood.

The bishop had in mind Kanowna, as their destination. Kanowna had previously been proposed and then dismissed for the Adelaide sisters who ended up in Coolgardie. Fr Anselm Bourke, however, as the bishop's vicar, asked that the Derry sisters be put off for the time being. It was the same story. The parish priest wouldn't be very eager. On 26th September, 1898, Bourke wrote to Gibney that he hoped the Derry Sisters would not come yet. He would very urgently ask His Lordship to put off their coming to a later date —

until you can bring them out yourself. They couldn't go to Kanowna. There was hardly a hope that Fr Long would exert himself for them. How could he take upon himself the burden of providing for a community of seven sisters? Would it not be very cruel to place them where disappointment and privations should be their inevitable lot? Father Long has not a roof for himself nor school nor church. ... I hope you will not decide on sending out just yet a while these good religious, religious whom, if they come out now, I should describe as unfortunate sisters.³²

Nevertheless, on the next day, Bourke did write to Fr Long that seven sisters from Derry were coming. The church was to be begun after contracts approved. The sisters were intended for Kanowna.

On the same date he wrote to Fr John, C.P., of South Australia:

The Bishop is sending out a community of seven Sisters of Mercy from Derry next month. These sisters he wishes to be stationed at Kanowna and according to directions, I have written to Fr Long to make preparations for their reception. They are not to leave Ireland until next month and I have urgently written the Bishop not to send them just now, but to detain them a while in Ireland. I cannot help feeling that Fr Long will not be able — not perhaps very eager — to help them — they are almost sure to be very much put about — you can figure to yourself what will be the plight of these poor nuns.

A letter, a month later, to the bishop, said that he had just returned from Kanowna. A meeting there of Catholics promised to subsidise the nuns five weekly and to provide a large room for the school and a place of residence for the sisters free of rent for three months. Kanowna, commented Bourke, was very much on the decline. Things had happened during Fr Long's visit to Perth recently that would ruin him — much to do with debts contracted by the priest. To a man the miners were against Fr Long ... since he disappointed and deceived them with the mad story of the twelve pound nugget.

By his letter of 2nd November, Bourke could write that the Derry nuns had arrived. Kanowna was going down most rapidly every day. He was thinking of South Perth for them — a church-school was needed there. He had spoken to Reverend M Benedict Murphy of Victoria Square, about giving over Guildford to them (which would have to happen if they settled at Midland Junction since most of the children from there went to the school at Guildford). Mother Benedict indignantly declined. Bourke commented:

I could not press as it is evident that the eviction would be a most ungrateful proceeding towards sisters who have been celebrating a jubilee of work in the diocese.

He had spoken also to the Reverend Mother of the Sisters of St. John at Kalgoorlie about going to Perth, but she would not hear of it. The new Sisters of Mercy would do well at Kalgoorlie, both for hospital and school.

On 20th November, 1898, Bourke wrote to Fr McLaughlin at Kanowna to ask his opinion about the Derry sisters going there. He had suggested to the sisters that they go to both Kanowna and South Perth — they were quite disinclined to separate except it be altogether necessary. A brother of Mother Clare and Sister Agnes Buggy, a priest in Eastern Australia, had suggested they come to his parish, but Clare declined — they were called to the west. Decision was now drifting towards South Perth. Tenders were being called on the Monday for the church-school.

Fr McLaughlin, as chaplain to the Derry sisters, had gone, on 3rd November, 1898, to Kanowna to see if the sisters could be placed there. Bourke wrote that McLaughlin did not think hopefully of the sisters going to Kanowna. He told the bishop that South Perth would perhaps be the place for them, that is, Victoria Park. By 3.12.1898, it was decided in favour of Victoria Park. A house was to be erected for them there. Living expenses and furniture had to be met.

Meanwhile the sisters — ignorant, one hopes, of most of this correspondence expressing uncertainty about their future — had left Derry on the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 24th September, and had embarked at London on the 26th on the German liner *Friedrich der Grosse*. After a pleasant enough voyage — despite rough weather in the Bay of Biscay and in the Gulf of Lyons and heat in the Red Sea — they arrived at Fremantle on Sunday, 30th October 1898.³³ They brought with them, among other things, a reminder of their Derry home in the form of silver teapots. As there was, as yet, no decision made about their place of ministry, they were the guests of the West Perth sisters at St. Brigid's. Mother M Berchmans Deane and the others there gave them a warm welcome. They were to find the hospitality of the West Perth sisters necessary for the next three months.

On 29th January, 1899, the first church at Victoria Park, St. Joachim's, was opened by Bishop Gibney. It was to have been called St. Anne's, partly to recognize the efforts of the ladies of St. Anne's Society, Perth, who pioneered the work of teaching religion in Victoria Park. But it is reported that Bishop Gibney, when visiting Rome, was requested by Pope Leo XIII to give it Leo's Christian name, Joachim. At the blessing and opening of the church, Reverend Mother Clare and the other sisters were present.

According to the *Record*, they occupied "appropriate seats" In his sermon, Bishop Gibney said that he could reassure the Derry sisters about their decision.

He believed that Victoria Park would yet be a great place, a settlement of no small importance... He looked upon the district as one of the most important attached to the city of Perth. It was great in its expanse and its

situation. The work was now in its inception. He could tell the Derry nuns that they had not made a bad choice. They had come to a people by whom, as they saw, they would be well received; they were placed in a good position, and they knew that they would be kindly assisted.³⁴

The presence of the religious community, commented the *Record's* reporter, was specially manifest in the decoration of the altar. The flowers, in particular, were chosen and arranged in a manner that bespoke a taste of exquisite refinement. The sisterhood was six nuns and two postulants.³⁵ They were accommodated in the house of Mr Claffy, (sic) a member of the committee which had organised the erection of the church-school.³⁶ They had arrived recently under the care of Rev Father McLaughlin and in company with the Rev Fathers Stritch and Cleary.

On the following day, Monday, the first school opened in the new weather-board church building with an enrolment of thirty-five pupils, many of whom were non-Catholics. One report claims that the first day's admissions were of two pupils only, both Church of England! In March of that first year the enrolment was up to over 60, most of the elder children being Protestants.³⁷ By mid-1900 average attendance was said to be about fifty children,³⁸ but this was corrected in a subsequent issue, where the correspondent wrote that the Lady Superioress had stated that "the average attendance is about eighty children per day."³⁹ By 1902, the total official enrolment was 89.⁴⁰

The area of Perth south of river in which the sisters settled, Victoria Park, was gazetted as a municipality in 1897. In 1901 there were 335 houses in the suburb, with a population of 546. It tended to be a lower socio-economic area with artisans and labourers predominating. Not untypical was a three-room weatherboard house, lacking piped water, gas, or electricity. The neighbourhood was poor at the turn of the century, but not destitute. Some of those gold miners who had gained something from the fields settled there and became a property owning working class.⁴¹ By 1900, Victoria Park was connected to the city centre by the overhead electric tramway which had commenced passenger carriage in the city in September of the previous year.

The sisters remained for some time without a permanent residence. Mr R. F. Claffey, a former policeman who became a good friend and benefactor, was renting them his four-roomed house opposite the church grounds. They had shifted there on January 13th. These quarters were very cramped, with room for only some of the community to sleep there. The others carried their mattresses to the church sacristy for the night, returning them each morning before Mass, which Dean Symth from the Cathedral said for them, after riding his push bicycle from Perth to Victoria Park.

A regular supply of food was not assured either in those early days. The community had to rely, to a great extent, on the generosity of their fellow Catholics. One story describes how Bishop Gibney came to the house of Mrs Kelly and asked her to gather up any food she had in the house and to send her young son Sid out with it *immediately* in the tram — on no account to wait to buy any — the sisters were almost starving.

The lack of living space and of adequate nourishment was not conducive to good health. By the middle of their first year, Mother Clare had contracted

sandy blight and had then developed typhoid fever. Fr Bourke wrote that

poor little Mother Clare of Victoria Park is dangerously ill. Typhoid. One of the sisters from Subiaco is at Victoria Park nursing her. Dr O'Connor thinks she will get it hard to pull through especially as she is so frail a little creature. (There is) also the fearful dread that, cooped up as the Sisters are, living in a heap together for want of space, the infection may run through the whole community.

However, the next day he could write that the news about "little Mother Clare" was not so bad today. Her face was a good deal drawn and pinched, nevertheless. Fr McLaughlin had presented him with the bill for the rent of the cottage eighteen. The sisters could not at all meet it. Should he pay it?

It would have been difficult for the sisters to pay the rent on the proceeds of their school fees, five pence per week. Given the socio-economic status of the district, receipt of even those low fees would have been uncertain. As with all convents of Mercy, the sisters added to their small income by teaching music after school hours. Music teaching, in fact, became the main source of revenue. A number of benefactors also came to their aid. Mrs Chamberlain of the Railway Coffee Palace, opposite the Perth station, sent a large canvas bag full of many kinds of food each Saturday morning faithfully. Other names often mentioned by the sisters in later years were those of Quinlan, Claffey, O'Connor, Charles, Tully, Harold, Murrys, Prestons, Russell, McArdle, McMaster.

By 13th June, Mother Clare was going on favourably. She was extremely weak and looked very ill indeed. The Doctor thought she would pull through.

Foundress

Mary (Mother Clare) Buggy was born in 1861, in Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, the daughter of a prosperous business man. When quite young, she was sent to boarding school in Liverpool, England, and remained there till she completed her schooling. She entered the Mercies in Derry in 1882 and was professed in 1885. For more than a decade Sister Clare taught music at St. Peter's school in Derry.

Then she was given a difficult task. Clare was a diminutive person who has been described as radiating serenity and joy.

It seemed that nothing had the power to disturb her calm and that everyone merited and received her respect. One often wondered how this could be. She had more than her share of physical suffering and was no stranger to some of life's bitterest experiences. I believe that in good measure she received the gifts of peace and joy; during her long life the role of peacemaker was hers and joy marked all her days.⁴²

This quality of peacemaking was called upon in 1895. The sisters at the Convent of Mercy in Carndonagh, founded from Derry in 1870, were in difficulty in their personal relationships. The bishop of Derry decided to ask the superioress of St. Peter's for a sister who could go in charge of Carndonagh. It so happened that the day he came to make his request, the portress was Sr Clare Buggy. He thereupon decided to ask for her! She consented and stayed in Carndonagh for three years, leaving behind a calm

and happy group of sisters. It was from there that she volunteered to go to Australia. Later in life she would reminisce, saying that it had really been too much for her. Others testified that she had done a very good job in a decidedly difficult situation — probably part reason for her selection as superior of the new foundation in 1898.

In Western Australia she also suffered much from the difficulties of the foundation, especially physically in the early days. But she was strong enough to spend a long life of service to God, her community and many generations of children "with serenity, gentleness, and that indefinable "something" that was a compound of rare holiness, good breeding and joyful endurance." She was continually to be seen on the playground with rosary beads in hand, keeping a watchful eye on the children. Nothing of their antics escaped her and although kind and gentle, she was nicknamed "clever sticks" In her later years she was a small, plump lady, a gentle, witty, and wholesome person. "She was a small rounded lovely human being ... a woman of prayer but very practical in it. no pioucity... she really lived out what she believed in." In her advanced years she still showed interest in all the human facets of life — from the government's free milk scheme for school children to the eye colour of a young music teacher's boy pupil. She became an ardent fan of the radio programme "Dad and Dave" and a one-eyed barracker for the Claremont Football Team, whose defeats in her telling sounded like victories.

She suffered again physically in her last few years, this time from a cancer. While she gave little indication of the severity of her pain, she did pass a remark that gave some glimpse into her soul and some indication of the source of her strength.

Every morning at Mass I place on the paten all my sufferings of mind and body, past, present and future to be offered with Jesus to the Eternal Father.

She died, "a little old Victorian lady and a loving Sister of Mercy" on 21st August, 1951, at the age of ninety-one. As one sister, who knew her only in her old age, put it, Mother Clare kept a little hold on your heart forever.

Mother Clare's assistant was Mother Veronica (Anastasia) Hayes. She was 33 when she was professed on 18th July, 1887. She died 11th June, 1913, relatively early in the Victoria Park history, but was long spoken of as a saintly lady. A kindly person, she was remembered as always being able to produce sweets for those children who got hurt or were in trouble. Her death was the first death for the small Victoria Park community. She is buried at Subiaco.

"The Mothers"

With Mother Clare and Mother Veronica also were the "Mothers", as they became called in later years: Sister M Benedicta, called Benedict, Phelan, and Sister Mary Benignus O'Sullivan. Benedict had been professed on 4th January, 1894 and Benignus on 4th July, 1895. Benedict was an artist and a very good business woman. She had the knack of making friends and on their help the sisters relied. Benignus was an efficient administrator and a firm disciplinarian.

The two Mothers were seen, at least in old age, as more severe than Mother Clare, not free as Clare was free. Clare had remained as Superioress for twelve years, until 1910, when she was replaced by Benignus. The latter was then replaced by Benedict in 1916, who was in charge for a three year term. Mother Clare returned in 1919 with a three year term, and then was succeeded again by Mother Benignus, who remained in office from 1922 until the time of the amalgamation with Victoria Square in 1934. What was perhaps even more significant was that the other posts of Mother Assistant, Novice Mistress, and Bursar were shared by one or other of the three Mothers, Clare, Benignus, and Benedict. Not until 1931 did another name appear in the Chapter Acts. In that year Sister M. Joseph Butler was elected Mother Bursar.

The Victoria Park community became — under the influence of the Mothers — a very prayerful, observant, and exact community, perhaps a little too exact according to some commentators.

In 1948, to mark the centenary of the foundation of the Convent of Mercy, Derry, the survivors of the original group — the two Mothers and Mother Clare — sent greetings. One of the Derry sisters commented: "Strange, is it not? 1848 the Foundation of our Convent, fifty years later 1898 the Convent under the Southern Cross, and now the Centenary year 1948 when they send us Good Wishes."

The amalgamation of Victoria Park with Victoria Square in the 1930s was bitterly resented by "the Mothers". They died at Subiaco, Benedict on 18th September, 1957 at the age of 87, and Benignus on 28th January, 1962, aged 88. Interestingly, Benignus is remembered as "gorgeous" by past pupils of the orphanage school at Subiaco, which she administered, strictly but with a warm attention to the needs of her students.

Also with the first group was Mother Clare's sister, S M Agnes Buggy, professed 12th December, 1889. Julia Buggy was a redhead and, Clare used to say, with the temperament that goes with it. She was quite different from the more peaceable Clare. Sister Agnes is remembered by some, however, as being quiet and gentle. Perhaps it was a transformation effected by the prayer to which she gave much of her spare moments. For several years before her death she was in charge of St. Anne's School, Belmont. She died on 2nd July, 1927, aged 61. Today Agnes and Clare rest side by side in the Karrakatta Cemetery.

Sister Mary of Mercy Gibson died 24th July, 1922, aged 75. Mary Mercy was English and a convert to the Catholic faith. She was disowned by her family for this and for entering the Order of Mercy, in which she was professed 11th September, 1897, just twelve months before leaving Ireland for Australia. She was rather legalistic and the children used to relate that she would not allow her pet parrot to have meat on Fridays. Sister Mercy brought with her to Australia Volume One of Cardinal Newman's *Historical Sketches*. It was precious, not only because of the interest in Newman which all the earlier Mercies seemed to share, but also because it was a gift, suitably inscribed by her "friend", Bishop William O'Doherty of Derry. Mother Clare also brought a gift from the bishop — more formally inscribed. It was Halliday Sparling's *Irish Minstrelsy*.

New Members

New members were slow to join. In contradistinction to the West Perth group nearby, the community grew only slowly. The first was a lay sister, Gerard Lyons, professed 3rd June, 1905. The second was Sister M Joseph Butler, professed 27th January, 1912.

Sister Gerard was a local girl, Kate Lyons. She won the hearts of all by her kindness over the years. It is recalled that some of the boys took advantage of her and when work was to be done escaped by climbing trees. But Mother Benignus soon brought them down!

In 1908 and the following years, postulants had come from Ireland, though not all found the life to be what they wanted. In March, 1908 two postulants had entered, "fine healthy girls" who seemed very happy, wrote Clare to Gibney. One of these, however, proved "not suitable" and had to be dismissed and a situation found for her. It had cost thirty pounds to bring her out. Clare tells the bishop that they had no means to bring others out from home. She had heard that there were two Miss Bradys, relatives of his, at the Ladies' College in Victoria Square. If they had religious vocations and intended to be Sisters of Mercy, she now asked him to give them one, please.

Sister M. Benedicta had a sister, Miss Phelan, a later letter continued, "a very nice good young lady... out by the last boat to enter a Convent" She was presently visiting the different convents to make her choice. Miss Phelan did join the Victoria Park Community as Sr. M. Aloysius, but died at the age of thirty, after only eight years in the country.

Those who remained also included the Irish women Sr. M Joseph Butler, Sr. M Teresa Butler, Sr. M Alphonsus Bennett, and Sr. Ignatius Walsh, while Sr. Patrick Roberts was Australian. The cumulative total membership throughout the years before amalgamation was 25 professed sisters (four of whom had died) and one novice, professed on her deathbed.

Gradually, however, the new foundation was able to consolidate its position. On 3rd December 1899 they moved from the Claffey house into a new if modest convent.⁴³ Some time later it was gutted by fire, one Saturday afternoon when the sisters were out visiting parishioners. It was renovated and extended.⁴⁴ Dean O'Reilly gave the presbytery to them, meanwhile, and set himself up in a little room in the church.⁴⁵

A highly successful concert had been held in early September, 1899, to raise funds for the convent building. In the concert the pupils of St. Joachim's Convent School performed several items, from the ball drill and march of the infants to the singing of "Music sweet shall flow tonight" of the senior pupils.⁴⁶ Concerts became traditional. The *Record* waxed lyrical about the success and entertainment value of the concert given by the pupils at the end of 1900.⁴⁷ The Mayor and Mayoress attended, and the Mayor spoke. "The performances, etc., demonstrated that it was an efficient school... The school, he thought, after what he had seen that evening, could hold its own with any in Perth. ...He recognised the necessity of a footpath up to the school, and promised to do all in his power to have the work completed as soon as possible..." His remarks were frequently applauded. In seconding the vote

*Right: M. Benignus
O'Sullivan, member of
Victoria Park pioneer group.*

*Below: St. Joachim's
Primary School,
Victoria Park.*





*Left: Sr. M. Gerard
Lyne with her sister,
Mrs Hannah Marshall.*

*Below: First Convent
of Mercy, Queen's
Park.*



of thanks, Rev Fr Lyons spoke of "the wonderful efficacy of the children, for which they had to thank the good Sisters.

He drew attention to the part the children would take in the making of the coming nation of Australia under Federation..."

Immediately after Mass catechism was taught in the church by the sisters who spared "no pains to impart a good religious training to the children".⁴⁸ Bishop Gibney himself visited the school and showed a man how to trench land; the result, a miniature vineyard and orchard on part of the ground attached to the convent and school.⁴⁹

Expansion to South Perth 1908

In 1908, improvements were made to the Victoria Park site. Clare wrote to Gibney about their "New Wing" which he had not yet seen. They had then about one hundred pupils. In 1908 also, the Victoria Park Mercies opened a school at South Perth, called St. Columba's, with 35 pupils. Prior to that, since there were no churches or schools in South Perth or Queen's Park, the sisters had gone there on Sundays to give religious instruction to the Catholic children and to prepare them for the sacraments.

When the school was begun in South Perth, two sisters from Victoria Park convent went there every day, probably by horse and buggy. Mother Clare was delighted, she wrote the bishop, that the new establishment carried the name of their "own Derry Saint" Saint Columba, the famous missionary. However, despite the fine building and really magnificent site, she wrote that it would be a hard struggle to pay the debts incurred for the piano, carriage, etc. So it would take Saint Columba to look after "his Derry children"

Belmont and Queen's Park 1915

In 1915 two more schools were opened, at Belmont and at Queen's Park. To these the sisters again travelled daily from Victoria Park. In this year, however, the Sisters of Saint Joseph took over the South Perth school.

St. Anne's Church-School was a brick and stone building, set on two and a half acres, with a "commanding position over the waters of the Swan River" Its first principal was Agnes Buggy. As a church-school until 1941, when a separate school was constructed there was not much comfort for the teachers. Church seats had to be re-arranged Friday afternoons and Monday mornings. Staff room was the small church sacristy. One past-pupil of the 1920s remembers the Sisters came each day from Victoria Park in a horse and sulky. Meals had to be brought from Victoria Park with them. Existence could be quite spartan. One later teacher remembers that she "was always hungry in Belmont" The two sisters brought part of a loaf from home and a lady across the road provided a pot of tea, a pat of butter, and some cheese. Morning and Afternoon teas were non-existent.

Sister M. Bernard Hagarty was a well-known figure of Belmont. Apart from being head and class teacher, she taught music before school, during lunch time, and some days after school. On the other days, the two sisters did

visitation before going home by bus and trudging uphill from the Great Eastern Highway to Shepperton Road, just in time for Evening Prayer.⁵⁰ Sister Bernard survived a number of younger assistants at Belmont, and was affectionately regarded not just by them but by parents and pupils, past and present. Her life was a simple and cheerful one, filled to repletion with dedication to her ministry of teaching and a ready availability to people.

Queen's Park was a swampy, low lying area. The population drawn there over the years, was not very high in the socio-economic scale, and it also became a semi-industrial area. Over the decades, too, it attracted many Italian, Slav, and — later — Dutch families, as well as the original Irish. All had, in common, the poverty of the struggle to settle in a new land. Depression years were especially difficult when the Railway Workshop practically closed down.

The Queen's Park school had been established to a large extent through the efforts of Mrs D. Cantwell, proprietress of the Coronation Hotel. The two foundation members were Sr. M Aloysius Phelan, sister of Mother Benedict, and Sr. Mary Alphonsus Bennett, who was not professed until 24th April of the following year. They had to walk half a mile to the train each day at Victoria Park Station and then a quarter of a mile at the Queen's Park end. This would have been all right in temperate weather, but not so in the heat or the rain. If it were raining they had to teach all day in damp voluminous clothing. Sr. M. Aloysius contracted T.B., from which she died on 3rd December, 1916. She was replaced by Sr. M Joseph Butler. The weekly fee for those children who could afford it, was 5d. As at Belmont, there were all the inconveniences of teaching in a building which did duty for both church and school.

Later, Mrs Cantwell procured, for a convent, a block of land with a shell of a house on it. This was repaired by Mr Russell, the builder, from North Perth and furnished by Mrs Cantwell. It was ready for the sisters to live in by 1st August, 1927. Srs M Joseph Butler, Xavier Byrne, and Teresa Butler were the first occupants. A lay teacher helped on the school staff. After twelve months, Sr. Gerard joined them, and then ensued a vegetable garden and fowl pen with hens, ducks, chickens, and turkeys. By this time, Queen's Park had been a separate parish for a few years and St. Joseph's convent became a separate branch house with about ninety pupils in the school. In 1936, a four-roomed school was built and extended in 1955. A new convent was built in 1957. It was needed. The previous small house had been greatly strained. As the school had grown, so, too, had the number of sisters. Two sisters forming the staff of St. Francis Xavier School, Armadale, opened in 1938, also lived there. One room had to serve the dual purpose of dining room and community room — which meant a twice-daily transformation. Most of the occupants slept on a verandah where a duck blind sheltered them from the weather until louver windows were inserted.

Victoria Park Grows

The year 1924 marked the Silver Jubilee of the arrival of the sisters in Victoria Park and the first postulant from St. Joachim's School. She was accompanied

by a student from Queen's Park School, whose sister had also entered from Queens's Park school some eighteen months previously. By this time the community numbered thirteen.

The present Convent was becoming totally inadequate. Even the private rooms of the community were being used as classrooms and music rooms. Two novices were due for profession in 1925, Sister M. Xavier Byrne and Anthony Paye. Mother M. Benignus, then Reverend Mother, set about building a new and more spacious building.

On Mercy Day, September 24th, 1925, the foundation stone of a large and spacious brick convent was laid by Archbishop Clune. The builder was Mr E. T. (Ted) Russell, a great friend of the community. Architect was E. Le B. Henderson. It was seen as "a gem in every respect, spacious, commodious, and beautiful, quite an ornament to Victoria Park, and second to none in the Diocese."⁵¹ Despite the generous dealing of both builder and architect, the cost of the new convent involved an overdraft on the Bank of New South Wales of 6,000 pounds and a loan of 2,000 pounds free of interest. Together with the purchase of furniture from Aherns Department store, the total cost was 8,425.18.0 pounds. Later the interest free loan — from the McArdle sisters — was commuted to a donation. The old convent was renovated and used as a high school, Our Lady of Mercy College, with about fifty pupils. The school was open to girls and boys from Kindergarten to Leaving though, at this time, very few remained for Leaving.

A small boarding school was also attached. Advertisements informed parents that the situation was unrivalled, and a more healthy locality could hardly be obtained. The location was "unsurpassed for convenience, healthfulness and beauty". The convent was about two minutes walk from the tram, and five or six from the railway station. The Clontarf Boys Band (under the Christian Brothers) had demonstrated this convenient feature on opening day by playing selections of music from tram terminus to convent.

It must have been a relief for the sisters of Victoria Park to have such new premises. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee, the *Record* had described their lack of living quarters and had also commented:

The sisters have never since they came to Victoria Park, had the opportunity or pleasure of teaching in a properly equipped school. The school is a church on Sundays; there are no partitions and all classes, except infants, are in one big space making the task of teaching one of constant strain and never ending effort to get the attention of the pupils.

The *Record*⁵² published a page of donations for the new convent, opened officially on Sunday 30th May, 1926. The new convent had "an appearance of solid grandeur" in marked contrast to the former "wee convent nearby"

In 1934, the paper, in its 29th September issue, was able to chronicle the opening of a fine new school building on Sunday afternoon, 23rd September. Contractors this time were Messrs Berry Bros. It was formally blessed and opened by coadjutor Archbishop Prendiville. The Children of Mary Sodality, the Hibernian Society, the Clontarf Boys Band, numerous clergy and some

civil dignitaries added colour to the occasion. A pleasing feature of the new school was the beautiful terraced stone entrance, commented the *Record*.

The parishioners had worked hard to save money in the building. Mr W. O'Connor and his "busy bee" committee had saved hundreds of pounds. The Ladies Committee (nameless) and others had also facilitated the undertaking. Nevertheless, even after the collection on Sunday was totalled and added to the funds in hand, a debt of some 3,000 pounds remained.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EPISCOPAL POLITICS AND MERCY SURVIVAL TACTICS

Autonomy in Their Own Sphere

In many ways the refusal of the Mercy sisters in the nineteenth century to be bullied by the bishops represents what has been described as a "radical obedience", a "loyal dissent".¹ In the patriarchal structure of the time, bishops were the official "protectors" of women religious. That these women refused to accept meekly what amounted to episcopal tyranny and unjust use of sacred power was a step forward in the movement towards holism in the church. It may have been, in the overall pattern, just a small step — but for the women concerned it was extremely painful and left bloody traces behind. With our twentieth century consciousness, we may wish they had been more radical in their dissent, more revolutionary in their unsubmission. To condemn them for this, however, would seem to be a failure to situate ourselves imaginatively in their historical ambit.

Religious have always been in an ambivalent position in the church. None more so than the nineteenth century active congregations of women religious. What authority they possessed — and at times it has been considerable — derives not from their office but from their personal charisms or gifts. Being outside the hierarchical structure has given religious orders a certain freedom to critique official policy and procedure.

In addition, the organisation of religious orders has, over the centuries, given an institutional space to women wherein they could use their gifts and seek holiness. In that space they could, within the limits of whatever version of the Code of Canon Law was operating in their period, govern themselves internally and, to a more or less free degree, perform works of apostolic service. Religious women could pursue careers largely closed to them in secular society, including the pursuit of perfection through asceticism, contemplation, and mysticism. Nevertheless, as Catherine McAuley and other foundresses such as Angela Merici, Mary Ward, or Nano Nagle had found, there was no real alternative for their work to survive beyond their own lifetime than official connection with the institutional church and whatever that implied.

Theologically important in preserving this freedom was the vow of celibacy. In many ways, the vow was positive in its rationale and effects. It has been for many — whether bound themselves by the vow or not — what Sandra Schneiders calls "an icon of a mystery".² For some practising celibacy, it has led to a mystical experience of union with God. For others it has been more of a means to a fuller participation in the announcement of the reign of God. As Schneiders writes, "In some mysterious way Jesus transformed the twin evils of childlessness and death, into symbols of eternal life"

On the other hand, its rationale was often situated in a false anthropology of what it means to be human. In the patriarchal ecclesiologies that finally prevailed, woman was considered — anthropologically and ontologically —

inferior to man. The male was the norm of humanity, endowed with all the capacity of reason that gave mankind dominion over lower beings. Body-centred rather than spirit-centred, the woman was defective according to the norm. She was irrational, emotional, subversive, a threat to male sexuality. Created second, she had sinned first. By nature woman was unfit for leadership. And, since it was from our birth in our mother's womb that we inherited original sin and eventual death, women were logically to be excluded from full participation in society and church.

There was one way that women could rise above these fearful consequences of their femaleness. Through celibacy and the resultant relation to Christ as His "Bride", nuns could escape the curse of Eve (Gen.3:16), the curse of having to bear children in pain and sorrow, and of remaining subordinate to their husbands. Nuns could, metaphorically, become male! Or, to put it another way, they could totally transcend the order of creation and anticipate their entry into the new creation, where we will all be neither male nor female.³ Whatever the dubious implications of such theologies, we can trace — from early Christian times — stories of women finding in celibacy a practical road to independence from father and husband. Celibacy was a way of escaping from their sole definition as wife and mother. Through it they could exercise various kinds of leadership within the church, even when they were excluded from the effects of ordained ministry. Through celibacy they could move towards self-definition, appropriating the ancient definition of a virgin as she who defines herself unto herself. The survival of semi-autonomous groups of women within the church has been of some significance, therefore, in the history of the struggle for equal rights for women everywhere.

Some of the Australian women who have been influential in bringing the unequal opportunities of women to public attention have appreciated one aspect, at least, of their convent education, claiming their religious teachers provided them with models of women not tied — at least in practice, in their own lives — to the ideology of motherhood and housekeeping.⁴ "Convent Girls" — according to some contemporary reporters — "tend — or is it dare? — to be different" Playing all the rules at school, says one ex-student, gives convent girls a head start in life. Another says "the nuns were the ultimate role models because they were very emancipated women. They had careers back in the days when women didn't really have careers... We never had any limitations placed on us." Discipline was seen as the nuns' forte; "it stands you in good stead later on."⁵ The sisters showed the possibility of another way of life. "Not that it had to be theirs... just that there was another way". They exhibited a simple sense of community, a particular kind of sisterhood. They were women living alone, living in a female society. They possessed "a wonderful arrogance" — they could only be satisfied with God Himself!⁶ "Don't be a wimp. Get in there, girl, and do it" was the message national TV personality, Geraldine Doogue, learnt from her days at Santa Maria College at Attadale.

In the eyes of some other contemporary feminists, however, religious celibacy has in no way been a blessing. These see the status of celibate women religious as having worked to preserve the status quo. Dependent, in the long run,

on their clerical male protectors, they see celibate religious communities as only furthering the oppression of other women who would not take that option.

Whatever our personal response, it was always an uneasy state for the nuns themselves. There now seems sufficient evidence to state that whenever women in patriarchal societies became consecrated virgins, whether celibate or not, men gradually took them under their protection. The process in Christian Ireland began with Brigid of Kildare, the St. Brigid whom Bishop Gibney held up so fervently to the West Perth and other Mercies for their emulation. Brigid was the heir to the very powerful Celtic goddess of the same name. Common in the legends are tales of sexual politics between herself and Patrick or Brendan, the men trying to control the strong Brigid and her nuns. But Brigid and her successors still had enormous power and influence, lasting until the twelfth century at least. Abbess of a double monastery of women and men, Brigid has been credited with celebrating an early form of the Eucharist as well as administering other sacraments, and even with having been ordained bishop by Mel, a power which passed down to her successors until about the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion.⁷

Nevertheless, it is clear her power rested not — as it would have in a matrifocal society — on her capacity for motherhood (though she was termed “one of the two mothers of Christ” and “Mary of the Gael”) but on her service to the church. As the centuries went by, any quasi-sacramental powers were lost. As church and state allied to form empires and nation-states and a Roman centralised hierarchy became consolidated in the church, a male power structure made God accessible only through the male clergy. In Ireland, dioceses became important rather than monasteries. Priestly celibacy was more effectively imposed. Ideologically, women became a more potent source of sexual temptation and stricter controls were needed. The women “who had become male” clearly possessed charismatic power only. They possessed it in abundance and served the church well. But, on the whole, they did not use it to challenge successfully its increasingly androcentric nature.

As the church attempted to become more monolithic in structure, and as women in general became more conditioned to their place at the bottom of the social and political and economic ladders, nuns tended to submit — sometimes not without extremely painful struggles — for the sake of survival and the retention of whatever influence they still could exert. In order to ensure the continuance of their active good works for needy people in diverse situations, and/or to preserve the space in which to listen in prayer to the needs of the world and the voice of God within their hearts, they tolerated what was often really injustice and oppression. In time they could actually come to see most of it as the will of God, a sacralized order of things.

In the nineteenth century, when the Institute of Mercy came into being, there was a particularly strong fear of women exercising too much leadership in the church. The processes of industrialization, secularization, and romanticism had led to a separation of Western society into public and private spheres, with religion relegated to the private sphere. It was in that century,

too, that the distinction between the concepts of "femininity" and "masculinity" became more hard set, with a feminisation of religion and a reluctance to see women exercise roles in the public or "masculine" sphere. The fear of women taking over in church leadership was thus tied up with the devaluing of status for the clergy and for the church as a whole, as it moved more and more into the private and "feminine" sphere.⁸ It was important for the male clergy to retain their patriarchal position of dominance. Just as wife was submissive to husband, and daughter to father, so too was spiritual daughter submissive to spiritual father or priest. The women mostly had internalized this submissiveness, as much as the men had internalized their dominance.

After the first Vatican Council in 1870, there was an increased emphasis on Roman centralism and on ecclesial authority. The trend was strongly towards a uniformity in externals within the universal church.⁹ Loyalty to the Holy Father, faithful adherence to directives from Rome, uniformity of outlook and behaviour according to the religious order's tradition and rule – these all became characteristics of the period. Religious constitutions approved after Vatican I often comprised a host of minute prescriptions, in contradistinction to those approved earlier. The focus on authority fed in also into the traditional Irish pattern which gave almost absolute power to the bishop within his diocese. Even those congregations which were centralised in government or decentralised but pontifical¹⁰ as were the Sisters of Mercy found themselves, in practice, very much subject to the local bishop. The characteristics of Australian geography and colonisation also fed into this pattern of decentralised concrete authority.

It is in these various contexts that we can view, with increased understanding and appreciation, the struggles of the foundation Sisters of Mercy to preserve their autonomy as a religious community within the church of Western Australia. Ursula Frayne's struggles with Bishop John Brady and with his successor Bishop Joseph Benedict Serra fall into place in a long line of such battles. They did not cease, either, when Ursula departed to found the Mercies in Melbourne, where she met what church historian Edmund Campion calls "another episcopal supremo, Bishop Goold".¹¹ The sisters who remained in Perth also found it constantly necessary to work to preserve their independence.

The theme continues with episcopal manipulation of property and of forms of government, and reaches new interest in the first three decades of the twentieth century with what may be called the saga of the amalgamations. A new generation of Mercy Sisters found themselves battling for survival while their very identity as separate groups was challenged by Archbishop Patrick Clune and Archbishop Redmond Prendiville. In this, though they fought long, they were not so successful, except for the West Perth community. This congregation resisted to the end the episcopal and papal nuncio efforts to get them to relinquish their separate identity. Their success in this area, and the pain they suffered in persevering to the end, has not been sufficiently known or adequately appreciated for its unique significance in the history of women's liberty.

Foundation Years: Struggle for Control Over Their Own Lives

John Brady, the first bishop of Perth, was almost "too indulgent" towards the Sisters of Mercy when they first came to the colony. Nothing they could do was wrong. He got his main support from visiting the convent and visiting it daily, spending up to five hours talking to Ursula. In her still fairly inexperienced state (she was twenty-nine at this time) she thought it good to stay and talk to him, thereby missing her convent duties and not being around to guide her even less experienced companions. Her assistant, Mother Catherine, encouraged her to talk with the bishop. Catherine was dying and unable to be fully aware of the situation.

Eventually, however, Ursula realised that she was probably imprudent in spending so much time in conversation. The incident which sparked off the resultant misunderstanding was humorous, indeed, ludicrous. The bishop accustomed to very solemn visitations of convents and other institutions and buildings in France, where he had received most of his upbringing told Ursula that he would be doing episcopal visitation of every house in Perth, convent included. Thinking this would be just another of his many visits, Ursula made no more of the matter. Imagine her surprise to find the bishop arriving in full pontifical dress, accompanied by assisting priest Father Powell, two students, and three or four altar boys. She gives a vivid description of the "extraordinary scene which ensued."

About one o'clock a procession was seen approaching the hall door: first two students in soutane and surplice, one holding the Bishop's Crozier, the other a cross; next Father Powell also in soutane and surplice; then the Bishop in soutane, rochet, cape and an immense three cornered black beaver hat with a black feather and a bunch of green satin ribbons at one side; lastly three or four little boys holding up the Bishop's train.

My bell was rung. In going to answer it I met a Sister who told me that the room was full of ladies and gentlemen. As she had but a passing glance, she thought that the purple silk and white surplices were dresses and cloaks. I met another Sister who told me that His Lordship was waiting to see the community. The general bell was rung and all repaired to the Reception Room and there saw what I have described. Unaccustomed as we were to such visits we did not know how to act. We merely knelt down to receive his blessing, joined in a short prayer then seated ourselves, listened to what he said, answered his questions and when they were gone, indulged in a hearty laugh.

However, the bishop did not laugh but subjected Ursula to a "severe lecture" because he had not been received in due form.¹² It was the first of many a lecture.

Relations between them deteriorated, especially when Ursula, realising her prolonged absences had not been for the good of the fledgling community, decided to show the bishop this had best stop. She did so, unwisely perhaps, not by direct communication with him but by adopting a cold and reserved manner towards him. He, of course, was nonplussed and took umbrage. He began to correct them and command them. Finally, he refused to come to the convent after Ursula, again perhaps unwisely, suggested they copy the Dublin practice of Reverend Mother Cecilia and Archbishop Murray's

communicating for business matters by letter. The bishop then refused to come to the convent at all, and decreed that Ursula could talk to him only at the Church and in the presence of her Assistant.

The bishop had always kept a tight control over the scanty mission monies, including those for the convent. He obliged them to ask him for the very necessities of life such as food and to account in minute detail for all their expenditure, domestic as well as work. If Ursula made any change in the duties of the sisters without consulting him, he considered her to have too much reliance on her own judgement, a want of humility and insubordination. Any apparent failure to show him respect on the part of any sister led to an unpleasant and often angry reproof.

I could not enumerate all the little nothings which drew from him long and severe reprehensions... I have often remonstrated even warmly, but my efforts to explain away his Lordship's impression have generally been fruitless as he was convinced that his opinion was correct and that I was blinded by self-love and pride. If I am not humble at least I meet with humiliations enough.

"Although I have not submitted," Ursula could say, and although she had represented "that such things were not required from us at St. Catherine's and that he promised not to interfere with our customs any more than the Rule" the bishop continued to claim that the necessities of the Mission required their customs to be different.

Brady did not hesitate to evoke his sacramental episcopal powers. He had forbidden the sisters to get any tradesmen or others to the convent without his permission. Sister Anne Xavier was ill for a few days and Ursula asked and received permission to get the doctor. A week later she thought it necessary to get him again for Anne Xavier, who had not recovered. As she herself was sick in bed, she could not go to the church as ordered to see the bishop and, moreover, assumed the previous permission would suffice. Not so the bishop. The nuns were "placed under an interdict which the Bishop was obliged to come in soutane, rochet and stole to remove!" It was this interdict that Ursula feared she should "never be able to think of without bitterness".¹³

Things came to a climax when Ursula told Brady he should not have signed an agreement in Dublin that he would not interfere with their internal arrangements if he knew that he would not be able to keep the contract.

I was really frightened at the effect these simple words had upon his Lordship; were he not a Bishop I would say he became enraged; he said this was the greatest insult I could offer any man and that I should not approach Holy Communion until I did penance for it.

Brady thought better, this time, of using his sacramental powers to punish Ursula. He came to the convent that evening and apologised. However, he continued to appeal to his episcopal authority in trying to control the nuns.

He has not required us to do anything *directly* contrary to our Rule, but in many cases he would wish us to adopt his explanation of it. Besides, he says the copy we have is incorrect or at least it was written for St. Catherine's

(Baggot Street, Dublin); he dwells particularly upon the chapter relating to his duty, as our first Superior after the Holy See by which we are bound to obey him without hesitation or reply.

Brady did not hesitate to write to Baggot Street Convent expressing concern over Ursula's low state of health, which he believed was the cause of "all the little uneasiness" felt by the sisters and by himself. He requests two sisters who could take upon themselves the duties of Reverend Mother. He wished that Ursula were "more disposed to take advice and direction in small matters not at all contrary to any rule of the Constitution but of *local expediency*." Reverend Mother Cecilia Marmion of Dublin did not think him serious in requesting a Sister to take care of Ursula, and suggests that she be placed under obedience to another sister concerning her own health. "Your authority in her case", she added, "must be all powerful and she must, besides, in her present position, make use of every lawful means to procure health and life."

To Ursula, Cecilia wrote that she was not to be scrupulous with regard to St. Catherine's customs and that she was bound to obey the Bishop in all that would not be displeasing to God. Ursula, in response, tried to "do the Bishop justice"

He thought his visits gave us pleasure and that it was even necessary that he should be a good deal with us at first, but he little knew how independent the Sisters of Mercy are and that they have no needs outside their own Community for amusement or society.

She also ventured to say that

if Dr Brady had been an Irish bishop, or even a priest on the mission in Ireland, he would act very differently, but although Irish by birth, the greater part of his life has been spent in France or in a French colony. Therefore, all his views, customs and manners are French and I have often heard of some Convents in France where great severity on the part of the Bishop was necessary to preserve order, and probably our good bishop puts us on a par with them. But he does not know us; one kind word would have more influence with us than forty blows; and certainly, if we would not do our duty for the love of our most dear Lord, we would not through fear of a severe Bishop.

In mid-1849, one of the others, Aloysius Kelly, was also presented with a dilemma of authority. Aloysius had been sent in charge of the branch house at Fremantle. After a year and a half of success, Bishop Brady, as impulsive as ever, suddenly ordered Mother Ursula to bring back the sisters and children in the boarding house as he was to close the school there. It was "too great an expense to be kept on" In giving instructions, Ursula directed Aloysius to state to the bishop their wish to bring back the furniture, etc. with them. These were the property of the sisters and would be needed in Perth. There were no superfluities but it looked a lot when loaded together.

The bishop told Aloysius to take only what was necessary and leave the rest for another time. Aloysius knew another time would be a long time coming and the articles were needed daily. In her zeal she forgot Ursula's dictum to "state her wishes and be decided by him" Accordingly she sent all their goods

to the 'flat' for the journey up the Swan River to Perth. The bishop's chagrin was great. Ursula told the story to Mother Cecilia:

He sent for Sr. Aloysius and in the grant, before all who were present, gave her a severe lecture for her disobedience, saying she had deceived him by showing him only a few articles, and in his absence sending a great many more to the boat. The poor child told me afterwards that she had been quite frightened at the Bishop's manner which was unlike anything she had ever seen before. Such lectures were new to her but not so to me.

That was not the only lecture Ursula and Aloysius had to endure over the matter. In answer to their repeated pleas for help, two postulants, Ellen Dillon and Anne Strahan, had recently come out from Ireland with novice Sister M. Francis Goold, and Ursula now wished to admit them to the Novitiate. For this she needed the bishop's permission. This he refused to give, "considering that act of (Sr M Aloysius) as a formal disobedience to his authority in which the entire community shared" Ursula was at the end of her tether at this time, stating clearly to the bishop that

unless they were received we could not go on here. That, however much we might wish to labour for the Mission our health would not admit of it, that those who first came were nearly spent and no longer able to work as they were four years ago and that unless the two active young Sisters, full of life and ardour, whom the charity of our dear Superiors had sent to our assistance at his Lordship's urgent entreaty, were permitted to join themselves permanently to our Community we could not remain.

With a touch of humour, she added, "The night prayer bell here ended the conference" It did not end the dispute however, which dragged on for more than a week, until the bishop — finding Ursula "still most respectfully resolute" — consented.

Ursula could continue to claim "I have not submitted" She was to have even more reason to refuse to submit under Brady's successor, Joseph Benedict Serra. Serra was very reluctant to provide material support and very eager to assume direction and administration of the community. He was to write later that all his troubles in Perth were because he was not "an Irish" but that would seem to have been a simplification of the situation. J.T. Reilly, in writing his memoirs, wrote that Dr Serra was a remarkably small man with a remarkably large beard, of which he was extremely proud, and with an inordinate love of his jewellery and orders, which he wore on every possible occasion. He was, added Reilly, extremely touchy. He was, claimed another layman Thomas Little, unable to maintain amiable relations with his clergy, many of whom quit the diocese from his "sad temper... and his general incapacity to rule and govern".¹⁴

A reading of Rosendo Salvado's diaries shows Serra losing his equilibrium on the slightest provocation. Archbishop Polding of Sydney, himself an English Benedictine, was asked to go to Perth to settle the schism created by Brady. Polding wrote to Rome that he "had almost as much trouble in managing His Lordship (Serra) as in arranging with and managing Dr. Brady".¹⁵

The Cardinal Prefect will remember the tenacity with which he demurred to pay the expenses of my official visit to Perth (=107 stg) and the degrading insult he offered me by asserting that I had charged too much. His temper is most violent — he is suspicious and narrow-minded — despotic and not sufficiently sensible to all that those under his authority have to suffer.

There is no doubt that Serra like Brady was a very zealous priest, but his Spanish culture and his inflated sense of self-importance led him to look at the independent spirit of the Sisters of Mercy in an increasingly unfavourable light. The potential for conflict was present from the beginning. Ursula and Anne Xavier, her assistant, had gone overseas in Brady's 1850 party, and it had seemed to Serra as if they were supporting the Irish born prelate in the growing struggle between Brady and Serra over administration of the diocese. In addition, scurrilous pamphlets had circulated in Perth, supporting the Bradyites and condemning Serra. Serra thought the Sisters a party to this pro-Bradyism.¹⁶ In this, he misjudged them. Their attitude to Dr Brady was quite the opposite.

Writing to Fr Colgan, Assistant General of the Carmelites in Rome, Ursula thanked him for his kind exertions on their behalf, and the success with which they were attended. "It is a real blessing to the Colony of Western Australia that Dr Brady is not to return there." She had been "one of the many respectable people who had deposed that Dr Brady was lacking in those qualities required of one called to be a shepherd of souls".¹⁷ She also wrote:

I cannot say how much we are grieved at witnessing so many scandals; there is scarcely a Catholic family in Perth that is not divided, the Mother adhering to one Bishop, and the Father to another.

Nevertheless, Tiggeman sees Ursula's action, when in Rome, of trying to have Serra deprived of the temporal administration of her convent as the beginning of the friction. This seems to have had some foundation in fact.¹⁸ Certainly Ursula, in July 1850, had written from Europe to her agent Mr Bernard Smith that he was not to obey Dr Serra (then apostolic administrator of the diocese) if he ordered him not to get the Native Children's cottage built. "He has no authority to give such an order" She advised Smith not to take any part in disputes between Serra and Urquhart.

The situation had been complicated by the presence of Father Dominic Urquhart. Urquhart was a former Cistercian monk from England, who had come to Perth with Serra in 1849 and had been appointed Vicar General by Brady. He had, however, demonstrated a remarkable facility for trouble-making even on board the ship out, and had continued to display it in the colony. He tried to convince the British authorities that Serra was unsuitable for the colony — "ignorant of English language, manners and customs" Serra had, said Urquhart, created scandal in Perth by squandering money on lawsuits. Rome, on the other hand, was already aware of Urquhart's disposition — "a person very unstable in his resolutions, and with little regard for order and peace".¹⁹ He left Perth, on orders from Rome, in March, 1851.

Ursula had fallen out with Urquhart over property and other matters. The Reverend Mother in Dublin had received a letter from Urquhart complaining of Ursula's extravagant arrangement for the building of a house for female

Aborigines for 175 pounds. The worst aspect was that she had not consulted him, the proper person to have been consulted. After her visit to Rome and Ireland, Ursula was especially determined to stay out of any such quarrelling. "Remain quite neutral" Ursula wrote to Smith, "and advise all the Catholics that you can influence, to do the same. You will soon see that this is your best plan as well as the most Christian mode of acting" "It is now the duty of the Sisters of Mercy in Perth to remain quite neutral taking no part in the matter" In the strictest confidence, she tells him that Dr Brady, Dr Serra and Father Urquhart are all much blamed by persons in authority in Europe" She tells him to keep this "a profound secret"

With Brady and Urquhart gone, Ursula found she still could not rely on Serra to allow the sisters to do their ministries in peace. There were a number of misunderstandings. As soon as Salvado arrived back in the country in August 1853, after an absence of four years, Serra began to tell him his suspicions towards the Sisters before Salvado had even disembarked. He urged Salvado to bring about some understanding. Salvado, who had been Serra's main witness in Rome, was able to clear the sisters and restore peaceful relations.

Salvado wrote:

Thanks be to God all these differences were smoothed over, and ... to the satisfaction of both parties. Dr Serra was so pleased with this service that he declared on this score alone my return to Australia was not only welcome but necessary. These strained relations brought about by things ... of small account in themselves, but which ... had created an atmosphere of discontent between the priests and the Sisters and indeed between most others on one side and himself on the other. I could never find out the reason why His Lordship should have delayed adjusting these things till my return.²⁰

But only temporarily. A number of petty misunderstandings led eventually, in January 1856, to the Sisters being refused the sacraments and to various commands being put on them *sub gravi* (under pain of serious sin). Serra was bringing to bear on these women the full force of an authoritarian bishop. His standing on his dignity together with his extreme touchiness led him to fall out, also, with the high civil authorities. When Governor Kennedy, with whom Serra was now in opposition, championed the cause of the nuns he was even more hostile towards them.

The details of Serra's complaints against the sisters are convoluted and wearisome.²¹ They include:

disobeying his school regulations (the teachers were using some of the Irish National System texts, a practice of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland, since these texts contained nothing contrary to faith and morals);

not attending all public devotions in the church, including High Mass and daily evening devotions of sermon and vespers (having five hours of prayer daily in their own rule of life, the custom was for them not to attend such public services);

collecting for destitute orphan children without his explicit permission; (they had started this work of mercy during the time Serra was apostolic administrator of the diocese and had approved of it);

I am compelled to believe, either that your Lordship labours under some grievous hallucination or has adopted a system of petty and grave persecution in furtherance of some ulterior objects in reference to these unhappy Sisters.

Polding advised Serra to govern his temper and to consult with the two excellent men, Dr. Salvado and Fr. Martin. He declared that Serra had gone beyond the bounds of his authority in his treatment of the Sisters of Mercy, particularly in the matter of confession. As Metropolitan, he directed — or at least entreated — Serra to give the Sisters a confessor of their choice or at least one in whom they had confidence, and to provide for them sufficient pecuniary or other support. Finally, he advised His Lordship to make Bishop Salvado or Fr. Martin his Vicar General in regard of the Sisters, or if he wished them to leave his jurisdiction, to say so.

Provide the means, and let them depart in peace. But consider first the loss which will ensue.²²

The nuns did not buckle under easily in this clearly unjust situation. Serra complained that the sisters were still going to Holy Communion despite the sub gravi orders he had given them. "I can do nothing with them," he said, "and I am going to leave them alone once and for all". Ursula stated outright to the bishop that his imputations were false and malicious, and such restrictions disedifying and injurious, especially to Sisters of Mercy, whose duties bring them into contact with their neighbour, on useful and necessary business.²³

The other Benedictine priests were reassuring to the sisters. The priests were forbidden to hear the nuns' confessions "a suspensionis a divinis" but, during Holy Week, Garrido and Griver and, later on Holy Thursday, all the priests in Perth, viz. Garrido, Griver, Salvado, and Bertran, went and argued with Serra against this. Salvado and Garrido did not believe the suspension to be legally binding on them and did absolve the sisters. For this, they themselves were suspended.²⁴ Referring to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Garrido wrote to Ursula that according to his own knowledge, her "good odour" was spread far and wide. Finally the bishop gave in and allowed their confessions to be heard, but only after several weeks. Even then, the priests were instructed to enquire meticulously about the fulfilment of the smallest detail of his commands, before absolution could be given.

The Sisters of Mercy were not the only objects of the bishop's censures. Salvado's diaries contain many incidences of "H.L." showing resentment and bitterness and using his authority in arbitrary fashion. Fr Benito Martin²⁵ was suspended for not having given the incense last Sunday... and for other disagreements between them... Martin was told to leave. Serra expected them to say Amen to everything he disposed. Frey Mauro was shouted at.²⁶ Garrido was called a hypocrite, stupid and good for nothing! Serra resented "the Salvado-Garrido association" Garrido eventually was ordered to leave W.A. by Serra, which he did in April 1858. He returned 31st December, 1859 to rejoin Salvado after Serra's departure from the colony.

Even Salvado was not always able to get along with Serra, though they had once been "dearest friends" These two Benedictine monks had come together

to Western Australia from the same monastery in Europe. They fell out, not just owing to Serra's "extreme touchiness" but — more vital for that great missionary Salvado — because of Serra's attempt to use the New Norcia Mission, acquired on Benedictine money, as a resource centre for the diocese of Perth. Salvado found Serra, as bishop, diametrically opposed to what he was when they were working together at New Norcia.²⁷ He resented Serra's urban monastery of New Subiaco, to which the bishop shifted most of the monks, while the mission at New Norcia was either being neglected or being used to provide food or money for Perth. Salvado himself was kept in parochial work in the diocese.

Salvado recorded his reactions to Serra's treatment of the nuns in his picturesque English. He wrote to Ursula:

My God! can it be possible to fancy anything more injurious and more infamous to a community of religious nuns, to the Sisters of Mercy of Perth whose irreprehensible conduct is so well known and acknowledged by both Catholics and Protestants of this colony and abroad?

I know you and your community for the past ten years. I have been your Superior for some time past, and I feel it is my duty to testify ... that I never saw or knew anything, or even had heard anything ... about you or your community that was not deserving of the highest praise and encomium... since His Lordship, Dr Serra, has arrived back in Western Australia I heard him on many occasions, and in the presence of many people to extol and praise in the highest degree the great regularity and good order of your community.

Finally, Ursula wrote to Serra:

I trust that, for the sake of unity and Christian charity, Your Lordship will govern us more mildly and paternally for the time to come, for I assure you we feel in conscience that your past harsh measures and suspicious accusations are *most unjust*.²⁸

It was the continued persecution from Serra coupled with an invitation from Archbishop Goold of Melbourne to found the Sisters of Mercy there that led Ursula to resolve to leave Western Australia. She resigned from her post as Mother Superior on 5th July, 1856, remained in Guildford for six months, and finally set out for Melbourne by boat from Fremantle on 23rd January, 1857. She was accompanied by Sister Anne Xavier and Sister Joseph Sherlock.²⁹

Serra would not allow any sister who had been professed in Perth to leave his diocese. This was another misuse of power, seeing the Mercy Institute was really pontifical, but may not have been realised as such in the contemporary confusion about the status of religious groups. Sister Francis Goold, a cousin of Archbishop Goold, decided to re-interpret Serra's prohibition, and also left. She returned, however, to Perth in 1867, after some years, apparently, of anxiety over her apparent disobedience.

Francis Goold's story is an instance where a woman of intelligence, talent, and good will can be made to suffer because of her refusal to submit meekly to somewhat arbitrary regulations. Francis had been a novice when she came to Perth and was professed there. Hence she came under Serra's interdiction

about leaving. When Ursula handed in her resignation in 1856, Francis was elected assistant to Mother Baptist. It seems she spoke out her "strong mind" in the troubles with Bishop Serra, for she was slow to accept injustice and quick to act on her convictions. She considered that if she remained in the Convent her eternal salvation was in danger on account of reasons known to God, His Lordship, and her own conscience.

Later she regretted her "passionate manner" but would not accept his "untruth" that she had "run away" from the Convent by herself and unknown to him, the Superior and the Sisters. She had requested to go to Melbourne but Serra, she claimed, refused permission as she had been professed in Perth, and he believed he thereby had the right to refuse. He also neglected to answer her last letter. Francis thus considered that he had given this consent, and took off for Fremantle to sail to the east.

According to Francis, Serra had actually nominated two sisters to escort her to Fremantle. She went accompanied by a sister and a young woman — whom she apparently dressed in a nun's habit, as sisters always travelled in twos at least. Mother Baptist and the other sisters in Perth had seen her off. She did not intend to go to Melbourne, as she did not want to involve the others there as "they have had neither *hand, act, or part*" in what she had done, nor were aware of her intent"

With the flight a fait accompli, Francis was accepted in Melbourne, though Serra continued to claim that she was out of her convent without permission. She had been led into error by his having *tolerated* two Sisters to go with her to Fremantle.³⁰ The kindly Benedictine, Father Garrido also had entreated her to retrace her steps. But Francis, in her own words, at this stage "was deaf to everything of the sort and thought she was doing what was right"

She had been elected to the post of Mistress of Novices at Fitzroy, in June 1863, but was deposed a year later — "on account of certain weighty reasons made known by the Mother Superior".³¹ In 1864 she went on to Bathurst where a Convent of Mercy had been established by Sisters friendly with Archbishop Polding of Sydney. In 1866, this group left Bathurst, as Dr Matthew Quinn, bishop of the newly erected diocese of Bathurst, was bringing out another party of Sisters of Mercy. Francis was very sorry to leave Bathurst, whence she journeyed to Sydney and then, finally, back to Perth.³²

After some nine years she had "made a general confession", during which her spiritual director, a Franciscan priest, Father O'Farrell, had told her candidly "the penalty she incurred in leaving the convent in the manner in which she did". After a year back in Perth, she was readmitted to both active and passive voice, that is, to full membership.

Ursula's successor, Mary Baptist O'Donnell, also had her troubles with Serra, though she had urged the sisters to conform to Dr Serra's will or quit the convent. There had been the troubles, for instance, over allocation of monies to the orphanage.³³ Serra left Perth in April, 1859, in an attempt to have Rome reverse its decision to make New Norcia a separate diocese under Salvado. He never returned. Mother Mary Baptist died, 9th March, 1862.

Her successor, Aloysius Kelly, wrote that her death had been accelerated in good measure by the sufferings of mind after her election.³⁴

Ursula Frayne had survived, "the great, independent, self-willed and master-minded Madam Mary Ursula", as Dominic Urquhart had termed her. She was, he complained, a "woman, a religious woman, who had out-stepped the proper bounds by getting out of her proper sphere".³⁵ Ursula had survived — but at a price.

Spirituality of Self-Abnegation

A period of peace descended with Martin Griver's assumption of the administration in 1859, and eventually of the episcopacy.

Griver was one of the priests who had championed the Mercies. He was a much admired and loved man, kind and patient, with an air of genuine dignity. A medical doctor as well as a priest, he had been recruited by Salvado. He arrived in the colony in 1849, and did much appreciated work with convicts and ticket-of-leave men and their families. Clothed as a Benedictine before leaving Europe, he had never taken vows. His biographer, Goody, gives the trouble between Serra and Salvado and the uncertainty as to whom he should make his vows as the reason.³⁶

Griver was a kind and patient man. Newbold calls him "the unwearying Spaniard" and also "one of the holiest of the Australian bishops". In his attempt to help the Mercies, he had once argued with Serra for two and a half hours on their behalf. He refused to hear their confessions under the stipulations made by Serra — so Serra forbade him to hear any confessions. Serra apparently did not bear Griver ill-will for this, naming him on his resignation in 1861 as provisional administrator of the diocese. Griver, said Serra, had piety, learning, zeal, and detachment. He had no personal enemies, Serra claimed, and was liked and respected by Dr. Salvado. It was Griver who, as administrator, granted the pro-Cathedral of St. John to the Mercies for the Children of Mary,³⁷ and made the Subiaco monastery available for an orphanage. In later life and ill-health, he lived there, nursed by the sisters in his dying years.

Griver lived the principle of the subordination of the flesh to the spirit. On his death there were found two crosses each with five protruding nails, embedded into his body, front and back. Convinced that penance was needed to repair the scandal caused by the disputes of preceding years, he prayed and acted as a peacemaker and gave the diocese a period of much desired stability. His life was austere, his habits simple, his disposition retiring. Yet people loved and revered him for a saint. He was respected as a man of God by civil authorities. To the sisters he gave continuing wise and prudent support. He was the capable administrator so much needed by the diocese and appreciated by the Mercies.

Their other advocate, Father Venantius Garrido, was now Prior of New Norcia under Bishop Salvado. He, too, had arrived with Serra in 1849. He had immediately fallen in love with the Australian landscape.

I raised my eyes to the Australian sky, and how beautiful it is! Its blue is something extremely delicate, more than anything else to be seen elsewhere. Time passes unnoticed in the contemplation of its beauty. It is simply inspiring.

Yet when ordered to leave by Serra in 1858, he had gone to Ceylon until able to return in December, 1859. He, too, had spoken out on behalf of the Mercies to Serra, but in the long run survival by submission was also his principle. In Ceylon he had written:

Obedience is dearer to me than all the mines in Australia, even if Australia became a pine-cone of solid gold. ... On with the Cross, rather, long live the Cross, since by the Cross salvation came to the world. ... Let us allow Providence to work in its own time.

Admirable as these sentiments are, we may query whether a spirituality balanced towards self-abnegation was all that healthy for religious women struggling to survive in a frequently hostile environment. In the ensuing decades, the West Australian Mercies were to continue to demonstrate that sense of independence which they had so proudly claimed in the pioneering days. At the same time, in many areas of their life, they were to fail to recognize the debilitating effects of the stereotypes of "woman" and "nun" laid upon them by society and church. Pride may well be man's "original sin", whereas in a culture such as ours, which so undervalues the feminine, women's original sin may lie rather in passivity, a too willing submission to the male "protectors"

Problems of Property

The Mercies were to need a strong sense of self-worth and independence in the next episcopal period, that of Matthew Gibney. He was, on the surface — and assuredly in intent — a kind and beneficent "protector". And yet he put in jeopardy the whole financial well-being of the diocese, including the livelihood of the religious orders.

Matthew Gibney had come to the colony through Salvado, arriving in 1863. Trained at the missionary college of All Hallows, Dublin, he came to Australia immediately after ordination. Gibney soon became an important figure in Catholic life in the colony. Griver made him his Vicar General and came to rely on him. His singleness of purpose and whole-hearted devotion to the Church made him the obvious choice for Griver's successor as bishop.

His personality was attractive. A big man of majestic bearing, he received much admiration and affection. He gave off energy and enthusiasm, strength and courage. He went on long missionary tours through the colony. He showed a lively interest in orphans and neglected children, and Subiaco Orphanage became his great love. The early issues of the diocesan newspaper, *The West Australian Catholic Record*, which he began in 1874 from the boys' orphanage at Subiaco, unfailingly carried stories about the orphans at Victoria Square or Subiaco, of which he was manager. Personal relationships with the sisters seem to have been very good.

He was also warmly interested in the welfare of the Aborigines and tried to work for that. He and the well-known journalist — anthropologist, Daisy Bates, joined forces on more than one expedition. Daisy Bates wrote a

"touching appreciation" of the "bighearted bishop" To her he was one of Western Australia's finest pioneers. A beautiful character, she wrote, with the greatness of simplicity, he showed himself a single-hearted worker. On location at Beagle Bay, he had "hoed and dug, and cut his way through suckers and undergrowth... it was impossible not to give of one's best under such a leader" A simple good man, he was "surely the greatest prelate the Roman Catholic church has had in Australia... the right man for his time and place and people."³⁸ Gibney never minded his own inconvenience. He received national renown by giving the last sacraments to Ned Kelly at Glenrowan railway station and then braving possible gunfire and rushing into the blazing inn at Glenrowan to minister to Dan Kelly and Stephen Hart.

From the late 1880s, Bishop Gibney had to face the problems associated with the rapidity of growth of Western Australia, particularly under the impact of gold. He expanded the works of the diocese tremendously at a time when the government had abolished assistance to non-government schools. In 1896, the year in which the Assisted Schools Abolition Act began to operate, there were nineteen Roman Catholic schools with 2,557 children. In 1909, the second last year of his episcopacy, there were eighty schools and 6,969 children. To cope with this growth he brought in more religious communities. He acquired attractive properties in many parts of Perth. He bought a partnership in Greenbushes Development Company to mine tin. He also purchased a daily newspaper, *The Morning Herald*.

The latter purchase was to prove extremely troublesome. Also problematic was the fact that, under the current legislation, all the lands for church purposes were in his name. Gibney had personal security of his own and this enabled him to obtain loans from the bank to carry on diocesan works. He had from time to time disposed of some of his properties and applied the proceeds to the church.³⁹ The trouble was that as the titles stood there was nothing to show whether the land was his own private property or belonging to the church. Moreover, the sole power of disposing both church and personal property belonged to the bishop.⁴⁰

Anselm Bourke, writing in November, 1901 to Gibney, showed obvious concern for the legal position of religious bodies working in the diocese.⁴¹ Bourke put the onus for the state of affairs onto Bishop Serra. Both Serra and Salvado had been distrustful of trustee administration of property belonging to a corporate or public body, as favoured in English law. Serra had procured a Private Bill to be passed through the Legislative Council in 1858, making himself owner of everything. Bourke was trying to protect the interests of St. Brigid's community at West Perth, who were being faced with death duties on property they did not own.⁴²

The bubble had to burst sometime, and burst it did with the collapse of the newspaper, which went into liquidation in 1909, four years after its purchase. Gibney had had as his Vicar General the wise and prudent Anselm Bourke. However, in 1903 he had replaced him with a newcomer to the diocese, Father Bernard Keogh, a young and very popular Irishman, in whom Gibney placed unbounded confidence. With the purchase of the newspaper, Keogh became chairman of its board. The newspaper was a millstone around Keogh's neck.

The bishop insisted it be continued, yet contributed greatly to falling circulation through prohibiting news about horse racing. Very large sales of land went into trying to keep the paper afloat. Its final debt was about 45,000.

In December, 1908, Father Keogh died, thirty-three years old. On his death bed, he told the bishop that he had been forging his signature to obtain money and had been secretly mortgaging convent and church properties. The newspaper was placed in the hands of liquidators the following month. When the extent of Keogh's transactions was revealed, it was clear that the diocese was in overwhelming debt. The Bank was pressing for payment.⁴³

Early in 1909, three promissory notes which Gibney refused to pay became public news in a lawsuit.⁴⁴ Though the decision was in favour of the bishop, it was a matter of only 220 pounds, small consolation when the total diocesan debt had turned out to be more than 200,000 pounds. The bishop was requested to resign — he was at that stage in his early seventies. His successor, Patrick Clune, an Irishman who had worked for several years in the Goulburn diocese and had then joined the Redemptorist Order, was faced with the daunting task of immediately reducing the debt to manageable proportions. This was accomplished through a cooperative effort of the diocese, involving sale of property, diocesan collection, and two Bazaars and Art Unions. The Roman Catholic Church Property Act of 1911 and amendments in 1912 and 1916 righted the concentration of power in the bishop, which had existed in Gibney's time.

Relations between Bishop — later Archbishop — Clune (1911-1935) and the Mercies were amiable, on the surface at least. Clune, was of a rather sympathetic nature, inclined to "good fellowship" with his clergy and a more relaxed style of discipline. Himself a member of a religious order, he was aware of the ramifications of such membership and tended to tread warily in his dealings with the sisters and their "holy territory". Nevertheless, the first part of Clune's episcopacy must have been an exceedingly worrying time for the Victoria Square and other Mercies, with many of their convents and institutions included in the mortgaging.⁴⁵

Victoria Square convent was in a specially perilous position since it had been part of a governmental grant to the Catholic Church for purposes of religion, and no portion had been legally transferred to the sisters.⁴⁶ In April 1909, Gibney had informed Reverend Mother that "a portion of community property had been mortgaged previously by Fr Keogh V.G. without the consent of anyone concerned." Gibney asked the community to be responsible for the debt, but the sisters declined "to have anything whatever to do with a debt not incurred by any of its members". The mortgage on Victoria Square Convent was for 4,000 pounds.⁴⁷ The crisis entailed left a lasting legacy of suspicion, and made the sisters somewhat jealous of their rights of confidentiality in financial transactions.

The sense of mistreatment was not alleviated, in the case of some of the convents, by Gibney's apparent failure to share equitably a money grant made by the government with the 1895 Education Act. Under the Act, Assisted Schools were no longer to receive public funds. A pecuniary compensation

was made to the managers of every Assisted School hitherto entitled to Grant-in-aid under the Elementary Education Act 1871. The grant to the Managers of the then existing Catholic Schools was 15,000 pounds (10,000 pounds according to the 1895 Act). Most of the Managers (parish priests), except Fremantle and Albany, gave the bishop the money to invest in landed property and so establish an endowment fund for the schools. Not quite 6,000 pounds was spent in building houses on land at North Perth, which was given by Bishop Gibney for that purpose. The rents from the houses were disbursed to the schools, in all nearly 6,000 pounds by 1908. However, in early 1908, a mortgage of 5,500 pounds was raised by the bishop on this property and the rents were taken to pay the interest.⁴⁸

The sense of wrong was strong among the West Perth Mercies. The legend there states that the grant involved a large stretch of property in North Perth, originally intended for them because of their valuable educational work, but eventually given, in part, by Gibney to the Redemptorists Fathers, and, in part, sold as separate blocks. It was a large block of land, the breadth of four streets running parallel and two in length, along Bulwer Street from Charles Street to Alfonso Street, to Camelia Street, to Leake Street, and bordered on the north side by Franklin Street, which was originally called "College Reserve" and was intended for the West Perth community.

The real situation is somewhat confused. Perhaps Gibney had verbally promised the West Perth sisters some of his land at North Perth for a college. Gibney had negotiated with the Redemptorists to come to the diocese and had promised them twelve acres of land as a free gift.⁴⁹ Propaganda had been querying this and Gibney had reassured the Fathers that it was his own property to give. They, in their turn, were obviously unwilling to hold to the agreement if this gift was not made. Gibney also claimed that Father Keogh was trying to buy land in the area, known as "the College Reserve" as a possible school site.⁵⁰

Whatever the facts about a promise of land to the West Perth Mercies,⁵¹ correspondence certainly indicates that the schools compensation grant money was not directly shared between the schools affected. As early as 1898, Anselm Bourke and Gibney were at odds in some matters. The Redemptorists in the Irish province, with whom Gibney was negotiating to come to the diocese, wrote that it was clear that the Vicar General did not want to help them; he was doing everything to make success impossible for them. Bourke was also expressing unease about several loans made at this time, including one for the school-church being built at Victoria Park. Bourke kept the accounts of rents paid to the schools, so when Gibney mortgaged the School Endowment Property, he probably objected. In 1909, Bourke made a plea for the sisters to obtain their share.⁵²

The animosity persisted to the end. In July, 1910, writing to tell him that his faculties as Vicar General ceased when the bishop's ceased, Gibney amazingly reminded him that he had never been adopted as a Priest of the Diocese. Bourke had come as a Benedictine novice, took vows, was ordained priest of the Order, did missionary work in the diocese, and later obtained a dispensation from the order. In 1873, he had gone to Adelaide but in 1879

urgently appealed to be taken back. Gibney's predecessor had been very reluctant, but had yielded to Gibney's persuasion. However, he did not adopt him as a Priest of the Diocese. Gibney did not either. "Bear in mind", Gibney concluded, "you were a profugus at the time I interested myself in your regard".⁵³

As well as mortgaging properties, Gibney was apparently also using convent accounts to borrow money. Mother Angela Costello of Bunbury refused to pay the interest of an overdraft with the Union Bank for 650 pounds (plus interest), drawn in favour of Rev. L. M. Martelli. She stated that the money was not borrowed for her community and she requested Gibney to pay the interest. Reverend Mother Benedict of Victoria Square wrote that it would be quite impossible for them to pay any more than their own old portion of the interest on the purchase of Vanzetti's House on the Terrace. She wrote also to the bishop's secretary was there any chance of getting even a little money out of the Highgate Hill (North Perth) School Houses to pay interest. She experienced trouble in getting the cheques for the Orphanage. She had to meet Bank interest and other big bills. It was absolutely necessary that the maintenance money for the Orphanage be paid in full to support and keep the place going. She did not want to pay for the electric light out of the Orphanage bread and butter money. "I hope", she wrote, "St. Joseph will help us to feed the many little helpless ones depending on the poor Sisters".⁵⁴

Archbishop Prendiville, successor to Clune, suffered from this heritage of doubt. The story is told that he took Mercy property, viz. at Subiaco, for church purposes. In fact, the true story seems to be the reverse. The land sold at Subiaco was, in reality, always church land, never the property of the sisters. It was during Prendiville's administration that the sisters, for the first time, had legal ownership of any part of Subiaco, where they had lived and worked for decades. In 1937, Prendiville transferred lot 48 at Subiaco to the Sisters of Mercy.⁵⁵ Moreover, the archbishop sold church property to help the sisters out of heavy debts on Santa Maria College and St. Anne's Hospital.

In 1939, Prendiville proposed to sell church land in Olive Grove Estate within the Subiaco property to make money available to the Sisters of Mercy to the extent of 6,000 pounds. The Bank indicated that there was no need for this, they would not take action against the Sisters. However, Prendiville decided to go ahead with disposing of certain assets to provide money for the operations of the archdiocese and to pay the Sisters the 6,000 pounds.⁵⁶ Correspondence from the archdiocesan secretary over the next five years or so makes more than one reference to further helpful payments from the proceeds of the Olive Grove Estate.⁵⁷ West Guildford (Bassendean) convent, in continual constraints trying to pay interest on loan, also received help in reducing its loan account.⁵⁸

Such is the legacy, however, that the tale of Prendiville's unjust dealings is still told. Edmund Campion writes:

Clerical arrogance is a feature of most histories of female religious in Australia and doubtless oral history could tap a richer vein. Thus, built into

*Archbishop P. J. Clune,
1910-1935.*



*Archbishop
R. Prendiville,
1935-1968.*

the sub-culture of being a religious in Australia is a lasting distrust of bishops and secular priests. It is a legacy of history that needs to be recognised.⁵⁹

Issues of Decentralisation/Centralisation

Archbishop Prendiville may not be the villain he is sometimes painted to be in control of religious order property, but he comes out rather badly in what might be called the Saga of the Amalgamations among the Mercies. This saga of foundations and amalgamations began in the closing years of the nineteenth century, during the time of Gibney. A recent call for reconciliation spoke of "sinful structures" in Perth Mercy life and history. Among the sinful structures were named "the pain and insensitivity associated with amalgamations".⁶⁰

Rosa MacGinley⁶¹ sees a basic transition occurring in the twentieth century in the structure of women's institutions. At the beginning of the century, the pattern was still generally that of monasticism where decentralisation of government and community structure prevailed. Centralisation, though approved for men's orders from the thirteenth century with the Dominicans and Franciscans, was specifically legislated against for women by the Council of Trent.

Under church law, the superioress was responsible to the bishop of the diocese or to the major superior of a corresponding men's order if that existed. A number of European institutes came to Australia in the nineteenth century with this monastic style pattern. The Sisters of Mercy were the most widespread of these and by the end of the century were established on a decentralised system in almost every then constituted diocese in the country.⁶² It is worth noting that the various units had not always come directly from Ireland or England. Moreover, this kind of subdivision had taken place in two ways. Perth had given rise to West Perth as a former branch house and Melbourne as a direct foundation. Adelaide had directly founded Coolgardie. So too had Singleton (from Ennis in Ireland) with Gunnedah and Broken Hill. Brisbane (from Dublin) had separated from their branch houses of Rockhampton and Townsville with division of dioceses.

However, the climate of canonical opinion was changing and, by the end of the nineteenth century, new foundations of women were being required by Rome to adopt centralisation in structure to suit the greater mobility of society. The two major Australian creations, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of St. Benedict — founded by Archbishop Polding in 1857, himself used to the monastic tradition of decentralisation — and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, were both on the centralised plan. This was to cause conflict and pain for the latter order within some of the dioceses where bishops held to the older tradition.

The Irish bishops in Australia had long favoured a diocesan-type decentralisation in government for the religious orders in their territory. Some tried to force the orders to adopt this model. In particular, Bishops James and Matthew Quinn had made a deliberate choice of the Sisters of Mercy to accompany them to their dioceses of Brisbane and Bathurst respectively. Both brothers had quarrelled over government with Mary MacKillop, foundress

of the Australian Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, to such an extent that she had withdrawn her sisters from their dioceses. A few members remained in Bathurst and in Bundaberg (Queensland), forming a nucleus for the new Congregations of "Black" Sisters of St. Joseph.

In Western Australia, Bishop Gibney also tried to convert Mary MacKillop's Sisters of St. Joseph into a diocesan based group. Despite the fact that Rome had declared in favour of the sisters' freedom of choice over the Quinns' demands, and despite Cardinal Moran's word to Gibney that they could not separate from their head house,⁶³ Gibney determined to pursue his own wish. In February 1890, two years after the arrival of the Josephites in the colony, he wrote to the cardinal that he had erected the Sisters of St. Joseph into a Diocesan Institute by powers given to him in a Roman decree of 1888.⁶⁴ All the sisters withdrew except for one professed member, Sister Ursula Tynon, and two postulants. Gibney increased their number with recruits from his overseas forays. After initially working in the Victoria District, they were all moved to the eastern goldfields in 1896.

The West Australian Mercies were also to experience conflict and pain because of changing attitudes in Roman regulations and local episcopal opinion. By the end of the 1880s, some forty years after the first group of Mercy nuns had landed in Perth, a number of branch houses had been established. As described in previous chapters, Fremantle (1847) and Geraldton (1883) had proved temporary, but permanent establishments had been set up at Guildford/Midland (1855), York (1872), Bunbury (1883), Toodyay/Newcastle (1884) and West Perth (1888). These had all remained connected with Victoria Square Convent as branch houses.⁷

In 1887, however, Matthew Gibney had become the fourth bishop of Perth. As Bishop, Gibney decided that the Sisters of Mercy should pay more attention to their original rule, which declared that branch houses able to support themselves should become independent of their mother or founding house. Catherine McAuley had deliberately chosen this independent mode of governance, considering that centralised government would hinder their expansion at local level. Local members would understand local needs and would attract local support. As we have seen, her choice proved an effective one for the time and circumstances. The Sisters of Mercy had spread rapidly throughout the English speaking world to become the largest order of women therein.

Accordingly, under Gibney's pressure, the branch houses already founded became independent congregations. The first was West Perth, which was declared a separate congregation on 26th May, 1896. Bunbury became separated on 12th December, 1897. On the 15th August, 1900, Guildford (which later transferred its mother house to nearby Midland Junction), York, and Newcastle Toodyay also became separate. Since Coolgardie and Victoria Park were founded in the late 1890s also, this meant that in 1900, there were eight self-governing Mercy congregations in the West.

We have no record of those sisters' feelings who thus had to leave Victoria Square, but as it was part of the tradition of the Institute in Ireland and

England and — of necessity — with overseas foundations, it is probably fair to state that they responded readily enough to the bishop's pressure.

Furthermore, there is no evidence of clash of strong personalities as had occurred with Brady or Serra and Ursula Frayne, or with the Quinn brothers and Mary MacKillop. James Quinn had even removed the experienced and capable Mother Vincent Whitty from office as superior of the Brisbane Mercy foundation — and this despite his having got Archbishop Cullen of Dublin to override the Baggot Street community's judgment not to release her for Queensland.⁶⁵ In these and other similar disputes between clerics and women religious, bishops had resorted to tactics of excommunication, deposition from office, even slander about personal conduct, and, more subtly perhaps, over-protection. All such tactics implied a downgrading of women.⁶⁶ Gibney was a strong personality — it needed strength and courage to succeed in frontier conditions. But he was not the "boiled potato of a man, bursting out of his skin of episcopal authority"⁶⁷ that clerics like the two Quinns were.

The new foundations progressed at an uneven rate, however. Gibney's action varied in one significant respect from similar actions of, for example, Bishop James Quinn of Brisbane. Quinn, a vociferous advocate of the Mercy type of government, nonetheless departed in actuality from the letter — if not the spirit — of the original rule. He had decreed that all branch houses within his diocese be connected. It was only when the diocese was divided at his death that the former branch houses of Rockhampton and Townsville became independent.

Gibney, on the other hand, subdivided within his diocese. He decreed each house independent — an inappropriate move in Australia where distance, scarcity of population, and lack of local personnel and resources made for circumstances very different from those in Ireland or England.

York, Newcastle/Toodyay, and Guildford/Midland were very small communities, situated in country areas that held out fewer prospects of growth than did the city. Entries were relatively few, and most were of Irish young women. When Clune became bishop in 1911, and favoured centralisation, it was not a shattering affair for these three small convents to resume life once again as branch houses of Victoria Square. There was a certain injustice, however, connected with their transfer. When the sisters from these three communities joined Victoria Square, they — on the advice of Clune — took their place as juniors according to rank. It was not until 1936 that they were given normal precedence according to date of profession.⁶⁸

Bunbury and West Perth, however, had progressed more firmly. The two foundations from outside the colony — Coolgardie and Victoria Park — had also shown steady growth, especially the former⁶⁹. This was not enough to save their separate identities.

The Amalgamation Saga

On the goldfields, Clune had brought about the reunion of the "Black" Sisters of St. Joseph with the original "Browns" at the end of 1911, aided by the death of Mother Ursula Tynon. It seems that he may have also suggested uniting the Coolgardie Mercies with Victoria Square, somewhere about 1912

or 1913, allowing them a vote. They voted against it. There is no written documentation about this, but given the re-uniting, with Victoria Square, of York, Toodyay, and Guildford in 1911/1912 and the movement within the Sisters of St. Joseph at that time, it is not highly improbable. If this is so, it is also likely that he suggested merging other groups of Mercies, such as Bunbury. If so, he did not succeed there either.⁷⁰

The port of Bunbury was growing in population and the activity and numbers of the Sisters were increasing also. Altogether there were 66 entries in the Bunbury register, including the original foundation members. There was a heavy concentration of entries from Ireland, evidence of strong recruitment there by the Bunbury superiors. Several branch houses had been established in the districts around Bunbury.

Bunbury might have escaped the episcopal trend towards amalgamation in 1911-12, but they did not escape the episcopal urge to control. In 1912 Clune rearranged their whole authority arrangements. In his episcopal visitation he "found the religious spirit on the whole very good, but a slight relaxation in minor matters had crept in which with the blessing of God will speedily disappear" He decided it was more prudent in the circumstances to do what he considered the necessary rearrangement of offices, appointing Sisters to various positions of authority.

By this time the movement towards amalgamation of groups of religious following the same rule had become world-wide. The first Mercy amalgamation had actually occurred in Ireland in 1871, when four independent houses joined in the diocese of Elphin. The Australian Plenary Council of Bishops in 1905 had sent to Rome a decree concerning the amalgamation of autonomous houses of the same order — the Presentation and Mercy Sisters were specifically mentioned. Rome had replied that the bishops could not decree, but could "encourage". The bishops of Victoria felt a certain urgency about the matter on account of a new Education Act. They were planning for a central Teachers' College, to prepare religious teachers for compulsory registration. Thus, the first twentieth century amalgamation occurred in Victoria in 1907, when most of the separate mother houses in Victoria — including that founded by Ursula Frayne — and Tasmania joined together.⁷¹

Amalgamation had become the name of the game in Rome in the early 1900s. Between 1902 and 1905 there was a series of letters which sought to "regularize" the conditions of the Sisters of Mercy in the United States. In 1905 Rome sought to unite all the Sisters of Mercy in that country. Nothing on a large scale occurred, however, until 1929. Local autonomy was a very strong instinct with the Mercies, wherever they might be. As in Australia, they considered themselves more or less diocesan. Their rule stated that the bishop was the highest ecclesiastical superior after the pope; many groups had come with founding or later bishops. In fact, they were really pontifical, and at times had appealed successfully to Rome against arbitrary bishops. But that did not destroy their feeling for local identity.

The Revised Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917 also fostered moves towards amalgamation. The code was overtly in favour of centralised

government. In 1918 Rome approved a revised Mercy rule for the amalgamated houses of Victoria and Tasmania. In 1922, it approved a rule for a number of American mother houses united as the Burlingame Amalgamation. In 1929 the American Union of Sisters of Mercy was formed, with 39 communities joining and twenty-one remaining outside. (Nine more were to join by 1962).

Clune had not given up the idea of amalgamation in Western Australia. Reverend Mother Mary Agnes O'Malley of Bunbury had died suddenly in office in 1921. No election was held, the Archbishop appointing Xavier Read to take her place, "as amalgamation was in view" according to the Bunbury community chronicle. The chronicle also states:

At the end of our Retreat June-July 1921, His Grace the Archbishop spoke to the Sisters about Amalgamation and left a copy of the Rule of Amalgamated Sisters in Melbourne, for Sisters to study. He expects this matter to be finally arranged by the end of the year and that early next year Sisters from each community will be called to elect a Mother General and select a site for Central Novitiate.

Amalgamation did not then occur, though, and elections took place the following year. The chronicle does not indicate whether any vote re-amalgamation happened at this stage.

Clune was acting with support from Rome. In 1920, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda responded to a petition of Clune concerning amalgamation with the statement that His Holiness directed that the five separate houses be asked to amalgamate and to form one central Novitiate.

But if any house should reject this amalgamation, it is decreed, that in the future in that house no postulant should be accepted as a novice and no other religious profession should take place there. This regulation may cause you difficulties in its execution...⁷²

Accordingly, the carrying out of the whole matter should be referred to the Apostolic Delegate. When Clune wrote to the latter, the Delegate replied that he was completely in accord with Clune in regard to the full enforcement of the prescriptions of the Holy See for the Communities of the Sisters of Mercy, who would not be disposed to amalgamate.⁷³ "So" the Apostolic Delegate concluded, "you may carry out your plan with all confidence" He advised him also to defer Profession and Reception of the novices and postulants at Coolgardie until the question of amalgamation was settled, or at least formally proposed.

A lengthy draft of Clune's talk to the communities during 1921 about amalgamation shows his strong desire for merging the various groups of Mercies in the archdiocese. He laid strong stress on the Holy Father's sanction of the plan and reminded them of the existence of penalties if they did not accept it, this despite his instruction "to invite them to join freely, voluntarily" He spent some time describing the "selfish" and the "unselfish" view and the value of sacrifice for the common good. He reminded them that their community belonged to "an organized Diocesan educational system" and that efficiency was important in this respect. They owed obedience to the deliberate judgment and recommendations of the Heads of the Church.

The main goal, therefore, was "the strengthening of the whole educational and religious system of the Sisters of Mercy in the Archdiocese" by the establishment of a Central Novitiate and Training College. This would lead to satisfactory and efficient spiritual and intellectual training, and an unfailing supply of good Religious and capable teachers for all the schools of the Sisters of Mercy. Since the latter ran nearly half of the Catholic schools of the archdiocese (i.e., 22 Primary and four Secondary), the Mercies were of immense importance in the educational work of the archdiocese. "The efficiency of that whole system on which ... the preservation of the whole fabric of our body exists, depends *largely* on the training and the efficiency of the Sisters of Mercy who have half the schools"

Clune promised to finance — if he could — the building for the Central Novitiate and Training College, on a site to be chosen by the new Council of the Amalgamated Communities, the plans to be drawn up also by the Council. It would be maintained by the Amalgamated Communities on a basis of taxation.

The Amalgamation was to be a voluntary joining together of the five different communities into one compact unified body on certain definite specified terms. It was to be quite different from what happened in the case of Midland Junction, Toodyay, and York, and also in the case of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Boulder. That was "really absorption not amalgamation". In this amalgamation, each independent constituent community would retain its corporate life practically untouched, functioning as at present, retaining its same relations with its branch houses except in the method of appointment of the Superior. The Mother General and her Council would appoint these. Each constituent community would manage its own finances. To safeguard the interests of each constituent, the council would comprise one from each community. No individual sister professed when Amalgamation began would be removed from her community against her will, except to a branch house of that community or "*except for a grave cause*"

There would really be very little change. They could keep their present Rule and Constitutions or adopt the Victorian Amalgamation ones. Two changes had raised an outcry, viz. change in the habit, and the giving up the office. He did not write down the reasons for the giving up of the office, but he wrote (surely, with tongue in cheek):

I have no quarrel with those who would not on any account go before God on the Judgment day in any garb except a stiff *starched front*.

He gave them the next few months to clarify and think about the proposal, that is, until the beginning of the Xmas holidays. Then he would ascertain their dispositions and call a Conference of Delegates from each of the Independent Houses willing to join. The Conference would draw up terms and conditions, choose the site for the Central Novitiate, and deal with other necessary matters.

The talks were not successful in persuading the independent communities to amalgamate. The West Perth Archives show the Apostolic Delegate Cattaneo getting more directly into the act in 1925. Archbishop Cattaneo, writing to

say that the Constitutions were to be revised according to the new Code of Canon Law, suggested that the revised book should be the same for all, as all acknowledged Mother McAuley as foundress. "The best and most expeditious solution would be to adopt the recently approved constitutions for the Amalgamated Sisters of Victoria and Tasmania." None of the Western Australian foundations followed his suggestion.

Nothing then seems to have taken place until the following decade. At the beginning of the 1930s, there were still five separate congregations of Mercy in the archdiocese of Perth: Victoria Square, West Perth, Bunbury, Coolgardie, and Victoria Park. Rome commented on this in the report on the state of the archdiocese made by Archbishop Prendiville, as coadjutor to the aged Clune. From then on, Clune manifestly felt obliged to tidy up the disorder of the Mercies. He now had a young and energetic assistant who could do all the foot work.

They won their first success in 1934. The Victoria Park foundation from Derry, Northern Ireland, had been perhaps too close to Victoria Square to have expanded sufficiently, though West Perth, somewhat closer, had shown impressive development. There were twenty-one sisters at Victoria Park, including five with temporary vows and two novices, who transferred to Victoria Square. Whatever the reason, the Victoria Park community was very poor. It had what was then a large debt of 6,000 pounds, necessitating the expenditure of much energy on raffles and other ad hoc means of money making to meet the regular interest payments. Australia was itself heading for an economic depression. Union with Victoria Square convent would help the financial burden through the pooling of resources.

Coadjutor Prendiville conducted visitation of the community and presented them with union with Victoria Square as a *fait accompli*. It was Rome's wish. No vote was taken, and individual sisters were not consulted beforehand. Some were not even officially informed until the last minute.⁷⁴ This led to tension and a degree of bitterness. Even today, among some of the survivors, the hurt is tangible.

What the Sisters did not realise was that, while Prendiville was in the forefront, getting all the odium, Clune was at the back of the whole thing, giving the directions. Clune took something of a delight in this. Yet he was sincerely convinced that amalgamation was "certainly for the good of religion and education in the Diocese". A new Superioress had been appointed at Victoria Park and practically a new teaching staff. The Novices had been brought into the Square.

In a short time we hope and believe everything will be running smoothly there. This is the greatest and most beneficent achievement that the young man has accomplished.⁷⁵

In reaching this great achievement, the young man had, indeed, in Clune's words, gone "full-steam ahead". Both of them had little sympathy, it would seem, with the women whose lives were being upset, and Clune, with his gift of colourful words, wrote vividly, but somewhat unkindly, about the effects on the elderly Mothers at Victoria Park. There was no attention paid, moreover, to preparing the sisters for the change.

On holidays at North Beach in Christmas of 1933, two of the Victoria Park sisters had received their first intimations of the resultant re-organisation, when they met two of the West Perth Mercies at the local grocery shop. The latter related that two of their pupils had been to Mass at St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, when Prendiville had announced that a different community would be in the convent and school at the beginning of the coming year. Shortly after that, a ritual of handing over the keys of the convent was conducted by Prendiville in the convent chapel and the Sisters were reminded — rather pre-emptorily — of their duty of religious obedience.

Redmond Prendiville was allegedly the youngest bishop in the world when he was appointed to assist Archbishop Clune in 1933. Born in 1900, in Kerry, Ireland, he was full of charm and good looks, intelligence and skill. As a young man he had played football, his magnificent kick gaining him a measure of prestige. So much so that he had been, the story goes, taken hostage at the age of eighteen by the Black and Tans, an incident which led him later to twice refuse a knighthood from the Crown. Another legend tells of his expulsion from All Hallows College, Dublin — either for joining a local or All-Ireland football match in which Kerry was going badly or for playing cards during a spiritual retreat, or for hanging a political flag (then forbidden in Ireland) out of his window. All Hallows refused to readmit him but he was taken as a student by St. Peter's, Wexford. He swore — or so the story tellers assert — to return as Archbishop so that the President of All Hallows would have to kiss his ring. Return as Archbishop he did, twenty one years after his 1925 victory as a full-forward for Kerry in the All-Ireland at Croke Park. In 1936 he appeared in the Irish newspapers with another kick, this time starting off the game between Kerry and Roscommon in Croke Park.

As Archbishop, Prendiville was a genuine pastor with a well-deserved reputation as a spiritual father. He was devoted to the confessional. Each Saturday saw a long line of penitents, especially young people and children, outside his box in the Cathedral. During his episcopacy the church in Perth grew mightily. He kept little for himself, allegedly owning personally just a watch when he died.

As he himself grew older he mellowed. But in his younger days, he was quick of speech and action and often insensitive to others' feelings. Later he learnt to turn the desirable blind eye and to assure that all was forgotten. In the early years of his administration, he could be — as his correspondence shows — very authoritarian. He had the name of driving around St. Brigid's Convent, at West Perth, to see if the gates were locked at 6 p.m. each evening. He was undoubtedly authoritarian in his manner of uniting Victoria Park with Victoria Square convent.

The high-handed behaviour of Clune's coadjutor would have assuredly disturbed those sisters who had, by then, been thirty years or more at Victoria Park. Mother Clare accepted the fait accompli and retired to Victoria Square, which she considered appropriate. The other two elderly Mothers — Benedict and Benignus — did not quite overcome their resentment, refused to go to the Square, and went instead to Subiaco. There younger Victoria Park-ites — mindful of their pain — would visit them on Sundays. Mother Teresa

O'Sullivan, superior at Subiaco in the 1940s — one of these visitors recalls — treated the two mothers "like queens, because she knew what they had been through".

Such pain did not enter into the calculations, however, of the episcopal re-organisers. The Victoria Park community, in contradistinction to the other separate foundations except for Coolgardie, had never been part of Victoria Square. Having stayed some time at West Perth on their arrival in the country, it was with these they had formed friendships. The larger and well established convent at the Square — despite having a common rule and original foundress — was more or less foreign territory to them. It must have felt a bit like being swallowed up by something larger than one's self, and the Victoria Square sisters were scapegoated to some extent. For the novices and for the younger professed members, the change was not so great. But for those who had been at Victoria Park from the early days, it must have felt like the end of a known and much-loved world. Mother Benignus, one sister remembers, cried all the way in the car to North Beach where the novices were at the time.

On the other hand, Clune had long been advised in favour of amalgamation by the Mercy sisters in Goulburn, where he had worked for his seven years as a diocesan priest. Writing to congratulate him on his consecration, one of them reminded him that he had always been such a true kind friend to their community and that his "two dear departed sisters (devoted nuns)" were now rejoicing.

Re the amalgamation it is the very best move you could make for the improvement of the schools and for the benefit of the Order of Mercy. Some did not care for it here in the beginning, but now all are very pleased and delighted because they know they are getting all the advantages that can be given, by having a separate novitiate and training school away from the Convent and full time to study and prepare for their different duties.⁷⁶

The writer, Sr M Brigid, then gives him replies to several questions he had asked concerning the effects of their own amalgamation and its present workings.

Those at a distance could not always comprehend the distress of those intimately involved in a particular set of circumstances. The Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome, by now watchful to preserve the rights of religious orders against over-reaching bishops, always came down in favour of the women's liberty to choose. It is said that Prendiville himself later stated he was chided by Rome for not giving the sisters a vote. Subsequent correspondence from Rome certainly indicates that the sisters were to be given a choice. However, in this instance, it would seem that the amalgamation now being a fait accompli, Rome was happy to let it stand.

So, too, were Clune and Prendiville content to rest for a while. Clune wrote that "Coolgardie, Bunbury, and West Perth are now trembling, but we have no intention of disturbing them yet". His coadjutor needed "a rest after this year's work."⁷⁷ The bishops, also, had learnt to go a bit slower.

Clune died in May, 1935, and Prendiville took over full administration of the diocese. The second amalgamation was formed with Bunbury in 1936.⁷⁸

There was a vote this time, but pressure was undoubtedly exerted. There was some polarization within the community itself. Some saw amalgamation as a remedy in a tense internal situation. Again, those who resented amalgamation tended, unfairly, to blame Victoria Square as well as the bishop.

The third amalgamation was with Coolgardie in 1938. Coolgardie proved more obstinate. Survivors of those days claim that Mother Antonia, in her lifetime, was decidedly against amalgamation. She, too, had unpleasant memories about property matters. Her influence was strong, even after her death. The Coolgardie sisters voted No twice before there was a positive vote.⁷⁹ Until then, they were, the surviving sisters recall, in Prendiville's very bad books — he refused to have anything to do with them socially. After the second No, he determined to fix it by not allowing them to take any more postulants. This was a blow, especially as they had three prospective entrants.

The Coolgardie Mercies were a flourishing group. Their environment was harsh, but the goldfields were then in their heyday and there was plenty of work for the Sisters as well as the other religious orders in the area. The group prospered, though life continued to be hard in such a pioneering area on the edge of desert. Blessed with an exceptional foundress, Mother Antonia McKay, there was formed a close community with a wonderful spirit and a very positive relationship with the people. Antonia's connections with Adelaide brought them several new members, some permanent, some on loan. Other Australian young women also joined them. A number of branch convents were founded. The Coolgardie Sisters of Mercy were assuredly a distinct and distinctive group. There seems to have been no desire to lose that distinct identity.

In September, 1936 Archbishop Prendiville requested Rome to authorize his prohibition of intake of new candidates into the Sisters of Mercy at Coolgardie. The Sacred Congregation, before acceding to his demand, wished him to make another attempt in the name of the Holy See to induce the Religious to enter into amalgamation. If they refused to do this, then he could proceed to prohibit their receiving new candidates. If, however, he was successful, Rome would move very slowly in the matter.

The matter was not resolved until mid-1938. Prendiville visited Coolgardie on 21st July and arranged for a vote re amalgamation with the Amalgamated Houses of Victoria Square, Victoria Park, and Bunbury. The sisters voted in favour by a large majority. The result was announced to the assembled community, who were advised details of Amalgamation would be made known to them in due course.

There are a number of stories still operating concerning the means with which Prendiville obtained this final positive vote. Fr Packer CSSR was sent up to give a retreat to the sisters, during which he persuaded them of the advantages of amalgamation and cabled Prendiville to come and give it another try. Another story — current also in West Perth and in Adelaide whence the Coolgardie sisters sprang — that the Coolgardie sisters heard that their friends, West Perth, were entering the amalgamation. The Reverend Mother from the goldfields, Cecelia Willoughby, came down to Perth for family reasons, found out that West Perth was still against amalgamation,

and was hurrying home while the voting was taking place. Whether this is true or not, the myth remains strong.

Nevertheless, despite this story of what might seem deceit, there does not seem the general bitterness in Coolgardie against amalgamation as in Victoria Park. One of the younger sisters of those days said it "seemed to come like that", and illustrated by banging her hands together. The younger sisters did not know much about it. Some thought they might do better if amalgamated, but did not really want it. They were told it was the pope's wish. She remembers sitting up in the stalls in the little chapel, very confused and not knowing what to do. They were not sure of any details of procedure. She does remember that on Mother Cecelia's return from Perth, she and the senior sisters were very upset. They considered it had been an unfair action to have taken the vote while the superior was absent.

In September, 1938, two months after amalgamation was accepted, Sister M Ignatius Conlon, forty-one years in the goldfields, and now the only pioneer sister left, asked to return to Adelaide.

West Perth Goes It Alone

The ultimate failure was West Perth. Or perhaps, since this is a history of the Mercies, it should be called the ultimate triumph.

A number of factors in the ethos and the situation of the West Perth Congregation seemed to combine to help them retain autonomy. The West Perth Mercies had become a very closely knit group, with a tendency to fight for their rights. Particular sisters retained their individuality and were used to speaking their mind. As a whole, they felt themselves to be a vital organisation — which they had been, indeed, from their beginnings — and would not allow themselves to be pushed around. They were a power in the local church of West Perth and were attracting quite an amount of attention as successful educators. They had been, in their beginnings, under the special protection, as it were, of Anselm Bourke, parish priest of West Perth, Vicar General of the diocese, a man of quiet yet strong influence. However, as a group they also felt very small and in danger of being swallowed up. This increased their determination. While very conscious of being so much smaller than Victoria Square, they were nevertheless convinced they could continue to go it alone.

This conviction was re-inforced by the support of monks from New Norcia. These had earlier advised Mother Berchmans Deane that Rome would not insist on amalgamation. The two Orders, Mercies and Benedictines, had, of course, the common feature of a decentralised government. Catherine McAuley had deliberately founded her Institute on the monastic style of government, where each monastery is independent, though following a common rule.

Prendiville seems to have delayed their taking of new members for about a year, while he pursued his plan to amalgamate all the Mercy groups.⁸⁰ In July/August 1947, he arranged the first of three canonical visitations of the West Perth Congregation. The visitor, Austin Kelly, S.J., found that only four out of seventy-six sisters were in favour; the rest were strongly opposed.

In August 1949 Prendiville wrote to Apostolic Delegate Marella that he had succeeded, in 1934 (sic), in amalgamating three of the five houses of the Sisters of Mercy. Two then refused to be amalgamated. In 1936 (sic), one of the two voted in favour. In 1935, during his ad limina visit to Rome, he had asked if it might be possible for him to compel this community to amalgamate.⁸¹ The answer was negative. The Sisters were free to accept or dissent. "I shall arrange for another Canonical Visitation", he concluded.

This second visitation was conducted in October 1949 by T.J. Barden S.J. This visitation showed the Sisters still generally against amalgamation. Many said that world-wide amalgamation would appeal much more than diocesan, and that those sisters they had met from amalgamated communities had not given very encouraging reports. One side effect was that a few of the West Perth sisters began to ask about the possibility of transferring to the Perth congregation. They seemed to have formed the opinion that the government of the West Perth group was irregular since their constitutions had not made provision for "branch houses" such as existed at Leederville and Osborne Park. The Apostolic Delegate did not wish to take any action on the matter, stating that the "questions of the status of the Sisters of Mercy, West Perth, and the worth of their Constitutions are now being examined."

One of the Sisters, however, decided to request a transfer to Victoria Square, and was supported by canonist Fr L. Begley C.S.R. After some parrying of her request, the Apostolic Delegate eventually indicated that if they wished to go direct to Rome, it was all right by him. Archbishop Prendiville retorted that it was not all right by him! Father Begley was transferred away from Perth and the Sister did not resume her request until the mid-1950s, when the Australian Union of Sisters of Mercy was formed. She finally joined the Perth province of the Union in 1955.

Begley seems to have complicated the whole West Perth situation. An expert in Canon Law and spiritual director to some of the sisters, he had, in January, 1950, written to Archbishop Prendiville with respect to the West Perth community, asking to have "the whole uncanonical situation of their Constitutions, the Carysfort Customs and Minor Regulations explained to them". He was convinced, he wrote, that if the real situation were explained to the sisters, they would gladly join Victoria Square; but they would resent an order from the Holy See declaring their situation uncanonical and unconstitutional. They would say why were they not told sooner? They would feel they were forced. He saw no other solution except for the Holy See to order amalgamation.

In June of the same year, Begley again wrote to Prendiville on the topic, saying His Grace was possibly not aware of what was going on in the West Perth Convent. For the past 25 years officials in Rome, he claimed, knew of the difficulties canonical, constitutional, and conventual of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, Eire, and the United States of America. There were discrepancies in the revised 1926 Dublin Constitutions. In West Perth, Sr M Augustine's so-called election was unconstitutional and uncanonical, hence receptions and professions since would be invalid. Begley tried to pressure Prendiville into



The Sisters holidaying at Triggs Island, circa 1930. In the picture are Srs. Sebastian, Aloysius, Francis, Patricia, Mechtilde and Imelda.



Usual mode of transport to Beach House and to Lesmurdie.

taking some action to redress what he saw as an uncanonically viable situation for the West Perth congregation.

A letter from Prendiville to West Perth, dated 6th January, 1950, explained that the 1926 Dublin revision of Mercy constitutions had been meant as a draft for the various countries to work on. But the Dublin sisters had thought it final and had distributed it as such. In neither the original rule or the revision had any provision been made for filial (branch) houses. There was no provision for grouping together of branch houses from the head (founding) house. For this, approval of the Holy See would be required and special constitutions added. Prendiville claimed that the original constitutions ordaining each house to be independent was difficult, nay, impossible, to carry out. Experience had shown that small autonomous houses do not flourish. There are few, if any, vocations; the same religious occupy the same offices for years; they cannot supply adequate teaching staff.

Mother Augustine was also anxious that the matter be settled, as — she felt — it was contributing to a certain degree of unrest among the sisters. Rome again decided on the side of the freedom of the individual. And by this time, the amalgamation of West Perth with Victoria Square was being subsumed into the wider issue of the amalgamation of all the Sisters of Mercies within Australia. Carboni, Marella's successor, was pursuing this latter question energetically.

Rome, in November 1954, had asked Carboni to invite separate Congregations to seriously consider Union. Individual sisters wishing to transfer were to be permitted to do so. Of the seventeen separate Australian Congregations, nine opted to form an Australian Union and the remaining eight decided to form a Federation. Victoria Square chose to join the union, West Perth the federation. A number of individual sisters, including the one from West Perth, asked to be transferred to the Union.

Once the Australian Federation was formed, Prendiville seems to have borne no ill will towards the West Perth sisters for their having stood firm. In 1961, Mother Damian Duncombe of Brisbane, first President of the Federation, wrote to the appropriate bishops requesting testimonials for each congregation in the Federation as the final step in obtaining Roman approval of its Constitution.

Prendiville's testimonial to West Perth was very generous. He stated that the West Perth Mercies had taught with distinction. There was a highly commendable spirit of piety and charity among them. In every case the Holy Rule was strictly observed. He held them in high esteem. The influence on the girls they taught was very marked. A convincing proof of this was that so many of their pupils were entering their Novitiate — a number proportionately greater than the number entering the novitiate of any other order of Religious in the Archdiocese.

The Scapegoat — Victoria Square

In January 1936 Reverend Mother Brigid McDonald of Victoria Square wrote to Archbishop Prendiville:

The news ... of Bunbury did not surprise me and though it will mean trouble and upset for us, much good will result from it for everyone concerned.

She was ready any time for his taking the votes of the Victoria Square community.⁸²

Little has been said by anyone about the "trouble and upset" for Victoria Square, but reflection on the state of play must show that the continual uncertainty and the eventual absorption of different groups of Mercies — including two that had never been part of Victoria Square community — would indeed be unsettling. While Clune and Prendiville thought of it as amalgamation between Victoria Square and, for example, Victoria Park, the sisters tended to think of it as smaller groups being joined to one larger central group. In some respects, it looked like a taking over of weaker units by Victoria Square.

The acquisition of more personnel and resources did mean that the Amalgamated Houses were able to use these more effectively. Formation in religious life and professional training on a Catholic model for the teaching sisters became easier to provide. Expansion in works occurred in several areas, particularly in the establishment of St. Anne's Hospital at Mt. Lawley and of Santa Maria College at Attadale, both suburbs of Perth.

Archbishop Prendiville made a canonical visitation of Victoria Square in February, 1936, and was happy. He wrote:

The spirit of the community is excellent; the rule is being rigidly observed.

The work of the Sisters at Victoria Square as teachers in our schools is worthy of the highest commendation. As teachers and trainers of character, they are second to none amongst the Religious teaching orders of this Archdiocese.

It was to be some decades before the full effects of amalgamation with its formation of a large centralised group and its increased capacity for institutional works were felt.

The lady initially behind much of this development was Brigid McDonald. From the north of Ireland and from a well educated family, she had leadership gifts beyond the ordinary. Born in 1879, she had entered Victoria Square in 1898, was professed in 1901, and was elected Mother Superior by 1910. In this role she alternated at elections with Mother Benedict Murphy until 1928, when Benedict resigned. From then until 1948, Brigid was at the helm. She was in office at the time of the amalgamations in the 1930s, and so was first Mother General of the Perth Amalgamated Houses — in toto, almost thirty years in the top leadership position. She was almost a magnetic cult figure; the majority of the sisters in her community were her devoted followers. Her respect for others, her natural dignity, her lack of snobbishness, and her unfailing charm led her to be re-elected time and time again.

Brigid was responsible for the setting up of St. Vincent's Foundling Home at Subiaco in 1914; the large chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Victoria Square in 1924; St. Anne's Hospital in 1937; Santa Maria College in 1938; and numerous small convents and schools.

M. Benedict Murphy.



*M. Brigid
McDonald.*

Archbishop Prendiville also succumbed to her genuine charisma. At profession and other conventual ceremonies, Mother Brigid would be the subject of a eulogy. But her programme of expansion was to lead her to his displeasure. Having obtained permission from him to borrow 14,000 pounds from the bank on church credit, she went far beyond this amount, borrowing to the extent of 40,000 pounds. When the archbishop went to raise loans for his own expansion programme in churches and schools, he found the banks would not oblige.

The Commonwealth Bank had long been prone to alarm when the Sisters went over the limit arranged or failed to repay loans with sufficient rapidity.⁸³ Mother Brigid swore that it was "not likely in the least we will incur any expense that will exceed the limit arranged".⁸⁴ The government itself was facing a very serious financial position and grants to social welfare institutions were being reduced.⁸⁵ World wide economic depression was on the way. When Brigid did overstep the limit, and closed the way for himself to obtain money, Prendiville's admiration evaporated in his anger. With a touch of unforgiveness, he wrote angrily and ceased friendly contact.

By this time, 1938, after many years of authority and effort, and burdened by a huge debt on St. Anne's and Santa Maria, and perhaps after being the centre of mystique and adulation for too long, Mother Brigid was not able to withstand the strain of episcopal coventry. Unusually for her, she seems to have collapsed under the rejection, went to Tasmania for a holiday, and then overseas to recruit postulants. While relations improved somewhat, and while the two had never failed to cooperate in the church's mission during this period, the archbishop never really relented towards Brigid during her lifetime.

Mother Brigid was out of office at last in 1949. Her health and her spirit were broken. On her death in 1955, the Archbishop made partial amends with an apology to the Sisters after the lay participants had left the hospital chapel. At the Silver Jubilee of the Hospital in 1962, he made further mention of Mother Brigid — "a woman of courage and vision... a valiant Sister of Mercy". It was a little late for Mother Brigid who, paralysed and silent, had died in St. Anne's Hospital after a long and wearying illness. The archbishop, too, had suffered physically and in the last years of his administration had also retired into a twilight zone, while continuing to govern with his accustomed skill.

Sexual Politics: Virgin Brides and their Clerical Protectors

The issue of clerical "protection" of women religious, as highlighted in the amalgamations saga, is part of the whole question of where women fit into our society. Traditionally, women have been the frailer, weaker sex. As such they have needed male protection. Nuns did not really escape these consequences of their being female. They did not really "become male". They were still women, needing protection by the male representatives of their heavenly spouse, Jesus Christ. An ideology was needed to support the assumption of power by the men in the church over the women who had taken on some kind of special service and leadership. It was found in the

symbol of the virgin bride of Christ. In many ways it was an authentic and life-giving symbol. But, like all analogy, the symbol of the sister as the virgin bride of Christ had ambivalent associations.

On the positive side, the vow of celibacy, the pursuit of virginity, gave women freedom from patriarchal dependence on their fathers or husbands. It gave them their own organisational space where their creativity could flourish and from which they could sally forth to do often extraordinary acts of service. It gave them also a focus for their sensuality and sexuality which could be life-promoting. It provided a pathway to union with the divine, with the ground of all being.

Some of these things were expressed in the rhetoric of the day at a ceremony of Reception and of Profession at Victoria Square in July 1879.⁸⁶ The paper spoke of

the solemn moment of the nuptials contracted between the Lord of Heaven and the frail creature formed by his hands — raised by this august alliance to a happiness infinitely purer, sweeter, and more delightful than is enjoyed by those who enjoy most of this world's best and choicest gifts.

"Taste and see that the Lord is sweet"... the spouse of Christ can intimately feel the truth of this invitation.

Relating the story of Moses and the blossoming of Aaron's rod in the sanctuary, leading to the tribe of priests of the house of Levi (Numbers 17,8), the speaker Father J. O'Reily (sic) talked about

the miracle by which virginity of its nature sterile becomes visibly fruitful. A race of maidens, neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but replenished by the grace of Christ is sustained from generation to generation, and yielding in every age the unceasing fruits of a holy and spotless life proclaims the presence and the power of God.

Every daughter of Eve is an off-shoot of the great tree of human life. Let her keep that place which nature has assigned to her.

The nun, it would seem, said the speaker, was "to worldly eyes a severed and fallen branch" The nun has

freely gone out into exile — exile of the heart — and in that state of isolation it is her resolve to live, a stranger always to the joys of family and of home.

Yet miracles happen. The labour of the Sister of Mercy — her outward fruitfulness in deeds of charity and goodness — commends itself to our approval, and convinces us that though a sundered branch yet she is not dead. But this fruitfulness is not itself her life... "All the beauty of the king's daughter is within."

The rod blossomed in the Holy of Holies. The nun's life of prayer is as a golden censer. In the nun is the soul whom the golden cherubim symbolize. The cherubim of glory spend their time in contemplation of divine things, meditation on the law of God, in fervour of spirit.

The nun's life of prayer — for the most part poured forth in the presence of her Lord — so close upon him that she might — if he were not invisible — kiss the hem of his sacred robe or lave his sacred feet with her tears. ... her Eucharistic Lord fills with heavenly radiance the soul of his spouse

dwelling constantly before him. At early morning her first act is to enter into his presence and with uplifted face feel the sunlight of his love upon her... Her last act at night is once again kneeling before his throne to experience the soothing effects of his adorable love.

However, there was a flip side to this symbol, too. Part of the appeal of celibacy was the idea of being chosen, especially selected by Christ as His Bride. All earthly lovers were renounced for the divine Lover. There was a heightening of resemblance to both Jesus and Mary, both virgins. The church officially regarded the celibate religious life as a superior state and often proclaimed this. This feeling of being special, of being among the Chosen, contributed strongly to the sense of being separate, of living in two worlds.

In a peculiar way, the symbol of the virgin bride of Christ could be used to hide from one's inner darkness, to suppress the "exotic other" within. Since the vow of celibacy is traditionally seen as connected with the rejection of the world and all it stands for, there is also a rejection of one's own femininity and a distrust of one's body. If the body and all its sensuality and sexuality is not fully embraced, if the existence of an Eve within, of an inner "damned whore", is not accepted, then the sense of one's self as a "worthy helper" will prevail. As it seems to do in some of the founding Mercy stories. Unless the myth is re-told, so that one is unable to say who is really helping whom, the external "exotic other" will always remain the exotic other. True solidarity between equal human beings, between the minister and the ministered, is impossible.

Retention of Individuality

Despite all the forces operating against what would seem to be necessary pre-conditions for psychic growth, oral history reveals an intriguing facet of the women who made the history of the Perth and the West Perth Congregations. These women remained individuals. They retained a uniqueness of personality despite the countless pressures to conform.

With few other options open, religious life attracted many with a strong sense of their own identity, sometimes with temperaments bordering on the idiosyncratic. Perhaps the regularity of convent life and its structures tended to make some of them even more unusual. A few such sisters have been described already. We have met, for example, Gerard Bourke and Veronica McMahon, lay sisters at Coolgardie, and Sr. M Berchmans Pash. Bunbury people remember Xavier Read and Anthony Foley and Philomena Collier. Angela Browne of Toodyay, "Mayoress of Toodyay" was said to be a character out of Dickens. Genevieve Pombart, who had entered at Midland Junction, had a rare ability to teach very young children. She was helped in this by her natural sense of performance and was quite a comedienne. At West Perth, we have met Berchmans Deane and Teresa Rielly and Brigid Watson. At Victoria Square, Francis Gould and Paul de Carne and John Stewart and several others of the earlier sisters left their impact. All in all, it made for an interesting collection of people.

This gathering of rare individuals had persisted over many decades. At Victoria Square there was Sister M. Emmanuel Moloney whose kindness

over-rode her regard for regulations. A big body, with no fear of anyone, she seemed to her pupils to do what she liked. A wonderful teacher, a marvellous storyteller, a very stimulating conversationalist, she would talk for hours after school with complete disregard of bells calling the sisters to prayer.

Then there were the Rodoredas, aunt Alacoque and niece Joan, whose Spanish ancestor had come out with Salvado at the age of eighteen, but had changed his plans for his own vocation when he hit Australia. Alacoque was the individual par excellence. Joan could be a fascinating personality, warm and loving. Her heart was especially merciful when it came to educating the girls in her care. This shone through particularly in providing training at St. Joachim's for the many girls there who, because of socio-economic and other circumstances, were unable to go onto matriculation. Joan's personality was also strong — it got her into disrepute with convent authorities at times. She challenged canon law and experienced a degree of ostracism as a result. Her appreciable talent was never really used as it should have been. Her M.A., with a thesis comparing Newman and Milton, was obtained from the University of Western Australia in 1935. She also had a wide knowledge of history and was versed in business principles. When she died, all her personal possessions fitted into one small school case.

Aunt Alacoque Rodoreda had spent almost all her seventy conventual years at Victoria Square, where she became something of an institution. She had been the youngest of her family, born of an Irish mother and Spanish father. This combination delighted her. She never tired of telling her Irish-born colleagues that she had the same ethnic mix as de Valera. As a child — and also as a novice — she was something of an "enfant terrible" sharing the exploits of the three brothers just ahead of her. One of these, hearing she wanted to enter the convent, warned her:

Well Agnes, I hope that you realise that you'll have to do what you're told in the Convent. Here you've always done what you liked.

Alacoque grew into an outstanding woman with a keen mind, a racy sense of humour and a light-hearted freshness of spirit. Her father had been organist and choir-master at the Cathedral, and Agnes had inherited his musical ability. She became a very successful music teacher and entrepreneur at Our Lady's College.

She single-handedly produced many of those school concerts which the elite of Perth, Catholic and Protestant, attended. From her music room, "Sister Aliquot" (also termed "Aunty Boo" for some forgotten reason) sold sweets, mostly aniseed balls, in small paper cones, for four or six a penny. She could be somewhat tempestuous and awesome at times, but she was not slow in slipping an extra sweet or two to her small customers.

In her old age, Alacoque's uniqueness was seen not least in her penchant for making her many anointings into dramatic and joyful occasions. As far as possible, each of the sisters living at Victoria Square would receive a personal verbal invitation to be present. The superior of the convent had been provided with a list (periodically revised) of the Cathedral clergy in order of preference. Father Rafferty always headed the list, except once when he plummeted to

the bottom because he had decided she was not yet at the point of death. Her joy was great when he returned later as Bishop Rafferty and, adorned with episcopal purple and pectoral cross, anointed her. On one other occasion long remembered among her companions she made all the necessary preparations to be anointed at 5.30 p.m., then arose early in the morning, attended Mass and waited for the sisters travelling to the outlying schools to remind them:

I say, don't forget to be home in time for the anointing. Father Rafferty will be here sharp at 5.30 p.m.¹⁸⁷

Sister Dympna Walsh had boarded at Victoria Square convent from the age of three, when her father had died. Nancy Walsh was a red-haired little girl and the leader of the rebels. Once, when a fight was in progress, the combatants were shooed away by a Sister. They went across the road to finish in the Palace grounds and situated themselves under Bishop Gibney's window. He, too, stuck his head out of the window and scolded them. Six or seven year old Nancy retorted: "Oh, you old Bishop, go and bag your head" The priest sent over later by Gibney to discipline them was disarmed by her honesty and gave her 6d.

She retained some of these unpredictable qualities throughout her life.

Another stalwart of the Square was Sr. M. Bonaventure Hayes. "Bon" had acquired the task of caring for the boy boarders at Our Lady's College, and "Bon's boys" became the subject of many a conversation and some times grievance. During the building of extensions to the nearby Royal Perth Hospital, an angry foreman presented himself at her door one morning with complaints about the "Convent boys" and their doings on the site. Bon dismissed him summarily, claiming "my boys" could never be the culprits. Some days later, two of "Bon's boys" were led by ear into her classroom by the triumphant but still irate foreman.

Bon's other mark of distinction was her teapot. In those days, tea was not served at all the meals, so Bon was the proud possessor of her own teapot containing a dark and noxious brew. She would prepare for a meal by surrounding herself with several saucers, cups and, of course, teapot. Her strong tea and her "black cake" were the favoured repast. Bon was also tireless in looking after others. As convent infirmarian for many years; as constant visitor to the poorer people living around East Perth; as teacher of Standard II, where her boys predominated; as crusader of prayer when her boys departed for World War II: Bon performed the works of mercy with kindness and compassion and with an overwhelming humanity.⁸⁸

Sr. M Patricia Savage looked after the sacristy at the Cathedral and then after girl boarders at the Square a descent "from heaven to hell" in her estimation. Manageress at the stylish Perth King Edward Hotel, she had been engaged to be married but had lost her fiance in World War I. One of her treasures which she brought with her to the convent was a gold manicure set. As a nun, on the anniversary of his death, she would ask her boarders to pray for his soul. With great dignity and humility, she would trundle wheel barrows full of lollies around the school to collect money for the boarding

school. Sometime during the 1940s, she asked for permission from Mother Brigid to renovate the boarders' dining room. Knowing funds were tight, she had taken the precaution of already having it done while Mother Brigid was in Ireland. Patricia enlivened her own life and the lives of her boarders by caring for numerous birds and potplants, and — piece de resistance — a white rabbit.

One who played an outwardly more humble role than many others was Sr M Pauline Sheehan, described by a co-worker as "one of the greatest and grandest Sisters who entered Victoria Square" She had worked in the Bridal Department in Brennan's Store in Hay Street and, as a nun, spent most of her days in the sewing room making and re-making habits. In that same room she helped many a troubled person through her gift of counsel. She was a tower of strength for Mother Brigid McDonald when St. Anne's was being built.

Once Mother Brigid took Pauline to St. Anne's "to fix the curtains" and there she remained. At the hospital, Pauline became unofficial counsellor to staff, both professional and domestic; unofficial clerk of works and maintenance person; artistic adviser and financier of minor projects. When Mickey Daly was reluctant to sell his property next door to an expanding St. Anne's Hospital, Pauline changed his mind through planting Miraculous Medals over the fence. In addition, she exercised an "apostolate of the backyard", giving food and help to those who wandered in. Thus she gathered around her a number of society's "down-and-outs" for whom she performed myriad duties they could no longer do for themselves. One of these was Arthur, a former professional concert pianist. Arthur could not keep sober, and finally gave his money to Pauline to be doled out to him in appropriate amounts. Even this did not prevent Arthur from occasionally celebrating and landing in the lock-up as a result. Pauline had some understanding with the local police whereby she would then bail him out for a small amount. Once, such an incident occurred while the annual fete was in progress. Pauline was heard to say: "He'll have to stay there for the night I have no time to attend to him."⁸⁹

Another who kept a relatively low profile was Sister Clement Lyne. She was ponderous and easy-going, with all the time in the world, yet she had an extraordinary mind and memory and capacity for work. In the days when sisters went out in twos, a visit by Sister Clement to a bookstore meant a two hours' wait for her companion while Clement read the books. A lover of languages, she learnt Italian, at the age of eighty years, to teach a prospective student in Toodyay.

The list could go on. Augustine Finey also minded money of prisoners. One North of Ireland ex-prisoner was known as "My son, my son" and supposedly had his letters in music. Augustine went to Mormon meetings, having been adopted a Mormon. When Augustine Finey had been transferred from Herne Hill in 1940, the Federal Authorities responsible for investigating subversive activities among foreigners, approached Archbishop Prendiville twice, with a view to suggesting she be sent back to the Upper Swan School.

They were of the opinion that Sister Mary Augustine was very effectively counter-acting the undesirable influence of communistic Slavs in the Swan District.⁹⁰

Anna Foureur of Coolgardie, who appeared different on account of her French origin, "lived her own life" Magdalene Ward, also of Coolgardie, went each morning for a walk up the hill to the reservoir before meditation and one day met a man gunning for someone after his gold. She calmed him down, took his gun and stowed it safely in front of Our Lady's statue in the chapel. Aloysius McQuaid, the extreme non-conformist, was termed "6WF" because she had all the news. She knew every person in Perth, it was rumoured, and certainly had a wide circle of friends upon whom she could call for help. Berchmans Pash found liturgy dead, but came alive at musical concerts. She had, at one stage, what has been described as "an incredible orchestra" at St. Joseph's School. With a great sense of fun and wit, she enlivened conventual recreations.

The Deasy sisters were also reputedly charmers. Sister M. Kevin Deasy was principal of St. Joseph's School at Victoria Square and also at Midland. She was one of the sisters who staffed the Orphanage at Subiaco when the girls were transferred there in 1901. So accomplished and persuasive was she that one elderly priest claimed that "Kevin would build a nest in St. Peter's ear and he wouldn't know it was there!" Kevin attracted many girls and young women to the Cathedral branch of the Children of Mary. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart was overwhelming and many of the girls caught it and later taught it as teachers in Catholic schools or as women religious themselves. Her boy pupils also remembered her with affection. An old man in his nineties still treasured her reference when he left school "the most precious thing I own" Kevin was a bit of a rival to Mother Brigid McDonald for popularity and influence and, in the opinion of some, "would win hands down"

For a while, Kevin Deasy also looked after the Goderich Street Hostel⁹¹ for country girls working in the city. Largely financed from his own money by the administrator of the Cathedral Parish, Fr Moloney, the Hostel was first under lay control, but taken over for a while by the Sisters of Mercy in the early 1930s.

Her sister, Sr M. Finbar Deasy, was more of a scallywag, addicted to playing tricks. She was warm and lovable and, as superior of Victoria Square convent in the 1940s, exercised a healing presence. One past pupil of St. Joseph's Orphanage in the 1930s, with an undeveloped talent for music, was taught by Finbar Deasy as far as Grade IV, a training which stood her in good stead when she was able to learn "officially" at school at the Square. The young girl at the Orphanage remembered the sister's "generosity and the little gifts which her soft heart prompted, though the strictness of those days made her disguise it."

Sr M Ligouri (Lilly) Lawsen, of Danish background, used to boast about her blue blood. Her companions called her the Duchess of York and Shanghai Lil. Stately and cultured, Ligouri could nevertheless relate to anyone. She laid out many poor people in York. Later, she contributed remarkably to the Bushies scheme for teaching religion to bush children through corres-



Sr. M. Kevin Deasy.



*Sr. M. Liguori
Lawsen.*



M. Columba Maguire.

Desk used by Sr. M. Liguori Lawsen while preparing Religious Correspondence lessons for children in remote areas.



pondence. She would write in her flowing script to the parents to help them teach their children to pray. To the pupils she wrote on scented notepaper with flower at the top. When this scheme was centralised, Ligouri and the other nuns running it were not told. The Duchess of York may have had a few "illusions of grandeur" but her class was happy, her discipline was firm but not oppressive, she was most just and, said her community, very easy to live with.

Mother Columba McGuire, of Toodyay football fame and one-time superior at the Square, had the reputation, not only of being very kind to priests but also of being able to put them nicely in their place, if need be. She earned this renown particularly for rebuking Archbishop Prendiville in a way acceptable to him. Prendiville had written to the Reverend Mother concerning a sister he had seen talking over the convent fence to a secular, after the hour of 6 p.m. at which hour Roman regulations had recently declared all good sisters were to be inside their convents. Columba had a remarkable facility for easing financial predicaments. Accordingly, she was transferred to Santa Maria College at a time when war years meant reduction in the number of boarders there, especially on account of the college's nearness to Fremantle. The archbishop went to congratulate her and to sketch the future of the college. The following dialogue ensued.

C. There's one thing I won't be able to do... I won't be able to talk over the fence to anyone because we haven't got a fence.

P. Did you hear that?

C. Yes, and you had little to do.

Columba loved dancing. When superior at the Square, she often permitted the sisters to dance at recreation. She herself loved doing "The Gay Gordons" a variety of barn dance.

Sister Regis Barry was one of five blood-sisters who entered the Sisters of Mercy, three in Perth, one in Adelaide, and one in Parramatta.⁹² Past boarders at Victoria Square remember Regis Barry as welcoming, kind, and compassionate. They thought her smile beautiful and her eyes expressive of an inner peace and joy. They found her just, an important virtue for young people. One parent was heard to say: "The best thing I ever did in my life was to give my daughter into her care." To some lonely boarders, especially, she was mother, grandmother, confidante, and friend.

West Perth had its share of strong characters and interesting individuals. Indeed, it was a mark of this group, according to some observers. One Congregational Superior wondered if it were a doubtful compliment when she was told that the sisters in one of her convents had all remained their own persons. The cleric making the remark quickly reassured her that it was a positive comment.

One very pious sister, Aloysius Young, was a kind of female Robin Hood. She made friends among the rich to help the poor. One woman, expecting her eighth child, had all her clothing stolen. Aloysius begged replacements from her wealthy friends. The baby was named Brigid, in honour of Sister

Aloysius' home. Dying at the age of ninety, Aloysius had lived in St. Brigid's Convent, West Perth, until extreme old age.

She had a unique way of teaching a lot of people how to pray. She had numerous little prayers for various occasions, most of which had to be said so many times a day. You had to stand there and learn the particular one she was introducing you to. She also lit innumerable lamps in the chapel for people's intentions. In charge of the chapel, she again persuaded her rich friends to donate to its adornment. The statue of the Infant of Prague was dressed up in suitable attire for every festive season.

Her poor friends were very special to her. The highlight of the week for one young man, a slow learner, was his visit to St. Brigid's Convent after Sunday Mass, for a cup of tea. While in her community, she was somewhat aloof and the sisters tended to run away from her, she was, in reality, very caring and lovable, as those sisters who looked after her in her old age discovered. With lay people, she could, it seemed, discard the conventual expectations that made her somewhat rigid in community life. In the weakness of later years, she showed her true self more freely to her sisters.

Another character was Sister M. Brendan Kennedy, of Irish birth. Her uncle had brought her out to Australia with marriage in view at least in his view, but not in Brendan's. The car given her by her uncle was the first West Perth community car. In dress she was a perfectionist. Yet, in times of necessity, she could completely disregard her appearance. She would drive the car with her veil way back on her head for better hearing, and discard the encumbrance of the large outer sleeves, then an essential part of outdoor dress. When she wanted to be sure of hearing clearly, such as on visits by the State School Inspector, she would cut holes in part of her headgear, the coif, at relevant places.

Brendan loved teaching literature. Some critics thought most of primary school was drama and other such forms of literature. All her pupils knew about St. Brendan the Navigator. Each day they were taught an Irish poem or song. In her old age, she learnt Italian.

She was original in all she did and thought. Her feelings, positive and negative, were easily expressed — you got them as they came. Very sensitive, she would cry if she heard anything sad. With a lovely face that grew lovelier and very peaceful, Brendan was still driving in old age. Failing energies did not daunt her. When she could not remember where she had parked in a large lot, she just rang a taxi and drove around the parking lot until her white car was located.

Sister M. Carmel Flynnne was also Irish, her family having migrated to Queensland and thence to the West. She is remembered as a great educator. A considerable number of young women who had been taught by her, especially at Leederville, entered St. Brigid's Convent through her influence. Very interested in people, she would keep in touch with the girls she had taught in primary school, and follow up their possible vocations. She became a great friend, too, of all their mothers.

In religious life, she was found by some to be a bit harsh. She spoke quickly and abruptly; a nervous junior sister would not ask her to repeat a direction. One such sister, told by Carmel to ring up Boans department store for a boiler, ordered a copper washing boiler instead of the required fowl.

She was, however, felt those who knew her better, to be basically very shy. She had endured great suffering in her family life. Her brother had died in war. Her mother had turned against God, and had told Carmel that if she did not come home from the convent, she would never see her again. Her mother kept this threat, and they re-met only before the mother died. Her sister came to see her only in her last ten years of life.

Underneath the shy, brusque, often misunderstood exterior, Carmel was very warm. She understood the tough conditions in which many families were living, and thought out little ways to help. When the older girls of a family came, during the weekend, to a meeting of the Sodality of the Children of Mary, she would tell them to bring their little brothers and sisters, to give their mothers a break. As local superior at Leederville, everyone was treated equally. There were no such customs as privileges for the "top" table at meal times.

Sister Veronica Docherty was a sister who prayed and worked all day "in the Joy of the Lord" If someone wanted a prayer for anything, Veronica was where to go. Her little black book of prayers was her constant companion when she was not in the kitchen, waddling about on her very painful feet. Very gentle, she was very gracious to the butcher and other tradesmen when they delivered goods. A glass of freshly squeezed orange juice or a mug of hot milk and ginger were prepared for sisters in distress. Or salt was heated in the oven for your toothache. She was like your Mum, one sister reminisces.

Her faith was simple and naive, but strong. If the convent was running out of potatoes, St. Joseph was reminded of their need by the potato resting at the foot of his statue. If you lost something, you were told by Veronica to say ten "Glorias" Always smiling in life, her face was shining in her last moments. She hugged one sister then and declared, "It's the day I've been waiting for"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FOUNDING MYTH SEEMS ALIVE AND WELL

"The Poor Catholics" and "The Dear Natives"

In the decades immediately after amalgamation, the two units now existing West Perth and Perth experienced a period of continued expansion. There was a renewed interest shown in the various elements of the original vision, which seemed alive and active still. Even when a steep decline in numbers set in, the founding myth animated members and appeared to be leading them more deeply into a contemporary image of Mercy.

Involvement with "the dear natives" re-surfaced. St. Joachim's High School at Victoria Park became a central venue for the education of part-Aboriginal and Aboriginal girls. West Perth became really part of the struggle for justice for Aborigines with the charismatic activity of one of its members. Finally, both Perth and West Perth contributed to a national Mercy mission to the Aboriginal communities around Balgo Hills in the Kimberleys of Western Australia.

The original primary concern for "the poor Catholics" continued at a fast pace, though these were no longer predominantly "bog Irish". The Irish themselves had risen in the social scale by then, and their places taken at the lower rungs of the ladder, firstly by migrants from non-English speaking countries and then by migrants and refugees from so-called Third World lands. However, "the careful instruction of women" and care for children in schools and other institutions remained a central characteristic, for the descendants of the early Irish and of the later more ethnically mixed immigrants.

Both groups expended much energy in building up their major secondary schools. Lesmurdie and Victoria Square blossomed, the two schools at the latter — St. Joseph's and Our Lady's — finally uniting to become Mercedes College. Perth opened a radiant new college, Santa Maria. St. Brigid's West Perth moved to Mercy College, Koondoola. These remained devoted to educating girls only. After decades of fullness of being, as a college with an extremely multi-cultural student population, St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, joined with nearby Xavier College, East Victoria Park, to make the co-educational Ursula Frayne College. Bunbury Catholic College finally subsumed St. Joseph's School. Coolgardie convent and school were eventually closed, as numbers decreased. The property became a day and boarding school run by Aboriginal parents. Nearby in Kalgoorlie, Prendiville College (now part of John Paul II College) catered for Catholic secondary students in the Golden Mile. Sisters remained on the staff of all these new colleges, formed through rationalization of resources by the Western Australian Catholic Education Commission.

In 1955 West Perth, with 85 Sisters, was responsible for nine schools; Perth, with 248 Sisters, for 28 schools. A long list of new primary schools can be

made to prove the increased spread of Mercy dedication to primary schooling. Sisters continued to be active in the religious instruction of children attending state schools. Some moved into administrative and resourcing positions within central Catholic agencies.

Concern for women and children was shown in other ways. The Orphanage and attendant services at Subiaco were transformed into the multi-faceted Catherine McAuley Centre in the renamed district of Wembley. West Perth took over an already established children's day care centre at Girrawheen as well as organised Glendalough Community Centre. Some individual sisters worked with women and children in various forms of spiritual, pastoral and social work outside the regular institutions. Women and children in Papua New Guinea, Newman in the Pilbara, Pakistan and the refugee camps of South-East Asia saw West Australian Mercies joining in the Mercy missions there. Catholic Adult education, *per se*, began to be a feature on the home front.

Finally, Catherine McAuley's love for the sick continued to inspire her followers. Perth moved into institutionalizing this with the opening of St. Anne's Nursing Home, now called St. Anne's Mercy Hospital. Aged people of both sexes were cared for in the Homes erected on the Subiaco (Wembley) grounds. West Perth operated similar homes at Craigie and Lesmurdie. Individual visitation of distressed people in their homes endured as a Mercy trait.

St. Anne's Nursing Home (Hospital) 1937¹

Every Sister of Mercy, at her profession, makes a fourth and "apostolic" vow: "the service of the poor, sick, and ignorant" The words may be somewhat modernised today, and the manner of service updated to fit contemporary circumstances, but the meaning is always the same. While teaching assumed the major role in the sisters' work in Western Australia, there was always "an assiduous attention" paid to the other aspects of the fourth vow. Visitation of the sick poor in their homes was one constant in the way which this obligation was fulfilled.

Very early, however, in the history of the Institute, nursing proper had become a significant feature of the services it offered. At the time of the cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832, the sisters responded to the government's request for help and took over the Townsend Street Depot as well as nursing in several other Dublin hospitals. Two parties of Mercy Sisters (twenty in all) had journeyed from England and Ireland to the front at the Crimea to tend the wounded soldiers in the war against the Turks. Two of them remained buried there. Florence Nightingale received most of the recognition for what was then a magnificent contribution by genteelly brought up women. One of the Mercies was Sr Elizabeth Hercy, who was to go to Brisbane and also to spend some years in Perth.

Mercy or Mater Misericordiae (Mother of Mercy) Hospitals had become a feature of Mercy life. Catherine McAuley had desired the sisters to have a hospital of their own in Dublin, and Mother Vincent Whitty, as one of her successors, had been involved in its planning.² Mother Vincent dreamed of

a Brisbane Mater, too, but early conditions in Australia did not facilitate the establishment of a Catholic hospital during her lifetime.³

This was in a colony where the Mercies were, for many decades, the sole order of women religious. The situation in Perth differed in that the Sisters of St. John of God were present also, from the late nineteenth century. Though this order began with both teaching and nursing, they eventually concentrated on the latter and built up a system of hospitals throughout Western Australia. The Mercies, in their turn, gave their energies to building up the network of schools so much at the heart of the bishops' vision for Australian Catholics.

By the time of the formation of the Perth Congregation of Amalgamated Houses, in the 1930s, there was need, in the city, for another Catholic Hospital, especially for mothers. An Instruction from Rome, in February, 1936, desired that religious institutes of women might apply themselves to the care of mothers and infants. This set a kind of official seal upon the establishment of St. Anne's Nursing Home, "Killowen" Mount Lawley, the following year, as a thirty-bed general and maternity hospital. It was the first hospital in Australia with religious involvement in Midwifery.

The purchase of "Killowen" had preceded the Roman directive. Mother Brigid McDonald had already conceived the idea of a general hospital and had acquired a very lovely property. The area now called Mt. Lawley had been opened up in 1903 by R. T. Robinson K.C. when he and a partner purchased 700 acres of bush and Robinson had chosen nine of them on which to build his home, one of the most notable in the city. Killowen stood on high land and looked down to and along the upper reaches of the Swan River, the Darling Ranges, and the city of Perth. It had twenty-five rooms, a magnificent jarrah panelled hall and sweeping staircase, and beautiful gardens landscaped down to the river. These were said to have been planned by a gardener from Kew Gardens, London, and to contain a greater range of rare trees and shrubs than any other garden in Australia. They included a magnificent rose pergola and a Roman swimming pool. The property was valued for probate at 15,000 pounds.⁴

After Robinson's death in 1933, the estate was put up for sale and bought by the Mercies in 1935 for just over 5,000 pounds. Archbishop Prendiville guaranteed repayment of a bank loan of 8,500 pounds for the cost of purchase together with 3,000 pounds for erection of operating theatre, etc., as also did the Sisters through a collateral. The cost was re-estimated in October, 1936. Reconstruction of the existing building, erection of a second, and equipment and other necessities now brought the total cost up to almost 27,000 pounds. The bank granted an overdraft to this extent.⁵ In fact, when the building was completed, the total cost turned out to be over 47,000 pounds. The debt was a heavy one. At the time of the hospital's opening in 1937, the overdraft at the bank amounted to 37,224.174 pounds.⁶ The sisters had "never, at any time, anticipated such a large expenditure and ... were completely misled by the architect."⁷ The Archbishop, nevertheless, informed the bank that he had no doubt that the undertaking would succeed. "As the Hospital is probably the most up to date Nursing Home in Australia, certainly in Western Australia, and as the Hospitals conducted by the Sisters of Mercy in other States have

met with such marked success, the Archbishop feels that this new venture will easily pay interest and an adequate sinking fund."

The money owing was paid, but the continual updating seemingly required by advances in technology as much as by growth in demand, spelled continual worry. For as soon as one debt was removed, another appeared to take its place through an ongoing programme of building.

A community of sisters had been appointed to set up the new St. Anne's by April, 1937. Sisters M. Eugenius Fox (Matron), Attracta Byrne, Assumpta McMahon, Gertrude Willoughby, Josephine Fitzpatrick, Eymard Quinlan, Magdalene Eagers, and Cyril Flynn are considered the foundation community.⁸ On the 10th of that month, Archbishop Prendiville blessed and opened the hospital, which was intended for general patients and midwifery.

The latter element was a surprise announcement, without any consultation with the sisters. The provision of midwifery was possible because Gertrude Willoughby had a double certificate in nursing before her entry into the order. (Nuns were not then in midwifery in Australia). The decision seemed confirmed when a woman in the gathering stepped forward that day, said that she was pregnant, and that she would love to be the first to book in, at the hospital.

Attracta and Eugenius had been sent to train in general nursing at the Brisbane Mater. The other sister-nurses had their basic certificates. Later, training was also obtained at the Mercy Hospitals in Newcastle, Sydney, and Melbourne, as well as midwifery at St. Vincent's and tutoring at Royal King Edward in Melbourne.

During their training days, Sisters Eugenius and Attracta made their final profession in Brisbane for the Perth Congregation. Attracta soon succeeded Eugenius as Matron. Both were strong, courageous, and dedicated women. Eugenius was very gifted in her nursing skills and, over the years, kept up professionally. She worked mostly in the theatre. She was a good organiser.

Sr Attracta is remembered by many as being unfailingly gracious, gentle, and welcoming. Described as a regal lady, she seemed to "just glide along", though she did not fail to maintain strict standards of care. Her love for and dedication in helping people in need and in trouble were said to be outstanding. During the war, Attracta and other sisters delivered numerous food parcels to destitute families. Attracta was also a very good organiser, and formed a committee to assist in running the famous three day fete for the new Maternity Hospital. She was always willing, too, to listen to and assist any of her Sisters. There are memories also of concerts held among the sisters, with Attracta usually the leading lady. She found it hard to keep to the script, her improvisations causing consternation among the other actresses. But the strongest picture is of a very gracious lady, teaching the "blue girls" in the hospital how to set up trays and present them to the patients courteously, or standing at the entrance of the convent hall greeting all the visitors to the celebration of St. Anne's Day each year.

For others, it was Sister Gertrude Willoughby — sister of Sisters Cecelia and Brigid Willoughby of Coolgardie — who was the real mainstay of the hospital



*Above: Some
foundation
members of St.
Anne's, Back Row,
left to right: Srs.
M. Assumpta
McMahon,
M. Gertrude
Willoughby,
M. Eugenius Fox.
Front Row, left to
right: Srs. M. Cyril
Flynn, Josephine
Fitzpatrick and
Celine McKernan.
Right: Sr. M.
Attracta Byrne.*





Group photographed at Mother M. Brigid McDonald's Golden Jubilee celebration, 1951, in front of "Killowen House" the original St. Anne's Nursing Home opened in 1937.



Srs. M. Eymard Quinlan and Paulin Sheehan in the original St. Anne's kitchen.

community. Gertrude was the first matron of the maternity section. She is remembered as a power of strength and support. Marvellous in community, a wizard at finance, she was, for many, the force behind Attracta's throne. When she was around, they felt, things went right. You could approach her for help at any time.

There had been great consternation among the Mercies when Prendiville announced the two-fold purpose of the new St. Anne's. But, says one of the survivors, they managed by working around the clock, living in very cramped and scattered quarters until the convent was built, even sharing beds between night and day staff, perhaps having to go outside and around the building to reach a bathroom and toilet. One Sister on night shift, asleep in the quarters called the Deep End, was awakened one day by a horse sticking its head in the window of her cubicle. Annual holidays were a dream only. Sunday night's tea was the treat of the week — it consisted of chicken bones, the carcasses left over from patient's teas.

A two-storey wing was added in 1941, and a new maternity block was discussed in 1946 with the West Australian Branch of the B.M.A, then concerned with the "desperate position obtaining with regard to hospital accommodation".⁹ A maternity wing would free beds for general patients. The time, however, was immediately post-war and it was not until 1958 that the seventy-five bed maternity hospital was erected, the twenty-first birthday of St. Anne's. It cost a quarter of a million pounds. At one time, as many as 200 deliveries were made each month ... as many as at King Edward Hospital. Many of the "babies" who had been born at St. Anne's returned for the opening in February of that year, and formed a guard of honour for the arrival of the official party.¹⁰ A Midwifery Training School commenced the same year, 1958. It was the first Catholic Training School in Western Australia. Some of the King Edward Hospital trainees had work experience at St. Anne's for a good many years.

In responding to Apostolic Delegate Carboni's opinion of Mother Alacoque Eustace's request to borrow 180,000 pounds for the construction of the new section for mothers, Archbishop Prendiville had stated that the only other Catholic Maternity Hospital in Perth belonged to the Sisters of St. John of God, and it was unable to cope with the demand. The Sisters of Mercy were anxious to provide a Training School for Catholic Trainee Nurses. Financially, there need be no apprehension. St. Anne's had a very high reputation amongst doctors and patients — Catholics and non-Catholics alike. So, Prendiville concluded, he endorsed their petition.¹¹ Mother Alacoque, nevertheless, found that endorsement from Prendiville was not all that easy to obtain for fetes and other money-raising ventures.¹² But Bridge Parties, run by the doctors' wives, donations received at the official opening, and finally the fete helped pay interest and reduce debt. The archbishop himself made a generous donation to the Building fund at the fete.¹³

Developments continued. Until 1959, Father Jim Bourke — of educational fame — had acted as chaplain to the hospital "on and off" for some ten years.¹⁴ In 1959, Fr John Senan Moynihan was appointed chaplain and took much interest in the hospital and its staff and patients. He had been a Capuchin

*Sr. M. Gertrude
Willoughby as
so many people
remember her.*



Sanctuary of chapel at St. Anne's Hospital.



Archbishop L. J. Goody and Sir David Brand photographed with M. Kieran Murphy at the opening of the new St. Anne's General Hospital, September 1970.



Aerial view of St. Anne's Hospital.

friar in Dublin and was, at the time of his assignment, described by Prendiville as "elderly (if you call 60 elderly!) and a very spiritual type" He was to be paid 12 pounds a month.¹⁵ Intending to write a history of the Perth church, he kept many notebooks of jottings, including one on St. Anne's.

In 1961, Mother Alacoque's successor, Mother Kieran Murphy, wrote to Prendiville about their intention to build staff quarters for the nurses' training school and an assembly hall for graduation ceremonies. It was estimated to cost 30,000 pounds.¹⁶ In 1964 a new two-storey pre-natal clinic replaced the previous one operating since 1958. It was added to the eastern wing of the Maternity Home, and was to care not only for the expectant mothers but also to provide teaching for student nurses in part of the midwifery course. It would include also rooms for unmarried mothers who did not wish to go to St. Gerard's Hospital at Subiaco.¹⁷ In 1972 the hostel and hospital for unmarried mothers at Subiaco was closed, and this service continued through St. Anne's only.

The St. Anne's adoption scheme had begun in a small way with an occasional patient. The first was a thirteen or fourteen year old school girl whose distraught grandmother appealed to the sisters for help. They responded by letting her live with some student-nurses in a house on site. Gertrude Willoughby was in charge. A small clientele developed for this service, and some rooms were used when needed in the Maternity section of the hospital.

The set-up, however, was too public. And, when a shop and an ante-natal clinic for teaching midwifery students was built, five rooms were added on top. This led to a steady flow of clients, cared for by the ante-natal clinic. Doctors gave their services free. At first the women did not pay, as they were not receiving social security. They varied in age, from thirteen to their early twenties, and in background. Many came from eastern states. Also added had been a study room and some of the young women sat for Leaving Certificate. The State Education Department cooperated in this by lending equipment. Others worked in the office, and could gain a reference for part-time work. It was felt better not to ask any to do domestic work, as in some other institutions such young women and girls became a source of cheap labour.

Adoption of the babies was arranged through the hospital if the mothers so desired. Particular care was taken that their confidentiality be assured. Often strong and supportive relationships developed between the girls themselves and with the sister-in-charge. This was Sister M. Christina Matthews, when she took over administration of the maternity in 1958, as well as tutoring of students. By the late 1970s, however, the need for such aid was evidently waning: 140 in 1973, twenty in 1977. By 1987, Government agencies had taken over all adoptions. For Christina, nevertheless, the service had not ended. She continued to keep contact with many of the former mothers, and found herself being approached by a number of their children seeking information about their natural parents. This led to having to work with other members of their families.

In 1966 Mother Kieran was now corresponding about the erection of a new General Hospital. The Archbishop professed himself delighted. "The Sisters

of Mercy enjoy an enviable reputation because of the high tone and standard of their Hospitals" He did not doubt that they would be able to refund the 500,000 pounds she proposed to borrow.¹⁸ The new hospital was to double its current size. This time the State government would help meet interest payments on money borrowed by the hospital to finance the project.¹⁹ The government was by then viewing St. Anne's within the over-all pattern of hospital provisions within the city and in terms of a study of projected hospital needs till the year 2000. The new 100-bed general hospital was opened on September 8th, 1970, after much team work on the Sisters' part and under the dedicated leadership of Sister Cyril Flynn and Gertrude Willoughby.²⁰ Its cost was somewhere between 1.5 and two million pounds. Extensions to the Maternity were made in April, 1973. In 1980, a fourth floor was added and renovations made to other sections of the total complex.

This development programme over the years had also included buying a convent and building a chapel. The convent was meant to have been Elm House, the home of Arthur Daley, purchased in 1955. It was used by some of the sisters and then, later, as nurses' residence and for midwifery students. Later still again, it was used by the sisters and is now doctors' consulting rooms. It stood on a hill north of "Killowen" and also overlooked the Swan. The land sweeping down to the river was a perfect site for the new chapel, blessed and opened in April, 1957, at the cost of 20,000 pounds. This was a lovely but simple building, and the stained glass windows caught the light perfectly. One of these windows was of St. Anne, the other of St. Brigid in memory of her namesake, Mother Brigid McDonald. The marble high altar was bought with money collected from the parents of babies born in the hospital since its beginning. At the silver jubilee of the hospital, Archbishop Prendiville called it a "gem of a Chapel"

The new convent was ready for occupation in September, 1961. It had 26 bedrooms. There was great rejoicing in the community for this was their first real convent. Even then, the downstairs community room the size of a small hall also served as meeting room and room for entertaining visitors.

For many years one of the Weld windows from Victoria Square graced the Maternity Hospital. Another little piece of history came to St. Anne's with the beautiful oval mirror, edged with rich yet restrained gold carvings, in the front foyer of the General Hospital. The Pombarts, a French family, brought it out to Australia with them. It was the two Pombart sisters who had taught school in Coolgardie before the arrival of the nuns. Matilda had become Sister M. Genevieve in Guildford/Midland and Angela, Sister Margaret Mary in West Perth. The O'Callaghan family, two of whose daughters were in the Guildford community, were very good to the Pombarts in their efforts to settle into their new country, and the latter gave them the mirror in thanks. Eventually it came into the possession of a priest in the family, the brother of Sister M. Peter O'Callaghan of Victoria Square, and he donated it to the hospital. The mirror is some two hundred years old.

At the beginning of 1981, the midwifery training school closed. Declining birth rate made it difficult for the hospital to meet the requirements for practical experience in midwifery training.²¹ A new King Edward Memorial Hospital

for Women had been built and Medicare had been introduced, both factors also in contributing to the decrease in numbers of births at St. Anne's. However, other roles for the hospital had been developing. A change of viewpoint occurred, with programmes previously geared to hospital needs now being centred on the needs of the family. Husbands, for example, were encouraged to accompany their wives to pre-natal programmes, to stay with them during labour, and to take an active part in post-delivery care. The hospital was able to offer field experience to students from other relevant institutions, including schools teaching courses on Human Sexuality. Pastoral care of patients in the hospital was extended to others. Hospice palliative care for a few dying patients was begun. Accommodation for families of the dying was provided, as also for country patients and their relatives. Sick and elderly in the area were visited and given meals if necessary. Sisters were available to lay out the dead in their homes and to visit bereaved relatives and attend Requiems.

Thus, the hospital continued to grow, particularly as a general hospital. In 1985, a \$15m. redevelopment programme began, which increased significantly its patient capacity and its medical facilities.²² As bed occupancy in the midwifery section fell, its unused facilities were made available to private doctors and a number of doctors and other medical professionals sublet rooms. This increased the services available within the hospital site.

Philosophy

St. Anne's had always tried to live up to its name of "Home" Perhaps nothing illustrates this more than its attachment to and affection for the babies born there. Each year it had held a Back to St. Anne's Day for its ex-babies. The number had reached 20,000 by 1960. Hundreds of young men and women and children would turn up. One newspaper account of such an annual reunion for "St. Anne's children" claimed 1,000 attending, about half of whom were born at the hospital. More than 150 children marched in a procession to the hospital chapel for benediction. In time, babies of babies born at the hospital were part of the scene.²³ Some past babies came back also at other times, as patients, as debutantes, as professionals. They were still "Mrs X's baby" when they were six feet tall. At the 1960 reunion, the *Record* displayed a photo of Mrs Darcy of Mt. Lawley with some of her 45 grandchildren born at St. Anne's.²⁴

Another point of pride, early in the history of the hospital, was the cooking, which was a matter of artistry as much as nourishment. When the place was opened, steamed cookers were a great innovation. Steamed fruits and vegetables were being served at St. Anne's long before the current low-fat phase of nutrition. Not only were they healthier, they retained their colour and shape. Sister Celine McKernan, in particular, was a genuine artist and loved to tempt patients' appetites with intriguing sweets. A pear preserved in syrup became a white mouse with ears and tail. An apricot and cream with sponge cake became a poached egg on toast. Sister Celine was self-taught. Visiting Ireland on the maiden voyage of the *Marconi*, she made great friends with the head chef. Sister Eymard Quinlan was the organiser. She was "a plain cook" a great organiser who did not suffer fools gladly. In one morning,

she dismissed six of her staff. She had to be persuaded to take them back she took five.

From the beginning, under Mother Brigid's influence, there had been great value paid to tastefulness and a non-hospital appearance in the rooms and in the meal trays. Colourful curtains and silverware and other feminine touches helped to bring a cheerful and more homely atmosphere to what might otherwise be a clinically sterile environment.

The hospital was always something of a family affair for the sisters on the staff. They were very poor for many years, but it was, the present members say, a community that always stuck together, showed concern for one another, and had lots of good times despite the normal irritations of long-term daily living together. Sister Agatha Chou ran the tuckshop, and in between dressed dolls for sale. She would buy these in town, and her companion was invariably embarrassed at the prolonged inspection they received before purchase. Sister Marcelline Dawson, in charge of a floor at the busy maternity wing, found relaxation in working with rock gems and exotic orchids. By selling the jewellery she made, she helped raise interest in and funds for the new general hospital.²⁵ One profitable commission she received was from Mirrabooka parish and Bishop Peter Quinn for a ring to be placed on his finger when ordained bishop. It was a gleaming bronze and gold ring with tiger eye gemstone.²⁶ Sister Conleth Henry ran the laundry, which began in a small shed but was, it is said, the happiest department. She left her mark on the staff — coming at fifteen or sixteen years of age, many remained on as middle-aged married women.

At the Silver Jubilee celebrations of St. Anne's, Archbishop Prendiville spoke to the sisters about their ministry of nursing. He referred to the history of what had now become an honoured profession, but was not always so. In the reformation of a calling "that was once a by-word for inefficiency" the Sisters of Mercy had "played a significant and heroic role. The world has come to realise that efficient nursing no less than skilful surgery and scientific treatment, lies at the root of most cures"

Saint Anne's Mercy Hospital has surely proved the truth of that claim. The archbishop spoke of their work in terms of its "womanly" nature — a limited view in these days when male nurses are increasing in number. Yet there is something essentially feminine about the care of the sick and something which mirrors in an especial manner the divine womb-compassion which is at the heart of the Mercy charism. It resembles the ministry of Jesus himself, as the archbishop reminded the sisters at their jubilee mass. "Yours is a busy life — busy with an activity like that of the Divine Physician who "went about doing good" bringing health to sick bodies and peace to troubled souls."

Staff development was a key feature of the 1980s, not only in professional work but also in the Christian and Mercy ethos of the hospital. The motto of St. Anne's, *Mercy Towards All*, was a constant reminder of that ethos, woven into a wool wall-hanging in the front foyer. A Christian Outreach Group was formed among the staff to promote and maintain Christian ideals. Important ethical issues, dealing with prolongation and termination of life at both ends of the age spectrum, became more and more urgent in health

care. A medico-moral committee was formed to explore the implications of a consistent and wholistic ethic of life.

Numberwise, St. Anne's continued to grow. In 1937, there had been thirty beds, with five religious sisters in community, and two lay staff. In 1983, there were 224 beds, nine sisters in community, and 335 lay people on staff. One thousand, eight hundred and twenty-three babies had been born in it.

In 1982, St. Anne's was incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act; a Board of Management began with an advisory interim board towards the end of the same year; accreditation was earned in 1984/5; links with Catholic and other hospitals associations had been forged; and Mercy structural links also explored. From 1988, formal moves were made for the hospital to become part of a Catholic health system being formed by the Sisters of St. John of God. Because of the distance and the diminishing ability of the Mercies to administer the hospital through lack of appropriate members, this was felt to be a more viable structural move than to join in more fully with the eastern-based programme to develop a stronger national Mercy Health Care linkage. St. Anne's also was included in planning for a medical faculty at the proposed Catholic university of Notre Dame Australia, being established in the West.

"A Glorious View" — Santa Maria College 1938

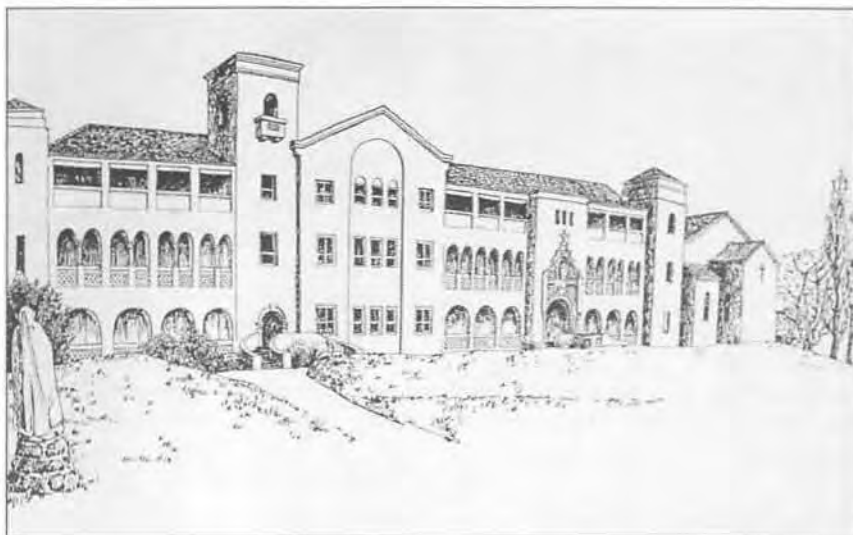
Santa Maria College at Attadale was established in the same period as St. Anne's Hospital. By 1935, it was clear that the boarding establishment at Victoria Square was no longer able to meet the demands of country families. Mother Brigid McDonald and her council decided to develop a new Boarding and Day College for girls in the bushland south of Perth. Premises freed by the transfer of the first class boarders from Victoria Square would be useful as a training centre for teachers.²⁷ In 1936, Brigid launched an Architect's Competition for a design.

The result was a lovely and spaciouly arranged complex. Spanish archways were a feature of the plan, including those on covered ways connecting the various units of the proposed layout. This included a convent for the sisters on staff and accommodation for the boarders. It was unfortunate that the restrictions imposed during War War II prevented the completion of the college according to this original concept.

The site was even more beautiful. On ten acres of virgin bush, it overlooked a particularly fine stretch of the Swan River. There was, the letter to the competing architects stated,

opportunity for an artistic design, unhampered by the influence of discordant surroundings. ... no definite limitations of materials or style, it is left to the unfettered discretion of the designer. ... Your conception of an ideal type of building for this purpose in a climate and setting which is probably unique in Australia. ... appropriate to use, climate and expressive of their high purpose.

Since the designs were to be "competitive" they were not to bear the name of the architect. The criteria for judging were fourfold:



Santa Maria College main building (1937).



*Sr. M. Bertrand
Corbett, first
Principal,
1937-1960.*

- a) aesthetic (beauty)
- b) conventual (fitness for the customary community life)
- c) professional (residential college for girls)
- d) present structure to give maximum of these three without sacrificing the future under any one of these heads.

The judging was arranged by the Diocesan committee for Building and Church Sites, and was unanimous. E. Le B. Henderson Esq. had presented the favoured design.

The land cost 5,000 pounds, which the sisters were able to pay from sale of land in Subiaco. Construction and furnishing required a 25,000 pounds advance from the bank. A mortgage on the land and a guarantee to repay the debt from Archdiocesan Corporation (through Prendiville) secured the loan. An entry in the Minute book of the Mercy General Council read:

Santa Maria Ladies' College, Attadale, was blessed and opened by His Grace, Archbishop Prendiville, February 6th 1938. The Boarders from Ladies' College, Victoria Square are transferred to the new College, which commands a magnificent view of the Swan River.

The first principal was Sister Mary Bertrand Corbett, 1937-1960. Bertrand Corbett was the first woman to get an M.A. degree at the University, when it was at Adelaide Terrace. *The Golden Jubilee Booklet* wrote that she was "possessed of rare academic and musical gifts. Generations of students remember with gratitude and admiration, this gentle, humble Sister who was a brilliant teacher of remarkable versatility" Her administration gave the new College a stable foundation.

There were some sixty boarders transferred from Victoria Square and only a handful of day pupils in 1938. The college was a mile from the bus terminus at first. Even the mail was delivered to the Roads Board Office until a plea for help led to the Post Office extending the mailroute. At first, the uniform was the same as that of the Ladies College at Victoria Square. The school grew fairly rapidly, although the bombing of Darwin caused a temporary setback in the number of boarders. In the later part of the war, the numbers actually grew as many women were in full-time employment. By 1942 there was an average of 127 pupils, 97 boarders and thirty day scholars.

During the war, staff was difficult to hire in the boarding school and the students helped with the household chores as part of the war effort. The burdensome debt was also being paid off slowly in this period of economic depression and wartime restriction. A suggestion from the Bank of New South Wales in December 1940,²⁸ that surplus funds be transferred from St. Anne's Account to Santa Maria's, did not meet with Prendiville's approval. He felt that the fundraising efforts at St. Anne's might suffer, and that the future prospects at Santa Maria were good. He questioned the sisters, all the same, as to why the credit in their working account was below 200 pounds. This was hard to understand, he said, in view of the number of pupils, and had completely upset his reckoning and arrangement with the Bank. He was cautious, nevertheless, in making this query.

I have no desire to alarm you, nor do I wish to worry you in the matter;
I am merely anxious to help you.

The sisters were able to show that they had paid the bulk of household expenses and, with the fees due to come in, would be able to meet the interest due. By 1947 the net debt was down to just under 4,000 pounds.

At one stage during the war, also, the Fremantle Hospital and Military authorities examined the school with a view to annexing it for wounded troops. It was found unsuitable. Later, however, the soldiers from the Military Camp established in the Government Reserve at Point Walter were able to attend the College Sunday Mass, then usually held in a wooden school hall now demolished. A small searchlight unit was set up on Santa Maria's lower figure eight lawn. It was used to train recruits to spot enemy aircraft.

The "Lessons for Ladies"²⁹ theme was still being expounded in April, 1957 by Archbishop Prendiville, when he blessed and opened a new chapel.

I congratulate the Sisters on the fine tone and high standard of Santa Maria. It could be compared to a garden attached to the Lord's household where the flowers of virtue were tended and fostered by women of piety and culture. It was in colleges like Santa Maria that the girls were taught and trained to be gentlewomen by living example. In such schools, maidenly virtue was on a pedestal.

Over the front archway was written Santa Maria Ladies' College.

The staff of the college had moved to a somewhat different position by then in their view of education for girls. From the beginning, Santa Maria had not been closed to girls from whatever situation in life. In 1942, for example, ten boarders were scholarship holders, that is, no fees were charged. This offering of free places to girls whose parents were economically struggling remained a characteristic of the college, as it was of all Mercy schools. At Santa Maria, there was no socio-economic distinction as pertained at Victoria Square between St. Joseph's and Our Lady's schools until the formation of Mercedes College.

From the late 1950s a continuous building programme began, which was tied in with growth of numbers but also with broadening and deepening of curriculum. This programme included opening of a chapel; completion of the original classroom block and erection of a new building; a separate primary school facility; the McDonald Cultural Centre for music, drama, and sports, with a seating capacity of over 1,000; Theatre Arts Centre, incorporating the former convent — the sisters moved to a house across the road; new Boarding complex; Education Support Centre. Curriculum offerings were thus progressively widened to include all aspects of the arts (a feature of Santa Maria), biological and home sciences, clothing and fabrics, computer and business studies, and remediation.

Speech and drama were especially popular at the college and the productions of the drama department became known for their high quality. Music was also extremely significant. There was a school orchestra from the beginning, and a school choir. The Music Centre was dedicated to Sister Mary Tarcisius Doyle, who died in November 1973, and who had been a leading figure in

the development of music at the college. It might be claimed, in fact, that music and the theatre arts have reached an unusual degree of professionalism for a school, and have become a very special feature of life at Santa Maria College.³⁰

The new boarding complex, opened in 1981, also commemorated Mercy "heroines." The original aim of Santa Maria had been to accommodate boarders moved from Victoria Square, and the sisters continued to see boarding care as a vital service offered to parents living in isolated areas. Designed to minimise institutional atmosphere and practices, the complex consisted of four houses, a central building for dining room and management, and a separate quiet area for meditation or withdrawal. The four houses were christened after Catherine McAuley, Ursula Frayne, Sister Bertrand first principal, and Sister Sylvester.

Sister Sylvester Kelly was one of the original staff of the college. She had previously presided over the Victoria Square kitchen and was remembered by past pupils for the "piece" (of bread and jam, being prepared for the boarders) donated to small day scholars sent on messages to her domain. One of her assistants there, an orphan girl Val, had been tutored by Sylvester in keeping accounts. Val came every Sunday to Santa Maria to visit her kind friend. At Santa, Sylvester was responsible for preparing the food and making uniforms. But she did a lot more than that to care for the girls. She listened to their complaints and comforted them when homesick. She died June 1972.

Pastoral care was always a feature of the college, but in the early 1980s opportunities for this became more formalised. In 1983 a full-time counsellor (a lay woman) was appointed, and she was assisted by one of the Sisters. A pastoral care strategy was also set up through "contact groups" whereby twelve girls met with a staff member twice a week. The groups were selected vertically, through Years 8 to 12.

The helping of people with physical or intellectual disadvantages was more formally promoted also in the 1980s. The school community helped with the Faith and Light Pilgrimage to Bindoon, Easter 1984, by supplying prepared dishes. During the January holidays, a camp for intellectually handicapped was held at Santa Maria and ex- and current students helped run it. An Easter hamper went to the Oblates Soup Kitchen. Funds were raised to send one of the ex-students to the International Games for the Disabled. An Amnesty International Letter Writing Group was organised in 1987.

The Golden Jubilee Year (1987) was commemorated with the planning of the Education Support Centre. The need for special help for girls with a mild intellectual handicap or a learning disability to be integrated into a Catholic school environment touched the original Mercy charism of care for women and girls and the sick poor. At the centre, specialist help could be received within the school establishment. Also importantly, the rest of the students would be helped to develop new attitudes and skills in relating. The Centre was finally opened in 1990.

By the 1970s, lay staff outnumbered the sisters and included one full-time male teacher. In 1981 the first deputy lay principal was appointed, and in

*Right: Sr. M. Colette
MacKinnon.*

*Below: Sr. M. Sylvester
Kelly with family
members.*





Santa Maria College Golden Jubilee Choir.



Aerial view of Santa Maria College buildings.



Santa Maria College Golden Jubilee Choir.



Aerial view of Santa Maria College buildings.

1989 he became the first lay principal and, towards the end of that year, a formal Mercy Associate.³¹ Looking forward to such an event, a College Board of Management had been set up in the late 1970s. It was advisory to the Mercy Congregational Council and had responsibility concerning finance and site development. Its office later was extended to include concern for the Mercy ethos of the school, this duty being the particular concern of the sisters on the board. Minutes of the board give the impression of an active group of people, well involved in the school, and with a view of management which included a wide educational interest as much as finance.

Involvement of parents also grew to be characteristic of "Santa" Parents of boarders, in particular, were drawn into the school. Picnics, for example, were organised at the college by a parents and boarders' committee. Meetings were held to discuss topics and matters of concern for parents of boarders. Parents in general were drawn into parent participatory groups, dealing with various educational issues as well as social contact.

In 1990, Santa Maria could claim the unique distinction of having one of its former head girls become the first woman state premier in Australia. Earlier, its first head girl had chosen another form of vocation, becoming a Sister of Mercy.³²

The present primary school of Mel Maria began in 1974. Four primary schools in the area were combined: Willagee, Myaree, Attadale and the primary section of Santa Maria. Each had had a Sister of Mercy as its head, and the new unit retained a Mercy principal. Ultimate administration was with the Catholic Education Commission, and arrangements about use of Santa Maria property and resources were settled.

Victoria Square

In 1924, a new chapel was constructed at Victoria Square to serve both the growing community of sisters and the two schools on the site. The small chapel within the 1871 convent building had been designed for twenty-five sisters, but was having to accommodate up to one hundred. The decade preceding 1924 had seen an upsurge of vocations to the community. From 1914 to 1924 there were 31 local vocations. Between 1925 and 1928, a further fifteen had joined.

Even the spacious new Chapel of the Immaculate Conception was too small for all the visitors who came for its solemn blessing on the feast of St. John of the Cross, 14th December. These contributed generously to the building fund, as did the branch convents and schools. The large amounts given by Mrs O'Callaghan and the McArdle family helped to pay off a significant portion of the debt. Miss Susie McArdle also donated the organ.

The chapel was constructed on the site of "the field", an area beside the convent that had been overgrown with bushes and prickly castor oil trees. It was designed by E. Le B. Henderson and built by J. J. Hewitt in 14th century or "decorated" gothic style. The era of adapting architecture to the Australian environment and climate had not yet arrived. The aisle ceilings were carried out in the groined and vaulted style of the early English or 13th century Gothic. The ceiling of the nave was half groin vaulted with richly moulded panels.



*Above: Family
of Frank (dec'd)
and Annie
O'Callaghan,
Back Row, left
to right: Frank
(Junior), Teresa,
Anne, Joe,
Gertrude. Front
Row, left to right:
Karthleen, Mary,
Madge, Annie
(mother), Agnes,
Cecelia, Gerald.
Right: Chapel of
the Immaculate
Conception, 1924.*





Ladies' College and "Romansleigh" Victoria Square.



St. Joseph's School, Victoria Square.

The stalls were of jarrah, the altar, pedestals and sanctuary floor of white Italian marble. In the early 1940s, murals were erected on the ceiling of the sanctuary depicting Fra Angelico's "Coronation of Our Blessed Lady in Heaven" These were chosen by Mother Brigid when in Rome in the late 1930s.

The crypt or section under the chapel was built in Tudor gothic with a cloister on each side, seventy feet long, capped with a battlement finish to form a line of demarkation between the two styles. This spacious undercroft was to serve as noviceship, archives, and conference centre at various times during the following decades.

At this period, Victoria Square grounds seemed full of nooks and crannies. If you entered The Young Ladies's College³³ from Hay Street, you walked up "The Trellis" or "Rose Walk" a path trellised with bougainvillea and little white cabbage roses.³⁴ If you were just starting school at the College, you would have been assigned to a classroom in "Romansleigh", an elegant two storey house of grey stone with a tower. Situated on the Goderich Street side, Romansleigh had been built about 1896 and purchased by the sisters a few years later at the cost of 3000 pounds. It was first rented out for some years (to 1904 at least) and then demolished in 1969. Some of its rooms were decorated with plaster frescos.

Downstairs were classrooms. Sisters slept upstairs. Sister Ligouri Lawsen (Shanghai Lil of York) had a studio up in the top storey of Romansleigh, and a special treat was to be taken up to see her paintings. Sister M. Francis Green, a thorough and exacting teacher, with a "childlike and quaint" personality and much good humour and fun, taught singing in the boarders' dining room. Sister M. Alacoque Rodoreda (Aunty Boo to the younger children) sold lollies in her music room. Aunty Boo was in charge of the music practice and had an uncanny sense for appearing on the scene and catching those girls who were shirking their duty.

If you entered from Goderich Street, you came onto a large round lawn edged with white stones. There was an area of pepper trees surrounded by a path called "The Plot", a couple of pine trees whose nuts were delicious, a Bower at the bottom of the playground on the southern side, and at the back of this a fence overlooking the Slipper Factory. In the early part of the century, there was a bake house near the bower, where the bread was baked for both convent and boarding school.

There was no real distinction between primary and post-primary classes in the College. The Juniors and Seniors had their classroom in the Oratory, in the main College building, which was being extended during these years. The primary grades were all in one room, the Big Room, and the Sub-Juniors occupied its stage. Numbers were quite small in these days and school was very manageable. The boarders' dormitory was upstairs. Boys under eight were admitted as Boarders, and under ten years as Day Pupils. St. Joseph's School also was coeducational to Standard Three. While the two schools were kept separate, there was much sharing of resources and teachers. A 1927 Prospectus for the College stated that the course of studies comprised:

Christian Doctrine, English, French, Latin, Greek, German, Mathematics, Applied Mathematics, History, Geography, Geology, Chemistry, Physics,



Students of Ladies' College, Victoria Square, 1911.



*Hilda Corbett, outstanding
student at Ladies' College,
Victoria Square, 1910.*



*Georgina Cooper (Sr. M.
Loyola), B.A. 1918.*



*Katherine Sanders
(Sr. M. Philomena).*



Novitiate group, Victoria Square, 1919 includes Junior Professed: Srs. M. Peter O'Callaghan, Cyprian Cooper, Bertrand Corbett, Sylvester Kelly and Carmel Barry; Novices: Srs. M. Berchmans Bourke, de Sales Doyle, Patricia Savage, Loyola Cooper, Philip Moylan and Barbara Cooper; Postulants: Srs. Mary Lorkin (Ambrose), Mary Donnellan (Teresa) and Josephine Fitzpatrick.



Senior girls, St. Joseph's, Victoria Square, early 1920s.

biology, Elocution, Plain and Art Needlework, Vocal and Instrumental Music (Pianoforte, Violin, 'Cello, Harp, Mandoline), Art of Teaching Music, Harmony, Counterpoint, Theory of Music, Drawing, Painting (in Oil and Water Colours), Book-keeping, Type-writing and Shorthand.

Pupils were prepared for the Junior and Leaving Certificate of the University of Western Australia, for Matriculation and Pharmacy Examinations, for the Alliance Francaise Examinations, for Commercial Examinations, Scholarships and Bursaries; also for the Australian Music Examination Board, the Associated Board of the R.A.M., and R.C.M., and for the Trinity College of Music.

The College claimed to place emphasis on the religious and moral training of the girls, and to help them to develop their character. School was from 9.15 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., but pupils preparing for the University Examinations resumed classes for special subjects from 4 to 6 p.m. They could get a hot dinner at the College.

Special care was taken of the boarders. The prospectus claimed:

The boarders are never left to themselves; they are always under the immediate supervision of one of the Sisters. They are not allowed out to visit relatives or friends during School terms, and parents are requested to seek that this rule is strictly kept. Pupils are not permitted to see their parents or friends during school hours. It is very injurious to the scholars' progress to have them withdrawn from their classes... Their correspondence is always subject to inspection.

Outdoor Games are warmly encouraged, not only because they are so necessary for the health of the pupils, but also because they are found to be direct aids to the maintenance of discipline and to success in mental work.

Sister M. Loyola Cooper was known for her stimulating teaching, especially in English. She set up a class library, a new venture in those days. Loyola had completed her Bachelor of Arts in 1918—five years after the university was founded. She joined the Sisters of Mercy and gained her Master of Arts in French in 1926. She began teaching English and French at Victoria Square in 1920 and continued until she retired in 1980. In 1988 an extensive search by UWA's alumni office for graduates of the university found Sister Loyola, then 94 years, to be the oldest known living graduate.

At a somewhat later date, Gregorian chant was taught by Sister M. Margaret Hehir and Father (later Archbishop) Goody. They had been pupils together in the primary school at Victoria Square. Father Albert Lynch, as Diocesan Director of Sacred Music, was exceptionally helpful in the teaching of plain chant, and Plain Chant Festivals and Plain Chant Examinations took place under his directorship. *Sing Ye Wisely* contains a tribute to the Victoria Square schools for their contribution to the development of Plain Chant.

Sister M. Margaret had singular success in plain chant, whose vowel sounds added, she felt, a lovely quality to the voices. Her singing and verse speaking choirs in both Victoria Square schools and (from 1966 to 1972) at Santa Maria were also inevitably winners. She had arrived from Dublin with her mother at the age of six and had been enrolled in St. Joseph's School, which was then coeducational to Third Standard. As an attractive little Irish girl, she

would readily stand up and recite or sing. She became a gifted musician and teacher in both singing, instrumental music, and speech. In the latter, she had been taught by Mr Lionel Logue, the teacher famed for his success in curing King George VI's stutter. As a pupil she had won many distinctions, especially the 1923 Trinity College Senior Elocution Exhibition of nine guineas. This was awarded annually to only two students, still under eighteen years of age, within the Dominions and India. She was the first to win a Fellowship in Speech and Drama within Western Australia, previous candidates having to travel to England to get it.

The Record of July 19th, 1956 ran a front-page headline, Convent Schools Prove Lions of Perth's Music Festival, and claimed that their successes indicated that they were the mainstay of the competition. St. Joseph's School, Victoria Square, carried off primary and high school choir sections. When once asked about the secret of her extraordinary gift for choir work,³⁵ Mary Margaret replied that she had aimed at perfection and used the means at her disposal to do so. She had loved the work and the girls. She had believed in lively work to prevent the girls becoming bored. As ex-pupil of St. Joseph's, she looked back "with gratitude and affection" for their high standards on Sisters M. Kevin Deasy (principal), Colman Ryan, Borgia Molloy, and Dominic Brady.

Sister Colman Ryan had excelled as an English teacher, and Mary Margaret still remembered many years later their productions of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which she had played the part of Portia, and *The Tempest*, for which Colman had managed to find the rare music to teach them the song "Where the bee sucks there suck I."

It was really Colman Ryan who established speech at The Square. Colman had been self-taught, having sat in on Mr Logue's elocution lessons. She was an enthusiast, and many of the sisters owed their speech qualifications to her.³⁶ *The Record* of 9.4.1938, detailing the success of Effie Long ATCL, LTCL, LASA, FTCL, one of her students, in gaining her Fellowship Diploma of Elocution — the highest degree conferred by Trinity College in Art of Speech — commented that Ellie was the fifth pupil of Victoria Square who had gained the rare distinction of a fellowship.

Sister M. Colman, born Kitty Ryan of Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland, had entered Victoria Square convent in December, 1913, aged 25 years. Her sister was a Sister of Mercy in Strabane, Co. Tyrone and three brothers were Franciscans. She had trained as a teacher in Limerick, and taught for a while in the Irish National School System. In Australia, she had taught for some twenty-five years at St. Joseph's School. After terms in Kalgoorlie, Bridgetown, Bassendean, and York, she was attached to Our Lady's College as Speech and Drama teacher. She coupled her extensive knowledge and love of literature with an artistic dramatic skill and a very human understanding of her pupils.

Sister Dominic Brady, a diminutive musician whose tiny hands incredibly possessed an amazing finger span, was a grand-daughter of pioneer Bernard Smith. She had been Cathedral organist from the age of twelve, and is said to have received lessons in the instrument from the legendary Bishop Salvado.

Her teacher at the Square had been Sister M. Cecilia Joseph Galvin, who had come from the Convent of Mercy, Charleville, Ireland, with the 1883 group of postulants. In Perth, Cecilia had been taught by the renowned Sister M. Francis Goold. Her pupil, Edith Brady, was recommended to go to Germany to study, but her parents had not consented. It is also related that when she entered for her Licentiate, the examiner was so impressed by her interpretation and execution that he remarked, "Sister, you should be examining me and not I you."

Sister Dominic had taught at the Square except for seven months at York in 1900 until she went to St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, in 1933. She stayed there for eighteen years, then returning to the Square where she continued to give a few lessons until her death in 1968, aged 93. One of her community at Victoria Park in 1942 remembers watching a silent "Mickey Mouse" film, during which Dominic sat at the piano and improvised appropriate music for all the cartoon antics. In Dominic's latter years in the Square, the same sister remembers her love of and sense of wonder for the beauty of nature, which drew her to praise of God the Creator.

Sister Borgia Molloy was also a gifted music teacher. Though she was deaf, Borgia Molloy was talented in training singers. One of her pupils was Veronica Mansfield, later Parsons.³⁷ At the age of seventeen, Veronica had sung for Dame Nellie Melba, thereby receiving a scholarship to the Melba Conservatorium in Melbourne. She went on to become a professor of singing at the Royal College of Music, London. In 1924, Veronica sang at the opening of the new chapel at Victoria Square. Borgia Molloy also established a choral club for working girls. A few times a year, the club would put on an evening of entertainment for the nuns. She herself was a much appreciated soloist in the sisters' convent choir.

Sisters Dymphna Walsh, Francis Green, and Philip Moylan were other gifted musicians and teachers, themselves having been taught by the legendary "Aunt Alacoque" Dymphna herself, as a pupil, had been a gold medal winner in 1921. While not a person who loved the limelight, she was very efficient, outspoken, and lovable in her lack of guile. Sisters Mary Philip and Francis were also outstanding performers and had been sent to Sydney Conservatorium of music after entry.³⁸

Philip has left a memory of extreme thoroughness and stick-at-it-ness in teaching, of sweeping the board at Eistedfodds, of removing all rough edges as performers from her pupils, and of producing a number of students who were extremely successful in exams and prominent as artists.³⁹ In the 1950s, she moved to Canberra where she remained for eighteen years as a member of the General Council of the Australian Mercy Union, and where her skills of music teaching proved advantageous economically.

Singing was also taught by the tall fair Countess Filippini, and some ambitious projects, such as Elgar's "Fly Singing Bird Fly" were undertaken. When the Centenary of the foundation of the Mercy Order was held in 1931, the College put on the opera *Il Trovatore* in His Majesty's Theatre. Two memorable College concerts in the Big Room occurred when Aunt Alacoque always in charge of the curtain not only rolled up the curtain (decorated by a



*Above: Sr. M. Colman
Ryan at her desk in
St. Joseph's School,
Victoria Square.*

*Right: Srs. M. Dominic
Brady and Oliver
McCarthy.*





*Mary Hehir
(Sr. M. Margaret)
in her Sunday
Mass uniform.*

*Countess Philipini
conducting the choir
for the State Centenary
celebrations, 1929.*





Illuminated list of Benediction days, 1924.



Delegates to the Perth Education Conference, 1929, attending a Musical Conversazione arranged by Musgrove's Ltd.

painting of Drogheda Bay) but, in one instance, also her own habit, displaying voluminous white undergarments, and in the other instance, taking with it Mother Brigid's veil — or so the storytellers say. At the Catholic Celebrations for one hundred years of Western Australia, the children's day, September 13th, was marked by an openair Mass in Victoria Square convent grounds. A choir of 1,000 voices sang the Missa de Angelis under Contessa Filippini. In preparation for this event, the *Record* claimed, she had received much more active co-operation than was merely necessary, from the Sisters who taught music in the schools.

Looking at "the living wall of children that stood beneath the shadow of the Convent Chapel", many of those parents and others present, went back, in imagination, to "the Benedictine monks and Irish exiles" whose hands, in the very early days of the colony, had helped lay the foundations of this beautiful complex. One "grandmother", deeply moved by the scene, remarked: "Forty-five years ago I came here as a child, and thank God I have lived to see what I have seen this morning".

Schubert's ode "To Music" summarised the love and reverence of the Sisters of Mercy towards the "holy art" of music, for one teenager who sang it in a Mercy choir many decades ago.

Thou holy Art,
In many a gloomy hour
When I have bowed
Before the storms of Life,
Hast thou revived
My heart, with glowing power,
In realms unknown to Earthly strife.

This "holy art" was taught to many. As one sister-musician wrote,

If there be a just pride in our work in this field over the years, it is not in the musicians of world or of local renown who have been numbered among our pupils. It is, conversely, in the "strivers", the "would-be's", to none of whom was denied the opportunity to perform or to appreciate this glorious gift. In their appreciation is our reward.

Despite these noble sentiments, success in music examinations was important to the schools. A 1907 Prospectus of Ladies' College, Victoria Square, gives photos of several highly successful Music students and summarises results since 1899.

Overall, the highest marks for the Perth Centre had been won nineteen times, maximum marks six times; seven gold medals, four volumes of music, and two exhibitions. In all, the number of honours was 149, the number of passes 125.

The central location of the school made easy visits to the Art Gallery and Museum, to His Majesty's Theatre for Shakespearean plays, botany and geology excursions to Lake Monger, Tuart Hill bush, the quarries at Boya, and sand dunes at Mosman. When the circus came to the Esplanade, the whole school would attend.

One young immigrant from the eastern side settled in unhappily with her new relations. But she found her new school, Our Lady's College, all that she could want. Later in life, she wrote:

I loved the old school with its mellow buildings...I remained at the convent for five happy years till I passed my Leaving Certificate. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole academic atmosphere of the school. There was a great dedication to the pursuit of learning... We could take a wide variety of subjects, French, Latin, Greek... botany and geology... It is little wonder that after five years at that school botany remains one of my main interests today, as it is of another contemporary, Nancie Fienberg, who is skilled in the difficult art of growing native flora. It was the teaching of Sister Mary Emmanuel which made us familiar with the main orders of Western Australian flora when most of them, to other people, were lumped together as "bush"... I still think I could not have had a broader or more liberal education anywhere than I received at "The Square".⁴⁰

By the beginning of the 1940s, there were about fifty boarders in residence, and 140 day scholars at the College and some 280 at St. Joseph's School. There were nearly ninety sisters. Down the Victoria Avenue end of the campus was St. Joseph's School. Near it was the original school/convent, used also for boarders. The present cement area outside the first Cathedral, called for many years the "Children of Mary Chapel", was a lovely garden cared for — in the early 1900s — by an elderly sister, Sister Conception. The garden suffered ruin the night the boarders climbed out of the window to look over the Hay Street wall at the celebrations for the end of World War I. In the midst of the paths from one end to the other was the cemetery, where ten sisters, beginning with Mother Catherine Gogarty in 1846, had been buried, until 1891, when the cemetery on the Subiaco grounds was used instead.⁴¹ Boarders would be sent across Goderich Street to St. Anne's Paddock to collect dung from the convent cows, to be used as fertiliser. The paddock is now the site of the Dental Hospital and Jewel House.

The *Record* was ever mindful that St. Joseph's School was "the pioneer school of the state".⁴² The building erected for it on the corner of Victoria Avenue and Victoria Square, was renovated in late 1936, architects still the Cavanagh Brothers. At first, St. Joseph's was up to Junior only, Our Lady's College to Leaving. When Santa Maria began in 1938, it was intended that there be no Leaving students at Victoria Square.⁴³ This arrangement did not continue for long; Senior classes were restored at the College. By 1963, the classes were too large to combine the seniors of the two schools on the campus, and the girls stayed on at St. Joseph's. This meant that the latter could be included in the state's list of recognised secondary schools.

Teacher Training

More efficient teaching had been a major goal — if not the major one for the episcopacy — of the Amalgamation of the various communities of Sisters of Mercy in the state. Teacher training facilities became available at the Square on the Goderich Street side, when Santa Maria opened. West Perth Reverend Mother received a direction from Prendiville to send two representatives to a meeting at the Archbishop's Palace on 27th November, 1937, "re-definite

arrangements for the proposed Training College at Victoria Square next year".⁴⁴ The College was for "the members of the various Sisterhoods who teach in our schools", Prendiville stated elsewhere. He kept an eye on what was happening, mainly through Dr McMahon, and approved the decision to form two groups of two years' full-time training, Group A for those with a Leaving Certificate, Group B for those with Junior only. He stressed the goal of a "C" and a "B" certificate from the Education Department, and was pleased that the supporters of the college also wished for a pass in a written examination in Religion as a necessary entrance qualification.⁴⁵ The College was opened by Archbishop Prendiville on 8th February, 1938. He described it "as the most important step yet taken within the state for the training of religious teachers." Dr McMahon saw it as "the dawn of a better day ... for the Catholic schools" in the state.

Though the staff was part-time, being attached to the schools at Victoria Square and also teaching the novices, it was quite impressive. Sisters Joan Rodoreda, Loyola Cooper, Vianney O'Callaghan, Stephanie Horne and Raphael Coady all had at least their first degree and a diploma in education. Two of them had masters degrees. All had diplomas in music or drama. They were assisted by others well qualified in music and drama, including Sister M. Margaret Hehir, together with a number of experienced primary teachers. Dr McMahon was visiting lecturer. Fr Albert Lynch, expert in church music, taught plain chant. In charge was Mother Alacoque Eustace, Reverend Mother Assistant. McMahon was also the organiser of a number of Annual Teachers' Conferences, which attempted to lay a foundation of knowledge of the content of Christian Doctrine for the religious education teachers of the archdiocese.

Relations with the State Education Department were good, and the department gave concessions to the sisters that those in other states did not have. Archbishop Prendiville and Dr McMahon, as Director of Education in Catholic Schools, lobbied M.P.s.⁴⁶ McMahon negotiated between the University and the State Teachers College for the students to be able to undertake some general academic studies at the University and a special course in Education. The rest of the curriculum was carried out by the College.

The College opened with sixteen students from the various women's orders in Western Australia. This number included two sisters from the West Perth and six from the Perth Mercies. The establishment lasted, however, only until 1942 and petered out through lack of candidates. In 1949, Father (later Monsignor) James Bourke became Director of Catholic Education and his annual reports expressed concern for the lack of adequate training of religious staff in professional and religious education.

A real difficulty is that those who are devoted and pious in their personal lives, often do not have a communicable and well-integrated grasp of the religion they serve so well. Furthermore, their lives are sheltered and ordered along religious paths so that they find it hard to remember ... if they ever knew ... the stresses that others will experience... As well as virtue and grace our teachers need more initial religious development, a keen interest in understanding the faith and books and leisure to pursue the initial interest. (1953 report).



Archbishop Prendiville and Msgr. McMahon with staff and students of Master Dei Training College, 1938.



Former student Sr. Eileen McVittie rejoices with Sr. M. Loyola Cooper (95), identified during University of WA 75th Anniversary search as its oldest known living graduate.



Convent of Mercy, Shenton Park.



"Abbeyfeale" Mosman Park purchased in 1912 for use as a holiday/beach house.

Religious orders in this period had a highly pragmatic approach to their work. The former teacher training staff at Victoria Square were helpful when unqualified teaching sisters were granted "teacher release" (half a day a week) to obtain certification through the State Education Department.⁴⁷ In 1952, ten places for full-time students were allotted annually at State Teachers' Colleges. By 1960, eleven sisters from Perth and four from West Perth had taken advantage of this offer. In an attempt to provide some education in the content of religious instruction, Bourke and others gave courses in philosophy and catechetics to the sisters at the Training College, and in 1955/56 a two-year Saturday morning theology class for teachers. The latter was attended by more than 100 sisters and was repeated in 1957/58.

By 1960 the number of Sisters at State Teachers' Colleges had declined. Secondary teachers began again to attend the University of Western Australia, mostly through part-time study in Arts. As the effects of union and federation of the Australian Mercies began to be felt, Mercy primary teachers began to be sent to Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra for professional and religious formation within Catholic Teachers' Colleges.

In 1969, a home-based Holy Spirit Institute of Sister Formation was opened and operated for a number of years. While its primary purpose was the spiritual development of the individual sister, it also contributed to increased efficiency in religious education. The Institute finally closed through lack of numbers and through the opening up of alternative resources.

Mercedes College 1967

As an outcome of the 1966 Provincial chapter, it was decided to combine St. Joseph's High School and Our Lady's College. It was felt that such a step would be advantageous to both pupils and teachers. The presence of two separate schools with separate fee structures did not seem appropriate to present understandings of the Mercy charism in the Australian context. Moreover, some rivalry had grown up between the two schools which was not in keeping with the spirit of Mercy. A single merged school administration seemed now preferable, with an internal division into upper and lower schools.

The new entity was initially named "Mercedes Catholic School for Girls" and opened at the beginning of 1967. It now enrolled over 1,000 girls. Teacher specialisation was possible in the secondary section, and a reduction of the number of primary composite classes could be made. A science grant from the Commonwealth government to Our Lady's College in July 1966 allowed the building of a science room and classrooms for the new school. In 1969, "Romansleigh" was demolished and replaced by "Glenrowan" a new block of eleven classrooms. In 1970, land owned by the congregation at Greenmount was transferred to the archdiocese in exchange for Victoria House, Goderich Street.⁴⁸ In 1959, the lower primary pupils were transferred to St. Patrick's School in Havelock Street, West Perth.⁴⁹

The new Mercedes School, with Sr. M. Dolores Serisier as principal, kept up the traditions indicated by its title. Sister Dolores had been principal of St. Joseph's from at least 1943. She was noted for her concern for each student and her support for each member of the staff. Her deputy was Sister

*Sr. M. Dolores
Serisier, longest
serving of Mercedes
College.*



Sr. M. Thomas with her Typing class.

M. Raphael Coady, principal of Our Lady's College since 1959.⁵⁰ The proposed uniform was the summer fawn dress of St. Joseph's and the winter green of Our Lady's.

The new school moved quickly into a number of curricular and extra-curricular innovative activities. In 1969, the *Record* reported a two day exhibition of student activities (MESA), which netted 1,000 pounds for the new library. In the evenings was held a non-stop programme of drama, music, and speech concurrently at two or three points. Various displays were put up by the Young Christian Students movement (YCS), and the art, literature, science, and maths clubs. A Miss Mercedes Quest was relayed by closed circuit TV operated by Fourth and Fifth Year science students. In 1970, a Secretarial Class for Year 11 students not wanting to enter Tertiary Institutions, was commenced. With attention to the meaning of the Mercy charism, Special Education for mildly handicapped students also became a feature of the school. Orchestras and choirs preserved the legacy of the past.

Towards the end of the 1970s it was agreed to phase out boarders at Victoria Square. Mercedes was to be a day school from 1981. The boarding school, a two-storey building, occupied a quarter acre of the western corner of the whole school complex of almost four acres.⁵¹ It looked over Hay Street and Victoria Avenue. A 1976 report on the boarding school had shown that facilities were inadequate and that it had a very limited future in its present form. There were 62 pupils in that year, of whom five were primary. The fees were \$210 per term and with such numbers, the boarding school was not economically viable. The deficit, as at June 1979, was about \$3,000.

At the time of merger, it was determined that school fees would be within the means of the average working parent. Consideration for large families and for those in financial difficulty was to be a feature of the school. This has continued. Being an inner-city school with easy access to transport, Mercedes population cuts across all social classes and cultures. The fees are as low as economically possible, and no student is excluded on account of fees. Because of its long history, many students enrol whose mothers or grandmothers had been students. At present, there are fifth generation students at Mercedes.

Somewhere about the mid-1970s, a record was reached with 43 nations of origin among the students. There were seven Aboriginal boarders at this time. In 1974 Mercedes hit the newspapers when Ingrid Clarke won the Aboriginal Youth Fellowship junior women's athletic trophy. Ingrid had had numerous successes during her time at the college in interschool athletics and as captain of the Mercedes athletic, A1 netball, and tennis teams.⁵² In 1977, a swimming pool was installed. In 1979 the name of the school was changed to Mercedes College.

The Music department continued to be held in high esteem. The school's reputation for music, speech and drama led to many enrolments. Its choirs at the Perth Musical Festival continued to have considerable success. Each year, a cantata "Easter Song", was performed at the Cathedral during Holy Week, and involved staff, students, parents, and local clergy. Given the long history of music at Victoria Square, dating back to the beginnings, it was

fitting that the winner of the inaugural James F. Nestor Award for excellence in Musical Performance in 1987 was organist Elizabeth Edwards of Mercedes College. A Music Camp at Rottnest in 1990 attracted forty students.

The old Music Centre in Coolock House had become increasingly inadequate, and the school had nowhere to assemble as a whole. Accordingly, Coolock House was demolished and a new multi-purpose hall was opened in 1981 on its site. This new hall could also serve as a gymnasium, and was indicative of the importance of sport in the curriculum.

It also was part of a larger development project. Stage One involved conversion of the old Our Lady's College, built in 1896, into facilities for administration, staff, drama, music, and media studies. Stage Two meant the upgrading of the old St. Joseph's Victoria Avenue building, built in 1896, for Years 11 to 12. Stage Three led to the demolition of the Boarding School fronting on Hay Street (built in 1853), to allow tennis and netball courts, and remodelling of the section which was the first convent, built in 1848, running parallel to Victoria Avenue.

This was to provide facilities for Home Economics, Commercial Studies (a Year Eleven Secretarial Course gave wider opportunities to senior pupils), and Art. Further down Goderich Street, Victoria House⁵³ was demolished to give a car park. More garden areas were established elsewhere. The fourth and final stage was the building of the multi-purpose hall. As the only inner city school, Mercedes made its up-graded facilities available to other organisations.

Total cost was \$901,000, \$315,000 of which was obtained from the Federal government. The School Board requested a fund raising firm to survey the parents' capacity to sustain such a building programme. The firm reported:

Mercedes College is certainly held in the highest esteem by those who claim association with it. Its very existence engenders pride in the fact that it has a somewhat unique place in the history of the Order and there was unanimous admiration of the work by the Principal and staff.

Sister Elizabeth Devine, as Provincial, at opening of the hall in May, 1981, reminisced that

we cannot think of Victoria Square without recalling names like Sisters M. Ligouri Lawsen, Emmanuel Moloney, Bertrand Corbett, Patricia Savage, Colman Ryan, Kevin Deasy, Philip Moylan, Martha Hayward, Margaret Hehir.

She added that Sister M. Loyola Cooper surely held the record, with 65 years of teaching at Victoria Square. The other record was that of the project committee of lay persons, who had met weekly for ten months, two to three hours each session, at the site.

In 1984 a full-time clinical and educational psychologist was employed to provide counselling for both students and parents. Parent-adolescent communication skills and other aspects of teenage and family development were addressed through courses offered by the school counsellor or through the Catherine McAuley Centre at Wembley. New classrooms were also

provided in that year, and in 1985, the acquisition of two blocks of land adjoining the hall in Hay Street allowed for a sports oval, a very popular area of the school. Buildings were further extended in 1990, when a new Library and Administration Block was constructed, and blessed and opened by Archbishop William Foley. A new Performing Arts centre was constructed in 1991, a contribution designed to enhance and continue the long tradition of performing arts.

The annual fetes to help in financing such extended services were a continual reminder of the tradition set by the pioneer sisters in the 1840s, on the very site of Mercedes. Those first teachers at the Convent of Mercy, Perth, would surely be intrigued and gratified if they could wander through the grounds and buildings or browse through the college news-letters of the 1990s. A House system among the students whose names indicated Mercy heroines: McAuley, Frayne, Serisier, and McDonald... Fete stalls of Asian and Italian food... Meditation sessions in the Religious Education Resource Room, parents invited to take part in Rhythmic Gym in the Hall, an Exhibition Tennis Match on the Upper Court, a Mock Trial and a Legal Advice Booth in the Library, Computing in the Computer Room. At Media Studies in the Media Room, the girls might be stimulated by news that Film Australia had chosen the screen play of one of Mercedes ex-students for support and possible funding.⁵⁴

It was a wide variety of curriculum and extra-curriculum offerings, and an even wider ethnic variety in the students and parents to whom those offerings were being made — subtle symbol of the new nation that had been built on the first fumbling efforts of people like Ursula Frayne and her companions.

Another reminder of the historic character of Victoria Square occurred in 1989, when the convent, constructed in 1871, and added to extensively but randomly — and rather unattractively — over the ensuing 118 years, underwent extensive renovations. From sixteen sisters living in what must have seemed to them a very spacious building, the "Vic Square" community had reached one hundred, at some periods. The convent grew into something of a rabbit warren, as it struggled to house the extra people. However, as the community then declined and aged, and as very pleasant additions were made to the hostel and nursing home at Catherine McAuley Centre, Wembley, it seemed appropriate for the older sisters to move there. Victoria Square was stripped back to the original convent building and refurbished in a way which preserved the sense of history it embodied.

It was hoped, too, that The Square would remain a centre of Mercy hospitality. Over the years, very many visitors — chiefly, but not totally sisters — had come and stayed, attracted by the centrality of the location and the surety of a welcome. The school had offered its facilities for numerous teachers' and other conferences. The Mercy convent and school had remained at the heart of the church in Perth. Now it was widening its hospitality to include many more lay people, and it was offering one of the halls within the convent complex — as distinct from the school — as a conference centre.

St. Joachim's

The most striking and wonderful trait of St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, was

its multicultural nature, and the immense vitality that brought to the staff and student population. Over the years, St. Joachim's had continued to cater essentially for the daughters of working class parents. In 1978, for example, there was only one professional parent and twelve self-employed. In the decades following the post-war migration, the school became increasingly multicultural. In 1975, to quote some more recent statistics, there were 175 girls from migrant homes and thirty of aboriginal origin. In 1978 figures had risen to 280 from migrant homes with forty to forty-five aboriginal. Many of the remainder were of second generation migrant extraction. Twenty-two languages were spoken in the homes. Fees were kept very low.

Curriculum offerings mirrored this diversity. A number of projects were gradually developed to assist the disadvantaged, migrant and aboriginal girls who comprised a sizeable proportion of enrolment. Apart from its multicultural nature, St. Joachim's attracted a number of girls from state high schools with considerable social problems. The enrolment of emotionally or behaviorally disturbed children, many not catholic, from other schools was seen as one way to extend witness to a caring, christian, and merciful attitude.⁵⁵

The first lay principal had been appointed in 1975.⁵⁶ Under her guidance and that of her successors, St. Joachim's became a comprehensive school with a strong vocational orientation. The curriculum was broadened. An integrated studies programme and a number of vocationally oriented programmes were introduced. A vocational wing was established.

The presence of a sister on the staff particularly concerned with pastoral care was a welcome addition at St. Joachim's, as was the development of counselling services, when a professional counsellor was shared between the three schools, Mercedes, Santa Maria, and St. Joachim's. Career guidance was also offered.

Other projects to assist disadvantaged students included a special class for girls in Grades 8 and 9 whose academic ability was inadequate for even the lowest level of School Achievement Certificate work, but who did not qualify for Special Schools. These remained with their peers for Form, Religious Education, Physical Education, Option classes. In 1977, a vocational wing was opened. The complex catered for home economics, art and craft, and commercial studies.

Probably in keeping with the lower socio-economic character of its population, parent involvement at St. Joachim's was only ordinary. Lay involvement increased with the setting up of a finance committee and eventually a board in the early 1980s. Co-education was also being discussed at this time, but was put into abeyance after a survey of parents' wishes.

A number of moves towards more effective use of resources and personnel in this area of south Perth took place within these decades, with amalgamation of various units of schooling from pre-primary to year twelve. In 1936, the Sisters of Mercy had opened Our Lady Help of Christians primary school at East Victoria Park. In 1953, the Christian Brothers were asked to staff a new regional secondary school funded by parishes in the area. Xavier College was opened at East Victoria Park. In 1981, the two schools at East Victoria

Park merged, with former primary principal, a Sister of Mercy, on the combined staff. St. Joachim's thus continued to cater for secondary girls, while Xavier was co-educational primary and boys only secondary. However, even this distinction was removed in 1990 when the three schools, St. Joachim's Primary and St. Joachim's High, and Xavier College, combined to form Ursula Frayne College, catering for students from pre-primary to Year 12. The closing head mistress of St. Joachim's High School, one of the first two Perth Mercy Associates, became the foundation principal of Ursula Frayne Catholic College.⁵⁷ This meant that St. Joachim's had now passed to the jurisdiction of the Catholic Education Commission. In this year also, the convent at Victoria Park, former head house of the Victoria Park foundation founded from Derry, became completely incorporated into the school. The process of taking over more and more of the convent building had begun some ten years previously. Ursula Frayne College, initially at least, was to operate from all three campuses.

The crest for Ursula Frayne Catholic College included a chevron, part of the Frayne coat of arms. It also included a Celtic cross as a reminder not only that Christ was the centre of the school community but also of Ursula's Irish origins. A black swan denoted the Western Australian heritage, and a book with the alpha and omega letters symbolized knowledge, learning, and the Bible. The design was created by a Perth Sister of Mercy.⁵⁸ Among the House names of the new college, chosen to honour the religious orders which had contributed personnel to Victoria Park and East Victoria Park schools, were the names of Catherine McAuley and Clare Buggy, first principal of St. Joachim's in 1899.

As with Mercedes College, it is interesting to note the wide variety of activities that occurred in this first year of Ursula Frayne College, ninety-one years since Clare Buggy led her sisters from Derry to Victoria Park. The first social event of the new college was that now typical Australian barbecue and Bush Dance, at which about 1,300 attended despite the threat of rain. An opening Mass in the Cathedral in May filled the building, while more than fifty parents and students prepared afternoon tea. For those interested in knowing more of Mercy history, a meeting at Victoria Square was held as part of an on-going series.⁵⁹ Counselling in relationships and in careers was offered on campus. The courses in teenage relationships and family faith and personal development at Catherine McAuley Centre were also available.

On the lighter side, the school was taking part in a Performing Arts Festival for Catholic schools and a Rock n' Roll Eisteddfodd at His Majesty's Theatre. Students took elderly residents at a hospital to a fair. During National Aboriginal Week, one Ursula Frayne student's altar cloth was chosen as the focus of a display at the Catholic Education Office. Japanese exchange students attended the college.

St. Brigid's, West Perth — Departure

The district where St. Brigid's, West Perth, was situated had changed drastically in the mid-twentieth century. Fitzgerald Street had become the main artery to the northern suburbs, and the convent and school was invaded by

the noise and fumes of traffic. Numbers in the schools declined as the area became an "inner city suburb" St. Brigid's High School was reduced to a Junior High by 1970, with First and Second Years and commercial classes.

The numbers looked viable enough, with a total primary enrolment in that year of 284 (ninety boys and 194 girls), and secondary 55 girls. The report of the State Education Department Inspector on the state of the primary section was very positive. He commented on the language problem, the majority of pupils in some classes being Italian, but with other nationalities present also. A novel approach had been adopted to oral and activity work through the featuring of homeland dancing, singing, etc. The report concluded:

School Atmosphere: This is one of the delightful aspects of this school. By acceptance, the school is a "home" and a focal point in the social life of the very considerable Southern European community.

The secondary section was not so promising. J.E. Bourke, examining the school in Religious Knowledge in 1963, had expressed uncertainty about the future of the school. He thought it should be given a good deal of consideration, mainly in terms of the need to amalgamate over-small fourth and fifth Year groups. In these two grades at St. Brigid's, there were but thirteen girls and only four of these were Catholic. Currently, there were 22 Fourth and Fifth year girls at Leederville, and an amalgamation of the two schools would provide better opportunity for teachers and children. Bourke suggested some differing options re amalgamation of the small high schools then existing at West Perth, Leederville, and Osborne Park.

The area around West Perth was zoned for light industry. The convent itself had got into disrepair. It was likely that the whole church property might have to be alienated on account of a coming Hamilton Interchange. The archdiocesan secretary wrote to remind the sisters that, if that were so, they should remember that the land on which the parish school and hall were built was parish land no matter in what name the actual Certificates of Title may be drawn up.⁶⁰ Thus there was talk of closing the church for a number of years, and it would seem more profitable to sell all as one area. But the sisters were reluctant to leave their place of origin; the idea of moving was traumatic. There were varying plans for the use of the building. The decision to build the northern freeway close to St. Brigid's site sounded the death knell. The sisters moved out of St. Brigid's in February, 1974. During its last week as a convent, a religious profession took place in the convent chapel — mirroring foundation day of the West Perth community in 1896, when a similar profession took place.

The convent was leased to the Department of Correction for a three year period, pending planning for the development of the West Perth area. The Department continued to use it as a work release hostel for prisoners. *The West Australian* (16th March, 1974) commented on "the twist of fate" whereby the four roomed cottage in which the first sisters resided was given to them in gratitude by a prisoner condemned to death. Sisters continued to teach in the primary parochial school and lived in a nearby house. However, the

primary school, too, was closed in 1976. Perth Technical College took over the school in 1980 for a fine arts centre.

St. Brigid's secondary and primary schools at West Perth had made a tremendous contribution to education, both locally and farther afield through its early boarding segment. In the post-World War II period, it had made a noteworthy contribution to the new migrants entering Australia and, through language and other differences, finding it difficult to settle. The small school begun in 1888, by two sisters walking daily or using horse transport from Victoria Square, were remembered at the centenary celebration in the Church on 16th July, 1988. Also remembered was Sister M. Berchmans, of Villa Maria Hostel, present at St. Brigid's parish school at its closure, and namesake of Mother Berchmans Deane, foundress. It was, commented the current Superior, Sister Beverley Stott, "a fitting co-incidence that at the beginning and the end there was a Sister Berchmans"

Mercy College, Koondoola, 1971

In 1971 a new Mercy College began at Mirrabooka Avenue, Koondoola. It was to be eventually co-educational, and for both primary (from Grade 5) and secondary. The spacious site allowed for the expansion impossible at West Perth. First Year secondary schools pupils enrolled at West Perth in 1970 transferred to the new site in 1971, using the primary school building erected by the Sisters of Mercy. A council bus transported the students. The Sister-principal of West Perth became the founding principal of Koondoola.⁶¹

The area was a newly developing housing area and still largely bush. Kangaroos, goannas, native birds, and wildflowers abounded on the school property. At the official opening of the secondary building in 1974, Professor Peter Tannock commented that "the school went back to one of the features of the order in its earlier years, viz... a rapidly expanding educational body in the Catholic Church." There had been a levelling off of expansion, but now a new phase in the history of the Sisters of Mercy was occurring, and a very encouraging one.⁶²

The Servite Fathers of Tuart Hill had been initially involved in planning for the new school, which was to have been both co-institutional and co-educational at various levels. They had not proceeded, however, feeling it necessary to consolidate their college at Tuart Hill. It became a Mercy venture only. The connection with St. Brigid's, West Perth, was kept alive. In 1975, a rearrangement of the various West Perth primary schools in the area (St. Gerard's and Servite Junior schools, Our Lady of Lourdes, Majella, Girrawheen, Wanneroo, and Mercy Primary at Koondoola) made for a more efficient feeder system to Mercy College, Koondoola, which — together with the Mercy Primary — would become coeducational. It did so in 1978. This more equitable provision for secondary education for boys was also intended to ease some of the strain of enrolments at the Servite-St. Kieran's College at Osborne Park/Tuart Hill.

At the beginning of 1976, Mr Richard Finucane, formerly deputy principal of St. Joachim's Victoria Park, became first lay principal of Koondoola Mercy

College.⁶³ His "messages" in the school magazine show an awareness of the Mercy connection. In the 1976 magazine he wrote:

The Spirit of Mercy College had its origin in St. Brigid's West Perth. We, at Mercy College in 1976, have an obligation not only to cherish the past, but also to develop the Spirit within our little community. It is a precious flame that must be protected and also be made to burn brightly. For it is the life of the College.

The tradition of Mass and Picnic on Mercy Day each year was continued. In 1977, the new Mother Berchmans Library Resource Centre recalled the name of the foundation superior of St. Brigid's. In 1979, Mr. Finucane invited former pupils of St. Brigid's to contribute to a time capsule to be buried by the college. In 1985, the Principal's Message claimed that pastoral care had "high priority at Mercy College. It is part of our "Mercy Mission". Two Sisters of Mercy, at this time, helped keep alive the memory of Mercy. One, Careers Guidance Officer, was named "Champion of the Underemployed"; the other, who prepared students for the sacraments and prayed with parents' groups, was "Champion of Angels" "our angel of mercy"

At the centenary Mass of St. Brigid's, West Perth, 16th July, 1988, the Congregational Superior, Beverley Stott, stated that "Mercy College continues as a large co-educational institution, educating in the Mercy spirit of the Christian development of character and talent in young people." She added:

It is most right that St. Brigid continues as our patron today both of the present parish and of other institutions grown from the seed planted on this day 100 years ago.

Her promotion of the human spirit through learning and an ordered good life is as apt today as it ever was.

St. Mary's College, Leederville

When the sisters moved into their new convent facing Franklin Street⁶⁴ in Leederville, in January, 1934, It was roomy enough to transfer the novitiate there. There were fifty girls in the high school, up to Junior only for that year. Classes were held in the convent. A new primary and secondary school building, costing \$15,000, was erected in 1952, the old building being demolished. In January, 1954, a union of the primary and secondary schools took place. A new uniform (maroon and fawn to replace the previous navy ones of different styles for primary and secondary) signified the change. By 1960, more than 400 children, from Grades 1 through to Fifth Year High School, were in attendance. There were also in residence 28 sisters, including fifteen novices. A second new primary school building was opened in April, 1976. This was on 92 acres of land, east of Lake Monger and formerly wasteland.

Reports on St. Mary's College by various examiners seemed uniformly positive. Religious Education examiner, Father J. Nestor, commended the teachers for the fine results and the "healthy independence" shown by the children. In 1966, one state school inspector, commented on the school atmosphere:

This is delightful. Very fine teacher — pupil contact and the establishment of sound routines are providing these children with a sense of personal responsibility and control and a very friendly and confident manner of approach.

With the post-war migration, the population of the college became strongly migrant, mainly Italian. Parental participation was encouraged by the administration. Contact with the local community also was promoted through a Unique Speakers Programme. This was student-based and run by a committee of ten students, chaired by a Year Ten girl. The programme consisted of guest speakers for students, staff, parents, and others in the local community. A Commonwealth Schools grant allowed the taping of talks for the school library. The committee's policy was generally to invite ordinary people with something to offer. Training in organisational and other skills was a valuable by-product.

Summing up the atmosphere of St. Mary's over the years, one sister on the staff, who had been to school there herself in the 1920s, claimed that Arranmore was a great school, children being basically well educated and making lasting friendships with the sisters and with one another. The students may not have thought the "good" sisters quite so good as their parents did, but home and school reinforced one another in teaching virtue and religion. Many vocations to religious life came from this "secure, happy environment"

With the new primary school building in Brentham Street, the primary and secondary schools were again separated administratively, with a combined programme for Years 11 and 12 at St. Mary's and the adjoining Christian Brothers College for boys. Then, in 1986, the two colleges merged to form Aranmore⁶⁵ Catholic College. In 1988, the management of the college was transferred to the Catholic Education Commission, while the Congregation retained the title to their property for which they received a levy from the Archdiocese.

Osborne Park/Tuart Hill

Junior Secondary classes — to Grade Ten — had been taken at Osborne Park from about the mid-1940s. At times, there may have been only one or two girls for the Junior Examination, but the service was still offered. In 1960, there were eleven sisters on staff, with 500 pupils from Grade One to Third Year High School. Additions to the 1934 school building had been made in 1949, and in 1952 a new block was constructed.

The Servite/Mercy connection was preserved with the amalgamation of the Mercy Junior High School at St. Kieran's, Osborne Park, with the Servite College at Tuart Hill in the early 1970s. The latter became co-educational and St. Kieran's restricted itself to primary students.

St. Brigid's College, Lesmurdie

Originally begun as a boarding school, with just three day scholars, the boarding component remained the significant one until as late as the 1950s, when daily life still revolved around the boarders. In the late 1970s, however, the population of the school, especially the day-scholars, increased

dramatically and the day school became dominant. By February, 1989, enrolments had reached 500. Fewer than 100 of these were boarders.

Nevertheless, the sisters' commitment to rural education through boarding schools survived. A grand new boarding school complex was opened in March, 1990, at the cost of \$4.26 million, lent by the State government interest-free. The sisters built the complex at their own expense. In a heart-warming gesture, the Boarding School Student Council raised money through cake stalls, Easter egg raffles, and Boarding School Social. At its opening, Archbishop Foley challenged the girls to retain, in the midst of their new modern, individualized facilities, "the family atmosphere of the old Boarding School"

At a time when it has become the trend to criticise "convent education", especially boarding schools, for their repressive formation, it is a helpful correction to find that past pupils of St. Brigid's may have found the discipline of a Mother Teresa "relentless" but also "marvellous training". Or to listen to other pupils of the late 1940s, early 1950s, recount with affection the stories of their somewhat "spartan yet homely existence" of which, in a strange way, they were proud, and of the influence to spirituality which the nuns had upon them. A little booklet, *Christian Courtesy for Catholic Girls*, read and learnt, page by page, each day at the beginning of lessons in the middle school, provided a source of training in behaviour long remembered. Music pupils — one past student of the 1950s remembers — performed one after another, at the end of the year, for the whole school. Later classes could recall the sense of compassion engendered by fundraising activities for projects such as Project Compassion, the Mercy Missions, CARE Australia, and Youth Ending Hunger.

Though the number of sisters on staff declined, Mercy ownership and sponsorship was, nevertheless, retained. In 1988, the convent quarters were handed over to the school at no cost to the College, and the sisters moved to a small house across Lesmurdie Road, next to Villa Maria. St. Brigid's College Board of Management gave scope for parents and other lay persons to act in an advisory capacity to the Congregation and school. An active Parents and Friends Association pursued a blend of social, fund-raising, and service-oriented activities, which were well supported by parents. In 1991, a past pupil of the school, Mary Retel (nee Travicich) became the first lay principal. The Board Chairman stated, in his 1990 report, that the challenge was now "to maintain a viable infrastructure whilst providing religious and other educational facilities in the Mercy tradition".

In 1971, the primary school was separated from the secondary and housed in a new set of buildings. From 1977, it also became co-educational. This had been tried in the 1960s, but was not a success. By 1989, however, the primary school was almost half boys. The college remained single-sex. Secondary-aged boys were able to attend Mazenod College, run by the Oblate Fathers.

The primary school, in particular, saw a renaissance of the arts in the 1980s, early 1990s. The school choir participated in Music Festivals and concerts, the opening of the Kalamunda Uniting Church, some civic occasions, and

numerous in-house productions. Speech, drama, ballet, private music lessons had always been part of the curricula. In the late 1980s, classroom music, including the recorder, percussion, and music appreciation, was introduced. From Years Two to Seven, each student was expected to learn the descant recorder.

In the Secondary College, Fine Arts also enjoyed a renaissance. In 1967, of 57 Juniors, only ten took Art; of nineteen Leaving students, only three. In 1971, a new member was attached to the staff with the brief of introducing Fine Arts as a career option. Consequently, demand for her course grew. St. Brigid's, Lesmurdie, continued firmly on the cultural paths determined for it in the early days of St. Brigid's, West Perth.

Country High Schools

St. Anthony's, Coolgardie was the only boarding school on the goldfields. It gave an education to children from isolated areas without access to any school, and included several who were below the age grade limit accepted by other boarding schools. It also included a number of Aboriginal children who could thus remain closer to their local environment.

However, it was not operating well financially as a boarding school, and necessary employment of lay staff made the future seem grim. Enrolments had been static until 1976, but then had dropped drastically. There was little hope of an influx of population into the region. School numbers were reflecting the recession in both mining and pastoral industries. Accordingly, the school closed at the end of 1979.

The sisters had already withdrawn from Kalgoorlie in 1975, though they were to return when Coolgardie closed, to operate a Motor Mission in the area. Prendiville College in Boulder was available for girls at secondary level from the beginning of 1971. Mercies had helped plan and staff this college in its beginnings, together with the Sisters of St. Joseph. This was the first time in Western Australia that two women's religious orders had combined to staff a school. The Sisters of Mercy withdrew at the end of 1975.⁶⁶

Bunbury Catholic College was established in 1973. It was formed from St. Joseph's High School and the Marist Brothers' College, established in 1954. St. Joseph's itself was the result of a merger, in 1955, of the two Mercy schools, Sacred Heart High School and St. Joseph's Primary. Thus it was co-educational from Grade One to fifth Year. It was governed by a board of Management, and the primary and secondary sections were to operate separately, each with its own principal.⁶⁷

Post-Primary Tops

During the years before 1970, when the Achievement Certificate replaced the Junior Certificate, Mercy country primary schools and some of the smaller suburban schools helped their students sit for the Junior University Examination in at least enough subjects to obtain a certificate. Usually one teacher taught almost all the subjects. If the student wanted to go on to do Senior, sometimes other teachers on the staff might be able to provide extra

subjects or the student encouraged to do some through correspondence. The classes were co-educational in all the country tops except Kalgoorlie.

Sometimes Grade Seven in the Primary school had to be grouped with the post-primary students. Sisters usually had to teach beyond the normal school day to get in all the subjects. Sometimes, with unfamiliar subjects, teacher was keeping one step ahead of pupils. This, coupled with all the other duties of a teaching sister in a small country school, which almost always had boarders also, made it a difficult task. But most of those who experienced it liked it. They found that with small numbers, teachers and pupils really got to know one another, especially when the same teacher taught the same pupils for three or even four years. Parents were usually grateful because the practice enabled them to keep their children at home at least until the end of Junior. All in all, it was a homely situation.

Apart from the more formally established Junior Secondary Schools, there were post-primary tops in the country at Donnybrook, Harvey, Toodyay, Bridgetown, York;⁶⁸ on the Goldfields, at Kalgoorlie, Norseman, and Leonora; and in the suburbs of Perth, at Shenton Park, Midland, and St. Joseph's Orphanage.

Primary Education

The primary schools had long remained the mainstay of the Mercy educational system. Most of them were essentially parish schools, however, and coeducational to Standards Two and Three. By the 1960s, while schools were being opened in new areas, a number of other schools were being closed or Sisters withdrawn completely from the staff. When the West Perth congregation, for example, closed the schools at West Perth and Glendalough, it was a case of population movement, in part due to advance of a northern freeway from the city centre. The trend towards closure or withdrawal intensified in the following decades as the number of teaching sisters in the two congregations declined. Gradually the parochial nature of the schools, the developing pattern of lay staffing and then lay administration, and the increasing central control as "systemic schools" from the Western Australian Catholic Education Commission meant less and less emphasis on their Mercy identity. Nevertheless, Sisters continued to administer and help staff many of them.

Before government aid became a reality, payment of the increasing number of lay teachers was a heavy burden on the congregations. In 1967, for example, Mother Kieran Murphy of Victoria Square wrote more than once to the archbishop, requesting help with payment of weekly salaries.⁶⁹ In May 1967, she requested permission to hold a fete to help pay for the secular teachers. Victoria Square had to pay fifteen teachers for Mercedes and some suburban parish schools. Nine sisters were doing teacher training in Eastern States Colleges. At this time also, she was asking for permission for fund-raising activities connected with extensions at Victoria Square and later the addition of two classrooms to the primary school at Santa Maria.⁷⁰

The following lists show where the Perth and the West Perth Mercies have been involved at some period with primary schooling.⁷¹

PERTH (Amalgamated)

Period of Opening:

- 1846-1870: Perth, Fremantle, Guildford.
1870-1900: Victoria Park, Coolgardie, Bunbury, West Perth, Toodyay, Geraldton, Subiaco Orphanage, York.
1900-1930: South Perth, South Bunbury, Dardanup, Kalgoorlie, Greenbushes, Donnybrook, Queen's Park, Belmont, Bassendean, Shenton Park, Subiaco parish, Norseman, Leonora, Menzies, Midland, Bridgetown.
1930-1960: Bayswater, Havelock Street, Attadale, Redcliffe, Gosnells, Santa Maria Primary, Carlisle, Armadale, East Perth, East Victoria Park, Harvey, Herne Hill, Rivervale.
1960-1990: Carey Park, Myaree, Willagee, Mel Maria, Greenwood, Langford, Bateman, Ocean Reef.

WEST PERTH

Period of Opening

- 1888-1900: West Perth.
1901-1930: Leederville, Osborne Park (Tuart Hill), Lesmurdie.
1931-1960: Wanneroo, Gwelup, Havelock Street, Scarborough, Kojonup, Joon-danna, Nollamara, Glendalough, Westminster (Balcatta).
1961-1990: Mirrabooka, Balga, Koondoola, Girrawheen, Craigie/Whitfords, Padbury, Woodvale.

It is difficult to summarise so much individual and group service in so many different parish schools, over more than one hundred and fifty years. Perhaps, these words from a tribute paid to the forty-one sisters who had taught at Bayswater, and to its last Mercy principal,⁷² who finished in 1988, might say something. The tribute ran:

Sisters, we acknowledge you all and the loving service you have given and we pray that we can carry on the Mercy vision in the years to come.

At times, the Mercy vision had been notably innovative. In 1978, for example, the Commissioner for Community Relations, Al Grassby, visiting St. Anne's School, Harvey, was "tremendously impressed" with the school's approach to its multicultural nature. He stressed that the school was "ten years ahead of most primary schools across Australia".⁷³

The Task Force Concept

In 1974, another innovative idea saw the Perth Mercies part of the establishment of a systemic school in the newly developing area of Greenwood-Hamersley, about fourteen miles north of Perth. This new concept of Mercy involvement led to four sisters committing themselves to the people in the area for five years. They came as a small community living among the people in an ordinary house and collaborating with them in their efforts to develop a Christian community. The most obvious need was seen as a school, and so two of the sisters helped establish and staff a primary school for the area.⁷⁴ It was called Liwara, a community of people gathering together. The school

was seen as part of a comprehensive programme to children, youth, parents, and senior citizens. The other two sisters acted as resource persons for programmes designed to meet people in their daily life situations.

Many in the church community felt that religious had a special contribution to make at this time to help the transition from a religious-staffed catholic school system to one run by lay teachers. The concept was worked out in discussion with others, more particularly with Dr. Peter Tannock of the University of Western Australia.

As the concept involved a preparedness by the sisters to move on when others were formed to take their place, it was hoped that the lay members of the parish community would experience an increase of responsibility within the church. Parent cooperation did become remarkable. The task force idea meant that the sisters were due to move out at the end of 1978, and a lay principal would take over. This proved difficult for both sisters and parish community, as relationships had been built and projects initiated were not completed. Mercy involvement ended at December, 1980.

Meanwhile, a second Task Force had started in February, 1979, when St. Jude's Langford Catholic School had opened, with a Sister as principal and another on the staff.⁷⁵ They had made a six-year commitment to the parish, and saw living in the area as an integral part of the Christian Community building up the school and parish. They also aimed to provide a multicultural programme for adjacent schools.

Motor Missions

The giving of Religious Instruction to children other than those attending the local Catholic school, if there was one, had been a permanent feature of Mercy education. This occurred in the city as well as in the country. Much of it was undocumented. A parish oral history project unearthed, for example, that sisters from Victoria Square were the first to teach catechism in the Nedlands area. They used a family home, and came out from Victoria Square by dray.

Religious Instruction to children in state schools had continued even where there were local Catholic schools. But, as these latter began to be closed from the 1960s on, in areas where population decrease and shortage of religious as teaching staff made their continuance no longer viable, Motor Missions assumed a significant role in the continuation of religious instruction. Three Perth Mercy Motor Missions were organised, in the areas of York-Toodyay, Bridgetown-Donnybrook, and the eastern goldfields. Operating from Kalgoorlie, the Goldfields Motor Mission visited Kambalda, Leonora, Menzies, Laverton, Leinster, Norseman, and Widgiemooltha, a small school with mainly Aboriginal pupils, on the way to Norseman. West Perth Mercies were involved with Bushies Schools, in the 1960s, at places such as Lake Grace and Esperance. Conducting canonical visitation of the Toodyay community in June, 1934, Archbishop Prendiville took the opportunity of commending them for their work for the country children.

I take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the noble and self-sacrificing work being accomplished by the Good Sisters. Not only are they

doing excellent work in the school but, at no small amount of inconvenience to themselves, they have undertaken to cater for and instruct the "Bushie" children in the rudiments of their faith. May God reward them for their zeal, piety and devotion to duty!

Another feature of this period was the movement of some individual Mercies from both Victoria Square and West Perth into central Catholic education agencies, including formation of catechists for the state school apostolate. From 1963, Sisters of Mercy provided staff for an annual Lay Catechists Diploma course, held one evening a week during the first term. Responding to a request from the archbishop, two sisters were assigned full-time, in 1969,⁷⁶ to resourcing the work of catechetics in metropolitan primary state schools, and particularly to the formation of catechists. In one way, it was a continuation of the Catholic Bush Mission of the 1920s, which had been operated centrally largely by three women religious, one a Perth Mercy and one a West Perth Mercy.⁷⁷ "Bushie schools" remained a feature for some time. In 1976, for example, one was held at Norseman for four days of the August holidays. It had a daily average of sixty children, with night sessions for adults. Staff comprised two sisters from Coolgardie and four from Perth.⁷⁸

Subiaco: Orphanage, Foundling Home, Hostel for Unmarried Mothers

The Orphanage at Subiaco continued to develop also. After the turn of the century, there were established, three main sections: St. Joseph's Girls Orphanage, where girls on attaining six years of age were accommodated; St. Vincent's Foundling Home for children under six, including boys; and St. Margaret's Hostel and St. Gerard's Hospital for the accommodation and confinement of unmarried mothers. St. Maria Goretti's School was also on the campus.

The numbers in the first two sections were large — numbers given in a return of June, 1940, indicated 264 children.⁷⁹ For many decades, the staff consisted entirely of Sisters. Sleeping was on the dormitory system, meals in one large common dining room. School was on the site, and outside contact, including parental, was strictly regulated. The children seem to have been well cared for in material, physical, and religious terms, within the confines of the system, but there was — as in most welfare institutions of the time — little provision made for the children's emotional and psychological needs. The physical structure itself contributed to the lack of individual attention. Rigid daily routines negated the development of affectionate relations between children and sisters in most cases. Even church activity was isolated, and commitment to local parish and local community doings was non-existent.

The school curriculum included the usual work of a primary school, including swimming and physical culture. Girls over fourteen were trained for domestic work. This involved cookery and domestic science, dressmaking and repairing of clothes etc., art, needlework and knitting, caring for poultry and vegetable garden, steam laundry and soap making, and bakery. Some who were talented intellectually did some secondary study at Subiaco and/or were sent to secondary school at St. Joseph's, Victoria Square. One such was Rose Clarke, a part-Aboriginal girl from Port Hedland, who had been sent by her parents

and the Broome diocese to attend High School, with a view to her being trained for teaching. Mother M. Claver, though "well aware" that Rose was too old for further studies, "had resolved to finish her off subsidy, or no subsidy." Rose was "a good child, studious, and intelligent. I feel sure she will put to good use the knowledge she has acquired".⁸⁰

The unmarried mothers in St. Margaret's Hostel also worked in the laundry. It was a vital part of the complex.⁸¹ There were almost 300 children and some 25 sisters. From the early 1900s, laundry had also been done for Victoria Square — nuns and boarders. By 1920, a steam engine had been introduced. With increased workload from the effects of Amalgamation, the building of new convents and especially the Hospital at St. Anne's, the laundry became quite an operation. Sr. M. Gertrude Bone was in charge for a lengthy period; later she was assisted by Sr. M. Carmel O'Keefe and twelve house girls fully employed. At one stage, two novices from the Square came out to help every Monday and Tuesday. Ellen Foran, a beautiful blind woman, who came as a very young child to the orphanage, in 1901, was a continuing mother grandmother figure to later generations of children.

The Child Welfare Department made a contribution to the upkeep of those children under fourteen who were wards of the state. About half of the children at the Orphanage and Foundling Home were, however, supported by charity and whatever the parents could pay towards their upkeep. In 1940, government aid, including from the Lotteries Commission, amounted to 4,000 pounds. Donations and parents contributed just over 2,000 pounds. In this year an overdraft of 4,000 pounds existed, owing to capital expenditure of 4,500 pounds. Which meant that 600 pounds was spent on salaries and wages, nothing on maintenance of buildings and grounds, and 500 pounds on other maintenance. Certainly an exercise in thrift and silent testimony to the generosity of the sisters and their volunteer workers! "No conditions whatever (existed) except the proof that the little ones are in need" Sister M. Claver, the superior, had written about this time.⁸²

St. Vincent's Foundling Home had been opened in December, 1914, especially to care for the children of unmarried mothers from birth. In the days before extensive social services, babies were actually picked up by the Sisters after their abandonment on verandah or under hedge at the Orphanage. Four years after the Home's opening, two Sisters, at the request of Archbishop Clune, had travelled throughout the Archdiocese to beg from door to door for its financial support. Additions to the Home, made in that year, were necessary to care adequately for the nearly seventy children, of whom only about a third were subsidised by the government. The new wing consisted of a large dormitory for twelve mothers and their infants, with commodious balconies on either side. A dining room for the mothers, a day nursery for the infants, and an observation cottage for special cases were included. The total cost of the Foundling Home was now 12,000 pounds of which 6,500 pounds remained to be liquidated.⁸³ Support for the Home was provided by the St. Vincent de Paul Society, who made an appeal throughout the diocese. Present on the occasion of the blessing of the extensions were members of the intriguingly named Ugly Men's Association. The ladies, of course, helped with



Left: Blind Ellen Foran fascinates the little one.

Below: Sr. M. Baptist McCluskey preparing stamps for the Missions.





Sr. M. Gemma helping with the bed making.



Sir James Mitchell and M. Teresa O'Sullivan.



Sisters gather with Eileen Lanigan as she celebrates the Golden Jubilee of her first contact with the Orphanage.



Eileen Lanigan with the senior girls.

Right: Patrick O'Hagan with a group of Sisters whom he has just entertained with his singing.

Below: Sisters gathered in the Orphanage Chapel for a celebration.



the refreshments and, significantly, in terms of a "feminine style economy" collected enough money to subsidise the "Rosary" cot.

The year 1923 was to see a mighty, never-to-be-forgotten effort in bazaar fund-raising. "Orfania" was recorded in great deal by the *Record*. A procession on November 9th ushered in the four weeks of activity. It proceeded from Pier Street in the city at 7.30 p.m. and proceeded by way of Barrack Street, Wellington Street, William Street, Murray Street, Barrack Street, Hay Street, and William Street again to Carnival Square. At least seventeen different organisations marched, including several Protestant societies.⁸⁴ *Pièce de resistance* was the Zoological Gardens display — consisting of a donkey, five silver-tailed Shetland ponies with five foals, and a tiny bull attached to a cart. The Zoo also provided a quiet black pony to be raffled during the Carnival.

The Carnival was a "gigantic fair", its goal being 10,000 pounds. Log-chopping; boxing; dancing; concert items; band performances; pedestrian events; and a host of stalls and side shows were held each evening at Carnival Square, admission to the grounds costing sixpence. A number of special events expanded the fair: a gift afternoon at the Foundling Home at Subiaco, which included a programme of music; weekly evening parades on Carnival Square by the W.A. Kennel Club; a Jumble Sale and Xmas Tree; a Cinderella Dance; a "B" Grade Football Match on the Leederville Oval (Perth v. Fremantle), which also included a sack race for youths during interval; a Combined Concert by the children of various schools in His Majesty's Theatre; goat races competitions for boys and girls; novelty events by the pupils of the Christian Brothers College and the Clontarf Orphanage; a "Show Ball" in Ahern's Ballroom; a concert by artists from the various theatres in Perth; a Cash Consultation (a raffle, apparently); and a weekly newspaper "Orfania" (price one penny) containing the full detailed programme and a deal of other necessary information concerning the Carnival.

Archbishop Clune declared that there was no other institution in Western Australia quite like the Home.

It took the infants from the age of a few days up to five years, and cared for them at the most critical time. The Sisters entered upon their work with a spirit of sacrifice and devotedness that could not be excelled. He hardly thought there was another work which fitted in so closely and so beautifully with the idea of a Sister of Mercy.

Clune also paid tribute to the services rendered gratuitously by Dr. E. A. Officer, who attended the Home almost every day quite free of charge, and to the help provided by the doctors and staff of the Children's Hospital. The sisters relied greatly on Dr. Officer and were extremely appreciative of his care of the babies and small children, who had "to make a big effort to keep a footing in their right place in the world, in spite of the greatest difficulties in most cases". Dr. E. A. Officer was often known as "the sporting doctor". He was a great lover of horses and ran some himself successfully at local races.⁸⁵

In April 1925 further additions were made to the Orphanage and Foundling Home. These were in the form of a two storey building, the ground floor of which was used as a chapel to supplant the previous chapel built in 1893

(the one now called the old chapel or, since 1989, on its restoration, the "Martin Kelly Centre"). Its upper storey was to serve as staff accommodation, which was badly needed. A new Kindergarten was erected, owing to the generosity of Mr Stuart Patterson, who paid for both building and equipment. The latter included Montessori apparatus obtained from London.⁸⁶

In 1938, it was decided to begin St. Gerard's Hospital for unmarried mothers, on the supposition that these would rehabilitate more rapidly if their antenatal care and confinement could be carried out in privacy. Archbishop Prendiville had for some years been considering the need of "the unfortunate outcast girl." These, he said, could be classified under two headings: firstly, the unmarried expectant mother, and secondly, the deserted wife. Accordingly, he had in mind the erection of a "Receiving Home" for the former. Since there would be no remuneration from this type of person, the financing of the venture would be most difficult. He himself undertook to pay the cost of retaining a fully qualified maternity nurse and donated 500 pounds towards the cost of the building, estimated at about 3,000 pounds. He appealed successfully to the Lotteries Commission to contribute to the cost of the remainder, saying that it did not seem possible "to appeal to the Public who might misunderstand the motives of such an Institution, and regard it as an encouragement to vice".⁸⁷ He personally organised a medical team of four doctors to attend the hospital. About sixteen mothers could be accommodated in the lying-in quarters.⁸⁸ It was a few years before the hospital was actually in operation, a situation brought about by war time difficulties in obtaining equipment and regulations for air raid precautions, but one which the archbishop was uneasy about.⁸⁹ Accordingly, he directed that the Receiving Home be opened to receive necessitous cases by 1st July, 1944. It began operating the next year.

In the 1940s until the mid-1960s, St. Joseph's Orphanage, in conjunction with other voluntary homes for children in the state, received a number of migrant children from Britain under a joint scheme by the British and Australian governments. They initiated the scheme "in the pious belief that they were giving them a better start to life".⁹⁰ Many of the children were not orphaned but abandoned by their families. Some were lost on account of war disorder. Having brought the children to Australia — and other Commonwealth countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa — the government largely left them to the care of voluntary, mostly church, agencies. Stretched to their limits already, most of these agencies had few resources to deal sensitively with the special problem of these unwanted children, some as young as three.

Reports concerning their treatment are contradictory. Some of the former residents of St. Joseph's and St. Vincent's were prompted by the exposure of the migrant children programme — hitherto largely unknown by the general public — through a book and parallel T.V. programme, *Lost Children of the Empire*, to complain publicly that they had been mistreated by the Sisters. Others denied this, but said they were worked like slaves, caned regularly, and shown little kindness. Still others said that the Sisters were

wonderful to them, and remembered their days there as the best days of their lives. One went on to join the Order.

Certainly the actions of the two governments in concealing from the children their family connections in Britain, and, in some cases, their true identities, are questionable. However, to be fair, records were probably not readily available in some cases. On the other hand, the trauma suffered by young people in being so transported — reminiscent of the origins of Australian society — was undoubtedly not sufficiently appreciated. It seems to have been a case where the smooth running of the system — well-intentioned though it might be — was placed before the individual. Given the ever-pressing financial burden on the voluntary agencies, inadequately funded by government, there is no doubt, also, that the children were expected to contribute their share of household duties. For some of these children, migration and orphanage custody meant a new life. For others it left scars that remained.

A letter written some eighteen years since its writer had graduated from the Orphanage at the age of eighteen, after nearly thirteen years there, shows the mixed yet basically positive blessing the institution was to her. She wrote to thank the then administrator of Catherine McAuley Centre, Sister M. Martin Kelly, for "the wonderful day" she had given them all the previous Sunday.

It was with trepidation that I came back ... To tell you the truth there were lots of ghosts to be laid and faced up to. For years I had blocked from my memory all the happenings, both good and bad, which were part of my heritage and growing up years. For me, and for many of my friends and childhood companions that process has been and still is at times, quite painful. I sadly missed many of my old teachers who made up the only family we knew. But what a joy it was to see all the photographs pinned to the lattice which traced those years...

On leaving Subiaco, she had gone to live with her father, but it had not worked out. The years in the Orphanage constantly came between them. Moreover, he was mapping out a future for her which she had grown beyond.

I did not want to work in some dingy factory or shop... My education at the Orphanage had been too good for that! The last words Sr. Catherine⁹¹ said to me were "See that you do us proud." This I have constantly tried to do by seeking the best in all things. She was a model any girl would be proud to be like. Learned and erudite, of forceful personality with a strong sense of doing the best for her pupils, Sr. Catherine's quiet pride in herself had a major impact on me. She was always, it seemed, to be looking for ways to improve her communication with us girls. How could one forget the time she was learning Italian with the broadest of Australian accents echoing down the corridors? We did laugh, especially the Italian and Maltese girls!

The writer went on to relate how she had married happily, yet Sr Catherine's words "worked away and in a way constantly haunted" her. Eventually, she decided to go back and finish the education the Orphanage had given her. At the time of writing, she was in her second year at Murdoch University doing a B.A./Dip.Ed. majoring in History and Politics.

For such a long time I have tried to find a way to set down in some form, the experiences and effects of institutionalisation on myself and the girls I grew up with. The reunion on Sunday as I listened to everyone trying to remember and tell their story since leaving has had an impact which leads me to believe that their's is a history which must be recorded... Their history is that of the Orphanage itself and in a way is intimately intertwined with the development of the work of the Sisters of Mercy in our state. Some history has been written about the work of the sisters but tends to be confined to education rather than the good work done in looking after the dispossessed and unwanted children not only of Western Australia but also of other countries.⁹²

In November, 1990, a second reunion took place, this time organised by past students who had formed themselves into an association of Children from Catholic Institutions (CFCI). The "old chapel and some-time school" was filled to over-flowing with bodies, and even more filled with excited voices, a spirit of camaraderie, a lot of laughter and a few tears. A plaque was erected in honour of Sisters and girls who had gone through St. Joseph's Orphanage and St. Vincent's Foundling Home, and the beginning of a framed gallery of photographs was made.

Memories ran freely. Many spoke of Mother Benignus (O'Sullivan, formerly of Victoria Park congregation), who was in charge of the school. One of the war orphans had memories of rows of children lining the drive to welcome them and singing a song composed by Mother Benignus.⁹³ "Mother Benignus, who was gorgeous, taught us and prepared us for our entrance exams in different fields", said another. The Mercies "gave us a really terrific education, one which we could never have had if we'd been in poor families". Girls were taught art of speech, drama, music, dancing, and swimming. There were reminiscences of movie viewing in the hall, holidaying at Rockingham, and huge Catholic school assemblies for St. Patrick's Day at Subiaco Oval. One remembers the quiet influence of a very elderly sister, talking to herself when weeding in the garden. When asked to whom she was talking, she would say, "I am talking to the flowers and to God."

An ABC radio programme,⁹⁴ interviewing ex-students and ex-staff, made some points about Catholic orphanages in Victoria which seem applicable also to Subiaco. The staff were grossly overworked and had little time to consider either the past or the future of each individual child. Government help was minimal. Sisters were on duty twenty-four hours in the day. The same staff who ran the home, also ran the school. They did the best they could with so many children, and the standards of care were usually better than in working-class homes. There was good housing, food, clothing, fresh air in the large dormitories, and medical care.

Institutionalization was inevitable, and its effects could be terrifying for a small child. "You were never a one-off". "The nuns were physically strict — in a large institution, there were lots of hand-beatings" On the other hand, some students claimed, "the institutions weren't all that bad. You made friends. Life could be fun. It was a time of security after insecurity. There was a lot of love in that they cared for us. You didn't recognise it because they weren't physically close". "They taught us to respect ourselves."

Catherine McAuley Centre 1971

It was during the 1970s that it became clear to the sisters that there was need for a complete overhaul of the Subiaco campus — now located in “Wembley” owing to rearrangement of suburbs within municipalities. Social wants were changing and so, too, were concepts of social welfare. While the traditional dormitory style orphanage was considered acceptable care at an earlier time, the Sisters could now see that it proved later to have severe detrimental effects on the children.⁹⁵

More emphasis was being placed in social welfare on the family unit. Accordingly, redevelopment was designed with the aim to keep the family unit together wherever possible, by relieving, for example, families experiencing a short-term crisis. The size of the institution was to be kept at 100 children, both boys and girls, from babies to teenagers; the environment was to be as close as possible to that of an ordinary family in a suburban community setting. In late 1971, planning to modernise the centre began. The complex was conceived as one whole, and renamed Catherine McAuley Centre.

Within the next decade, under the direction of Sr. M Martin Kelly, and a lay social worker employed in 1973, a number of programmes were created. Children in long-term residence were housed, first in group quarters within the old buildings, and then in seven cottages suitable for family-style living, with “house parents” employed. Natural brothers and sisters were kept together, and the ages of the children within each cottage covered a wide range. Up to eight children were accommodated in each cottage. A group home was also purchased in Salvado Road, Wembley and another in Connolly Street. The school on site was closed and the children attended various neighbourhood schools. In 1977, the children attended twenty community schools. Religious observances occurred in the local parishes.

Four short term crisis units provided group care while the needs of the child and the family were being assessed, and assistance was given in resolving family problems. A parent could be accommodated in the unit if necessary. Satellite housing was offered to teenagers, in transition from cottage care to independent living. A family support programme, proffering family counselling/therapy and other services, was envisaged. Finally, the day child care centre, begun in the mid-1960s for on-site children — was extended to off-site pre-schoolers and was consolidated, on daily and occasional bases. The care of the unmarried mother and the adoption of small babies was transferred to St. Anne's Maternity Hospital. Eight hundred and forty-five babies had been delivered between 1945 and 1972.

Professional staff, including a full-time lay psychologist, were employed. More staff were obtained so as to increase the staff/child ratio. An active group of volunteers, both men and women, contributed greatly to the smooth running of the establishment. The centre was now unique in Western Australia in its provision of care for siblings of both sexes over a wide age range — zero to eighteen years.

In 1979, the demolition of the building known as St. Joseph's took place, to makeway for a new administration block on the top of the hill. With this



Sr. M. Martin Kelly.

demolition went almost all the reminders of the original inhabitants of the site, the Spanish Benedictine monks. The so-called stables were left to gradually fall into disrepair. The old chapel, constructed after the time of the Benedictines, had a better fate and was kept in reasonable shape until its renovation in the late 1980s. Some of the olive trees around the original monastery were preserved. The rest of the olive grove on the Wembley site had been cleared to make way for the six long-term residences.

The whole campus, when completed, presented a very attractive scene. Each cottage was sited on a cul-de-sac bearing gazetted street names and had a street number. Essential services were provided as to any house in the area. All the cottages were designed and positioned so that they could be sold if need be. With a view to breaking down the walls between the centre and the general public, considerable finance was spent in designing and constructing roadways and walkways to ensure that the old campus-type setting gave way to a modern, open area complex, allowing for maximum local community participation.

It also imposed a heavy debt on the Sisters of Mercy, who were obliged to borrow \$300,000 for stage one of the re-development. Floreat Park Rotary pledged \$30,000 and the state government contributed a matching grant of \$330,000. Debt servicing requirements were met by a pledge of \$10,000 from the Archdiocese — to be contributed by the various parishes — and by the Centre's fund-raising.

Stage two, the short term crisis centre, was opened in July 1978, and was financed by the Sisters and the archdiocesan parishes to the tune of \$167,000. A further \$20,000 was used from residual money provided by the state government for stage one. Stage three — the teenage complex — was helped extensively by proceeds from an Opportunity Shop in 371 Oxford Street, Mt. Hawthorn. This was run by the Ladies Auxiliary. This auxiliary began in 1972 as a fund-raising committee, and continued to provide valuable service. The state government pledged a dollar for dollar grant for the teenage unit. Stage four's tender accepted was for \$208,894. (3rd April 1980). This was for demolition of St. Joseph's and construction of an administration block. The administration block straddled the top of the hill, with a magnificent view of Lake Monger, and melded in with existing developments. As far as could be achieved, the institutional look was avoided. In keeping with the new philosophy of the centre, administration was to support the various units rather than control.

During the 1980s, a number of significant changes occurred. The Day Care programme at the Centre doubled in size between 1975 and 1988. Numbers for the latter year were 104 full-time and 25 part-time day care, forty after-school care, fifty vacation care, and sixteen nursery. The numbers in Residential Care fell considerably, from 97 in 1975 to 37 in 1988. The age of the children admitted, shifted towards the adolescent age groups. The proportion with behavioural and emotional problems increased considerably.

About the mid-1980s, the philosophy shifted subtly from a "family style group" care model to a therapeutic approach, and became highly professionalised. While this approach was beneficial to some highly disturbed children in a

residence with low numbers, and seemed to have helped reunify families, there eventually arose doubt as to whether, in the long run, it best served the interests of the children. Moreover, the role of the primary care-giver, the direct-care staff in the centre, seemed to be devalued in contrast to the role of the professionals.⁹⁶

In the latter half of 1988, the Centre was offering the following services:

On Campus — residential care, day care, individual and family counselling, parent education groups, youth programme (including youth leadership), inter-generational programme.

Off Campus — regional planning/lobby group for children's services and extended agency network, community education, Herdsman Flats project (play group, health clinic and language classes).

Sister M. Martin Kelly, the lady whose vision and energy was responsible for much of the changes that had taken place, died in July 1987, aged 57. Largely self-educated in the field of child care services, she had been highly respected for her professionalism. Under her guidance, the old orphanage and founding home had been transformed into a modern family support agency. As a member of numerous committees and boards, especially the Consultative Committee to the State Government on Residential Child Care, she worked for government recognition of the contribution made by non-government agencies. Some kind of official recognition of Catherine McAuley Centre's contribution was made when she was awarded the M.B.E. Minister for Community Services, Kay Hallahan, declared that "Today, Catherine McAuley Centre has a reputation for being in the forefront of family support."⁹⁷

Homes for the Aged — Christos/Salvado 1978

Meanwhile, as these developments in child care were taking place in the 1970s and early 1980s, the campus was becoming the site, also, for homes catering for people needing care at the other end of the age scale.

In conjunction with Catholic Homes for the Aged Inc., which undertook to manage the project, planning began, in 1977, for Christos Nursing Home and Salvado Home for the Aged. Catholic Homes for the Aged would liaise with the Department of Social Security, and in them would be vested the land and building. The Sisters of Mercy undertook the responsibility for finance required above the government subsidy. The estimated cost for the nursing home was over \$700,000, the anticipated subsidy \$530,000. The hostel would cost about \$92,000. In return, the sisters were to have preferential consideration in obtaining places in the two homes for their own aged members. It seemed desirable that they be part of the board of management, but would have no other direct involvement in administration.

In July, 1977, transfer of land for Christos and Salvado⁹⁸ was registered at the titles office. The transfer was made from the Sisters of Mercy Perth Amalgamated to Catholic Homes for the Aged Inc. In making this offer, the Sisters were inspired by a post-Vatican Two model of local church as Christian community. They were prepared to forego ownership, but felt sure that their own needs would be remembered.

The first sisters entered the homes in 1978. It was Easter Week when they arrived at Christos Nursing Home. By mid-April, there were sixteen Sisters (fifteen Mercies and one Brigidine) and seventeen lay men and women. It was a first for the Sisters. Though they had their conventual prayers together, they were now being called to help form a co-educational community! Also different was the staffing, which was completely lay. Then, in November of the same year, eighteen sisters arrived at the new Salvado Villa for the Aged. They formed a community with twenty lay people, many of them friends and relatives of the Mercies. One of the pioneer sisters was Sister M. Anselm Daly, who had been part of the site previously for 38 years, "hard but happy years working for the "least" of God's little ones".

It was not long, however, before it became clear to the Sisters that they were in a very anomalous position with respect to the Homes. While the Sisters had responsibility for all deficit funding, they found themselves uneasy about the operation of the homes, especially about the freedom of the sisters to live their religious life. Moreover, the preferential treatment promised to them in obtaining places for sisters was not being given. There had been no written agreement; it was easy for the original arrangements to be forgotten.

Accordingly, after a period of several years when planning for a separate hostel for aged Sisters at Mossman Park proved abortive, the Congregation moved to take back the management of the Salvado-Christos. In September 1983, Catholic Homes for the Aged agreed to pass on the management, but it was mid-1985 before there was a bank change over, and even longer before the Sisters regained deeds to the property, lack of which was impeding long-term planning. A Mercy Board of Management was set up in April, 1985.

One Administration — Catherine McAuley Family Centre, 1989

In 1989, all the aged care and children's facilities were brought under one administration and one board. The over-all objective was "to provide a co-ordinated range of "Christian Family Life Services" to children, families and the elderly" This was done with a view to maximising the economic use of resources on the site.

A number of programmes were refurbished and extended. **Foster Care** largely, but not totally, replaced institutionalised care. This was more flexible and provided a more "normalised" environment for the child. It was relatively inexpensive. **Pastoral Care** helped place the children, identified and trained suitable foster parents, and offered them professional support through Centre staff. **Youth Accommodation** was made available at the Centre. **Family Support** programmes were offered through educative courses and workshops. **Skill Share** offered courses in skills related to employment, giving priority to people considered disadvantaged in the job market. Assistance was also provided with applying for jobs and with problems experienced because of unemployment.

The Nursing Home and Aged Hostel were materially re-developed, a number of detached and semi-detached units were built — initially as residences for the aged sisters of the congregation, but also appropriate for lay people — and a beautiful central chapel constructed. **Community Outreach**, begun in

1989, offered an individualised "home care" as an alternative to entry into Nursing Home or Aged Hostel. Support to the aged or disabled came from Centre staff or cooperating agencies.

A Co-ordinator of **Volunteers** was appointed in early 1990. Volunteers complemented the paid staff in the nursing home and hostel and community outreach, and enhanced the quality of care. **Friends of Catherine McAuley Family Centre** continued to raise funds.

West Perth and Movement into Homes

The West Perth Congregation had continued to focus on education, primarily through Catholic schools. In 1975, there were eighty sisters working in eleven schools, one day care centre, and an aged persons villa. However, by 1981, half the congregation was otherwise employed than in schools. This statement explained their rationale for the shift in direction:

In the apostolate, the congregation has stood by its fundamental aim of being involved in the Catholic school system. However, following the Second Vatican Council, it has opted to remobilise the Sisters to where the needs are most pressing. Allowing for the fact that laity are now able to perform many of the tasks formerly done by Sisters, the possibility is opened up of Sisters opting to be involved in work beyond teaching, such as nursing or social work.⁹⁹

Villa Maria Home

Villa Maria Home, Kalamunda, was originally a Rest Home with nine bedrooms, established by the Hungarian "Poor Sisters of Our Lady", just down Lesmurdie Road from St. Brigid's College. When these sisters left Perth in 1966, the West Perth Mercies bought the home for \$92,500. Over the next decade, they renovated and extended the original building, the result being a Hostel for thirty-four Frail Aged persons. The cost of this building was not quite \$400,000, for which they received a government grant for almost \$350,000. In 1988, another ten ensuite rooms were built, making the total number of hostel rooms forty-four. Four of these rooms were built for Sisters, with their own lounge, dining/kitchen and laundry areas.

In the 1980s, a number of separate units — fifteen in all — were added, making the whole complex more flexible and, with appropriate landscaping, very attractive. In 1991, a further nine units were begun. The site at the complex would then allow for a further nine. These units were Resident Funded units.

In 1983, the Sisters of Mercy with Homeswest (a Western Australian Government Agency) formed a joint venture to build twelve one-bedroom Units for rent. This was followed by a further ten rented Units in 1986. These twenty-two rented Units are the total responsibility of the Sisters of Mercy.

In 1988, the Community Centre was built. It consists of a large meeting room with a smaller area for dancing. The Centre also contains a library, doctor's room, hairdresser's room, kitchen and storeroom. This was built by Villa Maria. The Lotteries Commission donated all the furnishings.

The whole complex is thus a combination of differing styles of residency for aged people, all with access to common facilities and varying types of care.



Hungarian Sisters who were leaving Villa Maria with Sr. Rita Docherty (first left) and Sr. Anne Stacey (second left) who then staffed Villa Maria.

One on-and-off resident and chaplain who helped provided spiritual and pastoral care was also a link with West Perth memories. This was Fr. Eugene Perez, O.S.B., of New Norcia. His name is also connected with writings on the Benedictine heritage of Western Australia, including Bishop Salvado's private diary.

Craigie — Administrative Centre and "Mercyville"

Originally the West Perth congregation planned to house its aged and infirm members at West Perth, in a single storey building to be erected for that purpose. The plan was changed with the closing of St. Brigid's as a convent. Instead, there was built an administration centre and convent at Craigie, a new northern suburb of raw sand hills.¹⁰⁰ Attached was a centre, "Mercyville", for fifteen frail aged. Originally intended for retired sisters, it was extended to other women.

All the buildings at Craigie were constructed with the chapel in the centre, to give something of a village appearance. The buildings were of a very attractive contemporary design, quite dissimilar from the old St. Brigid's. A stained glass window in the convent door depicting the Benedictine motto of Pax (peace) brought back memories of the elderly Anselm Bourke and of the boarding school at West Perth, where the window was in the door leading into his quarters. Sisters slept for the first time in the new convent on 16th December, 1975. The chapel and convent were able to serve, also, the children and staff of the new Whitfords Catholic primary school, opened in 1978, with a Sister of Mercy as principal.

Nursing the frail aged was the first diversification of apostolate for the West Perth Mercies. Two sisters had become trained nurses. One, Sister Camillus, after many years of teaching music now found herself nursing the elderly Sisters at Mercyville. The second nurse obtained a job in a Government hospital. Their training was seen by some of the members as "a big breakthrough for our congregation who had so rigidly stuck to education with no other work then foreseen. These two Sisters were really breaking the ice for what was to come."

In 1983, the administration centre was changed once again, this time to two adjoining houses in Vincent Street, North Perth, not so very far from the original site of St. Brigid's, and just across a narrow side street from the Redemptorist Monastery. In the late 1980s, a proposal of a student architect for a new complex, "St. Brigid's Court", to be built on the old site aroused dreams and enthusiasm among the sisters for a symbolic return there. It would be also a physical return in the form of a congregational centre leased in the court. But it has remained a dream to date.

Girrawheen Child-Care Centre

In 1973, a child-care centre at Girrawheen was begun by the Benedictine Missionary Sisters. Its construction, in Spanish style reflecting the origin of the Benedictine Sisters, was made possible by a grant from the government, which recommended that the facilities be made available especially to single parents, migrants, and those in special need. The centre was equipped to cater for fifty children from two to five years old. A convent was incorporated.

In 1975, the West Perth Mercies took over the child-care centre. They also bought the convent. The amount paid to the Benedictine sisters, over five years, for the convent, was almost \$100,000. It was situated in a very convenient position, being near to some of their newly established schools, almost all of which were in the northern suburbs. In 1975, one of these, Our Lady of Mercy primary school, opened across the road from the Day-Care Centre. The area around Girrawheen was a State Housing area with many single parents living there. Both the Centre and the School enabled the Sisters to be in touch with these and other needy people, in a very real way.

Glendalough Neighbourhood Centre

This child day-care centre began, in Jugan Street, Glendalough, in April, 1982. A house had been converted for the centre by the Shire of Stirling, which then found it was unable to run it. The Shire approached the Sisters of Mercy through their similar centre at Girrawheen. The sisters agreed to take over the proposed Glendalough centre if there were a joint administration.

This was the original arrangement, but the centre became totally administered by the Sisters when the Shire resigned. The two child-care centres, at Girrawheen and Glendalough, were administered by the West Perth Mercies through one advisory board. Management committees had operated for child care and for each of the two aged homes from 1981. It was proposed, as at 1991, to move towards an incorporated body, one board of management acting over three advisory boards: one for the two child-care centres, and one each for the two aged-care homes. Constitutions were being developed for "Saint Brigid's Convent of Mercy Welfare Works Inc."¹⁰¹

The house at Jugan Street, Glendalough was small, and could initially take only eighteen children, up to the age of five, a number not very viable financially. In August, 1983, a small office had been added through a grant from the government. In 1991, this office was converted into extra space for the children, enabling numbers to rise to 23. It was part, however, of the philosophy of the West Perth Mercies to rejoice in the blessings connected with smallness of numbers.

"The Dear Natives"

Rossmoyne Centre and St. Joachim's

In 1961, a development occurred which echoed the original vision of 1846. Pallottine Father John Leumman had opened a hostel for Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal boys and girls from Pallottine Missions throughout the state, so that they might attend Catholic Secondary Schools in Perth. St. Joachim's, Victoria Park, was the main school to enrol the girls.

From the early twentieth century, the growing number of "half-castes" was seen as a pressing social problem. The church in Perth began to speak out more strongly by the 1940s. It was still much influenced by cultural attitudes of the time. In the late 1930s, the "half-caste" girl, Mary Rose Clarke of Port Hedland, had been a successful resident at St. Joseph's Orphanage. Towards the end of 1940, Bishop Raible of Broome requested places for two other half-caste girls of Broome. They showed, he said, remarkable mental ability.

He was anxious that they, too, would learn more than they could learn in Broome. The growing half-caste population in Broome called for workers from their own ranks who had been thoroughly trained.

Sister M. Claver of St. Joseph's Orphanage was, however, unwilling to accept these two girls. It would afford her pleasure to help them, but

in justice to our own children and the school I must decline the application. We are very short of teachers. There is only one Sister for the grade in question — and then there is the mixing of the races — they do not blend too well. At present I have at least nine half-caste children in the lower grades, and as these girls are state wards they are likely to grow up with us. While these children are small they make little or no difference to the institution but when they begin to develop they make their presence felt.

I certainly strained a point to admit Mary Rose Clarke to St. Joseph's and she has proved satisfactory *but she is alone*.

Archbishop Prendiville, in his reply, agreed with Mother Claver. Nevertheless, Prendiville continued to be aware of the need to help part-aborigines. Of the approximately 700 Aborigines in the archdiocese, most were "half-caste". One third were Catholic, mostly from missions conducted by New Norcia or the Pallottine Fathers in the North West.

The Wandering Mission in the south-west, opened in 1947, was primarily for half-caste boys and girls. At its opening, Archbishop Prendiville had spoken of their sorry lot.

Since 1901 they had trebled their numbers and their lot was a sorry one. It was said that the half-caste inherited the vices of both races. This he did not believe for one moment. He believed the blame should rest on their environment and not their parentage. Overcrowded, unhygienic bush dwellings, unproductive idle hours and scant charity would result in the growth of vice, whether the subjects be black or white.

The mission was endeavouring to make a practical and positive contribution to the complex question.¹⁰²

In time, children from the Wandering Mission, among others, were to come to Perth for secondary schooling at the Pallottine Centre.

In 1961, a girls' section was added to the Perth Pallottine Centre. The hostel was situated at Rossmoyne, within reasonable distance from Victoria Park. The Sisters of Mercy were generous in making places available, for girls from the hostel, at St. Joachim's High School, Victoria Park. The first three girls passed the Junior Examination in 1963, one of them being awarded a two-year teacher bursary by the Education Department to do her Leaving.¹⁰³ In the next year, 1962, St. Joachim's had enrolled twelve girls from the hostel, and the number continued to rise within the capacity of the hostel to house them. After a few years, the hostel also housed working girls, as they undertook secretarial and other tertiary courses. By 1978, there were 45 girls enrolled from the centre at St. Joachim's.

As with the whole question of white-black relationships in Australia, statements like that of Prendiville's above, may be judged today to show a lack of understanding by white Australians, of the true nature of Aboriginal

culture. For the children of mixed racial origin, the situation was even more ambiguous. There had been also a long history of non-acceptance of the part-aborigine by tribal people.¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, in 1988, one of these former "Pallottine kids" Mrs Cheryl Baskerville, an office-staff member of the Teachers' Union, spoke in favour of the Rossmoyne project. She spoke as chairperson of the Pallottine Aboriginal Board of Management. This Board, largely responsible for the education and management of Pallottine Aboriginal missions throughout the state, was to undertake a feasibility study with the Catholic Education Commission to determine future direction. Cheryl, formerly housed at Rossmoyne and educated at St. Joachim's, upheld the value of Father Leumann's project.

CHAPTER NINE

THE HUMAN AND THE SACRED ORDER OF THINGS

A Daily "Order" of Both Sacred and Profane

For most of the near century and a half that the Mercies have lived and laboured and loved in Western Australia, they followed a set "order of things", a daily ritual of living that embraced the human and the sacred. Till well after the beginning of the changes that we mark as Vatican Two, the same basic way of life, the same essential spirituality, the same daily ordering of behaviour marked their communal and personal living patterns.

A Set Horarium

Each day was strictly regulated in both sacred and profane matters. A set timetable of prayer and work and a minimum of leisure governed activity. The outline of a normal day can best be seen from a typical horarium, which varied only minutely — if at all — from convent to convent, decade to decade. There was some relaxation at weekends and during holiday periods, but not much. Study for professional duties was expected and times of silence and common prayer were assiduously enacted. At times of retreat, when prayer and meditation and spiritual reading replaced teaching and other forms of work, the timetable was even more regulated.

HORARIUM: RETREAT BEFORE RECEPTION

a.m.

5.30	Arise, Morning Offering
6.00	Angelus, Prime etc.
6.30	First Meditation
7.00	Holy Mass
7.45	Breakfast, Visit to Blessed Sacrament
8.40	Lecture
9.30	Second Meditation
11.45	Examen of Conscience

p.m.

12.00	Angelus, Acts, Litany, etc.
12.10	Dinner, Visit to Blessed Sacrament
1.30	Lecture
3.30	Spiritual Reading
4.00	Third Meditation
5.00	Vespers
5.30	Rosary
6.00	Angelus, Matins and Lauds
6.30	Supper, Visit to Blessed Sacrament
8.00	Recreation ¹
8.30	Night prayers. Prepare morning meditation
9.00	To rest

Work the Main Focus?

From the onlooker's viewpoint, work must have seemed the main focus of the day, whether the work be manual, intellectual, or religious. The day appeared marked by sheer hard toil. Discipline and order and steady activity were the keynotes. The premise that "the devil makes work for idle hands" may not have been the basic principle underlying such strenuous behaviour, but it was one that had significant influence in late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought. Even more influential was their basic aim, viz., the salvation of one's own soul and that of others. In the theology of the time that was a tough enterprise. And with the conviction of the Mercy Order that human development was fundamental to religious growth, hard labour was also demanded by the developmental needs of the many people being served.

These attitudes did not always lead to a healthy day, however. Ursula Frayne had complained about the lack of beneficial exercise they were unable to obtain, their duties not being so much onerous as constant. Visitation of the sick, conducted for altruistic reasons, had the advantage of providing walks into the countryside. So it was somewhat of a disappointment initially to find not very many sick people in the young colony. Once the schools began, there were always many families to be contacted, and the sick poor soon became numerous enough.

An extant Register of Daily Visitation of the Sick, 1852-1856, sets out the Regulations for the Visitation in Perth, Western Australia. It gives detailed lists of persons visited, where they were when visited, and the type of help given.

This help may have been in the form of nourishing food for invalids, supplies of grains and other necessities such as tea and sugar for needy families, prayer and consolation for bereaved, instruction in religion for the ignorant, loan of pious books for those in jail or the lock-up. Visits were made not only to private homes but also to the various institutions in Perth — the Poorhouse, the Home (for young women), the Depot at the Jetty (for married persons and children), the Hospital, the Lunatic Asylum, the Jail, and the Lockup.

As time passed, and demands grew, the day of a working sister could — and often did — become more and more unbalanced in its concentration on work. A research study² highlighted this problem of overwork in the period around the mid-twentieth century, when the stress of responding to the challenge of a rapidly growing Australian population after World War II made overwork "very much a widespread reality". The study commented on the effects of large classes in school; extramural school duties, especially in boarding schools where the same teachers were often involved with the supervision of boarders after school and at weekends; and additional tasks such as, the cleaning of the school, the care of the surroundings, and the care of the church. Financial concerns also often compelled the sisters to undertake music and speech lessons after school hours. Religious education of children in state schools often took up some of the weekends and longer holiday periods. Meanwhile, convents had to be kept in running order and religious observances fulfilled.

Visitation of hospitals and homes continued to be characteristic of Mercy ministry.

Leisure

Some time — usually one hour in the evenings — was set aside for leisure. Such periods were often most enjoyable with much playing of the piano, singing, versifying, telling of stories, and craft work. The writing and recital of poems was an early custom, inherited from Catherine McAuley, whose letters show her penchant for verse. One memento carefully preserved was a greeting in verse to Reverend Mother Aloysius Kelly and Sister Mary de Sales composed by the Sisters of St. Malachy's, Dundalk, at the time of their 1882 visit.

Unfortunately, recreation was not always as beneficial as it might have been, for sisters were obliged to recreate all together in the same room. Common recreations could become an obligatory penance, at least for some members, some times. Activity, time and locale were restricted. Work could tend to be brought into the conversation and tension could run high. Reading was restricted — "secular" reading was largely prohibited. Writing home provided some outlet, but there were severe limitations on the taking of photographs and the preservation of souvenirs such as postcards, programmes of entertainments, and other little personal memoirs.

Outside amusements were confined to the very occasional picnic. "Sports" were usually a no-no, not befitting the image of Victorian lady or of nun, though swimming during holiday periods at the beach gradually became respectable. Gardening or the care of pets, such as the convent dog or cat or budgie, may have provided some relief for the few. There was little attention paid to individual preference and need in any of this.

In the general world of arts and crafts, embroidery was a particularly traditional female craft, limited by the nineteenth century to the domestic sphere. Categorized as devoid of intellectual content, it was seen as decorative but not requiring much talent beyond manual dexterity. Much of the sisters' embroidery and other craft work was actually for utilitarian purposes — for the inevitable stalls and bazaars. While the occupations at recreation were the conventional leisure occupations of women, their suitability for producing goods of sale was also kept in mind. Embroidery, crochet, tatting, tapestry, wool work, patchwork, flower making, wildflower work, greeting cards, the embroidering and painting of church vestments, threadwork on altar cloths and table cloths, baby clothes: these and other crafts could be exercised to add to the community coffers as well as give pleasure to the maker and her companions.

The illumination of manuscripts, such as vows of profession or a feastday scroll for the Archbishop or the names of donors (to, for example, the new convent in Franklin Street, Leederville, in 1933), became something of a fine art for a few sisters with appropriate talent. The illumination of manuscripts is a very Celtic activity. The *Book of Kells* is said to be the most beautiful illuminated manuscript in the world. Sister M. Clare Augustine Moore in Ireland was an especially skilled illuminator — though Catherine had

expressed impatience at her slowness in this most famous of Ireland's arts. She could produce only "three rose or lilly (sic) leaves" a day, the foundress complained.³ We do not know how swift were her Australian sisters. We do know that West Perth sisters collaborated successfully with New Norcia Benedictine monks in calligraphy and illumination. One example remaining is in stained glass at Craigie. Victoria Square archives contain an early handwritten Mercy Rule, beautifully illuminated, with a gold embossed leather cover.

Concerts for feastdays of the Reverend Mothers provided other occasions for relaxation. So, too, the decorating of altars for feasts, especially those of Mary. Great beauty could be achieved with scraps of material and paper, loads of wildflowers and leaves, and an abundance of lights. The Bunbury chronicle at the time of the new chapel in 1924 describes the work of Sister M. Teresa Miller, then twenty-nine years old. In a small Gothic arch over the tabernacle door was "a beautiful painting in soft shades of grey, blue and white of the Pelican so expressive of what will take place almost daily on the Altar — the Mystical Shedding of the Precious Blood" West Perth sisters decorated the wall of the front parlour of St. Brigid's convent, the oratory near the Community Room, and the window of the Music Room. On the wall of the Community Room they inscribed, "The Mercies of the Lord I will sing forever". Four paintings of bunches of flowers by Mother Benedict of Victoria Park now grace the convent in Victoria Square.

"Religion" The Real Focus

The more perceptive onlooker might see, in the midst of all this activity, that their ordering principle was not so much "work" as "religion". The quest for the transcendent — in this case the Christian God, as revealed in Jesus Christ — underlay the way of life. This was the one common concern that had brought members to the Order, and welded them together as a group. "Religion" was the binding force that kept individuals committed to a life of sheer hard labour and around which everyday living was ultimately organised.

For those who could get through the often weird externals to the heart of the inner life that these externals were meant to foster and protect, the essentials were expressed in religious symbols. There were elements common to any religious system and elements peculiar to Christian belief. The former included interiority and contemplation, achieved through the practice of meditation leading to a heightened awareness of the transcendent. This was strengthened by the rituals of worship, focussing on the symbol common to many myths: descent and ascent, death and resurrection. In the rich symbolism of Christianity, this meant that the transcendent was sought in the imitation of Jesus, especially through entry into the central symbol, Jesus' death and resurrection. Communal living was but a foretaste of the loving and caring communion of the saints, which could be enjoyed here on earth but experienced fully only in heaven. Devotion to Mary was a keystone, but a long list of saints was also presented in the rule to be honoured as patrons of the congregation:

St. Joseph, St. Joachim and St. Anne, the holy apostles Peter and Paul,
St. John the Evangelist, St. Patrick, St. Bridget, St. Augustine, St. Monica,

St. Peter Nolasco, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John of God, St. Camillus de Lellis, St. Joseph Calasactius, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Angela Merici, St. Catherine of Genoa and St. Catherine of Siena.

A set of cards in Victoria Square Archives reveals a long list of intentions for which the Sisters were asked to pray when they went to Mass and Communion. They prayed for, among other things:

- conversion of sinners
- souls in Purgatory
- Bishops and clergy of the diocese
- deceased parents, relatives, friends, and benefactors
- all who desired their prayers
- deceased Superiors and Sisters of the Institute
- intentions of the Sodality of the Sacred Heart.⁴

The rites of initiation into the religious community communicated graphically the central symbol of death and resurrection. The old personality was to be left behind, a new one to be born. Hence the entry into a whole new lifestyle, with the taking of a new name and the donning of a new and distinctive dress. The ring, the leather cincture, and the crucifix at one's waist showed the willingness to submit to this new sacred order of things. Feastdays supplanted birthdays. The "old man" was to be discarded, the "new man" to be born. The plain cross of the rosary beads attached to the cincture exemplified, for the Mercies, their identification with Jesus. They, too, would be laid on the cross as he was.

The Victoria Square archives have several copies of retreat notes written for the novice about to enter into the of profession of vows. Speaking of the actual ceremony, the notes say:

While the procession is forming and you hold the lighted candle... reflect on the Virgins who trimmed their lamps to go forth to meet the bridegroom... Advance with a reverential joy to offer the sacrifice of yourself. ... In poverty, self-denial and obedience you are more rich, free, and happy than the Queens of this earth...

The Black Veil, the Sign on your forehead, which will rank you with the Companions of the Lamb — consider it as a pall, announcing your death to the world, its pomps, its enjoyments, sorrows, hopes, fears and affections. With this ring, consider — He hath bound me, with an immense necklace adorned me.

A Masculine Spirituality

It was indicative of the masculine cast of the spirituality that it was an old **man** that had to die, a new **man** that was to be born. Many women tend to move towards God through small, ordinary, everyday things and events. Not so much for them the grand, heroic journey. The severing of roots, doubly severe with Irish members, the impersonality of dress, the loss of small personal possessions that spoke of loved ones: all these were the inevitable effects of the male ambition for heroic sainthood, but their value is questionable in the feminine search for the beloved of the soul. Perhaps the veil, covering completely the hair, traditionally "woman's glory" best

illustrated the anonymity which was adopted. "The head shorn of its bright clustering locks" and then "covered by the white veil of the novice" was one of the highlights of the reception of novices at Guildford in 1903, according to the *Record*.⁵ It is no accident that the donning or taking off of the veil still remains somewhat of a touchstone of the wearer's theology of religious life.

Monastic Structuring

Traditionally, the common concern of religion had seemed to demand space and isolation to foster it. Hence, even for such active groups as the Mercies, a monastic structure prevailed. There were times and places of silence. In fact, silence pervaded the day that was not devoted to work requiring speech. There were daily nights of "grand" or "great silence", and monthly days and annual longer periods of spiritual retreat, when silence was more or less absolute. An early set of *Meditations of the Sisters of Mercy Before Renewal of Vows*⁶ has as its first Meditation, "On Silence"

...they must endeavour to make (the Retreat) ... with one spirit of submission to their Holy Rule, and of ardent and affectionate attachment to their Institute. This filial submission implies, amongst other things, a sincere love of Silence, and this Silence must be such as all spiritual writers inculcate, interior as well as exterior.

Monastic structuring also meant cloister — that is, restriction of movement out of the convent and of non-members into the convent. It also meant internal restraint. Sisters were not supposed, for example, to go into one another's bedrooms without permission from the superior. What Cardinal Suenens was later to term a sort of "house etiquette"⁷ prevailed. While the Mercies were always more realistic in their approach to such customs than some of the more enclosed orders, there is little doubt that even among them a very artificial sub-culture developed that persisted until the 1960s, and even later. This house culture contained elements dating back to medieval convents, together with etiquette associated with ladies in Victorian England, and customs that accrued among the Mercy groups themselves over the years.

Coupled with the usual freezing of culture due to the passage of time and the relatively cloistered nature of the community, there is little doubt that, as episcopal and/or the central Roman control tightened, structures became even more rigid. Great fidelity to the Rule was inculcated, without much attention being made, at times, to distinction between rule and custom. Bishop Gibney's instructions of 1909 are illustrative of the way in which the sisters' relationships with non-members was regulated.⁸

CONVENT OF MERCY

DIRECTIONS

I

The Nuns are forbidden to go down town for any purpose except to visit the sick, or to look up children absenting themselves from school, as also to administer help in cases of urgent want.

II

They are forbidden to receive seculars for any purpose except to arrange about school matters and see the Bursar about duties in her charge.

III

They are forbidden to change out of the Convent or to go outside their grounds without express permission.

IV

Convent doors and gates must be locked at 6 o'clock p.m.

GENERAL PERMISSION

To go to the Doctor, to the Dentist, to the Oculist, and to the Orphanage, but the Sisters must go there direct, with no delay, not calling in anywhere on the way.

The Sisters may see their parents and relations only once every three months.

West Perth Mercies seem to have escaped this order that convent doors and gates be locked at 6 p.m., for it was then that they did much of their visitation of the sick and the school families. They were brought to conform by the revision of the Code of Canon Law — and Archbishop Prendiville's vigilance.

The new Code of 1917 was highly significant in the promotion of authoritarianism. Most sisters entered young, frequently straight from school. The authority question was often not resolved in their lives, and rigidity could result. The Code also strengthened a certain anti-intellectualism in convents. While women in general had won the right to continuing intellectual formation, higher education became suspect for nuns. This was reinforced by the prevailing lack of interest, within Australian Catholicism, in any real intellectual development to underly faith. Moreover, there was no genuine practice of spiritual direction within convents, as in the original monastic tradition. Convents became more or less "total institutions". Authority became something to fear because of its power to hurt. Lack of true learning in both the secular and spiritual spheres affected the evolution of the group, preventing any growth in the skills of critical assessment and detachment.

A Denial of the World

Severe disciplining was considered important because the call was one to sanctity, a higher call than that of either marriage or single status in the world. The text of a ceremony of reception of eight novices into Victoria Square convent in 1912 is representative.⁹ If the aspiring nun wouldst be perfect, she would answer Jesus's call to come follow him. This meant that the world and all its grandeur was to be despised.

The empire of the world, and all the grandeur of this earth, I have despised
for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ whom I have seen and whom I have
loved and in whom I have believed and have taken delight.

Only those who have received the priceless gift of a religious vocation — the call to perfection of Our Lord Himself — can realise to the full, the preacher claimed, how sweet it is to sacrifice all to follow Him in answer to His words: If thou would be perfect, come follow me.

Keeping one's self unspotted from the world was the key motif in the sermon preached at Mother Antonia McKay's Golden Jubilee in Coolgardie, as it was in sermons at many religious ceremonies. St. Aloysius, the "angelic youth", was a great favourite with such sermon givers as Bishop Gibney. Not only was he Sister M. Aloysius Kelly's patron — she was Reverend Mother for twenty-four years and then Mistress of Novices — but also a patron of Governor Frederick Aloysius Weld, who presented Victoria Square convent with a statue of the saint. Notebooks show Aloysius was often presented as patron during retreats. One such notebook adds as goal "To know and feel the extent of God's claims on us... Am I becoming really spiritual?" Seeing that Aloysius was so "angelic" that he did not even dare to gaze upon the face of his own mother, let alone other women, he does not seem an apt exemplar for women, to whom the body with all its capabilities of creating and of nurturing is an essential part of their makeup — to be denied at peril.

The emphasis in this spirituality was on the cross, on death rather than on resurrection. The denial of worldly desires in one's egocentric self became for the women who entered the Order, an attitude of "self-effacement", a forgetfulness of self to work for souls and God, a measure of contempt for the body. Obedience was extremely important, submission of the intellect and the will to God in the person of the Superioress.

Spiritual Bookkeeping

The ideal Sister of Mercy was, in the words of the foundress, "gentle, patient, hard-working, humble, obedient, charitable and, above all things, simple and joyous." Catherine's writings show her warm compassion, a certain humorous lightness of spirit, and a practicality in helping people. Under the influence of many Jesuit and other directors, a less balanced practice of spiritual bookkeeping entered into many of the groups. To be a religious, they were exhorted, is to be eminently obliged to be conscientiously exact in spiritual duties and the exercise of piety. They should make strenuous efforts to attain to the absolute observance of the rule. Their observance was to be simple and unquestioning.

One of the Toodyay Congregation foundresses, Sister Monica Bourke, recorded her annual retreat resolutions in 1912, the year after Toodyay was re-united with Perth. She made three resolutions:

1. to be very obedient and respectful to superiors.
2. to be very careful about charity and silence.
3. never to omit a spiritual duty through my own fault.

Under these she wrote:

"There's a cross in *every* lot
And a need for earnest prayer
But a *lowly* heart
that leans on *God*
Is happy *everywhere*.

Her retreat notes on self-abnegation, at least as it was being taught to her, show what modern psychologists might call a training in co-dependence.

Speaking of obedience, her retreat master for 1914 outlined procedure when a difficulty arose:

Go simply and put the case before your Superioress and leave her to judge for you and do not be discouraged if you are refused even when what you ask for is really necessary for you. Your Superior will have to account for that and the result of the refusal, etc.

Her list of misdemeanours to be confessed at the monthly Chapters of Faults in 1913 shows the minuteness with which external behaviour could be scrutinised.

April Chapter

- I Late for Meditation
- II Late for Mass

May

- I Broke a jug
- II Late for Med-
- III Late for Rec-

June

- I Wasting lectric(sic) light
- II Spilling some ink
- III Cause of a door banging

July

- I Broke a sauspans(sic)
- II Late for Lecture
- III Neglect of duty

Monica was not the only one to emphasise detail. With their feminine penchant for the everyday, most sisters got caught in this trap to some degree. Even the energetic and practical Ursula Frayne showed concern for the correct details of the habit, material and style. Precise measurements of pleats, skirts, and other parts of dress were gradually crystallised in Mercy Customs and Guide books. Mothers Augustine and Philip of West Perth, many decades later, were held to be extremely exact about such particularities as the height at which the Office Book should be held; how the hands were to be placed on the back of the book; whether the hems of the habits were done by hand or by machine (they were supposed to be done by hand); and the height of the dimity (the white starched cloth covering the forehead). Mother Philip had a system of knocks with her ring by which the sisters were dismissed from chapel. While West Perth Mercies may have chafed under this, it was not really novel, and they were not alone. Mercies everywhere in Australia, had been treading similar paths and were to be even more strongly influenced by one another in the new national structures of Union and Federation.

For some, there is no doubt that such spiritual formation did not prevent the growth into authentic personhood and spirituality. For others, growth was hindered by negative traits, predicated on a distrust of the individual, which predominated. Passivity or its counterface, aggression; a running away from conflict; an idealization of the mind and a contempt for the body; a spirituality of control and dependency rather than of integration and wholeness: these qualities appeared in the spirituality of the time.

Stress on perfection as the goal could readily end in perfectionism and a subtle self-centredness. The undervaluing of one's shadow side with all its darkness could lead to frozen feelings, to paralysis, to an "unreal" personality. A 1989 list of characteristics of the group identity of the Perth sisters included among the weaknesses the fact that many perceived themselves to have a low self-esteem, to be too unassuming and so withholding of effort. This is in strong contrast to the earlier sisters, especially the pioneers in the various foundational centres. The 1989 research suggested that the contemporary situation was due to an out-dated novitiate training, which had led to fear-filled personalities aspiring towards a "humility" that meant a certain loss of personal identity and undue conformation with the expectations of community living.

Thus the spirituality of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia — as elsewhere — had been very much a seeking for perfection. Their devotional life in the nineteenth century and well on into the twentieth — in fact, one might say in essence up to the years preceding and following Vatican Two in the 1960s — was a spirituality based on idealisation of suffering and self-sacrifice. This was seen as a means of identification with Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross and thereby won salvation for all who would cooperate with his graces. His resurrection was a symbol and a guarantee of our like resurrection.

To some degree it was a spirituality built on a fundamentalist interpretation of Jesus' words: Be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. And: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind. It was also a spirituality founded on contempt of the world and its values, its indulgences, its temptations of the flesh and of the spirit. Sex and pride were the two cardinal sins — very much male sins.

Around the mid-twentieth century, tension was growing between the monastic restrictiveness of their communal life and the demands of their apostolic works. Retreat from the world was, in several ways, increasingly incompatible with ministry in the world. Experience of this tension was to make the sisters ready for the new attitude of embracing the world which was promulgated in documents of Vatican Two.

Spiritual Reading

Denial of the body and contempt for the world had been strong motifs in the spiritual reading material made available to the sisters. *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, was a favourite book for spiritual meditation for religious and other Christians striving for perfection. That the Sisters of Mercy were no exception is shown in the evidence of continuing use by successive novices and professed members of surviving copies.

When the large box arrived from Dublin by one of the first possible mails after their arrival in the new land, Ursula Frayne was particularly delighted by the presence of two well-bound volumes of handwritten retreat meditations by Fr St. Leger, one of their Dublin Jesuit friends. The two volumes are still in the Victoria Square archives, one dated 1845, the other 1846. It is interesting to examine these lectures and meditations and considerations. Ursula wrote

that she had used some of them for the end of year three days' retreat before the traditional renovation of vows. St. Leger often took as his recommendations for reading — apart from gospel extracts — passages from the *Imitation of Christ*.

Thomas à Kempis was an Augustinian priest. His two main themes are The Mystery of our Redemption and The Love of Jesus Christ For Us, as shown in his words and works and especially in his sufferings and death. No doubt, the theme of redemptive suffering was a consoling one for the early Sisters. There was plenty of physical and emotional suffering in settling into a new country, so far away from home, and so little evolved materially. This suffering would not have been lightened by the austerity of their religious living. Though that, too, quite obviously brought them joy in many ways.

Kevin Condon of All Hallows College, Dublin, the missionary seminary which sent so many priests to Australia during the nineteenth century, in an article on the Australian identity with its strong base in Irishism, singled out the idealisation of suffering and sacrifice, as one of the themes common to the spirituality of Catholics in both countries. The Suffering Servant as described in Isaiah and as exemplified in Jesus is a symbol dear to their hearts.

Humility, self-abnegation, withdrawal from the pleasures of the world, courage, patience, perseverance — all these were the virtues advocated by à Kempis and his more modern commentator St. Leger — as indeed, by all the priests who, over the decades, continued in the same tradition.

Ursula and companions needed all the humility and patience and perseverance they could muster, what with the shenanigans of bishops, and the well nigh impossible conditions under which they struggled and lived and loved. Writing to her beloved Mother Cecilia in Dublin, Ursula acknowledged her impatience but claims her charity. It was self-abnegation for the sake of God's Kingdom, not for their own aggrandisement. Their motto was that of Kempis — all things should be referred to God as our last end. How sweet it was to serve God by despising the world God gave comfort and compunction of heart. Catherine their foundress, had also said it in so many ways.

Sister Ignatia, the older member of the foundational group, who seems to have found it most difficult to settle into the new land, also referred to the *Imitation of Christ* in one of her numerous letters to Rev. Mother Cecilia Marmion. She wrote:

I did not think that many things that have occurred were possible. I must hope that the cross appointed by Providence which I imagined very heavy indeed, although Thomas à Kempis warns us that this proceeds from my own impatience.

Commenting that she was running from one topic to another, she continued:

I opened the *Imitation* at the words, "For always commit thy cause to me, I will dispose well of it in due season. Wait for my disposal and then thou shall find that it will be for thy advantage. I commit all things willingly to Thee, Lord. I wish that there was not too much said on future events but offer myself with all readiness to thy divine pleasure."

Saying that she did not find that altogether applicable, she ended, nevertheless, with:

I can, or at least endeavour, to act on every occasion and at all times from each instruction in this valuable book.¹⁰

There were other sources of spiritual advice from various books of Maxims and Counsels. Through these something of the spiritual wisdom of the great saints of the Catholic tradition, such as Alphonsus Ligouri, Catherine of Siena, or Francis de Sales, could be imbibed. Such books of maxims and counsels or sayings and spiritual practices are numerous in the archives, and compose, perhaps, the bulk of the surviving books of devotion.

A number of retreat meditation books also survive. Handwritten until well into the twentieth century — painstakingly so — they show the typical retreat given to the postulant before reception into the novitiate and to the novice before profession. For six to eight days long, and mostly of Jesuit cast, the meditations were divided into various points and considerations and applications and resolutions. All display the typical masculine cast of the Society of Jesus, an army of religious men founded to do battle for the church and organised on quasi-army lines. Such writings contained much great wisdom, but all too often it was presented in a very masculine mould, helpful to women needing order and discipline in their lives, but also with potential to harm if their predominant feminine mode of living was repressed by an imbalance of the masculine. Mother Mary Aloysius Kelly's Jesuit brothers were prolific in their provision of retreat meditations for the sisters.

What theology proper was presented was usually highly codified in Catechism form. *The Catechism of the Vows* is a typical and widely used example. The archives contain also *A Short Catechism on the Religious Life* and even a *Catechism of Scriptural and Ecclesiastical History*. The *Glasgow Infant School Magazine*, 1869 copy, shows that the catechetical method was very popular. Its mixture of facts, anecdotes, poems, songs, etc. is couched to a large extent in Question and Answer form.

The Stuff of Daily Living

Thus the search for perfection, proposed to the Sisters by their male spiritual directors and by their reading material, predicated an attention to the small details of existence. St. Ignatius considered it fundamental, one Mercy retreatant wrote in her notebook, that daily examen of conscience should secure steady progress.¹¹ Examens of conscience were part of the daily horarium — at noon and at evening.

Striving for perfection through the development of the virtues inherent in daily living was advocated as the surest way to heaven and to sanctity for the Sister of Mercy. Not for her were severe penances, grand ecstasies and exaltations. She was exhorted, especially by her foundress, Catherine McAuley, not so much to aspire to doing or receiving marvellous things from God, but to aspire to doing the ordinary things of every day extraordinary well. This was basically sound advice in as much as it guides us to look for God in everyday life, and in as much as we need to discipline ourselves at times through order and organisation. But, once again, the model of approach was the masculine

model of competing and achieving — even if the competition for the religious was against the self, or better still, against the arch foe, the devil.

One such exemplar of perfection through the self-competitive accumulation of small virtue gained great credence in the early twentieth century. He was the Irish Jesuit, William Doyle. Willie Doyle was the idol of novitiates of women religious in Australia as well as Ireland for some decades. He directly helped inspire a vocation in Mary Hayes of Cork, later Sister Mary Bonaventure of the Perth community. She continued to correspond with him during her novitiate, though the correspondence has been unfortunately destroyed. Willie Doyle had apparently attained perfection and sanctity through the practice of untold numerous aspirations during the day. Novices marvelled at how he could recite the number of aspirations he was supposed to recite. Many tried to emulate him — unsuccessfully, since the task was too great, even in mathematical terms. Human nature and Mercy "ordinariness" usually took over and common sense prevailed at some stage of the game... and game it often seemed to be.

This is not to decry that much in Willie Doyle's message was sound even if his practices were exaggerated, as the following quotation from his writings written into a Mercy retreat notebook shows:

What does it mean to be a saint? Does it mean that we must macerate this flesh of ours with cruel austerities, such as we read of in the life-story of God's great heroes? ... No, no, the hand of God does not lead us all by that stern path of awful heroism to our reward above. ... But sweetly and gently would He lead us along the way of holiness by our constant unswerving faithfulness to our duty, duty accepted duty done for His dear sake...

Without the slow secret mortification of doing ordinary and mostly trivial duties well, there can be no spiritual advance. Heroism is not a sudden romantic achievement, it is the fruit of years of humdrum faithfulness.¹²

Denial of Femininity

The negative aspect of this masculine kind of spiritual nourishment that underlined almost everything available to the Sisters was the denial of their femininity. Forced to try always to proceed in a rational and logical fashion, for many of the women their own highly instinctual characteristics were not allowed much play. That which was approaching the non-rational was suspect. Anything approaching real mysticism, for example, was considered alarmingly dangerous. Feminine instincts were thus often ignored because "Father said" otherwise. Natural female rhythms were underplayed or gone against, sometimes with sad effects in terms of personal physical and mental health and community well-being. For many women, to move towards such a vision of perfection was to move out of potentially life-giving processes and attitudes.

What saved most of them is that these earlier women had a strongly developed symbolic inner and outer life. Their rich religious culture gave them genuine spiritual sustenance. God for them was the numinous, the Perfect One. They belonged to a church, which was a precious part of the "institutionalized sacred" for Catholics, especially Irish Catholics. This church founded by the

Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, marked out for them the strong boundaries between sacred and profane, God and Satan, personal and impersonal, which could offer protection from being overwhelmed by dark forces within their own psyche as well as from without.¹³ Catholic ritual never rejected "right brain" elements of consciousness, appealing as it did to the imagination and senses through story, posture, incense, holy water, candles, statues, paintings, stained glass windows, music, and, above all, the sacraments and the seasons of the church year, closely allied with the seasons of nature.

Moreover, the memory of their foundress was one of joy and the hope of the resurrection. Though "the tomb seemed never closed" in her regard, and other difficulties and sorrows her frequent lot, the cross that was central to Catherine's life and teaching did not lead her to gloom. Her life was very human and her personality often playful. Human relationships with her family members and with the members of her community remained pivotal in her life.

Nevertheless, not all her followers over the years possessed her great strength and insight. As religious life became more and more structured, some expressed their unease in various neuroses or psychoses. This is the stuff which is hard for the historian to uncover, though there are traces in surviving correspondence and documents.

The Mother Archetype

One factor fostering this unhealthy development was the expectation that the love of family was to be almost totally replaced by the love of community. Friendships did develop, and very many were genuinely human and authentically Christian. Indeed, the experience of deep friendship is one of the bulwarks of meaningful community life. But the cutting off from one's roots was too traumatic for some.

To a large extent, an overdue focussing on the Superior as Mother of the group resulted. A quasi-cult would develop around particularly charismatic Reverend Mothers. This was intensified by the practice of electing the same pair of women, alternating for long periods, as Reverend and Assistant Reverend Mother. Coupled with this was a status system, based on seniority, which could lead to a degree of impersonality in relationships. This was more appropriate in times where the civil structures were hierarchical. It became increasingly outmoded as Australian society moved rapidly into democracy.

Jungian analyst, Marion Woodman, claims that the stress on masculinity implicit in the search for perfection — in secular as well as in spiritual goals — can be seen also in the stress on order and discipline and achievement of a household. She sees this as a denial of the femininity of the women within the household. It evolves, she claims, from an attempt to escape the devouring mother archetype present in the authority figures of the household — the parents, or with religious people, the superiors of the community. Such an attempt at escape often issues in neuroses of various kinds, which are the body and spirit trying to heal themselves.

Many of the neuroses of contemporary women seem to constellate around food or other substance abuse. This does not appear to have been a major

problem with respect to women religious. But for those who have lived in a religious community of pre-Vatican Two times, there are memories of odd women religious who sought their escape from the devouring mother or from an overwhelming stress on masculinity in their situation through eccentric behaviour, isolation from the normal community life, and other more serious pathological depressions. For some, it led to suppressed anger, which could threaten to overwhelm the peace and integrity of the soul. For some, it meant living in a kind of spiritual and emotional vacuum. Others, seemingly more "normal", sought refuge in acceptance of the parent/child, especially mother/child, image in their religious living, leading to a submission which was, in reality, an abnegation of personal responsibility.

The mother archetype was not all negative. It could provide healthy warmth of human contact in lonely situations. Ursula Frayne — and the other pioneers — were not beyond comforting themselves with the thought of the maternal and sisterly care still emanating from Baggot Street. Ursula wrote, on the arrival of reinforcements in the persons of Francis Goold and two postulants, and on hearing that Rev. Mother Cecilia Marmion intended to have one or two Sisters in training for the Perth Mission:

My own beloved Reverend Mother... may Almighty God give you an eternal reward for all your more than maternal kindness to your poor far-away children. ... The very thought of all the sacrifices you have made to promote our comfort and happiness makes me shed tears of gratitude to God for His bounty in providing us with such a Mother, friend and benefactress.

She signed herself, "Your ever fondly attached child in J.C."

The mother archetype fitted comfortably with the social structures of Ursula's day. In particular, the symbol of Mary, as Mother and Our Lady, brought much consolation to lonely women. Mary vividly expressed the maternal archetype. Not only did she show a motherly care for her children, but she had the power to help. She was the radiant Queen of Heaven and of Earth, and, as such, was a symbol of the feminine raised to a level with the masculine divine. The sisters may not have been able to articulate their awareness of the archetypal value for their femininity, of Mary's rich symbolism, but there is no doubt — from the place that Mary and devotion to Mary played in their personal and communal lives — that they intuited this. Daily prayers to Mary included the Magnificat, the Litany of Our Lady, the Hail Mary, hymns and prayers for special favours or on special occasions. The daily recital of the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary kept her image constantly in mind. Paintings, statues, altars in the chapel, oratories in the corridors, grottos in the grounds, medals, rosary beads, May devotions, processions around the grounds on certain feasts: all expressed and reinforced Mary's influence. The Institute was dedicated to Our Lady as Mother of Mercy, and every convent, in a special way, was under her patronage. Every sister wore Mary's beads dangling from her cincture. "Mary" was included in her religious title.

Perhaps the exaltation of Mary, the mysterious Virgin, whose purity the sisters tried to emulate, distorted the image of the woman Mary and helped push the humanity of the sisters further inwards behind their veils and voluminous habits. But Mary was, too, the Mother of Mercy and, as such, provided some

feeling comfort and warmth in what might so easily have been a sterile environment.

Friendship in Sisterhood

Friendship or "sisterhood" was gradually seen to be a more adult way of bonding in community. A community based on a model of genuine friendship eliminated undue reliance on or reaction to the personality of the superior. With young novices and sisters, there may have been the intense type of admiring friendship towards an older companion which was common enough among young girls of the time, and which could be a valuable step on the road to maturity. In single-sex schools and in novitiates, it was a valid enough alternative to flirtation with the opposite sex. In some ways, the friendship was legitimised in the novitiate practice of placing a newcomer in the care of a more established member, who became her "guardian angel".

On the other hand, fear of intimacy and affection, and especially fear of latent or active homosexuality, was present in customs that discouraged too intense a friendship. While a teenage "crush" — or "grá" in the Gaelic tongue — was permissible to some extent, too intimate a relationship between more adult members was dangerous to the vow of chastity. Hence, "particular friendships" were prohibited. For some in authority, and for some under them, a lack of insight confused such "p.fs" and those friendships which their foundress had described as

a source of great happiness, for which I thank God, a pure, heartfelt friendship which renews the powers of mind and body.¹⁴

The contemporary women's movement has helped many women develop again the gift of friendship. Religious orders of women have always had that gift. The hierarchical (masculine) structures of authority tended to destroy it to some extent, but it survived. For most sisters, friendship with one or more of one's companions remained a most precious part of the hundredfold which Jesus had promised to those who had left all to follow him.

Women's Culture — a Continuity of Small Things

In many ways, the daily life of a sister was not all that different from the life of many another woman. There is a certain continuity established between generations of women through what has been called "the order of things" ... the daily routine of living — of cooking and eating meals, of doing the housework, the washing, the making of beds, the cleaning of the home, the shopping, the talk with a neighbour over the side fence. Naming communities of church women "Religious Orders", reminds us of the significance of a basic routine in the life of such a group.

Nuns participated in much of women's culture, though they were excluded from much of it. Women religious established an order of things, remarkably similar but also notably different from Order to Order. The visiting sister could feel at home in a convent of her own Order, even if she did not know any of the members there. In the long run, women lived their lives contentedly in the pursuit of the mundane matters of daily existence; the spirituality and the humanity of the Mercy sisters evolved basically around and through those

small things. The spirituality being preached at them may have been couched in grand masculine terminology. In actuality, as women, they easily learnt to look for God in everyday life.

Practicality

Life for the sisters demanded that they manage convents and other institutions smoothly. In this, they were akin to the women running an untold number of households throughout the country. Practicality was indispensable, and was a particular trait of the various Mercy groups. Catherine McAuley had been eminently sensible and down-to-earth in her approach to life and to work. She seems to have passed this characteristic onto her future companions. There is evident, in all periods of Mercy history, an enjoyment of little events, an appreciation of the stuff of daily living, an embrace of such as the foundation of their search for God. The routine and rituals could be freeing as well as irksome.

Though much of the framework was monastic, Mercy spirituality was an apostolic spirituality, intended to support a life spent in helping others. Mercy virtues — as inculcated by Catherine McAuley and developed by the early members — included not only dependence on divine Providence but a support for one another, a nurturing of life, an unconditional love which embraces all and cares for all, especially the needy. They are unromantic and realistic virtues, non-possessive, mutual, and steadfast. When visiting the sick poor, said Catherine, the sisters should first attend to their physical needs, and “endeavour in every practical way to promote the ease, comfort and cleanliness of the sick person.” She advocated flexibility in responding to needs. “The poor need help today, not next week”. For her, prudence overruled undue enthusiasm or fanaticism. “We must not make too many laws”, she wrote. “If we pull the strings too tight, they will break”. Education was “to fit the children for earth without unfitting them for Heaven”. She told one clergyman she had to be, not only “simple as a Dove” but also “prudent as a Serpent”; and, she concluded, “since there is very little good can be accomplished, or evil avoided, without the aid of money, we must look after it in small as well as in great matters”

Rhythms of Life

The conventual female culture revolved around the rhythms of life in community: housekeeping and cleanliness, health and sickness, cooking and eating of meals, management of time in other ways, making ends meet. Some sisters — usually the “lay” sisters — devoted most of their day to household duties, to the care of the public rooms such as chapel and parlour, and the communal rooms such as community room, office, dining room or “refectory”. Some lay sisters, depending on the size of the community and the presence or otherwise of boarders, spent their entire day in the kitchen or the laundry. Sisters engaged in outside duties, such as teaching, were not entirely exempt from household chores. A list of “charges” outlined their area of responsibility. All took part in the annual spring cleaning, probably during Holy Week.

The physical layout of convents was markedly similar. There was the entrance hall with a parlour on each side, one often acting also as sacristy. There was

a door to mark enclosure; it led into an inside corridor running the breadth of the building. On the ground floor would be the dining room, the kitchen (perhaps in a side wing or a basement), the community room, office, and music room, and the chapel. Upstairs would be the bedrooms (cells), and sometimes the community room. If there were novices, they would have a separate meeting room and their cells would be somewhat apart. If the convent also housed boarders, their dormitory, dining room and study-come-recreation room would probably be in a side wing.

Given the size of many convents and the multiplicity of tasks in which the sisters engaged, it was to be expected that they might employ some outside help. Women might be engaged within the house to help with kitchen or house work. These might be local women happy to work for some hours each week; or they might be young women who had been in the Sisters' Orphanage. In many an instance, the convent became the only real home these latter women knew. Often, too, there was a gardener or odd-job man living in a shed in the back yard. The sisters gave him his meals and kept an eye on him when he was sick.

Meals

Meals were an important element in the convent day. Ritual surrounding meals included processing from chapel to and from the dining room, grace before meals, spiritual reading during it, and thanksgiving prayer at the conclusion. Tables were without cloths, crockery and cutlery were utilitarian, and stools replaced chairs. Each sister had her own damask serviette. West Perth had drawers in the dining tables for personal crockery and cutlery. Each sister was issued with plate, cup and saucer, mug (to be used only at morning and afternoon tea), bowl for sweets, cutlery, and serviette. Each did her own washing-up. Father who said Mass was fed in the convent parlour, where the furniture, table settings and the food were more elaborate. Convent parlours, in fact, tended to be homes for some lovely pieces of woodwork. They also exhibited some beautiful pianos, for the parlour often doubled as a music room.

In the convent dining room, food was usually plain but nourishing, and revealed the Irish origins of the groups. Potatoes, sausages, cabbage, and the Sunday roast were inevitable. Favourite recipes of the cook were written into a recipe book, often complete with household tips and remedies for various ills. One very early book includes intriguing recipes for the infirmary, such as "Toast Water" and "Rice Water". The infirmarian is exhorted not to throw away the toast when finished, but to give it to the kitchen.

The sister in the school or hospital had little if any chance of engaging in this most feminine of occupations. The practice of using lay sisters as cooks deprived most of the nuns of the opportunity to work in the kitchen. The danger for the sister cooks was that it could become cooking without meaning, especially when boarders swelled numbers. Mercy spirituality did, nevertheless, conduce to looking upon domestic duties — any duties — as a path to spiritual growth. Some wonderfully serene lay sisters did ensue. In places such as Coolgardie they were, in many ways, the heart of the community.

Meals were mostly eaten in silence, except for festive occasions. Then they became real celebrations. On special feast days and jubilees, the meal could be quite elaborate. A few menus for Sisters' Jubilee dinners at St. Anne's survive. They include such specialities as "Chicken Chantilly with Austrian Quenelles", "Ham Lilies", "Queen Anne Potatoes", "Passionfruit Ambrosia with Whipped Cream", and "Killowen Tartlets with Brandy Butter Sauce."

It was not a characteristic of the Mercies to go in for great fasts. The fasts of the church were observed, and also some peculiar to the order, but these were all honoured with moderation. On the whole, the sisters were admonished to eat well. Ursula Frayne reassured Reverend Mother Cecilia that they were getting enough to eat, including fresh vegetables and fruit. Over the years, many a convent grew its own vegies and had some fruit trees.

Demanding apostolic tasks required physical and mental health. Novices who did not finish their meals were looked upon with suspicion. Though the silence surrounding meals was meant to foster contemplation of spirit, there was perhaps the stronger attitude that eating was a necessary concomitant to ministry rather than a mode of worship or meditation.

Care of the Body

Cleanliness was endemic in convent precincts. One might even query as to whether it reached the status of an addiction, and was connected in some way with the undervaluing of the body that prevailed theologically. Less subtly, however, Mercy experience in Europe had reinforced the belief in the value of cleanliness. Mercy sisters in England and Ireland had been part of the reform movement within nursing which set up new standards of hygiene and devotion to duty. In the attitudes of the day, filth was connected with poverty, drink, and vice. Cleanliness and order would help the sick body and the sick soul heal itself. Paradoxically, however, the Australian climate was slow in breaking down the European habit of taking full baths only once a week.

Personal good health was not to be despised. The work of the Lord demanded a high degree of energy. The life, on the whole, was a healthy one. Sisters tended to live long and productive lives, once the scourge of tuberculosis had been brought under control.

Sisters who were seriously ill and unable to work were, however, seen as contributing to this work through their prayer and acceptance of the cross of suffering. Sometimes, though, sick sisters were given short shrift. The physical rhythms of women's lives were actually pivotal, but not really understood by the women themselves or by the medical profession. Sisters suffering from menstrual or menopausal problems were not given much help, apart from the practice of extra "sleeps" (about half an hour later rising) and the occasional early night. The traditional medical classification of the sufferer from premenstrual tension, for example, has been "neurotic".¹⁵ Problems of sexuality were shrouded in moral secrecy. Communication re sex, whether of a theological or a physical nature, was difficult.

Convent tales contain stories of women being told by doctors, or even their own superiors, that they were neurotic when there was really some physical

cause. Because of the constant work and the frequent lack of relaxing recreation, there was more fatigue than average in convent inhabitants. The style of dress, especially the headgear, was also physically restrictive and not conducive to relaxation. One of the adages was: "A good Sister of Mercy is always tired" A more healthy one, however, was the advice to a newcomer: "Eat well, sleep well, laugh well"

There was usually a convent doctor, engaged at a fee, ten pounds per annum in 1852. There was also a convent infirmarian in larger establishments; this would be a sister who could nurse, if the community contained one. Not much information was given to the patient, and treatment was traditional. But women, especially nursing nuns, were often skilful healers, using well tried remedies. There were very few unnecessary physical casualties.

Ownership

Ownership of convent property was in common, and its use was strictly regulated. Bedroom accommodation was spartan. The iron beds were narrow and not all that comfortable. The furniture was strictly functional. The walls were bare except for a crucifix and perhaps a picture of Our Lady or the Sacred Heart or one of the saints. The sister's vows of profession could be framed and hung. Wardrobes were probably a curtained corner to hang the couple of habits the sister possessed. Washstands contained a china or enamel jug and basin. The general atmosphere of the room was stark. Feminine niceties were frowned upon. There was a strong denial of sensuality and a vigorous rejection of anything approaching the erotic.

Household and other budgeting were serious matters. Scarce resources had to be carefully husbanded. Before 1860, for example, 774 pounds had been collected in Europe together with materials for bazaars, which events produced 379 pounds. The Propagation of the Faith had contributed 842 pounds. An unknown amount of contributions from Ireland had also been given.

In 1871, at the opening of the new convent in Victoria Square, the luncheon provided for the clergy, the governor's wife, Mrs. Weld, and a number of other influential ladies and gentlemen, cost £6/12/10. The matting for the new chapel had cost £3/3/0. In 1872, a second hand piano was bought in London at the cost of £16.16.0. Such furnishings were not only decorative but utilitarian, and carefully handled and preserved and passed on. In 1883, a camp oven cost the Geraldton community 5/3d, two clothes baskets 9/-, lamps 2/9d.

Sr M. Paul de Carne's diary gives some idea of minor expenses of the early 1900s. Fares from Perth to Guildford, second class return, were 2/4d. In a seemingly inconsistent entry, a single second class fare, Perth to Guildford, a couple of days later was 2/8d. Perhaps the fact that a railway strike took place that day may have boosted the cost; or perhaps she meant to write first class. A couple of weeks later, when she was returning to Perth, the entry was for first class single two fairs (sic) 2/8 (1d short), Bus 2/-.

On 2nd February, 1900, Mother M. John gave her 1/- for stamps. A letter to York cost 2d, exams and papers 2d, photographs and cards "to Liz.", 7d.

Total of postage was 11d, with change 1d, with which she bought a stamp. On 3rd September, the fact that Reverend Mother (Benedict Murphy) gave her nine stamps to write letters was happily recorded, in the French to which she seems to have resorted when emotions ran high (Aussi neuf timbres pour écrire lettres).

On 10th July, 1900, electric light was used throughout the Victoria Square convent for the first time. Two days later the light was increased in the community room and choir. The installation cost £38/9/6.

A perusal of the account book for St. Anthony's School, Wanneroo, of a later date, 1935 -, shows how much the sisters depended on music fees and donations. For the week beginning April 25th, for instance, 3/6d. was received from music fees and 1/- from donations. Not all weeks were as lean as this, but a week's working income rarely reached 10/-, let alone £1.0.0 pounds. Most of this was spent on petrol, the week's expenditure sometimes exceeding the incoming money.

There was no such luxury as personal budgets or even pocket money. All goods were held in common, and even those goods used personally by the sisters, such as dress, books, sewing materials, and the like were "to the use of" Sisters referred to "our" habit, "our" cell, "our" office book. Each sister — originally, it would seem, for laundry purposes — received a number, and this number, rather than her name, mostly appeared on books and other articles. There were a number of rules concerning usage of common articles, and permissions were needed to give, borrow, or lend.

West Perth's list for the prospective postulant of what to bring when entering is a relatively late one, but instructive.

2 black dresses; 2 black petticoats; material and binding for 2 capes; 2 nurses' collars; 3 yards black ribbon (3" wide — satin); 3 yards black silk Brussels net for veil, 54"; 3 yards white Brussels cotton net — coarse; 3 yards white Brussels cotton net — fine.

6 yards blue check toughnut for aprons; ½ doz. prs. black stockings; 3 pairs shoes; 6 nightdresses. Underclothing as usual.

Materials for sewing (fancy work and threads, black and white cotton, etc.)

Nugget set; 1 pair black gloves; umbrella; rug; watch.

Set Meditation books; *Imitation* with reflections and prayers; *Companion of the Sisters of Mercy*; Office Book; Missal.

Anything else was considered superfluous. There grew up a custom of annual granting of what was called "small leaves" — permissions to give, lend, or borrow small articles. The "small leaves" were written out by the sister and signed by the superior annually, the document being kept from year to year. They usually read something like this one:

May I have leave to give and take small amounts of materials for writing, drawing, painting and sewing; a few holy pictures and medals, and inexpensive articles of piety.

To lend and borrow requisites for writing, drawing, painting and sewing; books allowed for general use, clothes-brush, boot-brushes and polish, umbrella, torch, bag, gloves, case, apron.

One Small Leaves was still being signed conscientiously up to November, 1973, and was found carefully preserved among the possessions of the sister on her death in 1989.

Usable or losable necessities, such as soap, toothpaste and shoe polish, clothes, and umbrella could be obtained by asking the superior, and, in later decades, by writing a monthly slip asking for what was needed. Gifts received personally were considered to be donated to the community, and as such were to be handed up for community use. Money or other wealth that belonged to a member because of her family were considered "patrimony". It could be retained but could not be used by the sister for her own convenience. The disposition of "patrimony", either in whole or in part, was governed strictly by church and conventual law.

While the life style was materially simple, it was not spartan — except, perhaps, in times of severe financial distress. However, compassionate parishioners and friends usually came to the rescue then. On the whole, the sisters lived simply but sufficiently comfortably. Sharing of resources and low expectations for one's person made for efficiency of budgeting. A spirit of dependence on the Providence of God — inculcated from the beginning through Catherine McAuley's continual references to the loving Providence of God — made for much less anxiety than might have been expected, given the scope of the undertakings and the low level of returns that might normally be anticipated. Theologically, the notion of "poverty of spirit" and the sharing of all goods in common, probably made more sense than that of actual material poverty, as an interpretation of the vow of poverty taken by all professed members.

Citizenship

As communities, the sisters provided significantly worthwhile centres of education and culture, predominantly to the Catholics but not confined to them. As individuals, however, they took little part in civic affairs. Women, in general, did not receive the vote in Western Australia until 1899. Even then, the sisters were inhibited by the effects of monastic cloister, and do not seem to have exercised this vote until a decade later.

Monastic cloistering had to be overcome. In July 1900, Sister M. Paul de Carne recorded that Fr. B(ourke) had sent Fr. K(eogh) to tell Reverend Mother that the Sisters would have to go down to the Post Office to get their Certificates for voting. The Chapter of Discreets decided that they should not go. It became necessary for Bishop Gibney, in 1910, to write to the Reverend Mother in Bunbury that he wished them all "to particularly get on the electoral (sic) roll".¹⁶ He continued:

When your sisters are on the roll they can either vote or not as they please. I enclose a note which I sent to Sir John Forrest when he was beginning his campaign. You may shew these to the Dean and be advised by him."

A telegram from the Magistrate at Newcastle (Toodyay) at this same period informed His Lordship that he could not take votes at the convent, and asked Gibney to give permission for sisters to vote at the Booth. Such permission was granted.¹⁷

Bi-culturalism

The West Perth and Perth Mercy Congregations still retain a relatively high percentage of Irish members, result of vigorous recruitment within Ireland over the decades. In the beginnings almost fully Irish in membership, West Australian Mercy groups gradually became bi-cultural, as the Australian component increased. The developing Australian ethos came imperceptibly to be the more influential, despite the Irish ethnic roots of most of the Australian born. However, to this day, the two continuing Congregations remain a mix of Irish and Australian.¹⁸ This factor has not been explored sufficiently within the groups, both with respect to the effects upon the two dominant ethnic groups and the effects on members with other ethnic origins, such as Italian, French, British.

The Irish and the Australian had, in some ways, different cultural agendas. The Irish had learnt, through centuries of violent oppression under English rule, to survive by apparent submission, which, in fact, hid a fierce independence. To the Australian, able to be more direct and more open in a new land where, theoretically at least, and in practice to an extent unknown in the old land, everyone had equal chances, the Irish could seem evasive or secretive or concerned with appearances to a fault. The strong Irish sense of national injustice, at times, led to a sense of personal injustice, which was projected onto others in diverse ways. Group memories of humiliation and discrimination in their place of origin were not easy to integrate psychologically. Some expiation came through being tireless missionaries and "worthy helpers" External success became one way of coping with the fear of being an underdog. The "worthy helper" syndrome has been named, by one contemporary member, "the sin of the group"

Control of positions of authority within the communities was another. West Perth on the whole became more Australian in composition than the Perth congregation. Most of its entrants came eventually from its own schools. The sixteen Irish sisters who joined in the first half of the twentieth century never exerted the control that the more dominant Irish members of Perth did. Nevertheless, at West Perth, Mother Berchmans Deane who was Irish and, her successor, Mother Brigid Watson, who was Australian, were both community "heroines". They ruled the Congregation between them for many years. To some degree, "one was for either Berchmans or for Brigid". Irish sisters prevailed in authority in the Perth congregation until 1972, with the election of the first Australian to central leadership in the person of Sister Maria Goretti (Sheila Sawle) 1972-1977. Since then, there has been only one other Australian superior, Sister Anne Tormey (1984-1989).

The presence of the two cultures was never openly acknowledged. While Australian members did not truly grasp the different background from which their Irish associates came, Irish Reverend Mothers and Novice Mistresses lacked understanding of the developing Australian culture, with its low-key ordinariness. With the denial of bi-culturalism, there was no chance of a genuine response to multi-culturalism. The few members from other national groups got no special consideration.

To the Irish sisters, some of them very young, as young as sixteen at times, Australian sisters appeared insensitive to the traumas involved in leaving one's homeland and family, with no prospect of seeing them again. Australian sisters, more individualistic, could resent the closeness of "sets" of Irish members, and the ease with which they related to anyone from Ireland. Moreover, as the years of exile lengthened for many Irish sisters, and as no visits were made home, the Ireland of their youth could become a romantic and unreal place, somewhat out of tune with the very real and gritty Australian environment in which they lived. And, it may be added, out of tune with the Ireland of the now. This air of unreality could be distasteful to their Australian companions, engrossed in the present mundane struggle and environment.

Frequent loneliness, isolation and insecurity was felt by many Irish sisters. Ursula Frayne expressed it first. Writing to Reverend Mother Cecilia, and excusing herself for the length of her letter which was "indeed much ado about nothing", she explained: "...the only earthly comfort I have now is writing to you." Expressing in a subsequent letter, the delight with which Cecilia's answer was received, she wrote:

To understand the delight with which your long-wished-for letter was hailed you should be as we are, twenty thousand miles distant from all whom on earth we respect and love. For some time after it was handed to me by the Bishop I felt unable to speak and could only stand gazing on the well known writing. On reading it I scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry with joy, and for the rest of the day I was at dear St. Catherine's looking at and listening to those dearly loved Mothers and Sisters from whom I am separated evermore on earth. In describing my own feelings I describe those of each of your dear children exiled from you for the love of God.¹⁹

This sense of exile continued to be felt by Irish sisters over the decades. Mary McEnroe, on the *Lady Louisa* in late December, 1882, noted in her diary their "last, loving and fond farewell" to "dear old Ireland, which since we left it we esteem much more as we are never again to see it." On the voyage, she would record more than once that they daily watered the clump of shamrocks they had brought with them, and that if they looked to the North-West, they would see *Ireland*. Unfortunately, by St. Patrick's Day, the shamrocks were dead. "It will not bloom" she mourned, "except on *Irish ground*" (underlining hers). Many silent tears were wept on the day.

In Australia, such sorrow was not always alleviated by loving community relationships, and personal growth could be stunted. For some, the grieving for home was never done. The bleakness of novitiate training — and the sense of incarceration behind big walls at Victoria Square — was a poor substitute for the warmth of an Irish household, with its story-telling and music, and long hours of chat and laughter — often hiding tears — by the fireside, its coming and going from house to nearby house of an extended family. The Australians, too, had in their collective memory the trauma of migration, for all except the Aborigines are migrants in this new nation of Australia. Begun as a convict settlement, Australia and Australians came very, very slowly to accept their lowly beginnings. No less off-putting to the Irish newcomers could be the Australian posture of "It's all right, mate!"; its humour, characterised

by cynicism and an attitude of "knocking", of "cutting down the tall poppies" — cover-up for a basic attitude of nothing good could come out of Australia. Intensifying these collective low images in both the Irish and the Australian psyche, was the suspicion that Western Australia was a cultural backwater, the part of Australia so isolated that it was wellnigh forgotten.

Irish immigrants in Australia were far from silent, however, about their native land. Catholic newspapers made much of special occasions such as St. Patrick's Day, lauding the glories of the ancient race and its present day strength. The *Record* 2.3.1918, for example, declared that

St. Patrick's Day is the occasion when every true Gael gives external expression to her patriotism. The world over it is Ireland's day. It is the day when Ireland can show her strength and influence before the world. New York and Sydney, San Francisco and Melbourne will ring on that day with Irish music and Irish cheers.

Exhorting the Irish of Western Australia to keep step with their kinsmen across the world, and join in the celebration in Perth, the journalist continued:

It is a sacred duty of an Irishman to Ireland, especially at the hour when we need to show the world that the race is still united, and now more united than ever before.

It is significant that it was the overseas Irish who formed the "very powerful element", as claimed by the writer. The Irish nation lived, moved and had its being from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, mostly outside of Ireland. The note of exile, of longing for a homeland in which they could no longer find a viable existence, was a persistent one. England was the unforgiven oppressor, the "blood of the Gael" still carried the fire of freedom in its veins, the veins of "the wandering Celt" "the Irish exile". These sentiments were transmitted to many an Australian born child by "the Irish priest and the Irish nun" to whom, the *Record* claimed, Australia owed so much. The Irish heritage of so many Australian Catholics but deepened the strong sense of exile at the original source of the Australian ethos.

For the members from other ethnic groups, their cross-cultural adjustment was to two dominant cultures, not one. Irish and Australian food and other social traits were often not all that different from one another. Irish stews, meat curries, fish in batter, and potato chips were acceptable dishes to both groups. Not so to those from others lands. Food was only one of the several varied cultural tastes; it was a relatively unimportant but constant reminder of difference. More poignant reminders came with the loss of the warmth and support and sense of belonging — and often exuberance — that came from membership of a large extended Italian family, for instance.

Celtic Spirituality

One fountain of spiritual wealth that did not quite dry up in this secular, materialistic nation being built by white Australians, was Celtic spirituality. The Irish were a Celtic race, that race once widespread in Europe but now mainly confined to Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brittany.

The type of spirituality that resulted from the amalgam when the Celts conquered the original Irish people was a feminine type spirituality in many

ways. In pre-Christian times, goddesses were everywhere in Ireland. Pre-Celtic Ireland was matrifocal. While the Celts were patriarchal, they fitted easily in with the loose organisation of the people they conquered. Later, women — who held an extremely important place in pre-Christian Irish society — encouraged the introduction of Christianity as a more wholesome alternative to the cult of the warrior hero. Their spirituality was very close to nature. God or the Goddess sang for them in a hundred, thousand places around. Creativity and artistry were highly valued.

Both the early Irish and the invading Celts had little social or political structure apart from a loose tribal organisation. Monasteries were more significant in authority than local bishops. They were decentralised, incorporated both sexes, were often governed by a woman, and the abbess or abbot acted as a "soul friend" rather than a lord over subjects. The Celtic church retained this structuring for some centuries, though Roman centralisation eventually won. Yet, even then, the people were reluctant to lose their ancient traditions. Goddesses became saints, as with Brigit. Holy wells continued to be places of healing, and — in penal times — sacred trees resumed their role as places of teaching.

It is hard to know how much of this Celtic ethos had survived in Ireland by the time the Sisters came to Australia. Certainly women had no place in the authority structure of church or state. Irish devotion was now largely displayed in a very Roman fashion. But underneath the highly disciplined masculine type spirituality that prevailed in the nineteenth century, there was evident another current of tradition and piety, one that the conscious tradition tended to call popular piety and even superstition. However, for the Irish, including those who went into convents, this earlier tradition formed a very real background to their devotion.

The Irish had survived centuries of persecution, material poverty, and well-nigh cultural annihilation through this undercurrent of religion and spirituality and popular devotions. Saying Mass in the out-of-way caves or forest thickets; reciting the Rosary and other prayers to Jesus and Mary and other loved saints in the privacy of their homes; seeing God and his angels and his saints in heaven in all the little things around them and in the events of their daily lives; helping one another in "the troubles" of famine and war and civil discrimination: all this kept the old faith alive and their cultural roots firm.

Memories of such persecution and such loyalty were still strong with the young women who came to Australia in the 1840s, for Catholic Emancipation had just taken place. The great Irish statesman and liberator, Daniel O'Connell, had been a personal friend of their foundress, and a visitor to Baggot Street convent, whence had come the foundation sisters to Perth. The warmth and feeling of belonging, and strong attachment to their native land, comes strongly through their letters. The fact that they were ministering in Western Australia to a predominantly Irish people only highlighted that bond. So, too, in a strange way did their contacts with the Aboriginal people, once they began to know them. For characteristics of Celtic spirituality are close to aspects of Aboriginal spirituality. The Aborigines also find their spirit in the land where they were born and where their ancestors

lived from time immemorial. Theirs, too, is a religion with many feminine traits. Both are cosmic spiritualities.

The sense of sacred mystery all around one in Ireland is evident in a West Perth sister's account of her childhood in the 1920s.²⁰

Everything in nature fascinated me. The change of seasons were very marked in Ireland and each brought its wonder and joy. In Spring it was my delight to watch the daisies peeping through the grass, the violets, daffodils and bluebells grew in profusion in the woods and forts — the latter places were full of mystery so we did not dare go in until we were much older. When we finally summoned up enough courage to enter — we found more than flowers — there were mysterious stones with inscriptions written in languages other than English and Irish. Many hours were spent by us excavating in these places. All this filled me with wonder — as to who lived there in years past and where their souls were then.

Prayer life in Irish homes in our era was a very natural thing. The rosary was said at a certain time each evening. If visitors or neighbours happened to be present at the time, they too joined in. The phrases of the Litany used to set me thinking for hours e.g. "Our Lady, Gate of Heaven", "Morning Star" etc.

Another fortunate thing was our nearness to the Church where the Angelus rang three times a day. Everybody stopped work to say it in private or aloud, if there were people present. We never went by the Church without paying a visit. In the quietness of summer evenings there was a heavenly peace which captivated me.

This strong tug at the feelings, the emotions, the rootedness, was a solid mainstay when the weight of nineteenth century spirituality bore heavily upon them. For the better adjusted it provided a warmth and an enriching alternative or complement, which helped their feminine nature to survive, grow and become strong. On the other hand, the masculine orientation of the devotion they were being taught, if it did not overwhelm them completely, helped them to develop a virile side to their characters, and thus grow into more complete and integrated personalities.

One danger was that this folklore could increase the romantic exaltation of the Irish soul already cherished so much through the pain of exile. Spirituality could become irrelevant to daily living. Romanticism did undoubtedly occur, as the nineteenth century unfolded into the twentieth; but the beginnings of "home visits" for the Irish sisters, in the 1960s, helped to bring memories and insights closer to the reality of modern day Ireland, without necessarily breaking the ties with the past that contained so much richness.

Australianism

On the other hand, both Irish- and Australian-born members were affected by the growing "Australianism" of the society in which they were living. A number of peculiarly Australian traits have been pinpointed by commentators over the years, and it is interesting to see how these characteristics have operated in the growth of the Mercy communities.

The "tyranny of distance" is an obvious one. It intensified all those feelings of exile and alienation that the Irish sisters brought with them. It helped keep

the various Mercy groups, within Western Australia and within Australia as a whole, separated from each other. It seems particularly influential in the development of a unique goldfields spirit in the Coolgardie foundation, which, though founded largely by Australians, also had the extra factor of having come from Adelaide. Distance was especially tryannical for all the West Australian Mercies, in so far as Perth has been termed "the most isolated city in the world".²¹ It is significant that when, in the 1950s, a meeting was called nationally by Mercies in the eastern states to discuss the formation of some kind of union or federation, no invitation was issued to West Perth. The organisers did not realise there were two Mercy Congregations in the West.

Coupled with this tryanny of distance was what has been called the "cultural cringe".²² Up until well into the twentieth century, even those citizens born in Australia often called England or Ireland "home". Anything that originated in Australia was considered second-rate. One had to go "overseas" for something of value. The cult of mediocrity, what Patrick White has called "the exaltation of the average" may be seen operating in the anti-intellectualism and pragmatism of the Mercy endeavour, in some periods stronger than in others but permeating all to some extent. The sense of inferiority feeding into this cultural cringe was intensified for those Australians who were Irish and Catholic, and resulted in an ecclesiastical triumphalism, a strong devotional adherence to "the faith", and a ghetto mentality in educational and social affairs. In church matters, Catholics looked to Rome rather than to England, the spiritual home of most Australians before World War II. Even their Irish Catholicism was strongly shaped by Rome. The cloistered state of the Mercy sisters did nothing to break down this cultural and religious isolationism.

Australia has been called the most secular nation in the world. Late nineteenth century Western Australia was most unreceptive to genuine religion. Denis Pryor²³ commenting on A. B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life*, notes this:

The Aussie-battler myth takes in much that defines Australian life. There is no religious dimension to it. The religious observances which defined the cycle of the seasons in Europe led there to community festivals. But in the Western Australia of the 1890s there is a rootless remoteness which threw people back on purely private resources of courage and endurance. It is an exercise in irony to consider what "fin de siècle" meant in Australia.

The little Aussie battler, the good bloke, the real mate, the fair dinkum fellow, these are symbols of something that is true and strong and courageous and sportsmanlike and unaffected in the Australian collective personality. The harshness of the land, the violent vagaries of the climate, the isolation of distance, the call of the bush to even the most urbanised, the growing cult of sea, sand, and surf: all have gradually combined to form an attractive picture of the Australian which may have been far from the realities of living, for most of the denizens of this land, but which has influenced strongly their self-image and the impression they made on other nations.

But, unfortunately, this collective image had a dark side also. It was a highly imbalanced male picture, fiercely masculine in its slighting of women, contemptuous of the feminine in its heightened form of ockerism. In a

country which has experienced no foreign invasion (apart from the original one in 1788), the dominant Australian ethos glorifies egalitarianism, materialism, and failure in conflict, in a way which leads to a dislike of anything which is creative or truly different. It is also an a-religious country, where religion is definitely an optional extra.

Australian Catholics could not but be influenced by the prevailing ethos of secularism, if only to become more fierce in their "spirituality of the faith".²⁴ Archbishop Foley, on the occasion referred to above, claimed that "the Anglo-Irish Church of Perth had been influenced in a major way by the pioneer Spanish Benedictine monks who had reached outward with a well articulated presence to the Aboriginal people." Foley claimed, "We have been diverted from these original aims..." With the Mercies, as with the Australian Catholic Church in general, energy for those most oppressed of Australians, the Aborigines, was deflected more and more towards the other primary aim, the building up of an efficient Catholic school system. While it was, in many ways, a vibrant protest against the secularism of the environment, the Catholic school also gradually helped its graduates become upwardly mobile within that environment. It is difficult to state at what stage — if at any — the aim of social mobility, assuredly a legitimate one, became more central for the West Australian Mercies than that of following

the example of their Divine Master, Jesus Christ, who has testified on all occasions a tender love for the poor, and has declared that he would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done unto them. (Original Rule).

Historian of Religious Orders in Australia, Rosa MacGinley²⁵ states that the 1920s saw the growth of a middle-class complacency among Catholics, and this, despite depression years, was well embedded by World War II. Religious did not seriously question the Catholic Education enterprise. Religious life goals were often seen in terms of providing workers for Catholic schools. While personal religious living remained austere, there was a sense of security and achievement in their work, which did not encourage any radical challenge to the church's current form of pastoral effort.

The granting of state aid to non-government schools in post-war decades, the resultant intensity of attention paid to procuring money for capital and recurrent expenses and various educational programmes, together with the growing affluence of most Australians, has undoubtedly exacerbated leanings towards the Australian secularist ethos. It was about the same time, that the place of religious at the core of the educational enterprise became no longer sustainable. A new vision of Church was not the only heritage of Vatican Two. New images of ministry also meant new concepts of Catholic education. The Council also unleashed a stream of departures from religious life and a gradual movement away from schooling as ministry for several who remained. For Mercy schools, having moved away from the limited vision of forming "good Catholics", it has, nevertheless, been a constant battle to preserve an ethos of mercy and justice within their own walls.

The "original sin" of white Australia, the dispossession of the original black Australians from their land, has continued to infect the culture of the people.

Racism has been a constant thread in Australia's history. It began with the untruth that the land was unoccupied and so could be colonised. It continued through the years of civil war with the black inhabitants already there, the continual non-recognition of the survivors as members of the body politic, the horrendous White Australia immigration policy, the continuing discrimination against non-white Australians, whether Aboriginal or Asian or whatever. There is little obvious conscious racism in the Mercy sisters, committed as they are to a God who made all persons to be equal. Accusations of unconscious racism do, however, exist. Within the school situation, practical responses to post-World War II migration, including Asian migration, have been ready enough, at times, innovative. But a concerted, conscious effort to deepen understanding of different cultures has not been a conspicuous trait.

The failure of the West Australian Mercies to pursue their original aim of helping the Aboriginal people lost them a unique chance to see into the heart of the mystery of this continent. Ursula Frayne, despite the limitations of her time and culture, sensed the Aborigines' insight into this mystery and expressed it falteringly in her letters. As Australia continued to be one of the most urbanised nations in the world, and as West Australian Mercies limited their efforts mostly to the white people of Perth and the larger towns, Ursula's glimpse of another culture and another understanding of this land faded in the Mercy collective memory, with but spasmodic and brief reappearances.

CHAPTER TEN

COPING WITH CULTURAL CHANGE

A New Society

Around the mid-twentieth century, Western society — and eventually the whole world — began to move into a period of profound cultural change. Within a few decades, breakthrough theories in the physical and social sciences began to be combined with the discovery of insights from ancient cultures to bring about a transformative vision of reality. So radical were the shifts in our perceptions of our world that commentators began to talk about a new age of history.

Some writers have identified megatrends or megashifts in American society, the more basic of which were beginning to emerge towards the end of the 1950s. These new directions can be seen — to a greater or lesser degree — in all Western countries. They were to transmute an industrial culture into an information culture, with a parallel growth of high technology high touch characteristics. While national economies became world economies, and business planning tended to be on long term rather than short term bases, organisational structures altered somewhat differently. Decentralisation rather than centralisation, self-help rather than institutional help, participatory rather than representative democracy, networking rather than hierarchies, and multiple options rather than either/or choices became the goals of the new society.¹

Other writers have taken up the theme of the transformation of our consciousness. They have produced a synthesis of the knowledge revolution; have described and analysed the personal and social revolutions of the time. The 1980s, in particular, witnessed new and exciting learnings and experiences for the individual, as well as fresh and more holistic approaches to health and medicine, education, the social and the physical sciences, politics and government, business management, religion, indeed, all aspects of our social life.²

Many commentators associate this transmutation of our view of the world and of our own place in it, with the coupling of insights of feminists with those of contemporary scientists. Theoretical physicists have explored the nature of time and space in such a way that many of our established beliefs are being thrown into disarray. Successors to Galileo, Newton, and Einstein have developed theories on the origin and fate of the universe which are iconoclastic of many traditional scientific theories and religious precepts. Whether the current exploration of the nature of the cosmos leads the scientists to a firmer or a lesser belief in God, it is certain that notions of divinity are being radically altered for many people.³

The new paradigm has been identified by some commentators with the re-emergence of the feminine. Feminism is affecting deeply the contemporary search for spirituality and community. Our images of God, our largely uncritical acceptance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and our anthropocentric

view of our place in the universe are all undergoing drastic revision. Feminist historians are showing that the human race's first image of the sacred was probably feminine, that of the goddess. Modern creation-centred spirituality is combining with feminist spirituality and the environmental movement in ecofeminism. A partnership rather than a dominator model of society has become the goal for many. All is part of a new age which is giving rise to new questions.⁴

A New Style of Religious Life

In such a time, traditional frameworks of thought and social institutions find it difficult to survive unless they can adapt drastically to the new cultural environment. In the 1960s, Catholic religious life was precipitated into potentially life-giving or potentially destructive organisational change. The immediate stimulus came from the Second Vatican Council of Bishops, meeting in the early years of that decade. The effects were to be catalytic for both the individual members and the organisation. During the next two decades, the Church as a whole — and religious orders in particular — entered into an unsettling period of renewal and experimentation, a period full of much richness and much pain. By the end of the 1980s, it had become evident to many that the kind of religious life as had been lived in the Mercy Institute was in transition. What was to emerge from this transitional phase was not apparent. What was gradually to become clear was that the current form of religious life was entering its final days. For many, though not all, it was to be the end of "a protracted era of cultural and spiritual suffocation".⁵

Why the Need for Renewal of Religious Life?

On the surface, the early 1960s were years of healthy development and much growth. On a national basis, the high peak of entries into the Mercy Institute was reached in the years 1967/68.⁶ In Western Australia, membership continued to grow and Congregational Institutions continued to flourish. There had been a considerable increase in membership for both the Perth and West Perth communities from the 1930s. In that decade Irish recruitment had considerably swelled numbers in both groups.⁷ In 1966, Perth numbered 270 Sisters. West Perth had reached its peak in 1961, with 100 members.⁸

Demands for sisters, especially to teach in the schools, were spiralling. As elsewhere in the continent, Western Australia experienced a steady increase in post-war population, an increase due to a baby boom and international immigration. In Western Australia, also, during the late 1960s, when mineral riches were being developed, migration from other states gave a population rise of over twice the national annual average.⁹ This continued population explosion necessitated an expansion in schooling, and in Catholic schooling in particular, owing to the relatively high birth rate of Catholics and the fairly high percentage of Catholics among immigrants. There was no government aid until the 1960s, and women religious largely carried the Catholic primary school system. They were making a significant contribution to the Catholic secondary school system, as also to the Church's social welfare programme.

Functionalism

The growth of knowledge led to greatly increased professional demands within

the educational system. One consequence of their strong involvement in the rapidly growing Catholic school system seems to have been an increase in pragmatism within the West Australian Mercies. The chief function of these women religious was seen to be teaching or nursing. There was, consequently, an even closer alignment to the institutional church than had already existed. More and more, Sisters became functionaries, quasi-clerics. To some extent, they also became, through their social service institutions, the agents of the state, a factor which increased in significance as Australian governments moved into a period of state aid to Catholic schools, hospitals, and other welfare agencies.

While professional requirements increased, paradoxically, a kind of anti-intellectualism was apparent among the West Australian Mercies, always basically devoted to practicality. They were not alone in this. The Australian Catholic Church — in addition to many other Australian institutions — suffered a loss of intellectual vigour from the 1960s.¹⁰ One evidence was their suspicion of liberal education and of secular universities, at this time. Earlier sisters, in both West Perth and Perth, had university degrees in relatively unusual proportion for women of that day. Now, for a few decades, higher education was suspect. Though formal primary teacher training began in 1938, and sisters again began to attend university for secondary teacher preparation, the goal was not learning for its own sake, but purely for professional purposes. The founding of Catholic teacher training centres had, in part, been motivated by fear of the secular ethos and of losing control of the formation process. It is the opinion of some members that lack of a genuine liberal education also contributed to a certain fundamentalism in their approach to religious life, and an inability to acquire a sense of critical detachment, which might otherwise have helped them realise what was happening culturally, in the wider society and to their organisation and to themselves.

Trend Towards Uniformity

Growth in numbers, heavy work demands, and increasing supervision from the Roman church, intensified a trend towards uniformity. Rise in numbers was accompanied, especially for the amalgamated Perth group, by a loss of some of the homeliness and relative ease of relationships which had characterised the smaller groups of pre-amalgamation years. The bureaucratic aspects of both church and state had expanded, unceasingly, during the twentieth century. With the 1917 Code of Canon Law¹¹ and the growing centralisation of Australian society, the organisational aspects of the Mercies became more and more formal. Gradually, there was introduced a much larger degree of legalism into their manner of living.

Urgent need for teachers meant, at times, that women were asked to do jobs for which they had no professional training. The grace of state was expected to work miracles. It did not prevent the development of low self-images in many sisters. For pupils of this era there could be an image of women having to lead cold hard lives. It became very easy for the women themselves — it seemed almost necessary, in order to survive — to compensate for a situation of over-work, under-education, and very structured community living, by

embracing, wholeheartedly, the syndrome of "the worthy helper" a more modern version of the stereotype of "the good Sisters"

Authority and Authoritarianism

Add to this situation, the election of rather austere personalities to leadership in both of the Western Australian congregations, the choice of women who seem to have truly internalised the restrictive theology and juridicism of the period. It had been partly Mother Brigid McDonald's own freedom of spirit during most of her extensive period of administration that had helped keep many of the Perth Mercies as individuals for so long, despite their growing size and the increasing number of directives from Rome. Under her rule, the sisters seem to have had space to retain a fair degree of their natural dispositions. The West Perth Mercies had always enjoyed an atmosphere of relative freedom and uniqueness of spirit.

Mother Brigid McDonald's successor as Mother General of the Amalgamated Houses, Mother Alacoque Eustace, was personally an ascetic, and seems to have contributed to a tightened community life. Alacoque was in office from 1948 to 1960. She was faced with the tremendous task of supplying Sister-teachers to a rapidly expanding school system. Herself highly imbued with a sacrificial spirit, she put all her energies into accomplishing this task. While her efforts were highly successful, in another way they contributed to what has been termed a kind of slump. Mother Brigid had encouraged the secondary school staff to move on to post-graduate work. Not only the full-time music teachers but several others had gained their diplomas in music and drama. Alacoque eschewed further qualifications. Her own were for primary teaching and she felt anything else unnecessary. Nevertheless, she did send students part-time to the University of Western Australia.

Mother Alacoque had belonged to the Guildford/Midland Junction community at its amalgamation in 1912. At twenty-three years of age, she had been the junior. Never forgetting the poverty and health problems of the young over-zealous community, Mother Alacoque opted for security, strength, and solid but humble achievement. She was an example of a deeply spiritual woman, her energies centred on her mission. Said to be tall and bloodless in appearance, she was in her own way impressive, but a vivid contrast to Mother Brigid. Her common word was No. In colloquial terms, she was always "taking you down a peg", and she had graphic ways of saying it. As Reverend Mother Assistant, she had been in charge of teacher training. Her part-time staff had a constant battle to get time and resources adequately to prepare their students. Even the prospective (or practising) primary school teachers did not take the full course of studies leading to certification, this in the years when professional training was of growing importance. This was eventually remedied through the persistent requests of Alacoque's assistants. Despite such shortcomings, Mother Alacoque was, however, in many ways, the person of and for her time.

It was during Alacoque's term of office that the move towards an Australian Union of Sisters of Mercy was completed, the decree being passed in Rome 3rd August, 1954. She had attended a number of meetings concerning it in

the eastern states and had explained the position not only to her own Sisters but also to the Superiors in Adelaide and also in West Perth.¹² One of her councillors, Mother Philip Moylan, was elected to the first General Council of the Union, a position she retained for three terms of six years each.

West Perth did not have quite the same timidity towards further education for the Sisters. They exhibited more regularity in their primary school training, progressing automatically through the various exams required for a teacher certificate. Nevertheless, the canonical visitators of the late 1940s had felt obliged to point out their need for more thorough spiritual and professional formation. The first visitator had also warned against possible pernicious effects of university attendance.¹³ It was "inadvisable for Sisters to attend courses at the University except in very special circumstances when the Ordinary is to be consulted."

In West Perth, as in Victoria Square, there was also a narrowing of discipline in these decades. Reverend Mother Augustine O'Driscoll, who was in office three years (1950-1952), felt a need to improve observance after the laxity of the later years of Mother Ignatius Stritch's administration. It is said that Augustine was large of soul in many ways, valuing education and appointing well-educated sisters to key positions. But her manner of reform was irksome to many. She had a commanding presence and she used it. She was accustomed to bullying the girls she taught into submission — so that she could then teach them as splendidly as she did. The girls grew to like her and to acknowledge her value. But the sisters were not so docile. When she tried to tidy up community practices, most felt it negated their individuality.

Augustine was not re-elected. Her successor was Mother Philip Shine and she was in office for seventeen years (1953-1969). She, too, was meticulous in small details of rule and daily living. After the visitation conducted during her period, Mother Philip called together the sisters preparing for final profession. She told her listeners that the Visitator had stressed strongly that no candidate "without a religious spirit" should be permitted to take Final Vows. This was the "spirit of Obedience to Superiors, holding the place of God." This spirit was essential, and instructions from Rome on the matter insisted on increasing vigilance when admitting subjects to Profession. Mother Philip was felt by many of the younger sisters to be suspicious of secular education. She did not hesitate to send them to the local teachers' college and also to the Catholic Teachers' College in Sydney. But she feared the loss of religious vocation through exposure to the so-called worldly influence of secular institutions.

Spiritual Impoverishment

Members of religious orders tended to accept the conditions imposed because they felt it was part of the role of being a nun. They desired religious consecration and put up with the cultural accretions. To onlookers, nuns were often enveloped with an intriguing mystique. To some, the whole institution was an anachronism. However, some professional women felt that "the nuns got it right" in these decades of the 1940s to the 1960s. They offered a strong academic curriculum and motivated individuals to perform well in a variety

of areas. They developed in many of their pupils a strong social conscience, and were important role models for girls approaching womanhood. Despite what would now be seen as a lack of adequate professional training — or because of it — the nuns taught everything, they did everything, they were the bosses. The net result was to instil in the observant schoolgirl, a conviction that women could do everything.¹⁴

Yet many sisters could sense that things were not authentic. There was for some a sense of living in a museum, and a frustration that minor regulations often interfered with ministry or healthy relations with family and others. There was a feeling of going through the motions, a destruction of spontaneity.

Perhaps the strongest contribution to this loss of spontaneity may have come from a spiritual formation programme that was somewhat impoverished. The Mercies had been founded in the nineteenth century, at a period in church life when its religious practices were particularly depleted. Catherine McAuley clearly distrusted many of the imprudent spiritual practices common in convents of the time.¹⁵ The French influence, with its nuances of Jansenism, was quite strong on Irish spirituality, and was taken to Australia through Irish nuns and Irish priests, not only those who studied in France itself, but also those who came from the seminary of Maynooth and the missionary college of All Hallows, Dublin. Less spectacular religious devotedness found expression not so much within the framework of a strong and positive tradition of spirituality, as in pioussity or pietism. This meant a long and often wearying succession of devotions and other exercises of prayer. The on-going disclosure of the mystery of God through the evolution of the universe and the history of peoples had been neglected in favour of an almost exclusive stress on the redemptive Word and the person of the Saviour. At times, the latter seemed to degenerate into sentimentality.

Add to this the extremely rapid initial growth of Catherine McAuley's new Mercy Institute everywhere, including Western Australia, and the consequent fewness of older and more experienced members to form the young into a solid spiritual and theological tradition. From this combination of external and internal factors, there had resulted an inadequate religious formation. There was a strong emphasis on the juridical aspects of ecclesiastical and religious life, little systematic study of scripture or of the various life-giving Christian spiritualities that had developed over the centuries, and few intimations of the riches that might be gained from other faiths or from secular knowledge and experience.

There was much that was constructive in the programme of initiation into Mercy life. For many sisters it seems to have succeeded in helping them on the journey inwards. French spirituality as delineated in works of devotion such as those of the great spiritual director, St. Francis de Sales, had some positive influence. But, on the whole, Mercy formators, especially in later years, tended to ignore, or to present inadequately, the truly creative spiritual systems or ways available within the Christian heritage. With many Mercies almost addicted to practicality, much of the training into the way of life was pragmatic.¹⁶

In earlier days, young women had tended to enter in ones or twos and there had been a relatively short period of noviceship training. Now, with large numbers of entrants and with growing supervision of religious orders by Rome, the period of formation began to take as long as six years or more. Novice Mistresses commenced to play a stricter role. With considerable numbers under her care, and standards of conformity becoming higher, the Sister directing novices often had to do violence to her own nature. One former Novice Mistress at Victoria Square, Mother de Chantal, when dying, said to some of her previous charges of the late 1950s: "I used to cry within me at the things I had to do to you."

Thus, as society changed radically, and as external circumstances became somewhat overwhelming, the gaps in the spiritual and theological training, and the increasingly a-cultural nature of the way of living, began to spell a hidden danger for the Mercy institution. It was in danger of making its primary goals the maintenance of the status quo, and the preservation of established institutions.

Individuals were in danger of remaining linked into the age that was passing, and of not realising.

A Dysfunctional Environment

These developments took place within a conventual environment which was, in many ways, becoming dysfunctional. Religious identity was considered to be a-historical, not subject to change. Newcomers learned how to live in a nun's world, a unique sub-culture, wherein they had to discard much of their previous way of life. They did not learn, in recompense, how to live according to the gospel in a way that was still Australian. There was no genuine dialogue, as of equals, between the new entrants, with their direct and immediate experience of the unfolding contemporary society, and the Mercy community into which they were being initiated. The already established knew what was to be expected of a woman religious. Mercy culture, therefore, tended to be more and more static and archaic, more and more obsolete. Its capacity to witness to Jesus Christ, to concretely live evangelical values in a way which would touch the hearts of their Australian contemporaries, was progressively more attenuated.

One factor preventing a dynamic evolution of Mercy culture within an ever-changing Australian society, was the sense of superiority which members, like all Christians of the period, had inherited from the culture of Western Christendom. There was little capacity to examine their own culture, little realisation of what was needed to be able to live and preach the gospel in a new context. This sense of superiority, this knowing they had the right answers, is apparent from the beginning in the letters of Ursula Frayne and her companions. Others in the colony, the ruling establishment, the ordinary settlers, the "poor Catholics" and "the dear natives" whom they had come especially to serve, all were finally judged by the cultural and moral criteria of Christianity as it had evolved in Europe.

It was not until the end of the 1970s or later, that a truer sense of solidarity with other people begins to appear. The church's continued insistence on

cloister had fostered the attitude of living and working in "a safe environment" Its practice had led to a shielding from the real world in many ways. Like almost all religious of the time, Sisters of Mercy, founded to serve people in need, were not involved directly in the world. They came in contact with, and helped others, largely through institutions, most of them Mercy organisations. In these institutions, the sisters could set their own terms. Sisters lived a kind of double life-style, resided in a dual environment, their home base being a nun's world. Religious houses had become almost total institutions. To their pupils or other colleagues, the convent could appear an anachronism, static, closed.

Convents Catch Up With the Changes

However, a few changes had already begun to creep into the convents during the 1950s, mainly in terms of the study of theology, scripture, and secular education. Pope Pius XII had told religious they must become more competent, and this message had been relayed repeatedly to the Australian religious by the Apostolic Delegate Carboni. Authors such as de Lubac, Chenu, and Congar were examining theologies of social responsibility. Overall, the response was genuine but the immediate visible effects were minimal. There were some slight modifications in the life style, including the habit.

The Western Australian Mercies were helped to respond to such exhortations by the formation during the 1950s of the national Mercy bodies, the Union and the Federation. Major Superiors of both congregations attended national meetings, and were stimulated to introduce study programmes, mainly with the younger members. There was, on the whole, little visible change. What was pivotal, however, was that change in attitude had begun to occur. Religious life was not completely a-historical, not completely unopen to reorganisation. Secondly, the increase in level of education was probably to bear a significant relation between the later democratizing of their institutional structures.¹⁷

Renewal was needed, hinted Pope Pius XII. The situation within religious life would not seem to have had, when Pope John XXIII came along and called the Second Vatican Council in 1962, many possibilities for radical reform. And, yet, it might have provided just the right backdrop for such a conversion. In some ways, the stage was well prepared for a shock that would reach to the roots of religious life. What was required, in the first instance, was a shock which was, essentially, a "future" culture shock.

Catalyst for Change — Vatican II (1962-65)

The future shock came — and with a vengeance. The pronouncements and directives of Vatican II led to a period of gradual but far-reaching change within religious communities. Many hitherto largely unconscious reactions of individual members to the repressions and contradictions of their way of life, now began to surface. Over the next three decades, Sisters moved into altering structures, life-style, modes of spirituality. They began to re-construct the meaning of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They re-interpreted community. They partially shared leadership and decision-making.

They tried to de-institutionalise their organisations. They took on new values — relevance to the world, freedom, self-actualisation, pluralism, unity in diversity. They concentrated on personal human and spiritual development, group dynamics, new models of shared leadership. They de-clericalised themselves, re-claiming their basic lay status, modernising and, eventually, for the majority, putting off the religious habit. Ministries became individualised and diversified, and a number of sisters moved into work with non-church agencies. They began to give up their large convents and live in smaller houses in suburban streets, physically and psychologically closer to the people.

The impetus for this unparalleled activity lay in the various promulgations of Vatican II, especially those connected with the role of the church in the world and with the need for renewal in religious life. Sisters had eagerly studied the documents of the Council. Two insights within the documents made, in particular, a tremendous impact on religious, in general.¹⁸ The first was the universal call to holiness; the second, a revolutionary stance by the church to the world. Religious life was no longer a superior state or call. Everyone was called to holiness, to the practice of the evangelical counsels. And, even more revolutionary, the world was no longer a place from which to withdraw. The church — and, ipso facto, religious life — was to work towards the transformation of the world, in union with all women and men of good will.

There was one of the minor ironies of ecclesiastical history in all this activity. Women religious — who, latterly, in some ways, had been the most submissive of all groups to the church hierarchy — now, through that very submissiveness, embarked on a programme of re-vitalization, which was to lead them way beyond anything envisaged by the episcopal councillors or by themselves. Some of the consequences of the programme of renewal were not particularly welcomed by the fathers of the church.

Leadership Through Chapters and Councils

Mother Kieran Murphy and Mother Philip Shine

The last of the Perth "old guard", Kieran Murphy, began her two six-year terms of office (1960-1971) just before the Council. She and Mother Philip Shine of West Perth are good examples of the transitional leadership, whose spirit of obedience led them to take the first steps on the path of renewal, but whose background was such that those steps were hesitant and tentative. Mother Kieran's Report on the Perth Province during 1960 to 1966 shows this hesitancy. It begins by coupling "Religious Discipline and Adaptation", stating that such were helped notably by a Religious Congress held in Perth in mid-January, 1965. At this congress, a Perth Regional Conference of Major Superiors was formed. Her 1966 report tended to concentrate on Religious Discipline and on the works of the province. Her Report of January, 1972, on the other hand, lists the many opportunities for Renewal for Provincials, Superiors, Mistresses of Formation, School Principals, and individual Sisters which had been made available during her second term of office. Membership numbers also began to follow a new trend. From 1960 to 1966, only three Sisters had secured Dispensations from Final Vows, four had left during Temporary Profession, and three (of 37) postulants had left. During the next

six years, ten had been dispensed from Final Vows, seven from temporary, and ten (of 26) postulants had left. In those six years also, responding to the decisions of the 1966 Chapter, five Sisters had completed a Bachelor degree, and seventeen were underway. The number receiving Primary certificates showed a similar increase. A new note was introduced with one Sister gaining and another pursuing a Diploma in Welfare.

In her concluding remarks, Mother Kieran stated that she was optimistic about the future. She saw

this time of experimentation and transition as a period in which, "open to the Spirit", we are seeking stable values which will revitalize our spiritual lives. Meanwhile, in some areas, there is confusion and instability. This need not be so. As our Director and Guide we have our Holy Father, Pope Paul, speaking to us regularly in the pages of "Osservatore Romano". Other would-be guides who speak a different message need not be followed.

Kieran Murphy, in many ways, fitted this time of transition. Although committed to traditional religious life, Kieran Murphy was a very different personality from her predecessor, Alacoque Eustace. Born February, 1895, in County Cork, Ireland, Julia Murphy, at two years of age, took herself off to school, sat in the front row of seats, and refused to budge. That determination and initiative remained with her always. At the age of sixteen, she entered the Victoria Square community, and while still quite a junior, was elected to office of Mother Bursar and then to that of Reverend Mother Assistant. She was then superior of a number of branch houses, including The Square, until, in 1960, she became Mother Provincial of the Perth province of the Australian Union.

Mother Kieran had several traits which proved useful in this interim phase. She was very direct, without any kind of deviousness. With a smiling face and a ready wit, she could disarm opposition. Many homely and humorous tales are told of Kieran. Yet, with her decisiveness, practicality, and meticulous — and rather disconcerting — punctuality, she could initiate action. In particular, her response to the need to obtain better professional training for the sisters, especially the younger ones, was prompt. She allowed others to take action also. She would tell them to go ahead and find out, and then to do whatever they thought was right... "Go ahead, dearie, and do it."

She was also noted for her financial acumen. The church archives show numerous letters which detail the many transactions over finance she had to undertake to run the many projects and programmes initiated and pursued by her. She oversaw the construction of the new general hospital at St. Anne's, the high school at Victoria Park, a Juniorate where prospective entrants into the community at Mosman Park studied, and quarters for senior sisters at Victoria Square. In an era before government aid, she sold a city property of the Sisters so that lay teachers could be maintained at a school threatened with disclosure. She was able to deal effectively with various difficulties. To a past member asking for what was judged an exorbitant amount of money, she detailed their debts for recent buildings and concluded, "It behoves us to economise". To two bishops trying to close some of the country schools because of falling numbers, Kieran protested, "Not on your life", and gave

them five good reasons — clicking her fingers after each reason. She added to that — “But, Your Grace and my Lord, it’s the bulldozing that’s getting me” It is reported that Your Grace and my Lord felt they were the ones being bulldozed.

Kieran died as she had lived, without much ado but remaining keenly interested. In retirement she developed a morning routine of lighting lamps of intercession for vocations to the community. To a comment on this, she replied, “Darling, this is the language of love” She was always able to supply faultless summaries of world events, and kept the community involved in praying for national leaders. Her daily visit to the Cathedral for midday Mass was something of a triumphal procession in the old style of religious life. With an amazing likeness to Queen Victoria, she led the other octogenarian Sisters across the street, signalling to the oncoming traffic to stop. She died as she had acted during life, mirroring her response to the church’s exhortations to change — with a minimum of fuss, “at once”, “on the dot”

Mother Philip Shine, in her two Reports, during the 1960s, on the General State of the West Perth Congregation,¹⁹ also shows the same kind of transitional response to change as did Mother Kieran. She wrote of many difficulties having been passed through by the Congregation, but in spite of the problems involved, God had stretched over them the right hand of His Mercy. She, herself, had found — as correspondence shows — inspiration from the writings of such spiritual guides as Fathers Colin C.Ss.R (*Friendship with Christ; Striving for Perfection*) and Leen C.S.Sp.

Mother Philip rejoiced that membership had risen, through the first period, from seventy-five to ninety-eight; that, in matters material, considerable expansion in education and in other works had been undertaken within the Congregation. She seemed to find particular joy in their membership of the Australian Federation of the Sisters of Mercy, which had been established in 1957, and, later, in the formation of the “National Conference of Sisters of Mercy of Australia” in 1967. She saw the latter as another strong link in the promotion of unity and in the preservation of the spirit of Mother McAuley. She had attended the 1967 and 1968 meetings of this “Link”, where all the Sisters present had remarked on the warmth of charity and union which prevailed. It was considered unique that such a wealth of the original Mercy spirit should have been retained so faithfully in spite of the distances of time and place separating Baggot Street and her numerous daughter-Houses.

Mother Philip readily expressed her appreciation of her own Sisters of West Perth. With Mother McAuley, she, too, could say: “Every day’s experience deepens my appreciation of my Religious Sisters”. Nevertheless, her final words were ones of discretion. Quoting Pope Paul, she reminded her Sisters that the road was difficult and laborious. However, she also exhorted them to lift up their souls in hope, for the cause was not theirs, but that of Christ Himself, who would be their strength, hope, and power.

Post-Vatican II Model of Mercy Religious Life

It was not until after special experimental Chapters — requested by Rome — that the two Congregations really began to adapt their way of life to the

modern world, as counselled by Vatican II. In both congregations, most of the changes were formally introduced through a series of very powerful Chapters. It took the Special Chapters of the late 1960s/early 1970s and several six-yearly²⁰ Chapters afterwards to introduce the different adaptations.

Beginning in the 1970s, especially during the administrations of Sister Joan Flynn in West Perth (1969-1980) and Sister Maria Goretti (Sheila) Sawle in Perth (1972-1977), a large number of modifications were initiated in many visible aspects of Mercy religious life. Among those aspects which were gradually but greatly altered were the traditional uniform dress or habit, time-honoured living patterns, distinct conventual behaviour, identifiable residences or convents usually close to parish churches, ministries largely within Mercy schools, hospitals, and welfare homes. The re-imaging of these seemingly sacred symbols perplexed many, both within and without the Congregations.²¹

Personal and Communal Renewal

Nevertheless, while the years after the Special Chapters were supposedly years of experimentation, there was little likelihood the new arrangements would be reversed. Because the previous institutional model had become so repressive, the new post-Vatican II religious life, as it gradually emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, stressed the personal human growth and development of each member. Sisters began to have a greater sense of their own self-worth, of their own ultimate responsibility for their life, and of their share in accountability for the group's life and work. Christian teaching had always recognised the equality and dignity of each person. Modern philosophies and spiritualities of self-fulfilment and self-realisation were now exerting great influence. The healing of past injuries seemed vital.

Individual freedom and responsibility; tolerance, pluralism, openness, and unity in diversity: these also became cherished values, the more so as Western society itself began to break out of traditional forms and structures. The new paradigm of the human that was rising in secular society, influenced by liberal philosophies and by scientific theories of evolution, valued the intrinsic and imperishable worth of the individual. Having to conform to hierarchical patterns and role requirements, twenty-four hours of each day, as the traditional life-style of the convent demanded, could appear an intolerable burden to many a newly found individual.

On-going formation of members became a very important goal. Much time and finance was devoted to the spiritual renewal of both individuals and communities. The 1969 Acts of Chapter of West Perth quoted the Roman document on the Instruction on the Renewal of Religious Formation: "Throughout their lives religious should labour earnestly to perfect their spiritual, doctrinal, and professional development". The 1975 Statements of Chapter affirmed the policy of professional training and acknowledged the value of a wide educational experience. It also recommended that there be implemented a Human Development programme for the on-going education of the Congregation, and that an on-going programme also be devised to afford each Sister opportunity to develop as a well-integrated religious

woman. The Congregation also resolved to devise a policy of retirement. Gradually, as time and money and inclination permitted, every Sister was enabled to update herself through courses in spirituality, theology, and professional education. These courses were not only within Australia but also overseas, in Ireland, the United Kingdom, North America, Europe, Jerusalem, or Manila.

Likewise, the 1972 session of the Perth Special Chapter directed the Mother Provincial and her Council to appoint a Committee to draw up a plan of Renewal. They were to treat this as urgent and present their plan to the Mother Provincial and Council as soon as possible. Superiors and Mistresses of Formation were to receive a special programme of training. Sisters in temporary vows were to continue the spiritual and religious formation begun in the Novitiate.

In response, a number of resource people were employed to help devise and deliver a Renewal programme for the Perth Congregation.²² Sister Maria Goretti's Report to the Province in December, 1977, outlined the various programmes devised for the members to explore personal growth and development. On-going formation programmes included: province programmes, local community programmes, individual programmes, ageing programmes, diversity of styles in retreats, life and work experiences, travel opportunities, and action/reflection process. Professional training was strongly promoted.²³

A 1979 Policy Statement on Spiritual and Apostolic Renewal provided release time for every finally professed Sister after an initial ten years in the apostolate.

This release time could be repeated. The opportunity of a renewal experience overseas for three months was to be offered once to every Sister twenty-five years professed who had not previously travelled overseas. The 1978-1983 report of the then Perth Congregational Superior, Elizabeth Devine, claimed that there had been "a large investment of time and finance in fostering the development of our people at all age levels. More than 100 Sisters have had release time for spiritual or professional up-dating since 1978." The up-dating included courses in centres in Rome, Jerusalem, England, Ireland, France, Canada and the United States. This thrust continued; the report of the 1984-89 Perth administration, that of Anne Tormey, listed sixty-four spiritual and academic courses attended by almost as many sisters.

In both groups, personal growth, experienced often at a profound level, helped improve the quality of community living. Developmental help was given specifically to community groups at various times. The concept of local community as a locus wherein members shared their faith and life, and received support and challenge to mission and ministry, surfaced. Skills of communication, the acceptance of differences, the question of hospitality, the feminisation of the environment, the quality rather than quantity of life together; these elements led gradually to a search for new structures and models of local community.

Religious orders, aware almost for the first time that they were human institutions, began to examine organisational theories and management

procedures of the Western business world. Revival of interest, within the spirituality movement, in processes of discernment, especially Ignatian, also had an impact. Many of these procedures were adaptable to local community living. Regular community meetings; annual goal setting techniques; sessions for study, discussion, awareness raising, prayer and celebrations; local budgeting; discernment for local superiors; intercommunity reflections and liturgies; theological reflection on the new Mercy Constitutions; by degrees, these became more or less standard fare for life together in a Western Australian Mercy. Daily living was becoming more human and more humane. A trend towards smaller communities of residence (as distinct from work communities) and a more feminine life-style was also operating.

Congregational administration was also becoming more human. These modern procedures were especially adaptable to congregational and institutional organisation. Social and organisational planning, techniques for greater effectiveness and productivity, dynamics of group processes and communication: all found some place in the preparation for, and action after, the various congregational and national Chapters held in the decades after the Council.

Training was received for such planning, especially in the year-long preparation for the 1978 Perth, and the 1980 West Perth Chapters, both under the guidance of Brother Ronald Fogarty, FMS. Reports from the Administrations; statements of more widespread concerns arrived at through local and congregational/provincial assemblies; responses to various study sessions: all combined to form a number of discussion papers on the various aspects of life and mission. These papers went through several readings in order to become Chapter Documents. They covered the essential elements of the Sisters' life and work: mission and ministry, quality of communion, the faith dimension and spirituality, and personal and corporate responsibility. Through this long process, some quite significant innovations were thus introduced, in a participative manner which had helped prepare most members for change.

Aided by the work of ISMA on the continuing sponsorship or otherwise of Mercy Institutions, various internal and trusteeship structures were set up for each institution. West Perth had already been the first to set up a board for a secondary school when a layman had been appointed principal of Mercy College, Koondoola. The shaping of structures of accountability at each level — local community, institutional, and congregational — was a particular concern for the Perth Congregation during the 1984-88 administration, under Sister Anne Tormey.

In the 1980s, the relationship between community and mission assumed increasing significance. Prior to 1950, the church had proclaimed to religious that their commitment to mission was secondary to the primary call to personal holiness.²⁴ Now, Sisters of Mercy were increasingly reminded that they were founded particularly for the poor people in society, and — a new factor — that this involved working also against the causes of oppression. Such convictions were reflected in the documents of both congregations increasingly and more strongly from the second half of the 1980s.

The 1983 Report of the ISMA National Executive Council stated:

Community life structures are experienced by many as in direct conflict with the realities of MISSION, not so much in terms of repression and unresponsiveness to personal need (though there was some evidence of that), but of being quite out of harmony with other aspects of the Sisters' life and work.

We have moved from a system where the religious community was central and clearly defined in terms of its requirements and its boundaries.

TO

a system where the religious community is only one intersection on a large number of interlocking circles. Fragmentation is one of the results. We need a new understanding of the basics of community and of how it serves our MISSION, before new structures can be devised.

The Perth Congregational Report of 1983 commented on this and stated that "in our search for new structures and models we need to realise first that we are people *in* formation *in* community *in* mission, and not just a community who happens to live together separating community from mission".

A New Definition of Mission

In the late 1960s, a new definition of the church's mission began to be articulated which was to have profound influence on the Sisters' understanding of their Mercy call. In 1977, the National Conference of the Australian Sisters of Mercy held a seminal assembly in Melbourne, with Sisters attending from all congregations. At it, Mercy and Justice were linked. This was the formal beginning of a new orientation for Mercy mission. It was one in which Sisters began to engage in social analysis, and to seek to fulfil their ministries in such a way that they would not merely dispense charity but would work to eliminate the causes of the need for that charity.

As the church began to re-affirm its "preferential option for the poor", so, too, did Mercy statements on mission.²⁵ The new Australian Mercy Constitutions, studied intensively by Western Australian Sisters and local communities during the 1980s, together with the policies of the ISMA national chapters of 1981 and 1987, incorporated into Congregational mission statements and goals, reinforced these new perspectives at the local level. The question became, in the words of the first ISMA chapter: How could Sisters of Mercy "become more significantly involved with the most needy, disadvantaged and oppressed people in our contemporary Australian society?" The immediate Western Australian response was an awareness raising programme, including seminars, think tanks, retreats, and processes evaluating life and ministry.

Keeping in mind the special Mercy tradition of working with women, the 1987 Perth Accountability Report, for example, repeated the ISMA aim of raising "awareness of the extent and consequences of poverty, injustice and inequality in our Australian society, and (of directing) our ministry particularly towards the disadvantaged, especially women". Its 1989 Chapter Mission Statement affirmed that the Congregation was "willing to put people and resources into strategic action to transform the structures of church and society

that are unjust and oppressive." It recognised that the institutions it sponsored had a role in working for system change, and it committed itself to on-going evaluation of their ministries in the light of their growing awareness of structural injustice. The West Perth Acts of Chapter 1987 included a Proposal on Social Responsibility, which linked mercy with work for justice, and with care for the whole world system, the emphasis being always on the most powerless, the smallest and most helpless.

The Vatican Council had stressed that it was important for the church, and hence religious institutes, to be in the modern world, to be in touch with contemporary reality. While many of Mercy schools were in poorer areas, their contemporary reality continued to include the middle-class Australian white social reality. Traditional ministries benefited from the increased professionalism of the Sisters and the vastly improved circumstances of their congregational and individual lives. A new injection of spirituality was being given through the re-appropriation of the special gift or charism of Catherine McAuley, who had received her call to religious life through the poor of Dublin.²⁶ West Perth enunciated clearly their belief that the call of the Church, for them, at this time, was in many ways for leadership positions in Catholic Education and the formation of adults.²⁷

In the two groups, Sisters also began to take on new ministries which appeared, to them, more in keeping with the charism in the current social situation. At times, this was also to help free individuals from the strictures of institutions, to use their gifts more easily, or to live more humanly. This caused, in the beginning, some tension, and also a vacuum in the institutions, but the vacuum was soon to be filled by competent and devoted lay colleagues. Moreover, a subtle change began in the operation of those Sisters who remained within the institutions, either as staff members or as members of advisory bodies or management boards. Whether continuing in their previous positions or whether adopting roles more directly concerned with policy-making, values-formation, or pastoral/spiritual care, they strove more consciously to constitute what was being called "a Mercy presence" and to work against oppression in any form. The testimony of colleagues suggests that this often did constitute a powerful ongoing Christian influence. For the Sisters, however, the question was how they could grow, individually and collectively, towards their changing role: from being the visible workforce to the less personally satisfying, more hidden, and difficult work of enabling, supporting and acting as resource persons and catalysts? To be credible and apostolically effective in this setting, they realised, called for a mature human person who was integrated, responsible, self-initiating, able to be at ease and relate well with people.²⁸

The liberation of the affluent from their conscious or unconscious role in the oppression of others, continued to be judged part of the Gospel vision. It was consonant with early Mercy practice. Catherine McAuley had approved the opening of "select schools", whereby the middle and upper classes might contribute to and even be led to join her works for the poor. What was new was the awareness that the quality of its involvement in action for social justice, for the elimination of the causes of injustice, might well be the touchstone of renewal for a religious group such as the Sisters of Mercy.

Some of the Sisters who moved out of the institutions went to more individualised ministries within the church and, to a lesser degree, the secular community. Chaplaincies or counselling in hospitals, business and educational establishments; multi-cultural consultancy to schools; adult religious education; Archdiocesan pastoral planning; spiritual direction and retreat work; staff development; church archival work; parish work as pastoral assistants; social and pastoral work through hospitals, community centres, and women's refuges; medicine; home nursing; care of victims of Aids; pottery: these were among the newer and varied ministries of West Perth and Perth Mercies.²⁹

BEING ON THE PERIPHERY

Some members had found their task within a number of specific Mercy projects demonstrating — dramatically perhaps — this re-vivified choice of the poor. They had entered into ministries more directly concerned with individuals or groups on the periphery of society.

Centres for Homeless Aborigines

One West Perth Mercy project was centred on work with Aboriginal Australians. In the capital cities and in many towns in Australia, the fringe-dwellers include a disproportionate number of Aboriginal women and men. From the mid-1970s, one of the West Perth Mercies, Sister Bernardine Daly, had been trying to follow more closely the vision of the first West Perth superior, Mother Berchmans Deane, that the work done at Victoria Square for Aborigines up till the turn of the century would be carried on by her new foundation.³⁰

Bernardine was instrumental in setting up a number of centres for Aborigines in need. In 1975, St. Norbert's New Era Home for sick and old alcoholic and homeless Aboriginal people was opened in East Perth, in conjunction with the New Era Fellowship — consisting mainly of past pupils and their parents — and with some support from other sisters, including some at Victoria Square. In 1978, the Anawim Drop-In and Short-Term-Stay Centre for Aboriginal girls and women also began to operate in East Perth. This project was partly supported by the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Anawim youth group, a group made up of young people, originally among the helpers at St. Norbert's, who were seeking a life related to that of the early Christian communities with their fellowship in Christ.³¹

After a period in Roeburne, in the Pilbara, where she worked with alcoholic Aborigines, Sister Bernardine was operating, by the mid-1980s, from a small house in Vincent Street, named Mercywell. Mercywell, besides being a centre for her own work, was also a centre of hospitality. From it visits were made to hospitals, prisons, and the parks to make friends with the poor there, not only but mostly Aboriginal. Attached to Mercywell was a farmlet at Bindoon, called Maryfarm, which offered a place for a holiday for those who would not otherwise be able to have one. In 1989, Mercywell was demolished and its place taken by two houses in Summers Street, Perth.

Her work with rural- and urban-based Aborigines had taught Bernardine much about their culture and spirituality, particularly the traditional view of

the land. Thus, from Mercywell, Bernardine also moved out to support the Aboriginal people as they struggled for land rights and for humane treatment from the justice system.³² She also saw, as part of her ministry, the education of white Australians as to the situation of Aborigines. In 1976, she had spoken on their lot in the Cathedral. The *Record* commented on the "rare appearance of a woman religious speaking from the steps of the sanctuary during the homily". This aspect of her work became an increasingly significant one.³³ In January, 1991, she was awarded an Australia Day honour, which she accepted because she had been nominated by Aboriginal people.

Kimberley

Both the Perth and the West Perth Mercies had stayed relatively close to Perth, given the vastness of Western Australia. This mirrored the white population's settlement. In 1961, Bishop Jobst asked Mother Kieran of Victoria Square for sisters to staff schools at Wyndham and Halls Creek, and for admission of "Native Girls" to the Mercy Novitiate. She was unable to spare sisters for the schools but professed her willingness to train Native Postulants. Archbishop Prendiville gave his "wholehearted approval".³⁴

Nothing came of this. But the closer coming together on a national level of the many groups of Australian Mercies, firstly in the Australian Mercy Union and then in ISMA, facilitated a Mercy ministry in the Kimberley. For at least a decade, Adelaide Mercies had spent their holidays working in the Balgo Hills area, in the Great Sandy Desert, about 1,000 kilometres east of Broome, on the coast. Singleton Mercies took up permanent residence there, in the mid-1970s. Eventually, in response to another appeal by Bishop Jobst, members from Perth and Adelaide, two other provinces of the Union, joined them. When ISMA was formed, the Kimberley apostolate became a national project of the Institute, in which have worked a number of sisters and associates as teachers, pastoral workers, and nurses, with the three communities in the area. These were Balgo itself (the old mission settlement), Billiluna (an Aboriginal-run cattle station, whose people were largely from Halls Creek and Hooker Creek), and Mulan at Lake Gregory, a community — and a station — formed by people returning from Balgo to their traditional land. Both Billiluna and Mulan people had requested a Sisters' school.

The West Australian Mercy contribution to the Kimberley has been very significant for those concerned and has helped enrich their home groups.³⁵ From the people of the Aboriginal communities and from the harsh but beautiful country surrounding, these Mercy women claimed to have learnt a different way of looking at reality. They came to appreciate the spirituality and culture of the people with whom they lived and worked: their capacity to trust in the land and its providence and in the reciprocity of their kinship ties; their gentleness and patience and different sense of time; their ability to forgive, despite their powerlessness; their great love and tolerance of their children.

On the other hand, for some of the Sisters working in this area, their understanding of their ministry was shifting. They were becoming more aware of the dangers of forming romantic notions about the people and about their

own work among them. They felt the people needed to be challenged to be responsible for their schools. To do otherwise towards them was to do them a disservice. This view gained some confirmation from the decreasing vitality and the increasing violence that seemed to be apparent within the communities. The value of a Mercy mission in the Kimberley was always to be critically appraised.

Newman

In the early 1980s, there was a call to another frontier. A request came from the Geraldton diocese to the West Perth Mercies to come to Newman, an iron-ore mining town in the Pilbara, more than a thousand kilometres north of Perth.³⁶ The bishop, Bill Foley, stressed the lack of older people and extended family bonds in an environment overloaded with a work-ethic, a property-ethic, and a power that was materialistic. The West Perth congregation took the request to the first ISMA Chapter. Perth expressed a willingness to be involved, and ISMA felt it to be a happy portent of much future cooperation between the Australian Congregations, as well as a way to become more significantly involved with disadvantaged people.

Two sisters³⁷ from Victoria Square and one from West Perth volunteered. From 1983, the sisters worked, in a variety of ways, as parish and community workers, especially with the women who found themselves in many ways severely disadvantaged in the isolated and often desolate and severely masculine environment. In 1989, Victoria Square congregation recruited a Melbourne Sister of Mercy to replace its own member. In 1990, the West Perth sister was replaced by a Rockhampton Mercy. The ministry, however, remained the administrative responsibility of the two West Australian congregations.

Outside Australia

With the second half of the twentieth century had come a movement of Australian Mercies into what used to be termed "foreign missions" firstly in Papua New Guinea since 1956, and later in Pakistan and the refugee camps of South East Asia. In all three areas of overseas ministry, there has been a vitalising overflow into life within Australia. Awarenesses of many kinds, cultural, social, and religious, have been aroused within the direct participants, and this maturation has influenced both sisters and their colleagues and friends back home. Funds and useful equipment and other resources have been collected in different areas, and sent to the Mercy missions in Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, and South East Asia.

Papua New Guinea

The involvement in Papua New Guinea has been the most extensive and resulted in development towards an independent Mercy Congregation, to be composed of national members and expatriates. The Mercy Institute, as founded by Catherine McAuley, has always stressed identification with the local church and people. Contemporary insights into missiology have led, in the last couple of decades, to fresh concepts of how to incorporate the spirit of the Institute into another land and culture, an advance on understandings

held when the first groups of Mercies went to Papua New Guinea — and when the first groups of Mercies reached Australian shores.

The two national bodies of Union and Federation had both begun to work, separately, in Papua New Guinea in the 1950s, mainly in the Eastern Highlands and the area around Wewak on the Sepik. Traditionally, while missionaries taught and healed, their work was thought of predominantly as converting heathens to Christianity, in order to save their souls. The benefits of Western civilization, in one sense, were a by-product. With the Mercies, there was a minor attempt to incorporate some Papua New Guinea women into the Institute, but without success.

Attitudes changed over the years and perspectives grew broader. As with the Mercy mission to the Kimberley, a continuing evaluation was essential. Structurally, the National Mercy Conference facilitated collaboration between various units. When ISMA was born out of the National Conference, all the existing communities in Papua New Guinea came under its umbrella. Sisters from the two West Australian groups have served, in education and nursing, during all three stages of Australian commitment.³⁸

The new imperative to blend past and present, to harmonise Irish, Australian, and Melanesian cultures, was colourfully symbolised by the final profession ceremony of the first woman of Papua New Guinea to join the Sisters of Mercy, on December 28th, 1988. Petronia Gawi's small home community of Catholics had built a new chapel for the event, and had taken part in a spiritual retreat of four days as preparation. For the ceremony itself, Petronia entered the chapel in full tribal dress, accompanied by her villagers shouting, dancing, beating drums. Gifts symbolic of their village life were presented — bilum, fishing net, oar, basket of food — representing the villagers' acceptance of Petronia's offering of herself to God through the Sisters of Mercy. Her change to dress current among the Sisters of Mercy showed the other side of the coin, the transcultural nature of her commitment. The multi-cultural nature of the evolving PNG Congregation has been seen, especially by the National sisters, as a potentially powerful Gospel sign of intimate union in community. It is a sign significant to the people of their country, struggling to integrate their many diverse cultures.

Pakistan

In the mid-1980s, ISMA undertook a mission to Pakistan, to the two cities of Gujrat and Peshawar. Services offered to the Catholic dioceses in the two cities were health care, education, and pastoral work, especially with women. Women in this Muslim country had been extremely oppressed, in Western terms. Christians were in the lowest strata of society. Even within the Christian community, women had been kept extremely secluded and allowed little opportunity to grow as independent individuals. In times of civil unrest, Christians and women — and foreigners — became targets of violence, disrupting normal programmes. The need for an ongoing critique of their work was highlighted.

In 1988 a sister from the Perth Congregation joined the Mercy team at Peshawar.³⁹ Her Mercy Literacy Centre opened up new vistas for illiterate

girls and women. Her work in the school led also to a remedial classroom to help the almost totally illiterate children in the school who were not touched by the ordinary programme.

Mercy Refugee Service

Mercy Refugee Service has been one of the most imaginative and well coordinated efforts of the national Mercy Institute. Cognizant that the rapidly deteriorating plight of refugees, especially in South East Asia, was one of the major social problems of the 1980s, ISMA set up a Mercy Refugee Service, to work as a sub-unit of the Jesuit Refugee Service. Through it, much work was done within Australia to help refugees settle into our society. Some sisters and lay associates worked in the camps in various countries of South East Asia.

Because of Mercy Refugee Service, West Perth Mercies were invited to join the West Australian Refugee Committee, a committee formed by church and other voluntary groups working with refugees. West Perth suggested that the Perth Mercies also be represented. Through the government refugee settlement scheme, both congregations became sponsoring bodies for some families from countries such as South America and South East Asia. Some Mercy schools in the West became involved in helping families settle in Perth. Some past students responded to the invitation of **Mercy Endeavour Australia**, a national project of Mercy ex-students designed to raise awareness and to help M.R.S. financially.⁴⁰ A few sisters also responded to the appeal of M.R.S. for Mercy tutors in a unique long-distance education programme for Khmer refugees in camp on the Thai-Cambodian border.

In 1990, a Perth Sister⁴¹ was one of two Mercy sisters who began educative and pastoral work in a camp at Sungai Besi, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Her presence in Malaysia stimulated interest in and activity on behalf of the Vietnamese refugees coming from Sungai Besi to Western Australia, among sisters, associates, and students.

Shared Responsibility

The late 1970s and the 1980s saw other meaningful phenomena within the Western Australian Mercies. One of these was the attempt to form structures and procedures for sharing responsibility in government.

The 1977 Perth Chapter had advocated a team concept of Congregational leadership. The newly elected leaders attempted to follow this mandate, but it proved difficult. Factors operating against immediate success included misunderstanding of what team management entailed, conditioning of members through a long history of hierarchical structures under a higher superior who possessed ultimate personal authority in Canon Law, and a lack of suitable structures for accountability. Also weak were skills in communication, decision-making processes, and structural analysis. Gradually, however, the new concepts and skills began to be incorporated more easily, but very slowly, into congregational life.

The same sort of difficulties were operating in the attempt to set up participative structures for the congregation and for the institutions, also

advocated by the 1977 Perth Chapter and the succeeding one in 1983. The 1983 Perth report, after six years of experimentation, asked the following questions:

How can we set up *participative structures* to permit members to be heard effectively, to share responsibility and to take a real part in the shaping the future direction of the Congregation?

What type of *intermediary* bodies would it be desirable to establish to free the Leadership team and to involve more people in decision-making processes?

What structures are needed for *review and accountability* to the Leadership team for those with delegated authority, whether they be religious or lay people?

These issues of shared responsibility, and of participative government and life style, and the relationship to the vow of obedience, continued to be seen as highly significant. A number of structures were set up at various levels,⁴² and a number of in-service programmes were offered, in an effort to make participation a reality. Communities of residence were given more say in how shared responsibility would operate locally, within the canonical restraints of a named superior with personal authority. In practice, many local groups slowly began to function practically on a basis of equality among members.

Perhaps because of its relative smallness, team leadership was not a burning issue with the West Perth Mercies. Instead, the Congregational Council was encouraged to take counsel with itself. Drawing on the ISMA Executive Council Document, *The Wind Blows About At Will*, the note of participative government appeared in the 1987 Chapter Acts. The Congregation decided to "continue to be involved in Participative decision-making more fully, in order to heal, liberate and promote the growth of persons into the maturity of Christ."

Despite limitations on the success of the Perth and West Perth Mercies in moving to genuine sharing of responsibility for their life and work, they had explored the gospel concept of authority and the notions of leadership as partnership, empowerment, and engagement. Through their experimentation in this area, they appeared to have learnt much about communication skills, about how to negotiate arguments, and how to arrive at decisions together. They had developed strategies of mutual exchange and networking, and techniques for consciousness raising. New challenges to the institutional church had been quietly issued, in the areas of leadership and authority, ministry, spirituality, liturgy and community. There had been valuable attempts to build communities of shared power.

By 1990, the questions associated with participative government and shared responsibility were seen by some commentators to be a crucial one for religious. Rome continued to limit the degree of experimentation by insisting on obedience to a superior with personal authority. The draft Mercy Constitutions had been, on recommendations from Rome, amended to stress authority rather than leadership. The 1983 Code of Canon Law prescribed a centralized model of government administered by a "supreme moderator" and consultant council. Yet some contemporary religious were questioning

whether their own dignity as human beings and whether works of social justice in today's society could be promoted effectively in this older model.⁴³

Mercy Ethos

The renewal movement within religious life, as directed by Rome in the aftermath of Vatican II, stressed — particularly in its document *Evangelica Testificatio* — that religious institutes should return to their original charism, that is, the charism of their foundress or founder. A renewed interest in the life and spirituality and work of Catherine McAuley led also to a re-appropriation of mercy as an essential characteristic of her Congregation.

The quest to understand and to own mercy was also encouraged by the identity crisis into which the group entered, as did other religious institutes, during the years of change and during the following years of decline in numbers. To retain or to exercise a Mercy presence in the institutions or within other agencies to which Sisters moved, became an important goal. As more and more Sisters moved out of the Mercy institutions, either through direct choice or through attrition of membership, it began to seem very important that the lay people who replaced them preserved a Mercy ethos in the institution. Hence, not only did the Sisters study and reflect on mercy — as a Biblical concept and as a way of life and of ministry — they also began to share the results of their reflections with their colleagues.

During the 1980s, a number of influences inspired them in their new exploration of mercy or compassion. ISMA was established, and the Acts of the first National Chapter formulated. After two interim versions,⁴⁴ the draft and then the definitive final version of the new Australian Mercy Constitutions was disseminated and studied. 1981 was the Sesquicentenary Year of the establishment of the Order. In July of that year, the first international meeting of Sisters of Mercy, entitled *Trocaire*, the Irish for mercy, took place in Dublin, and was attended by West Australian representatives. An international meeting in Dublin, in 1990, to discuss the future of Baginbun Street, was also seen as a symbol of Mercy world-wide.

A number of popular writers on spirituality were developing the theme of the way of compassion or mercy.⁴⁵ In late November 1980, Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*, had been released. The pontiff's interpretation of the biblical concept of mercy as a essential element of the Gospel ethos, a way in which God, through Jesus Christ, especially manifested love and became visible to humankind, seemed to put an unofficial seal of approval on the original Mercy Rule. In that rule, Catherine McAuley had called mercy, "the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who desire to follow Him". In comments on her Rule made by the Roman commission investigating her candidature for sainthood, Mercy was called an effective addition (*aggiunta effettuale*) and an original addition (*aggiunta originale*) to the Presentation Rule which she had taken as her starting point.⁴⁶ In 1990, Catherine was proclaimed Venerable, the first stage on the road to canonization. It seemed another confirmation of the charism of Mercy.

A number of shifts in nuance of understanding can be traced through looking at Mercy documents of this period. Insights freshly re-claimed included the

foundational recognition of one's own need for mercy from God before we can become a channel of mercy for others, as well as the reciprocal nature of mercy between helper and helped. "Mercy is pure gift through us and to us". As the impact of Christian feminism commenced to be felt, the feminine quality of mercy as a biblical concept was also explored.⁴⁷ West Perth Sisters also devoted time to studying creation spirituality, into which framework mercy easily fitted.

The Women's Movement

By the late 1980s, Christian feminism had begun to be a noticeable reality on the Perth scene. The renewal in the church had taken, for some women, a more definite feminist orientation. The two Mercy congregations exercised a considerable degree of critical leadership in the introduction of Christian feminism to the Perth Catholic — and wider church — scene.

Congregational leaders, Beverley Stott and Anne Tormey, as members of the West Australian Conference of Religious Institutes (WACRI), were closely involved, during 1983-84, in the establishment in Western Australia of WATAC, Women and the Australian Church, an Australia-wide project of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious of Australia. Initially they facilitated a group of women who met to work through the local issues and policies. Anne was the Western Australian representative of the national WATAC committee, and made a significant input into the formation of national directions. Then, as the intent of the framers of the project was that it become as soon as possible a grass-roots organisation, they removed themselves from leadership roles. However, they continued for a while to foster a feminist consciousness by organising a number of sessions on relevant topics, at which both local and international women spoke.⁴⁸ They supported Heather Formaini of the Western Australian Religious Department of the ABC in bringing up feminist concerns and activities on her TV and radio programmes. As members of WACRI, they also promoted, at the archdiocesan level, the concept of pastoral planning, and gave strategic support to the appointment of a woman to the position of over-all coordinator. They responded creatively to the 1983-85 Report of the National Executive Council of ISMA, *The Wind Blows About At Will*, which included an account of Sister Pauline Smith's attendance at the Nairobi Forum '85. As a result of an original proposition by Anne, Beverley assisted Pauline in the organisation of Australian Mercy retreats on women's spirituality held in 1986.

A number of other Sisters of Mercy participated in overt feminist activities. Such activities included the establishment of an on-going ecumenical Christian Feminist Circle, facilitation of public liturgies, contributing at the first Celebration of Women's Spirituality Network in 1989, and lecturing to clergy on women in the church.⁴⁹

In other — less manifest — ways, West Australian Sisters of Mercy, in general, had been affected by the women's movement. While few called themselves Christian feminists, various facets of their renewal programmes of the 1970s and 1980s expanded their consciousness, to such an extent that they began

to move away from many patriarchal tenets, attitudes, and practices. In doing this, they tended to diverge more and more from the clergy and many of the laity.

While a national study of religious, in general, conducted in 1987/88, suggested that the majority of women religious were "still caught in traditional thinking" and "do not believe that social, political or environmental issues are their concern",⁵⁰ the 1987 Regional Report of the West Australian Mercies⁵¹ named "Women's Issues" as one of the significant issues facing the Institute. In 1987, there were two sources of feminist stimulation for the Perth Mercies. The first was a visit from American theologian Sister Joan Chittister, whose writings and lecturing dealt vigorously with the oppression of women, especially in the church. The second was the ISMA Chapter. Its Statement of Vision included these words:

We are part of the contemporary breakthrough in history of the rise of women's consciousness. All women today struggle to find their power and potential in society. We bring to this struggle the perspective and experience of vowed celibate living.

In the following year, retreats attended by members from both congregations helped bring the Chapter Vision to the regard of all members, as did local community reflections. The 1989 Perth Chapter Mission Statement resonated with the vision when it spoke of the challenge within the Institute to align themselves in new ways with the needy and oppressed, particularly women. In 1991, women's issues emerged as a significant topic for the West Perth Chapter in December of that year. What also emerged, however, was that there was great variability in the recognition of, and commitment to, feminism as a major force in society.

New Paradigms of Mercy Membership

The 1980s also saw a shift in the attitude towards the structural aspects of Mercy life. Church Law has jealously guarded the boundaries of what it calls Religious Life, though there has been a history of reduction and expansion of the space within those boundaries at different epochs in church history. Ecclesiastical authorities tended to exercise supervision of communities of men and women almost exclusively through canonical provisions and classifications.⁵²

It was a very slow advancement towards abolition of the distinction, from the thirteenth century, between a public vow of religion which was called solemn, and a private vow which was called simple. At the end of the sixteenth century, Rome suppressed existing groups with simple vows and forbade new ones. By the nineteenth century, some were being approved, but it was not until the 1917 Code of Canon Law that such institutes with simple vows, known as Religious Congregations, "obtained full comparability ... in those elements which pertain to the religious state" with the old Religious Orders in which solemn vows were taken.⁵³

The tendency to supervise by classifying was still evident in the 1983 Revision of the Code. In it, vows were no longer simple or solemn, only temporary or perpetual. Religious Congregations and Religious Orders were referred to

by one name, Religious Institutes. The Code did, however, distinguish between Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The former term included, apart from Religious Institutes, what were called Secular Institutes of Consecrated Life. The latter referred to communities whose members did not take religious vows as such but who took "bonds" and who lived in common, like members of Religious Institutes.

Some writers however, defined religious life from a theological rather than a juridical standpoint.⁵⁴ Theologically, religious life had encompassed many more historical phenomena than those institutions which fitted the strict juridical descriptions of the various ecclesiastical epochs. The Mercy Institute itself was founded in a period when its exact canonical status was ambiguous.

Catherine McAuley had initially envisaged a loose kind of association, with some core members to keep it going, and others committed only temporarily. She thought her House of Mercy might attract young women during their years between leaving school and entering marriage. Gradually a certain lifestyle, way of dress and behaviour, habits of prayer grew up among them. It was the adverse reaction of others and, above all, the desire for her work to continue with the Church's approval, that led Catherine to agree to as precise a juridical definition as was then available, and to the resultant supervision. Even after she became a vowed religious, she continued to involve lay people closely in her work. This caused scandal, but became a characteristic of the Order. Wherever the Sisters of Mercy went, they gathered around them a circle of women and some men who participated enthusiastically in their mission of mercy.⁵⁵

With a decline in vowed membership within the Mercy Institute, and with a renewed interest in the charism and spirit of Mercy, some of the members of the world-wide Mercy Institute, especially in North America, felt that it may now be being called back to Catherine's original vision of core members and lay colleagues. Their growing conviction was finding expression in what was usually called a Mercy Associate Programme, wherein individuals may join the Institute in a variety of ways of participation and of degrees of commitment.

Mercy Associates

By the middle of the 1980s, the Institute in Western Australia had considered the establishment of a Mercy Associate Programme. There was not a whole-hearted conviction that it was the way to go for the future, but there was a willingness to let something emerge. In the Perth Congregation, two different programmes began, one — a loose kind of association — in 1985, the other — involving closer ties — in 1986. In 1990, these merged. Both programmes attracted a sizeable number of women and some men. In West Perth, where less enthusiasm for the programme prevailed, one associate was admitted in 1990.

As it stood in 1990-91, the Perth programme consisted of participation in an orientation programme around the Spirit of Mercy, followed by a public commitment to join with the Congregation in promoting the spirit of Mercy. This commitment was renewable yearly. Options for on-going involvement,

apart from continued formation in the understanding of Mercy, included participating in a specific Mercy ministry; associating with a local Mercy community; joining committees for congregational life and mission. The associates proved themselves willing to share responsibility for the continued effectiveness of the programme.

The Perth Congregation developed a couple of other pro-active approaches towards the vocation issue in the second half of the 1980s. The Formation Committee was extended to include lay people, and the Committee also gave opportunities to young people to examine Mercy ethos, spirituality, life, and mission. A research study by staff of Curtin University, into the public image of the Mercies in Western Australia, was also commissioned. It was hoped that this might provide strategic insight into the issue of recruitment. As a consequence, a Mercy Associate was appointed, part-time, to consider recommendations.⁵⁶

In addition, West Perth Congregation joined with Perth in 1990-91 to prepare for the establishment of a Companions Volunteer Community (CVC) in Perth. Sponsored jointly by the Jesuits and the Sisters of Mercy, since 1988, the Sisters of Mercy adopted CVC as a national venture, leading to a small number of communities. CVC was intended to enable young people to live a simple life-style in community for a year, engage in voluntary apostolic service to the poor, and follow a process of formation that helped members to develop their spirituality.⁵⁷

There was one implication of these new forms of association, particularly the Associate programme. If they were to continue to have any real meaning, the Mercy Institute would need to re-define membership. Within the traditional juridical format, it referred only to vowed membership. To accept a new paradigm of Mercy association, the meaning of "member" would have to be re-thought to include those others who shared a common spirituality of Mercy, focused through Catherine McAuley's framework. Inclusion of these other "members" would have many ramifications, particularly for practices of shared leadership and participation. For the vowed members, it would entail a profound re-look at the meaning of the four Mercy vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and apostolic service. This latter task, however, did not need to be done alone. At the national and the international levels, there was a growing number of Mercy theologians who could lead such reflections.⁵⁸

Signs of Failure in the New Model

So, for many, the decades immediately after Vatican II constituted an exciting, hope-filled time. For quite a few, however, change was too slow or past hurts too strong or new realisations led to new options: departure became the only solution. For others, there seemed to be a repudiation of what had made religious life precious to them. For everyone, it involved much pain. Yet, overall, the future seemed bright.

Nevertheless, the signs of radical conversion were ambiguous. For whatever reason, the new model of religious life failed to attract women. Internal tensions decreased as many of the vocal dissenters left and survivors learnt

to live with the continuing consequences of the experimentation. Yet, despite all the organisational improvements and all the re-birthing of individuals, despite all the skills auditing of individuals, despite all the strategic plans and scenarios for the future, it looked more and more probable that contemporary religious life was becoming outmoded, even in its updated form.

From 1966 to 1976, for all orders of women Australia-wide, there was a 75 per cent drop in entries of women to religious life; and a 63 per cent increase in departures after first profession.⁵⁹ Despite an initial optimism for the future, it gradually became evident that the statistics of the two Mercy Congregations were likewise on a downward curve. The membership graphs of both groups revealed steep plunges. (See graphs).

As the decline in numbers became drastic, many Sisters wondered if they could anticipate even a low level of survival.

Several explanations could be given for this continued dwindling. One could say that the new insights of the Council teachings were but superficially understood. Certainly there seemed to be confusion around the true meaning of ministry, as clergy, religious, and laity struggled to appropriate new understandings of the universal ministry and priesthood of all who are baptized. As lay people moved into ministries hitherto the domain of religious, the latter often suffered an identity crisis.

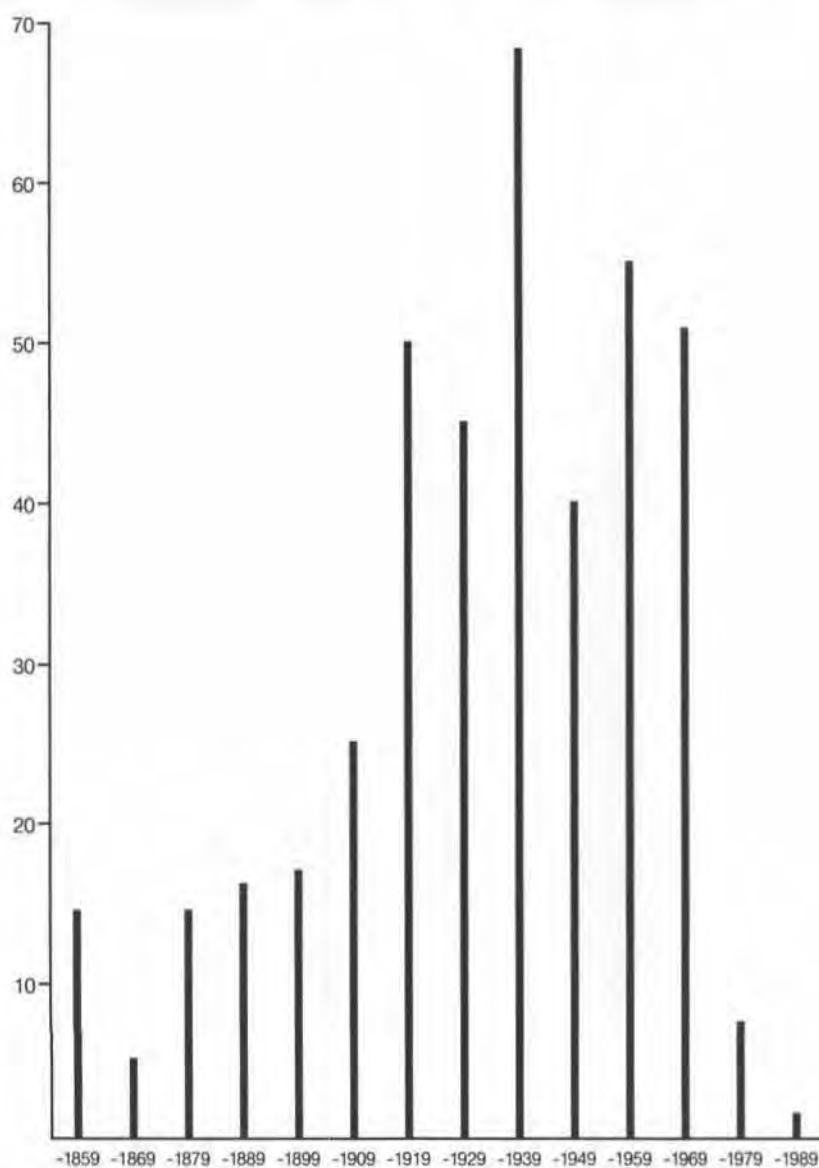
In responding to the call to be church in the modern world, to listen to the signs of the times, there had been, some thought, too much readiness to be considered normal, to resemble a Catholic people who were now firmly part of an increasingly affluent Australia. For an Institute firmly established on the service of the poor, this might constitute a sure recipe for loss of passion. Indeed, as with most other religious congregations, the Mercies appeared to have moved into what some writers are now calling a "therapeutic" or "human relations" model, and other writers a "liberal" model, of religious community.⁶⁰

To some observers of post-Vatican Two religious, accent on the unique worth of the individual seemed at times to obliterate the value of communion. As the educational apostolate — hitherto so bonding for the Catholic community in Australia — lost its central pastoral position, religious suffered a loss of a common practical goal. Accent on mercy helped to preserve and clarify Mercy identity, but — as mercy is an element in any kind of compassionate response to those in need — also had the contrasting effect of encouraging diversity of ministry. There seemed to be a reluctance to put to the test the sacrifice of individual visions for a common, integrating, and specific concrete goal.

As Congregations failed to hold many present members and to attract new ones, and as the profiles of the congregations grew older and older, a widespread feeling of powerlessness resulted in pessimism for the future in many members.⁶¹ While various restrictions of the traditional life-style had been removed, the support and the challenge it had provided did not seem to have been replaced by structures which adequately reflected changing understandings of religious life and altering relationships with the world. Local communities tended to settle into living comfortably and tolerantly

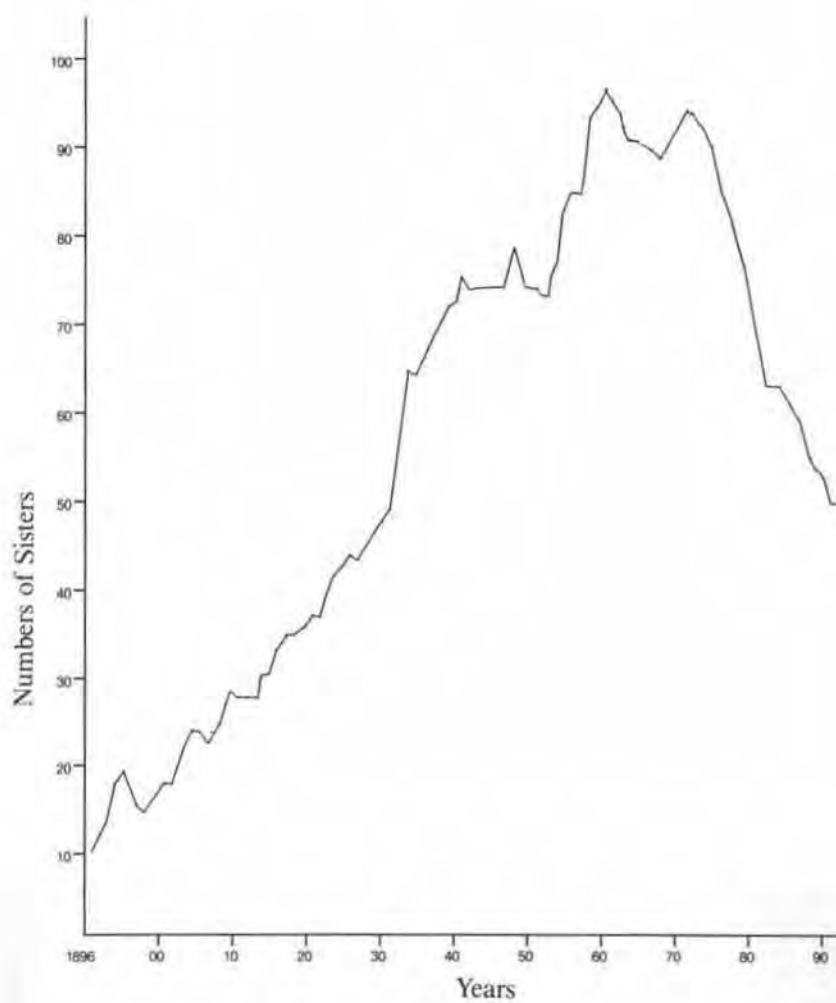
Numbers of Sisters professed in each decade

Perth



Updated from Report of S. M. Goretti Sawle 1977

SISTERS OF MERCY: WEST PERTH
Numbers over 95 years history



with one another, with an attenuated life style, which was still, fundamentally, on the traditional model. Structures and processes of participation had multiplied. But such modifications in government were as yet far, especially at congregational level, from being a consensus of co-equal, co-responsible persons. Roman regulations continued to require hierarchical patterns of authority, which were at odds, for some members, with a growing understanding of collegial community within a group of women who saw themselves as bound together through a common listening to the Holy Spirit.

For those who were experiencing a more genuine mutuality within the women's and some other contemporary movements, the absence of true collegiality was highlighted.

The social context was far from favourable to entry into a convent.⁶² The years were extraordinary in most parts of the world. There was considerable unrest among Western youth in the 1960s and 1970s. Experimentation with drugs, violent and non-violent student riots, exploration of new life-styles: much of this was characterised by a repudiation of adult authoritarianism. Everything was being questioned. Inevitably, this influenced young people in Australia. While Western Australia was far from the centres of extreme unrest, the mass media kept everyone informed. Many youth became alienated from, among other social institutions, the church, traditional morality, and conventional religious practice. New prospects for adventure and for careers made entry into convent life improbable.

A general philosophy of impermanency seemed to encourage a distrust of long-term life options. Modifications in family patterns included a number of relatively less permanent forms of family life. These did not seem to provide an ethos favourable to religious vocation of the traditional kind. *Time Magazine*⁶³ wrote of "the epidemic fear of commitment".

The repercussions of the women's movement cannot be under-estimated. The educational level of women had risen sharply. So, too, had career and life possibilities for women. Convents were no longer a principal avenue for feminine leadership, as they had been in many previous centuries. More highly educated women seemed reluctant to join an institution, such as a religious community, which was an intimate part of a church which devalued women in many ways. The strengthening resolve of many women to accept the equating of — and fear of — body, nature, and the feminine, which was characteristic of a highly masculinised culture — increased the growing estrangement of many younger women from the church. This meant that there was little sense of belonging; a lack of ease in articulating a relationship with God, who had been presented to them in androcentric language.⁶⁴ Conventual life, which had been based on a denial of the body in many ways, looked more and more a-cultural.

Some special factors in Australian society intensified the fall in membership from the 1960s. Sociologist, Cyril Hally, states that by then, Australian Catholics no longer constituted a religious minority. Such a minority tended to close in on itself and to limit the degree of difference permitted to members. Vatican Two legitimated pluralism, and also encouraged the involvement of the laity in the church's official ministries. The parish and the school were

increasingly questioned as the major, almost exclusive, means for evangelisation. This led to a wider range of choice for apostolic activity. Religious institutes were no longer the only avenue for lay dedicated ministry.⁶⁵ Religious, themselves, through an "exaggerated care to provide for pluralism and to allow for constant experimentation", sometimes gave an impression of instability.⁶⁶

Hally claims that the migration factor was also significant. The Catholic population doubled in the years between 1947 and 1971, due not only to the post-war baby boom, but also to post-war migration to Australia. The latter changed the face of the church in this country. From a preponderantly Irish-Australian composition, it shifted to one with great ethnic diversification. Demands for Catholic schooling increased tremendously. But the newly arrived migrants did not contribute members to the religious orders who were staffing these schools. There was, until relatively recently, no vision of a multi-cultural Australian church to correspond with the changed reality of a multi-cultural society. Vocations to religious life were not nourished in this void.⁶⁷

Neither was there, in the 1960s and later, any vision of an Australian theology, nor any real expectation of its emergence in the near future. There had been an overwhelming amount of pastoral action in Australia, much fervent — perhaps, fervid — Australian Catholic life. But there was little regard for the theology implied in "this extraordinary praxis of faith".⁶⁸ Theological content consisted of some doctrinal statements and pastoral directives. Reflection on the Australian Catholic experience, of the type that might have helped religious truly enculturate themselves within the Australian environment, was, at that stage, missing.

As the 1970s ended, and then the 1980s turned into the 1990s, and the year of the second millennium, 2000 A.D., approached, the statistical trend continued to follow the downward curve, with the possibility of organisational death remaining as the end point. The ISMA Organisational Culture Study of 1987 saw as potential problem areas the "sense of passive acceptance and a reactive rather than a proactive process in all areas of concern". This included the problem of an ageing community. The Report claimed that Mercy data showed "little attention to both methods of attracting women into the order and of attracting, and effectively managing relationships with, Associates." There was a sense of sadness pervading some of the material analysed, a sadness that did not "deny a sense of life as having significance and fulfilment but rather sadness at the lack of potential being fulfilled, given the continued significance of the institution's foundational mission in contemporary society"

The 1990 Perth Congregation/Curtin University research into the reasons why "girls (almost without exception) were choosing life styles other than religious life" highlighted "the perceived unattractiveness and inappropriateness of the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience in the context of contemporary society. The advent of the feminist movement was seen to have changed the choice set for women so dramatically that religious life in the traditional sense was no longer a viable option". It was apparent that the group interviewed considered that the Sisters themselves were not doing enough to promote religious life as a viable option which encourages or demands personal

commitment. This confirmed locally a conclusion reached by the ISMA study. Its authors considered that the data suggested that Mercy culture — examined on a national basis — was becoming dysfunctional, and that the Institute was not seriously addressing the viability of the organisation, through new membership.⁶⁹

As the last decade of the twentieth century commenced, the statistics were not encouraging. Yet, among the Mercy Sisters themselves, the past three decades had been times of much talk about “creativity” and about “refounding” religious life. There had been action to follow the talk — not, perhaps, as much as the talk might have suggested, but, nevertheless, a creative and courageous endeavour. And in many Sisters, an underlying optimism persisted, a belief, as well as a hope, that Mercy life — in some, as yet unknown form, would endure.

AFTER WORDS

WHERE IS THEIR SPHERE NOW?

The registers of the eight separate groups of Mercies that once co-existed, in Western Australia, name 845 women.¹ Some of these stayed only a very brief period. Others remained many years before choosing another life option. A goodly number persevered for life. All contributed, each in her own way, to the works of Mercy for which the organisation had been founded.

The original group of Sisters had been criticised for stepping out of their proper sphere. In later decades, they may have done that less directly, but they did enter into spheres not then readily available to their lay sisters. In many subtle ways, they contributed to the delineation of a new place for women, in church and society.

This book has tried to depict some of those ways. The research has yielded numerous illustrations of the persistent devaluation of women's work through their secondary status. This is especially evidenced in the highly bureaucratic — and frequently autocratic — way in which their organisational autonomy was limited by those in power within the church. More could have been said on the lack of opportunities for truly equal participation in decision-making and ministry, as also on their own internalization of their inferior roles. But the message is clear enough from what has been said.

On the other hand, the narrative has also provided one concretization of the enormous amount of work contributed voluntarily — or with relatively very little remuneration — by countless women religious. In more than one social field, they made offerings which were highly significant and, on occasion, innovative. If one's works are evidence of one's participation in a community, then the West Australian Mercies have joined — exuberantly — in the fashioning of the Australian nation.

Their story shows the strength of these nineteenth and twentieth century women's moves for autonomy, of their struggle to gain control of their own lives. They did not always succeed, but a recognition of their efforts may highlight the issue of sexism and help place it more firmly on the social justice agenda of the civil and church communities. It may help us all see what more subtle traces of the androcentrism of previous decades continue.

Among the Sisters themselves there appears to be an uneven awareness of this issue.² Reflection on their history, particularly on the evidence of marginalisation contained therein, as also on the prolific testimony to the gift that their organisation has been to others, may help them courageously break the silence about sexism which still binds Australian women — above all, about sexism in a church which claims to be a community of equal disciples of Jesus. Reclaiming their history may give them the energy to strive to re-define the church to include women fully. It may give them the energy to re-state that the church is as much their sphere as it is men's. It was a task which Ursula Frayne and her colleagues, in the language of another time, had also set themselves.

Have the Mercies finished their task? According to this analysis, there is still plenty to be done. Yet statistics of membership seem to indicate that perhaps they *have* run their course. We find, in the story of the West Australian Mercies, a fairly detailed account of the life cycle of an organisation which has passed through the first peak of its growth, is now in a period of severe loss of membership, and thus — unless a new development takes place — is rapidly on the road to organisational death.

Wider sources point to a major transition occurring within religious life, in general. Various reasons have been propounded as to why this is so. Is it because the kind of apostolic groups such as the Sisters of Mercy have reached fruition, have completed the task of their era? That era is almost past. If a new age is upon us, then it must be bringing new needs and demanding new organisational responses. A number of writings have appeared within recent years which purport to set the present crisis in religious life within this kind of framework.³ They find within the present moment analogies with past times of transition.

Australian historian Mary Rose MacGinley, for example, sees our period as crucially re-orienting as the transition from the desert to the community form of religious life, and as the transition from stable feudal communities to the centralised congregation of the more recent past. Eras of social upheaval, she shows, have been accompanied always by the emergence of new types of religious communities. In the long history of the church, many more such groups have died than now exist. Their specific ministry had become obsolete or their way of life had been too tied to an out-of-date social order. She believes that many Congregations have done what they were founded to do.

American sociologist Marie Augusta Neal also finds three major transitions in the emergence of apostolic religious life, each linked to changes in major institutions of European society. Vowed Virginity was a new way of life for women in the beginnings of the church, and it took some three centuries to be accepted. From the virgins and widows, living in their own homes but pursuing a consecrated life of prayer and good works, emerged the institution of cloistered convents for nuns around the fifth century. They paralleled the monasteries for men and played a similar role in the formation of a more stable mediaeval society. Their main purpose was the contemplative life, and their organisation was very much in keeping with that of well-born ladies of feudal society.

Then, from around 1600, the effects of industrialization brought different kinds of poverty and distress. A new class of urban poor arose. So, too, arose groups of women committed to a life of prayer and of service for those in want. Both MacGinley and Neal show how the Roman church found it difficult to accede the title of religious to these women who objected to strict cloister and other measures restrictive of their freedom to respond to need. They were termed not nuns but sisters, and joined congregations rather than orders. Many, if not most, of them were from peasant or working class background. They had no property of which to divest themselves, and so the vow of poverty had to take on a new meaning.

It was not until the 1917 Code that such women were fully recognised as

religious, as formally equal in status with nuns. In the attempts to be granted canonical recognition, these apostolic religious congregations had been forced to adopt semi-monastic practices. These increasingly became a hindrance to their goals. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was clear that a new world was being born. New forms of poverty and new understandings of the mission of the church were also being forged. The persistence, in women's communities, of historical and largely patriarchal structures became increasingly critical. More and more contemporary women were seeing them as stumbling blocks to mission. Neal asserts that, since the mission of social analysis and of working for social justice — rather than works of charity — is now the pressing moral imperative for the church, the apostolic congregations of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries are no longer the most apt organisational response to the call to consecrated service.

Irish historian of religious life, Diarmuid Ó Murchú ranges further, attempting to demonstrate that that form of religious life closely aligned with formal churches and formal religions — of which Christianity is only one — is dying. In all the major religions, he declares, religious life is operating out of an old model, hence the rise of new sects and cults. Following Hostie and Fitz and Cada,⁴ Ó Murchú sees each cycle of religious life to be between 250 and 300 years. The present Christian era, which he calls the Missionary Era 1800-, will have run its course, on the given model, between 2050 and 2080. Subsections of each era include phases of foundation, expansion, stabilisation, decline, and breakdown. The latter can lead to extinction, low level of minimal survival, or revitalisation.

For Ó Murchú, the basic myth of religious life is relatedness at all levels of life; the mission of religious — in any church or religion — is to keep "community" alive. Those new religious groups following this call share their mission with secular groups also seeking to awaken an "alternative" consciousness. This consciousness stresses the essential unity of all life in the universe. The religious is the mystic, the contemplative, who can help ordinary people glimpse this essential mystery. The missionary and apostolic modes of religious life are now past. They are now a-cultural.

There is data which supports this latter assertion, from the Mercy Institute. The fundamental advice of the Organisational Culture Study of 1987 was for today's Mercies to come out of their safe environment and to seriously enter the outside world. This is the same advice as that given by theologians and other church leaders, in recent times, under the concept of enculturation. They urge Christians to respect and to dialogue with cultures, especially local cultures. They claim that, without a genuine enculturation in the world in which one lives and works, the task of proclaiming the good news of the gospel is not truly possible. In John Paul II's words, culture is everything by which human beings develop their many bodily and spiritual qualities. In other words, Christians must engage in an ongoing and transforming cultural sharing which leads each to richer personhood.⁵

Many writers⁶ move into the symbolic when they treat of the possibility of breakthrough rather than total breakdown within existing congregations. They project images of chaos, mirroring the world being re-discovered by

modern physicists,⁷ or of a dark night, mirroring what seems to be happening in the psyches of individuals; images of sitting contemplatively with the questions until we gain the wisdom capable of projecting us on a fresh course of action; images of re-founding or of re-weaving or of re-imagining religious life. For the Mercies, these images, including the images of darkness, do seem to have resonated. Contemporary Mercy life presents evidence of both pessimism and optimism, of a decline in communal passion coupled with much effort to keep the dynamism of Mercy active, of a paradoxical conviction, that Mercy life as it is now will die, but that it will — somehow — endure.⁸

Can this historian dare to suggest signs of breakthrough in the data she has gathered? It is far too easy to fall into the trap of historical determinism. Total breakdown is not necessarily inevitable. And even though, statistically, there seems every possibility that the Sisters of Mercy in the West have reached the end of their era, it is also obvious that they will not die out with a whimper. There is confirmation of too much energy still, as seen in the continuing and influential Mercy presence in traditional institutions and ministries; in the brave attempts at other ways of opting for the poor and oppressed people of our contemporary world; in the burgeoning Mercy movement around the world.⁹

This has been a celebration of one particular section of that world-wide Mercy story, of its highs and its lows. It shows, I believe, the tremendous power of an ideal. Mercy, as John Paul II re-affirms in *Dives in Misericordia*, is at the heart of the gospel ethos. The previous chapter of this story shows that the charism of the Institute of Mercy is still, in many ways, alive and well, in Western Australia, and looking for new forms in which to express itself.

I do not doubt that Mercy, as a universal ideal, detectable in all religions and cultures and times, will continue to inspire women — and men — in some way. Mercy, often translated in the bible as compassion, — suffering with — issues forth into a passionate commitment to that suffering person. The question remains as to whether the spirit of compassion will continue to move women — and men — to a passionate engagement in the life and works of the Institute of Mercy. And if so, how?

Other questions also remain. Christian feminists claim that the place of crisis in faith, today, for many women, is spirituality, above all, in the domain of worship and ritual. Other writers warn about the burn-out effects of action for social justice without a profound commitment to contemplation. Some theologians see the contemporary drying up of passion as related to the spread of unbelief, of faith worn away at the edges.¹⁰ Have the Sisters of Mercy lost that faith-filled passion which so motivated them in their origins and kept them alive through nearly a century and a half of toil? Has their faith worn away at the edges — so that they have been left behind in the current pursuit of spirituality? Are they caught between fear of betraying the past and the passion of new longings? Where might the Mercies' passion lie now?

If mercy is always a divine quality and a basis for a passionate way of life and of action; if the contemporary Christian call to action is to stand

in solidarity with oppressed peoples as they struggle to be free; if, in the search for the sacred, the place of crisis, and the area of commonality, are today located in spirituality — then reflection on those conjectures might help the Sisters of Mercy of Western Australia discover where their passion now lies. If so, the successors to those 845 women who are the real tellers of this present tale, might create their version of the Mercy founding myth.

Perhaps they will be empowered, through the re-claiming of their communal story, to accept a challenge issued by eminent theologian Karl Rahner over twenty years ago,¹¹ that women themselves would have to determine, from their own experience and as "the church of women", their place in both society and the church. As members of a church which claims to be the church of women as much as it is the church of men, they might no longer be content to allow it to continue as a partial sphere determined by men as the controllers of the whole. They might re-find their passion in working to transform the church into a place of genuine reciprocity and mutuality, into a church which is truly a community of equal discipleship of Jesus.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

As the actual events of this story are mainly in-house and as it has been a story almost too rich in detail, most of the archival work was done in the Perth Mercy Archives at Victoria Square and the West Perth Mercy Archives at Craigie. The Victoria Square Archives have a substantial collection of original and copied documentation dating from the arrival of the Sisters to Western Australia in 1846. Sisters' letters to the Convent in Baggot Street, Dublin, between 1845 and 1849 are printed in *Valiant Women*, ed. Geraldine Byrne, Melbourne, Polding Press, 1981.

Documentation for more recent years was available at the two Mercy Administrative Centres, Wembley and North Perth. Both Archives and Administrative Centres also contain an appreciable amount of short biographies and reminiscences, written for community purposes. Material concerning the successive national Mercy bodies is also at these centres.

The Archdiocesan Church Archives in Victoria Square were a particularly rich source of material, especially in connection with relations between the successive bishops and the various convents. These archives also contain full sets of the Catholic newspaper, the *Record* (WACR), as well as some published and unpublished secondary material on Western Australian church history, including Catholic Education. Among the unpublished material are some valuable theses and manuscripts. A not quite complete set of Catholic Year Books was also helpful. Through the industry of the archivists, the two Victoria Square archives (Church and Mercy) also contain copies of pertinent documentation from the J.S. Battye Library, Perth, and the Benedictine Archives, New Norcia. An index of relevant photos held by the *West Australian* newspaper is also being prepared.

There was also a fairly heavy reliance on oral sources — interviews of individual members and groups, as well as the informal conversations which produced much factual data and, more significantly, a feel for the people involved.

Background material for Catherine McAuley and the Order of Mercy, both in Ireland and other countries, is readily available in printed form. Those works quoted are noted in references.

The social, political, and economic history of Western Australia was gleaned from standard texts, especially those of Professor C. T. Stannage, University of Western Australia. Again, those works consulted are noted in references.

Finally, a range of feminist texts, in the attempt to construct a methodology as well as critique the data gathered, have been read. Some, but not all, are cited.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACAP	Archdiocesan Church Archives, Perth
ISMA	Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia
SMAP	Sisters of Mercy Archives, Perth
SMAWP	Sisters of Mercy Archives, West Perth
Sr. M.	Sister Mary..., title attached to religious name of members. Where the name is spelt in various ways, I have used the spelling in the admission register.
W.A.	Western Australia
WACR	West Australian Catholic <i>Record</i> ; the newspaper had variations of this title at different periods.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

1 A STORY AND ITS TELLING

1. Mary Darcy, "Searching out a new Story", 1990, No. 1.
2. H.A. Norman, *The Wishing Bone Cycle*, quoted in Lynn V. Andrews, *Flight of the Seventh Moon*, p123.
3. E. More, J. Tulloch, A. Ross-Smith, 1987.
4. Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos Refounding Religious Congregations*, New York, Paulist Press, 1988.
5. D. Urquhart to Mother Vincent Whitty, 17.7.1850.
6. Sister M. Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy unto Thousands*, Dublin, Browne and Nolan Ltd., 1957, p.106.
7. *Transforming Grace Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1988, p.43.; Rahner's *Theological Investigations*, VIII 75-93, New York, Herder & Herder, 1971.
8. Feminist scholars see sexism, however, as inextricably linked to all the other unjust dualisms of which our society is guilty, especially racism, classism, imperialism, and ecological destructiveness.

2 THE ORIGINAL VISION

1. or January 7. Fremantle Shipping Register says January 7th, after a voyage of 113 days. Convent Register says January 8, arriving in Perth January 9. Ursula Frayne to Rev. Mother Cecilia, 10.1.1846, says they sighted land late afternoon 7th, and landed 8th January.
2. Religious women were often termed Mrs. at this period.
3. Opposite the present Concert Hall.
4. On corner of St. George's Terrace. Lord Street was later re-named Victoria Avenue.
5. 8.4.1848.
6. Copy of notice to Mother Mary Anne Doyle of Tullamore, in SMAP.
7. Information from Carysfort Mercy archives, Dublin.
8. Sister M. Ignatius, *The Wheel of Time (A brief survey of the ninety-six years' work of the Sisters of Mercy in Victoria, 1857-1953)*, Melbourne, Sisters of Mercy, 1954; Maree G. Allen, RSM, *The Labourers' Friends Sisters of Mercy in Victoria and Tasmania*, Melbourne, Hargreen Pub. Cpy., 1989.
9. Dublin register.
10. Urquhart to Vincent Whitty, 17.7.1850.
11. Allen, op.cit. The Newfoundland Mercies continued, though Frances Creedon had only one companion for several years and was by herself for a short while in 1847 (*Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, vol.III, New York, P.O'Shea, 1888.) In 1962, they established a convent in Peru. Rose Lynch later came to Geelong, Victoria, but stayed a little over a year.
12. Cecilia Marmion to Brady, draft, c.1846.
13. To Reverend Mother, Baggot Street, n.d. but June, 1846.
14. Ursula Frayne, 17.2.1846.
15. 7.3.1848.

16. WACR 29.9.1913.
17. Another source mentions a Father Thomas.
18. 6.II.1896.
19. Perth, Sands & McDougall Ltd., 1903.
20. Catherine Sherlock was the second of three daughters of Sir Robert and Lady Catherine Sherlock of Rathfarnham, who entered the Mercy Order and came to Australia. Her mother was a friend of Catherine McAuley. Maria and Catherine were professed at Baggot Street, May, 1850. Maria became a Geelong foundress, and the youngest, Alice, entered in Melbourne in 1866 (Maree Allen, op.cit.).
21. Goold/Kelly Manuscript, *A Short Record of the Sisters of Mercy of Western Australia from 1846*, n.d., SMAP.
22. J.F. Whitely, WACR, 27.9.1913.
23. Often called "Evangelist". Where two versions of a name occur, I have adopted the one given in the earliest entry in the register.
24. Archbishop Murray crossed out the paragraph.
25. In medieval times, women who were not able to read and so recite the Office in choir were traditionally admitted as lay sisters into convents. Their duties were domestic. Some wealthy women would bring their maids when entering, the maids becoming lay sisters. The lay sister status, although increasingly inappropriate, was still operating at the time of the establishment of the Mercy Institute. Some educated women were happy to become lay sisters because they did not want to teach. Placida Hayes was first a lay sister; she became a choir sister in the 1860s and was Assistant Reverend Mother.
26. Angela Bolster (ed.) Introduction, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841*, Sisters of Mercy of Cork and Ross, 1989.
27. Mary Rose MacGinley, *Women Religious in Australia Choice at a Crossroads*, Sydney, Institute of Religious Studies, 1989, outlines the distinction between "nuns" and "sisters", and describes how they each arose. Orders of nuns were monastic, i.e. took solemn vows, had strict enclosure and divestiture of personal property, and lived in single autonomous convents. It stemmed from the world of European feudalism. Nuns entered into a public engagement in both church and civil law. Their ultimate ecclesiastical superior, under the Holy See, was the local bishop or head of the corresponding men's order. In the 17th and 18th century, there arose "sisters", especially in France, and then increasingly in the 19th century, groups of women who wished to perform good works. They could take simple vows and move about for the sake of their ministries. But they could not, therefore, could not be given juridical status as nuns. De facto, however, social conditions were making these groups the norm and the women were being considered religious. This situation prevailed canonically until the Code of 1917. A similar situation arose with the foundation of the so-called Secular Institutes in the 1920s and later. It was not until the 1983 Code that these were fully incorporated as institutes of consecrated life.
28. *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, ed. Sr. M. Ignatia Neumann, Baltimore, Helicon, 1969, pp.331, 389.
29. Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978.
30. 20.8.1847. Underlining mine.
31. Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia, *An Organisational Culture Study*, Research report, E. More, J. Tulloch, A. Ross-Smith, Macquarie University, 1987.
32. David Mossenson, *State Education in Western Australia 1829-1960*, University of W.A. Press, 1972; C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, Perth City Council, 1979, p.75.

33. Letter 11, *Sketches of Conventual Life in the Bush*, manuscript, Ursula Frayne, Melbourne, 1866.
34. Numbers vary in different accounts but are approximately the same. *The Record* 6.10.1874 gives 158 children in senior portion of assisted school and 110 in junior.
35. 6.2.1848, copy C17/1 ACAP.
36. Boxes in which they kept their pens, papers, etc.
37. To Mother Vincent Whitty, 28.10.1849, quoted *The Link*, Sisters of Mercy Perth, November, 1983.
38. To Mother Vincent Whitty, op.cit.
39. J.F. Whitely, WACR, 27.9.1913.
40. These were Sr. M. Placida Hayes, entered 1850 from W.A.; Sr. M. Joseph Sherlock arrived 1851 — left for Melbourne 1857; Sr. M. Gertrude de Sales arrived 1851; Sr. M. Teresa Spillane arrived in W.A. in 1853 and entered four months later; Sr. M. Vincent Brennan, first Australian born, entered 1862; Sr. M. Camillus Reddin entered from W.A. 1862. The next entrants were not until 1870.
41. Before 1860, apart from an unknown amount of donations from Ireland, resources included £495 collected in 1850 in Europe, together with pictures, statues, and articles for bazaars; £379 from bazaars; £842 from the Propagation of the Faith. In 1848 the first convent was built and paid for by the sisters. In 1853 the Pension School was added and later extended.
42. Goold/Kelly manuscript, op.cit., p.13.
43. 20.10.1852. The lottery was for "an elegant Note Case in papier machie and Mother of Pearl. Tickets 5 Shillings. A beautiful Madonna Brooch set in Gold. Tickets 5 Shillings." Purchasers also received a ticket for a "handsome piece of Needlework, in a gilt frame".
44. "Faith and Fetes: Women and the History of the Churches in Australia", Sabine Willis (ed.), *Women Faith and Fetes Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, Melbourne, Dove Communications, 1977.
45. Ursula wrote to Serra 29.8.1853 re the calculated income required for Sisters and the Native Institution — 12 Sisters of Mercy £240 p.a. (total) — every expense except building and repairs of buildings; Native Children £12 p.a. per child. Their cottage needed repairing and enlarging. There were also a few small debts amounting to about £28 or £30. She could not encroach on the £200 given by him for current expenses of the year ending 25 August, 1954.
46. Frayne manuscript, *Sketches of Conventual Life in the Bush*, op.cit., Letter 12.
47. Urquhart to Mother Vincent Whitty, 17.7.1850.
48. 14 March 1868.
49. Salvado to Frayne, 26.11.1853.
50. Ursula Frayne to Serra, 10.10.1853.
51. 27.2.1854.
52. 12.1.1857.

3 "THE GOOD NUNS"

1. 10.7.1847.
2. Letter to Editor, *The Inquirer*, November 1847, in *Westralian Voices* ed. Marian Aveling, U. of W.A. Press, 1979, p.176.
3. 17.9.1921.

4. More, Tulloch, Ross-Smith, op.cit.
5. To Rev. Mother Cecilia, 6.12.1847.
6. Goold/Kelly manuscript, op.cit.
7. C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, Perth City Council, 1979.
8. Rev. John Smithies to Methodist Missionary Society, London, 25.9.1846, quoted Martin Newbold, *The Turbulent Bishop Brady An Outline of Western Australian Catholic History During John Brady's Role as Priest and Bishop of Perth, 1843-1871*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., ACAP.
9. Quoted Newbold, op.cit., p.17.
10. *Memoirs of Dr Madden*, New York, Catholic Publication Society, 1892, p.225, quoted Newbold, op.cit., p.59.
11. J.R. Wollaston, *The Picton Journal: 1841-44*, ed. A.Burton & P.U. Henn, Perth, Pitman & Son, 1948, p.274.
12. For details about Bernard Smith and the Marmions, M. Newbold, op. cit.
13. *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Western Australia*, Perth, Sands & McDougall, 1903, pp.31-2.
14. Stannage, op.cit.
15. Letter Book, ACAP.
16. Record of Sick Externs Visited, SMAP.
17. *The Real Matilda Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present*, Penguin Books Australia, 1984.
18. Stannage, op.cit.
19. Col.Sec. to Gibney, V.G., 6.10.1882. Gibney to Lord Gifford, Col.Sec., 9.10.1882 (ACAP) asks the government to support the immigrant girls brought out by Sisters at the convent. The sisters would always find a home with them when needed. The girls should not be sent to the poor house. They would rather die than go to such a place at home.
20. 1853, CSO 36/269.
21. 29.7.1855.
22. op.cit., Chapter 32.
23. Terms used in the ISMA Organisational Culture Study, op.cit.
24. Mary Cochina (or Kookina), the first little Aboriginal girl, had arrived around Easter, 1846. In 1847, when the sisters were still housed in the temporary cottage down the end of Lord Street, (now Victoria Avenue), and the school was moved into the church, they were able to take in more orphans and Aboriginal girls. These were taken to Fremantle before the end of that year. Twelve white and black little girls were enrolled. When the convent there was closed in May 1849, they were brought back to Perth to the new convent further up Lord Street.
25. Goold/Kelly Manuscript, op.cit.
26. Frayne manuscript, op.cit., p.20.
27. quoted in Newbold, op.cit., pp.99,143.
28. Haynes, Barrett, Brennan & Brennan, *W.A. Aborigines 1622-1922*, Historical Association of W.A., 1972, extract 57.
29. Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council (W.A.V.P.) 1871, Paper 2. More can be learnt of Salvado from E.J.Stormon (ed. and trans.), *The Salvado Memoirs*, University of W.A. Press, 1977.

30. Vatican Archives, Propagation of the Faith, SRCG, 1867, quoted Vincent Tiggeman, *On the Administration of Church Property in Western Australia 1845-1867*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rome, 1955, ACAP.
31. 1867, *ibid*, p.288.
32. Quinquennial Report, 1879.
33. Gibney to the Governor, Report, 2.1.1893, WACR, 23.12.1905.
34. Goold/Kelly manuscript, *op.cit.*.
35. 30.7.1854, Ursula Frayne sent to Salvado a list of residents at Victoria Square convent: 12 Sisters of Mercy; Mary Spillane, a domestic aged 20 years; 6 native girls — Mary Christian c.12 years, Mary Rose c.11 years, Mary Anne c.11 years, Mary Cecelia c.12 years, Mary Lucy c.11 years, Mary Francis (not yet baptized) c.14 years; 4 orphan girls of Irish parentage — Selina Burke 10 years, Mary Burke 6 years, Mary Kennedy 6 years; Eliza French 3 years.
36. 7.4.1854.
37. 1.1.1856.
38. Or Ballomara.
39. *Recollections of Rev. Mother M. Ursula Frayne*, manuscript, Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne, p.85.
40. WACR, 7.7.1878, 1.8.1878.
41. 6.7.1878, 1.8.1878.
42. Memorial to Earl Grey, Sec. for the Colonies.
43. Dom E.Perez, *Dom Salvado's New Norcia*, manuscript, ACAP.
44. Acta 1851, (213) f.601, Tiggeman, *op.cit.* Perhaps it was a gesture of asking for forgiveness when Serra, in retirement, in 1881, remitted £10 to Bishop Griver for the Sisters of Mercy in Subiaco if they were in need of it to finish their buildings. They were also mentioned provisionally in his will, made in 1871 and confirmed in 1877.
45. Methodist Archives, Perth.
46. C.S.O., 36/317, Report p.3.
47. It also gave £100 for the school. Letter Book, Serra, 1853, ACAP.
48. 4.5.1853, C.S.O., 36/269.
49. C.S.O., 36/269.
50. Letter to Salvado, 30.7.1854, New Norcia Archives.
51. WACR, 6.7.1877.
52. *Of Woman Born Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, London, Virago Press, 1977, p.27.
53. WACR, 31.7.1879.
54. 23.2.1882.

4 GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

1. This portion of Lord Street is now called Victoria Avenue.
2. The Infants' school was also called Holy Innocents or Holy Infants. St. Francis Xavier's Benevolent Institution was the boarding establishment for the Aboriginal girls.
3. Frayne Manuscript, *op.cit.*, p.66.

4. 1.8.1849.
5. Emphasis is Ursula's.
6. David Mossenson: *State Education in W.A. 1829-1960*, University of Western Australia Press, 1972.
7. 31.1.1853, CSO, 36/269.
8. Serra (Letterbook, ACAP) says he blessed the school on 25th July. Ursula Frayne, in her manuscript, *Sketches of Conventual Life in the Bush*, begun 1866, gives 24th September for the date of opening and blessing. In a letter to the CSO, 17.9.1853, 36/269, she says the school house has been operating the past two months, though barely habitable as yet.
9. CSO, 17.9.1853, 36/269.
10. Newbold, op.cit., p.251.
11. Stannage, *People of Perth*, op.cit., p.96.
12. CSO, A5 File 21, 315.
13. *The Herald*, 6.3.1869.
14. From her diary. These and some of the other details from oral testimony of Dr. Heather Vose, who was writing Lady Weld's biography at the time of her death in 1990.
15. Report of Hon. Sec. J.T. Reilly, St. Vincent de Paul Society, *The Herald*, 6.3., 1869.
16. Fred Barlee to Bishop Griver, 17.2.1868, CSO.
17. WACR, 24.3.1881; 5.5.1881; 19.5.1881. Griver Notebook, No. 2, pp.20,321, ACAP.
18. 24.3.1881.
19. WACR, 6.10.1874.
20. WACR, 6.5.1875.
21. WACR, 29.12.1881.
22. WACR, 29.12.1881, reprinted from *West Australian*, 23.12.1881.
23. C17/2, ACAP.
24. *Fremantle Herald*, 28.10.1871. Some details of costs from the Gibney file in ACAP may be of interest: Tender for carpenters' and plumbers' work were submitted by Wm Sloan £194.4.4. on 4.2.1870; by Thos Smith for roofs labor and nails, material and labor for plumbers work, material and labor for galvanized iron ridge roll £2.0.6 on 4.2.1870; by Richard Barry and James Corbett, for roofing of new convent Lean To or Passage — nails and labour, 20/- per square (main roof 27/- per square). The nails and shingling of the orphanage, Perth, were done by Joseph Nunan for 24/- (£1/4/-) per square (any timber necessary 9/6 per 100 ft.) Tender dated 4.2.1870. Mr.T.Reiley submitted a Memorandum of Timber Scantling Boards £321.18.5.
25. Keith Amos: *The Fenians in Australia*, N.S.Wales University Press, 1988.
26. WACR, 2.12.1874.
27. 14.3.1869, 1.8.1868.
28. B26 1/4, ACAP.
29. WACR, 22.8.1896.
30. WACR, 28.2.1903. It was also being called "The Ladies' College" and "Pension School" from a mid-1900s certificate of merit; or "Ladies' College" in a 1907 Prospectus.
31. WACR, 6.6.1896.

32. WACR 30.11.1895, 6.6.1896, 22.8.1896. See also file 46/3 ACAP — Perth Town Lot C13, frontage of 99ft each to Hay and Goderich Streets, depth of c.369 feet from street to street. The new building stands about midway between Hay and Goderich Streets. Estimated Value Land £1386 Buildings £5000 Total £6386. Valuer B.C. Wood, 8.7.1902.
33. WACR, 24.12.1898.
34. WACR, 18.7.1878.
35. 23.12.1916.
36. WACR, 23.12.1916.
37. ACAP, Griver/Sisters of Mercy file.
38. Permission was obtained from Rome by Gibney in 1907 for her to be re-elected.
39. WACR, 28.6.1930.
40. 24.11.1855, to Goold.
41. *Recollections of Rev. Mother M. Ursula Frayne*, op.cit.
42. By the end of 1855, the Senior Free School, the Infant Free School for boys and girls under six, and the School for Young Ladies together comprised over 50 children. (Frayne to Goold, 24.11.1855).
43. In Melbourne, Ursula and her companions founded the Sisters of Mercy at Fitzroy; from there, she was also responsible for the establishment of St.Vincent de Paul's Orphanage at Emerald Hill (South Melbourne); several schools of various grades; and a branch convent at Kilmore. Joseph Sherlock was first superior of the Orphanage, founded January, 1861. WACR, 2.7.1885; Maree Allen, op.cit.
44. WACR, 13.8.1885, p.7. gives the reports for 1884 of the Government Inspector on the Catholic Elementary Schools. Guildford school is said to be held in the R.C. Chapel; five classes under 2 Sisters of Mercy. "The proficiency of the scholars is very creditable."
45. WACR, 29.2.1896.
46. 1923. See later this chapter and in Chapter 8.
47. Farewell to Governor Robinson, WACR, 6.9.1877.
48. Ken Spillman, *Identity Prized A History of Subiaco*, University of W.A. Press, 1985.
49. *New Norcia Times*, Moynihan Notebooks, Sisters of Mercy in W.A., ACAP.
50. *W.A. Times*, No. 224, 24.10.1876.
51. WACR, 24.12.1932.
52. WACR, 27.12.1902, p.6.
53. WACR, 6.9.1877.
54. WACR, 6.10.1877.
55. WACR, 6.9.1877.
56. WACR, 8.2.1883.
57. WACR, 8.5.1879; 22.5.1879.
58. Gibney, Report to Col.Sec., Hon. Malcolm Fraser, 16.7.1883.
59. WACR, 29.12.1881.
60. 8.5.1879.
61. 24.2.1869.

62. The allowance was eventually increased to 1/1½d per head per diem. In 1905, the Girls' Orphanage received £144/18/- for month of February, £168 for month of May; £171/19/1 for month of October, 1907. (see account slips, Charities Department/Colonial Secretary's Department — no indication of numbers). During the year 1909, it received £1,977/0/3 at rate of 1/1½d per child. M.Gibney to Moran, 26.1.1910.
63. See, e.g., *The Herald*, March 6, 1869.
64. *West Australian*, 29.8.1883.
65. WACR, 20.9.1883.
66. WACR, 20.9.1883.
67. Stombuco had earlier designed All Hallows School and St. Anne's Industrial School for the Brisbane Mercies.
68. *Fremantle Herald*, in WACR, 9.8.1893; WACR 26.1.1893.
69. WACR, 23.12.05.
70. 1881 census — Newcastle 208; York 757; Northam 252.
71. Marian Aveling, "Western Australian Society The Religious Aspect (1829-1895), in Stannage, C.T.(ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of W.A. Press, 1981, gives these figures for 1890 — average attendance of Catholics listed in 1881 census: 660 out of 1175 in Fremantle; 1740 out of 1828 in Perth; 129 out of 655 in York; 230 out of 1973 in Toodyay. Of course, it would not always be easy to attend church in country areas.
72. WACR, 13.8.1885, gives an 1884 Report of the Government Inspector, which states that "the school-room is a well-arranged and spacious building, fitted with gallery and suitable furniture... The scholars evinced satisfactory proficiency..."
73. 6.7.1874, p.3.
74. WACR, 6.6.1877 — church was opened January, 1883.
75. Rica Erickson, *The Brand on His Coat*, University of W.A., 1983.
76. Anne Dunne, born 1857, entered from W.A., professed 19.12.1878, died 16.9.1923. For account of ceremony, see WACR, 27.9.1894, p.7c.
77. 1870 census — Toodyay 215 adults 57 children; York 231 adults 95 children.
78. See statistics from Aveling given above, endnote 70.
79. Some accounts include Sister M. Baptist Palmer, who was born in Toodyay. In 1885, she was celebrating her feast-day in Guildford. In 1904 she was lent by the Perth community to York.
80. Present spelling. Rica Erickson, *Old Toodyay and Newcastle*, Toodyay Shire Council, 1974, gives Hasell. A old sign in the museum at Connor's Mill gives Hassel. In the 1970s, when the school had closed and the Sisters were finding it difficult to maintain the Toodyay complex, the present Mr. Hassell offered to give money to restore "The Ship" if the Order guaranteed the continuation of the school and the presence of Sisters. It could not give such a commitment. The building was eventually restored in 1986/7 as part of the Avondown Centre for Catholic Education..
81. Rica Erickson, *Old Toodyay and Newcastle*, op.cit.
82. *ibid.*
83. 1895 — 78; 1897 — 43, at which number it remained.
84. WACR, 31.5.1883. The four sisters were Sisters M. Francis Goold, Stanislaus Morrissey, Bernadette Agnes Lewis, and Gertrude Whitely.

85. That is, the Select School for Young Ladies as distinct from the assisted school. The Select School would have included a boarding section.
86. WACR, 9.8.1883.
87. Lady Barker (Broome) is mentioned in several newspaper items at this time with respect to the sisters, and it was in this year that the sisters were holidaying at Rottneet in the Governor's holiday residence.
88. Ruth Marchant-James, draft of History of the Presentation Sisters in W.A., 1989.
89. WACR, 20.3.1884; see also WACR, 13.8.1885, for 1884 report of the Government Inspector — "the former mixed school is now organized in boys' and girls' separate departments... the girls' and infants' in a suitable building recently erected for the Sisters of Mercy."
90. Marchant-James, op.cit.
91. 12.11.1885, p.7c.
92. One of the sisters at Geraldton was Ellen Kenny, a lay sister, Sister Mary Agnes, who left the community in November 1884 without permission. She was then 28. She was dispensed from her vows of poverty and obedience (but not chastity) the following year by Bishop Griver. A second lay sister, Sophia Drew, called in religion Cecilia, applied for a dispensation from her vows. Meantime, she was sent to Bunbury, where she received the desired permission.,
93. WACR, 22.12.1887.
94. Catholic Year Book, about 40.
95. *Victoria Express*, 1.3.1890.
96. *Victoria Express*, 10.7.1891.
97. In 1896, Bishop Gibney asked the Black Josephites also to give their Northampton convent and school to the Presentations. They then went to Boulder (Kamballie) on the goldfields. The Northampton school, however, was not taken over by the Presentations until three more nuns came from Ireland. It was reopened in May, 1899.
98. She was not born in Australia; the first Australian born was Sr Vincent Brennan. Further details from the Registers show that she had been received as a Lay Sister in 1851, professed in 1853, admitted as a choir sister in 1862, elected as Mother Assistant 1877, re-elected 1880, resigned 1883 to take charge of the new house in Bunbury.
99. WACR, 28.6.1883.
100. To Mrs Dunne, 16.12.1892.
101. Building of the school (later called the Hall) was between 1884 — WACR, 13.8.1885, gives an Inspector's Report for 1884 which stated the school was too cramped, and that the school authorities were taking steps to provide additional accommodation — and June 1887, when Placida Hayes died. She was praised for providing St. Joseph's School.
102. Designated William Conroy in *Record*, 28.7.1938, which sets out the details of grants and transfers of land lots.,
103. WACR, 28.7.1938.
104. *The Inquirer*, 17.7.1888.
105. WACR, 19.7.1888.
106. 7.2.1889. It was built by Messrs White and Veryard for £630. A later addition, for Infants, by Mr. A. Lee, cost £620. Lee furnished the rooms with gas fittings and chandeliers for £42. Messrs White & Co. later erected a drill-shed for £80. WACR, 18.7.1896, p.11.

107. Catholic Year Book.
108. Mr. D. Gray built chapel and adjacent rooms for £250. A temporary laundry cost £60.
109. Mossenson, op.cit.
110. *Lessons for Ladies A Social History of Girls' Education in Australasia 1870-1900* by Coral Chambers, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1986. It does not treat of W.A. specifically.
111. *Inquirer*, 8.8.1849.
112. "Education of the People", in C.T. Stannage (ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, op.cit., p.569. See also L. Fletcher (ed), *Pioneers of Education in Western Australia*, University of W.A. Press.
113. Fletcher gives 1901, but the school's Golden Jubilee Annual gives 1902.
114. Bi-centennial lecture, "Catholic Education in W.A. — historical perspective", 1988.
115. Mossenson, op.cit; Fletcher in Stannage (ed), op.cit.
116. Quoted Chambers, op.cit., p.162.

5 RETELLING THE FOUNDING MYTH

1. In Stannage (ed), *A New History of Western Australia*, op.cit.
2. Original spelling.
3. Though canon law, in fact, required only six.
4. Mr Lionel Logue, a South Australian who went to London in 1924 and who, in 1926, helped the future King George VI overcome his stammer. Denis Judd, *King George VI*, London, Michael Joseph, 1982. Logue also taught speech at Victoria Square.
5. Paula McAdam in *Joining in the Dance*, Sisters of Mercy West Perth manuscript, SMAWP.
6. Gibney to Bishop Dwyer, 10.10.1909, Box A9 814, ACAP.
7. At first for Adelaide University, then, after 1913, for the University of W.A..
8. 9.11.1912; 21.6.1924.
9. 30.6.1940; 11.2.1945.
10. Now at Craigie.
11. Old diary, SMAWP.
12. The story is told that she sat on the front doorstep of St. Brigid's until Mother Berchmans consented to admit her. The story of sitting on the front steps is, however, also told of Sr. M. Benedict Taylor who was being sent home by the West Perth community.
13. "The Founding Fathers of St Ildephonsus' College, New Norcia" by Br Valerian Braniff FMS in *Religion and Society in Western Australia*, ed. John Tonkin, University of W.A., October 1987 (*Studies in W. Australian History IX*). St. Ildephonsus' College for white boys followed in 1913.
14. In fact, West Perth was not invited to join the initial meeting about formation of a union, the eastern Mercies organising the meeting not being aware that there were two distinct groups in Perth.
15. Victoria Square Novitiate Register records Mary as "of this colony", Elizabeth and Christina as "of Newcastle".
16. For the purchase of St. Brigid's, Lesmurdie.
17. Born Cootamundra, N.S.W., 1873, of an English father and Irish mother.

18. Oral history relates she was a widow at her entry. She was Mother Bursar until 1911; Rev. Mother 1911-1917; Mother Assistant 1917-23; Rev. Mother 1923-29, at her death Mother Assistant.
19. They were later taught this by a Miss Brown.
20. WACR, 5.10.1961 — account of her golden jubilee.
21. Janina Pascoe in *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit.
22. Between 1900 and 1935, theory exams 1676 students; instrumental 2058; vocal 364; distinctions 1131; higher diplomas as teachers and performers in piano, violin, singing 179; LRSM diplomas 70; medals gold and silver 41; vocal diplomas 64; 115 diplomas piano and violin; 43 prizes piano and violin. One gained the Leipzig Conservatoire while studying in Germany; 2 scholarships for singing to Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music, London; 1 for violin at Royal Academy, London; 1 for piano at University Conservatorium, Melbourne.
23. WACR, 21.9.1912, p.17.
24. Value of property at purchase was £1,770. Situated on corner of Shakespeare and Marion Streets, it consisted of the block upon which was the cottage, purchased from Mrs. Bridges, and two adjoining strips in Marion Street, purchased from Mr. H. Brown and Mr. J. Clinch.
25. *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit.
26. Sister M.Camillus Jackson in *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit.
27. "real".
28. Sr. Pius Stanley in *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit., adapted.
29. *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit. In February, 1960, a Junior primary feeder school began, St. Laurence's, Westminster, catering for Grades I to IV.
30. Now covered over.
31. *Lesmurdie A Home in the Hills* from the diary of Maude Sanderson, The Nine Club, 1979, p.84.
32. Mrs Catherine Sanderson, present occupant of Lesmurdie House, disagrees with this statement, but Sister Paula McAdam remembers Sister M. Francis Hughes asserting it.
33. Janina Pascoe in *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit.
34. Other birth years recorded are 1889, 1891, 1892. 1890 is the one given in convent records.
35. Later Archbishop Sir Lancelot Goody.
36. One of these three did not leave the congregation until she was 60.
37. Sr. M. Anthony Boxsell in *Joining in the Dance*, op.cit.
38. WACR, 2.4.1898, p.16.
39. Gibney to Bishop Dwyer says that the Sacred Heart High School was founded December, 1897, 10.10.1909, Box A9 8/14, ACAP.
40. WACR, 15.4.1899 and 5.11.1898, p.12.
41. Non-current files, Perth Congregational Office, Wembley.
42. WACR, 6.5.1875.
43. The Victoria Square Register, where she entered, gives "Bridget". The Bunbury Register, "Brigid", by which she was known.
44. Victoria Square Novitiate Register gives her name as Maria. Bunbury Register as Ellen. She had a sister Mary.

45. One from Hokitika, New Zealand, one from Bunbury (born in Victoria), a third from Victoria, all three of whom left, and one from Jarrahdale, Western Australia, who stayed.
46. Mrs Aileen Mountford in Centenary Booklet, *Pathfinders in Education, Sisters of Mercy, Bunbury, 1883-1983*.
47. Centenary Booklet, op.cit.
48. WACR, Dec.14.
49. Sister M. Helena in *Leaves from the Past*, Sisters of Mercy Perth manuscript, SMAP.
50. Russell Hardiman, *Early Days in Donnybrook*, gives a good account of the convent and school.
51. 25.12.1937.
52. Bunbury Convent Chronicle.
53. "Thomas Little at Dardanup", paper, 1986, School of Social Inquiry, Murdoch University, W.A.
54. The Bunbury Music Hall was built by Powers, begun September, 1918 and opened 3.17.1919.
55. ACAP.
56. Bunbury Convent Chronicle.
57. 14.12.1929; cutting n.d. (1931), ACAP.
58. Centenary Booklet, op.cit.
59. Centenary Booklet, op.cit., p.16.
60. In February, 1903, the community also included Mother M. Dolores Tunney, lent from Perth.
61. WACR, 7.3.1903.
62. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, op.cit., p.241.
63. WACR, 31.3.1906, p.11.
64. Gibney to Dwyer, 10.10.1909, Box A9 8/14, ACAP.
65. After re-union with Perth, she was known as Josephine, probably to avoid confusion with Joseph Regan.
66. WACR, 21.11.1908.
67. Chronicle of Sr. M. Ignatius Tyrell, SMAP.
68. WACR, — July 1908.
69. Fr. Reidy.
70. Names and ages were: Rev. Mother Gertrude O'Callaghan, 26; Mother Assistant Ignatius Tyrrell, 26; Camillus O'Mahony, 36; Gerard O'Mahony, 33; Magdalen Reidy, 27; Alacoque Eustace 23; Stanislaus Brennan, 27; Teresa Cronin, 27; Aloysius MacQuaid, 24; Agnes O'Halloran, 24; Genevieve Pombart, 32; Annunciation Grave, 25.
71. *Leaves from the Past*, op.cit.
72. WACR, 13.4.1918.
73. Sr. M. Magdalene Lucas was lent until the end of the year. Later, in 1904, Sr. M. Baptist Palmer was lent.
74. WACR, 7.12.1901.

75. She was transferred to Midland Junction and later to Perth.
76. Visitations, 14.1.1901; 3.2.1903.
77. ACAP.
78. Gibney to Dwyer, 10.10.1909, Box A9 8/14.
79. Later there was a post-primary section.
80. Rica Erickson, *Old Toodyay and Newcastle*, op.cit.
81. WACR, July 24th, p.11, col.3.
82. Toodyay Centenary Brochure, 1946.
83. Rica Erickson, *Old Toodyay and Newcastle*, op.cit.
84. See also A.T. Thomas, *Toodyay*, p.38.
85. Sr. M. Margaret Hehir claimed that, seeing it lit up, she cried: "Doesn't it look like a ship!", and it was called The Ship thereafter.
86. WACR, 4.5.1929.
87. There were some lesser buildings and, at one stage, an old, dilapidated hall down the back.
88. *Record*, 16.9.1933.

6 NEWCOMERS RE-CREATE THE FOUNDING MYTH

1. Some of this background material has been collected from Nancy Keesing(ed.), *History of the Australian Gold Rushes By Those Who Were There*, North Ryde, Angus & Robertson, 1971.
2. Spelling as in Mercy documents of the era.
3. *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, op.cit., vol. IV, 1895; Centenary Booklet *The Sisters of Mercy South Australia 1880-1980*.
4. Donnellan's two daughters became Mercies.
5. Bishop Gibney did not forget Kanowna's need. Later that year, when the Derry Mercies arrived and also stayed at St. Brigid's, West Perth, it was suggested to them that they split, some going out to Kanowna, the others beginning at Victoria Park. The nuns, however, did not agree to being separated, and they all went to Victoria Park. Finally, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart went to K.
6. Gibney to Dwyer, 10.10.1909, Box A9 8/14, ACAP, gives date of foundation 22.1.1898.
7. Chapter Book, 12.2.1902.
8. "Letterbook, ACAP, p.219.
9. Coolgardie Convent of Mercy was the only one with title deeds etc. not in Gibney's name. They were in Catherine McKay's name.
10. WACR, 31.1.1903, p.11.
11. WACR, 5.2.1921, p.3 col.f.
12. WACR, 13.8.1921.
13. Buried at Coolgardie are the following, with age and date of death: Sisters M. Josephine Briggs, 49, 28.3.1908; Gertrude Carroll, 34, 28.2.1910; Evangelista Rooney, 40, 23.9.1920; Antonia McKay, 79, 3.8.1924; Philomena Cane, 39, 1.4.1928; de Pazzi Briggs, 72, 24.10.1926; Catherine Wade, 76, 29.9.1939; Joseph Gurry, 70, 19.1.1953; Martha Murphy, 74, 15.4.1959; Alphonsa Smith, 78, 1.5.1958; Gerard Bourke, 72, 17.8.1960; Antonia Lawson, 79, 22.10.1960; Magdalene Ward, 87, 14.2.1962; Anna Foureur, 94, 27.9.1965; Veronica McMahon, 84, 26.6.1966; Clare Smith, 86, 16.8.1966.

14. Sr. M. Ignatius Conlon's account says she returned in 1906 with Sr. M. Madeleine who had come on loan in 1904 after a visit of M. M. Antonia to Adelaide. The community at 7.3.1899 had seven members, including 1 lay Sister and 2 novices.
15. H.D. O'Kelly, "An early Goldfields school", *Tom's Weekly*, 23.8.1971.
16. Left and married in Norseman.
17. Margaret Bull, *White Feather The Story of Kanowna*, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1981, Chapter 12.
18. Catholic Year Book gives: for 1912, 19 Sisters, 24 boarders; for 1922, 19 Sisters, 45 boarders.
19. Noviceship Register records "Gertrude", with a later note saying this was her confirmation name.
20. WACR, -8.1903.
21. One of them, Rosanna, entered Victoria Square in 1942 and became S.M. Germaine.
22. West Perth Mercies also were involved in the Bushies School at Esperance, in the 1960s.
23. 5.4.1934, Prendiville to Rev.Mother, Coolgardie, ACAP.
24. Bourke to Gibney 2.11.1898, ACAP.
25. WACR, 16.2.1918.
26. Sister M. Anthony says it was a doctor's house which was rented for the time being; see letter of Mother Antonia dated 18.2.1918.
27. The larger ones originally from Kanowna church are now in the Pro-cathedral of St. John in Perth.
28. The Kalgoorlie Festivals seem to have been from early 1950s to early 1960s. In 1954, St. Anthony's Choir, Coolgardie, held shields/certificates for first place in choir sections of the Kalgoorlie Festival for four successive years previously. In 1954 it won the inaugural shield at the Perth Music Festival. It was the only country choir contesting. In 1974 and 1975, the Coolgardie Primary Choir won first place at the Esperance Music Festivals.
29. Leaving classes probably did not last for long. *Records* 1963-8 show only Junior classes at Kalgoorlie, and some of the pupils went elsewhere for senior; others got jobs. In 1954, 6 passed Leaving from Coolgardie, two of whom were from Kalgoorlie. Sister Margaret M. Lowry, in oral interview, said that Leaving was only at times, if there was a girl who wanted to go on; there were a couple who went teaching.
30. WACR, 7.4.1960.
31. Angela Mullen does not seem to have been professed in any West Australian Mercy congregation.
32. Letterbook, ACAP.
33. WACR, 5.11.1898.
34. WACR, 4.2.1899, p.15a.
35. There is no extant Noviceship register for Victoria Park. The first postulant to be professed (Kate Lyons, Sr. Gerard) did not enter until 1902.
36. WACR, 28.1.1899; 4.2.1899.
37. WACR, 15.4.1899.
38. WACR, 16.6.1900.
39. WACR, 14.7.1900, p9d.
40. 1902 Catholic Year Book.

41. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, op.cit.
42. Sr. Raphael Coady, *The Link*, op.cit., November, 1983.
43. Cost of erection and furnishing £686.6.3., Gibney file, ACAP.
44. Date of this fire seems uncertain; one account says additions were made in 1909 but a fire was in 1915 when very little of the convent and contents were saved. Another account, by M. Clare Buggy, gives 14th November, 1914, as the date of the fire, and says it was a Sunday afternoon. That date, however, was a Saturday.
45. WACR, at time of silver jubilee 1923.
46. WACR, 8.9.1900.
47. 5.1.1901, p15a.
48. WACR, 8.9.1900, p.8.
49. WACR, 13.10.1900, p12a.
50. At one stage, the parish priest would not allow the curate to drive the sisters home. After 1940, the area became a separate parish and Father T. Ahern, P.P., drove the sisters home most days.
51. WACR, cutting, n.d., SMAP.
52. 10th and 30th July.

7 EPISCOPAL POLITICS AND MERCY SURVIVAL TACTICS

1. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (ed.), *Women of Spirit: Female Leaders in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979.
2. *New Wine-skins Re-imagining Religious Life Today*, New York, Paulist Press, 1986, p.136.
3. Gal.3.28.
4. Carmel Niland, Chairperson of the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board, and Susan Ryan, later Senator and first woman Federal Cabinet Minister, at the 1981 National Mercy Chapter.
5. Sunday Mail Magazine, Brisbane, 19.3.1991, p.6.
6. Germaine Greer in Marcia Cohen, *The Sisterhood*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1988, p.35.
7. Irish historian, Sister Margaret MacCurtain, O.P., in T.V. documentary, *Beyond the Veil*.
8. Rosemary Radford Ruether in R.R. Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (ed.), *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, N.Y., Simon & Schuster, 1979.
9. Rosa MacGinley, PBVM, in "Congregations of Religious Women in Australia An Overview 1838-1939", unpublished monograph.
10. Congregations with diocesan status came more immediately under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. Those with pontifical status came more directly under Rome. In 1908 the Sacred Congregation for Religious was established. It was the women religious themselves who had petitioned for greater Roman control, as an escape from arbitrary decision-making by local bishops. (Emily George, "Canonical Status", in Carol Quigley (ed.), *Turning Points in Religious Life*, Delaware, Michael Glazier, 1987).
11. "A Historian Reflects on Religious Life in Australia" in Anne McLay (ed.), *Men and Women in Religious Life*, Melbourne, Collins Dove, 1990, p.12.

12. To Cecilia Marmion, November, 1846.
13. Brady would have been acquainted with the type of sisterhood which arose especially in France, in the 17th and 18th centuries; after 1800 some 400 of them were founded in France alone. They were considered not "nuns" but essentially lay, and so had no juridical status. They were accepted by a local bishop to work in his diocese. He thus was considered their ecclesiastical superior. When the Sisters of Mercy were founded in Ireland in 1831, they were given ready Roman approbation but not full religious status according to the then canon law. Mary Rose MacGinley, *Women Religious in Australia Choice at a Crossroads*, Sydney, Institute of Religious Studies, 1989.
14. Little to Polding, 11.7.1856, ACAP.
15. Quoted in Tiggeman, op.cit., p.250 — S.C.1853-1857, (5), ff.1322-1322v.
16. Perez, op.cit.
17. Tiggeman, op. cit., pp.137,141. — S.R.C.G. 1851,PII (974)f.716V.
18. Tiggeman, op.cit., p.102 — see Acta, 1851, (213)f.601.
19. Cardinal Franson to Serra, Book A2 J.S.Moynihan, ACAP.
20. *New Norcia Times*, Moynihan, Sisters of Mercy Book, ACAP, p.90.
21. Ursula's refutations are in brackets.
22. Copy of original, Polding to Serra, S.R.C. VI 319-132. n.d., sent by Polding to Propaganda, ACAP.
23. 28.1.1856.
24. See note on letter Serra to Martin Griver, 24.1.1856, ACAP.
25. sic; also "Benito Martin" in manuscript by Dom Perez, but Martinez in Catholic Year Book.
26. "He knows that even if I shouted at him sometimes, I was loving him very much". Serra to Griver, n.d. but after leaving the diocese. ACAP.
27. 8.10.1855, quoted Tiggeman, op.cit., p.198.
28. 26.1.1856.
29. These three thus founded the Order in Melbourne, at Fitzroy. Ursula continued to be "a tower of strength and a rock of common sense". She acquired a reputation for business acumen and exercised a matriarchal role in her own community. From it, were established an orphanage and three branch convents.
30. Box 26, file 7, No. 1, ACAP.
31. Chapter Book, Sisters of Mercy, Fitzroy.
32. Chapter Book, Perth, gives May, 1866 as date of readmission to the community and is signed by Rev. Mother Aloysius Kelly. Register (written later) says January, 1867.
33. See above, Chapter 3.
34. Serra continued to show interest in the colony. He wrote to Griver, sending things for the bazaar of the Sisters of Mercy (and of the Sisters of St. Joseph) 1860. He also sent the Sisters of Mercy kind messages, expressing regret that the Reverend Mother (Baptist) "shed tears". He promised to try to find postulants for the Sisters. 2.4.61. He wrote graciously in reply to Baptist's successor, Reverend Mother Aloysius Kelly 25.7.62. He mentioned them in his will 1871 (confirmed 1877) to receive 1000 reales if Griver as administrator cannot send these to "the Superior of the charitable establishment" he helped.
35. Letter to M. Vincent Whitty, Dublin, 1850, SMAP.

36. L.J. Goody, *Martin Griver Second Catholic Bishop of Perth (1814-1886)*, Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, 1986.
 37. Notebook, p.20; Notebook 2, p.321, ACAP.
 38. *West Australian*, July 1st, 1925.
 39. Gibney to Moran 31.1.1910 A7/6 ACAP
 40. See *W.A. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 40, p.3698..
 41. The Convent of Mercy, Coolgardie was the only one of the grants and titles to convents in a list in ACAP not in Gibney's name. The list included Mercy convents at West Perth, Perth, Bunbury, and York. Gibney assumed control also over a much more modest grant of an allotment of land by an old man, Richard Barnett, to the Sisters in Bunbury. The sisters were requested to send in the title deeds; Gibney wanted to transfer it into his name "on behalf of the Sisters". (A. Bourke).
 42. 30.11.1901, ACAP, 68/2. Serra's bill became law, 17.9.1858. It vested all churches, buildings, convents, monasteries, lands and premises of the church "absolutely and indefeasibly" in the bishop for the time being.
 43. A.B ourke to O'Reily, 31.5.1910, A7, ACAP.
 44. *West Australian*, 9.5.1909.
 45. Mortgages included those on schools at Victoria Square (2), West Perth (2), Newcastle (1), York (1), Bunbury (2).
 46. Perth Lots C9,C10,C11 — area 1 acre 3 rds 12 perches — where was situated the Convent of Mercy and School, was acquired, free of encumbrance, as endowment for Chapel etc. in 1873. The title deed was at the Palace. The endowment was "in trust for the erection, maintenance and repair of a chapel for Public Worship and other Buildings connected therewith and for the provision out of the revenues belonging to or arising from the use of the said Chapel in such manner as shall be lawfully appointed for all things necessary for the celebration of Divine Worship therein."
 47. Victoria Square Chapters and Council Meetings; J. Duhig to Moran 15.6.1909, Box A 7/6, ACAP. See also ACAP File 3C17; B1 Book 2 Gibney file; Clune to Vic. Sq. 7.7.1934.
- Telegrams were sent by Gibney to Canon Robinson, Kalgoorlie and Dean Brennan of Boulder, asking them to take over the mortgage. Curates were asked to hand over from their stipends what was in excess of their personal support. The mortgage of the telegrams was on portion Lot C12 which meant nearly all the Convent outbuildings, the kitchen, and about 20 feet of the main building. 97/10 A9. A memo by Gibney signed 19.4.1909 indicates that this mortgage was the first of Keogh's "deceitful transactions relative to the Convent of Mercy property (Victoria Square). He mortgaged Lot 12 to a Dr. Ingersole for £1500. He took the title deeds out of my safe without my knowledge or consent. He forged my name to the mortgage and witnessed the forgery himself. ...Demand now come for payment in full with interest."
- Correspondence between the Australian Provident Society and Keogh, 25.7.1902, 46/3 ACAP, indicates that the priest was then negotiating for loans on Lots C9,10,11, Perth. Lot No. 1 housed the Old Convent at cnr. Hay Street value £6725; Lot No. 2 Sisters of Mercy School £6970; Lot No. 3 Convent of Mercy at Corner, C11 and 12 £10,356.
- A note in Gibney's writing (n.d.) also indicated that Keogh mortgaged the Convent of Mercy, Lots C13, 14, and 15 (which included S21.S22, Gibney's property in Adelaide Terrace).
- Total mortgages on the convent seem to be 28.8.1902 £8,500; 16 December 1907 £1,750.

48. Document, n.d., A9 23/9; Report by Bishop Dwyer to Moran 21.10.1909, A7/6, ACAP.
49. 2.2.1899, J. Magnier Csr to Gibney, ACAP; agreement signed 23.12.1898.
50. *West Australian*, 9.5.1909. The term "College Reserve" was used in the newspaper account of the court hearing about three promissory bills Gibney refused to honour. It referred to land in Newcastle Street that Keogh wanted to buy from the Methodist Ladies' College. It was originally intended to be the site of their college, but they decided to build in Claremont. (Jean Lang, *A Living Tradition A History of Methodist Ladies' College 1907-1980*, p.11). Keogh had borrowed to buy this land. Gibney had opposed the purchase. In court, Gibney stated that before the inception of self-government, he had an endowment of 8,000 acres and had from time to time sold such of it as he did not require.
51. It is interesting to note that there was no animosity among the West Perth Mercies to the Redemptorist Fathers, who became good friends. One of the Mercies helped decorate, with a painted wall frieze, some of the public rooms of the new monastery.
52. 18.9.1909. There was trouble over the share of the grant almost from the beginning. On 8.2.1902, Gibney, refuting accusations, stated that he had assured Propaganda he would sell the land if requested and give each community the amount to which each was entitled pro rata. Bourke also was upset over the fact that the properties mortgaged included West Perth Church and Presbytery (though not Convent).
53. In the 1930s, Bishop Collins of Geraldton was still complaining about injustice to the Geraldton diocese in this matter of the schools grant. (31.1.1933; 2.7.1939.) His predecessor, Bishop Kelly, had made several pleas, right through from 1909 to the 1920s. Eventually, after the death of Gibney in 1925, Kelly had taken the case to Rome, but Bishop Collins was still asking for a re-investigation in July, 1937. 21/18 A9, ACAP.
54. 28.8.1908; 18.1.09; 23.2.09; 30.3.09; 24.12.09; 22.2.10 — Gibney file, Sisters of Mercy, ACAP.
55. 26 April 1937.
56. Secretary to Bank of NSW, 26 5 1939, c17 43/9, ACAP.
57. See, e.g., to Rev. Mother General, 21.7.1942; 26.2.1944, Sisters of Mercy, Perth, c17/6, ACAP.
58. 21.7.1942. However, correspondence does show Prendiville forbidding Mother Brigid to transfer money from elsewhere to help Bassendean.
59. *Men and Women in Religious Life*, op.cit., p.12.
60. Personal letter to the congregation, Sister Gabrielle Blake, chairperson of Process Committee, Chapter Year 1989.
61. *Footprints*, Melbourne Archdiocesan Historical Commission, February, 1990. See also her *Women Religious in Australia Choice at a Crossroads*, op.cit.
62. They were not monastic, however, in other respects; they took simple not solemn vows, and did not observe strict enclosure.
63. 8.2.1890, quoted Ruth Marchant-James, draft of History of the Presentation Sisters in W.A., op.cit., p.16.
64. 24.2.1890.
65. Anne McLay, James Quinn *First Catholic Bishop of Brisbane*, Toowoomba, Church Archivists' Society, 2nd edn, 1989.
66. M. O'Sullivan, "1838-1870 Involvement of Religious Women in Early Australia", in *Congregations of Religious Women in Australia An Overview 1839-1939*, unpublished manuscript, pp.13,20.

67. Campion, op.cit.
68. Perth Chapter Acts 18.5.1936. Places at meals, in choir, bedrooms, etc. were usually arranged according to seniority.
By end of 1909, the statistics for the Sisters of Mercy in the diocese of Perth were: 142 professed, 19 novices, 23 institutions — 15 primary schools teaching 1956 children; 7 high schools teaching 365 children; 1 girls' orphanage with 148 children. (10.10.1909, Gibney to Dwyer, 8/14 Box A9, ACAP).
70. Sr. Margaret Mary Lowry's testimony. I have not been able to confirm or disprove this.
71. Archbishop Carr of Melbourne to Mother General, 12.7.1907, stated that Rome had directed him to move towards Union or Amalgamation of the Mercies.
72. c17/4, ACAP.
73. 21.4.1921.
74. Oral testimony of some involved.
75. 29.5.34, C13 16/2, ACAP.
76. Sister M. Brigid, The Novitiate, St. Michael's, N. Goulburn, 30.1.1911, C17/4, ACAP.
77. 15.2.1934.
78. There seems to have been made some distinction between the movement of Victoria Park and of Bunbury/Coolgardie to join Victoria Square. A statement in the Chapter Acts of the Amalgamated body says: Guildford, York and Newcastle (now Toodyay) rejoined Perth under local Superior (sic) in 1911-1912 and Victoria Park joined same community in 1934. In 1936 Bunbury with its five branch houses amalgamated with Perth under a Mother General and in 1939 (sic) Coolgardie with its two branch houses joined the Amalgamation.
79. Sr. Margaret Mary Lowry — one of the No's was in 1935; she is unsure of the other date.
80. While documentation exists about prohibiting entrants into the Coolgardie community, I could not find any for West Perth. However, Sister Paula McAdam was told by her mother, a great friend of Mother Berchmans, that Sister M. Peter Murray was not allowed to enter West Perth in the early 1920s. Other sisters confirm hearing about the prohibition.
81. This is a confused account, probably due to lapse of memory. It was not till 1936 that three houses — Victoria Square, Victoria Park (joined to Victoria Square in 1934) and Bunbury (1936) — were amalgamated. Coolgardie then accepted
82. 38.
82. C17/6, Sisters of Mercy, Perth, ACAP.
83. For example, Prendiville to Rev. Mother, 13.1.1931, Sisters of Mercy, Perth, ACAP c17/6, ACAP.
84. ibid, 14.2.31.
85. ibid, 7.7.1932.
86. WACR, 31.7.1879, pp.5-7.
87. Partly taken from Reflections by her niece, Sr. M. Joan Rodoreda, *The Link*, September, 1983.
88. Sr. M. Imelda Ryan in *The Link*, September, 1983.
89. Sr. M. Raphael Coady, *The Link*, November, 1983.
90. 8th June 1940, C17 77/7, ACAP.

91. The Hostel finally reverted to lay management and then petered out. The building was bought by the Sisters and demolished less than ten years ago for a car park for the school at Victoria Square.
92. Perth: Carmel (who died very young), Monica, Regis; Adelaide, Dolores; Parramatta, Vianney.

8 THE FOUNDING MYTH SEEMS ALIVE AND WELL

1. Nursing Home here means Hospital; it was an English usage. The hospital was first St. Anne's Nursing Home, but included General and Maternity sections; then St. Anne's Hospital, in 1960s; St. Anne's Mercy Hospital in 1990.
2. Dublin Mater was opened 1861. Mercy hospitals were opened in at least Cork and London before this.
3. It was not until 1911 that the first of the several Mater Misericordiae Hospitals in Brisbane was founded.
4. Letter to Manager, Bank of NSW, 5.9.1935, Moynihan notebook, ACAP.
5. 14.9.35, c17/6, ACAP; other letters referred to here are in Moynihan Notebook.
6. Prendiville to Reverend Mother, 2.9.1937, c17/6, ACAP.
7. Sec. to Bank, 7.7.1937, Moynihan Notebook, p.89, ACAP.
8. Council Minutes give Josephine Fitzpatrick, whereas list of community members for 1937 gives Cyril Flynn, with Josephine at Subiaco. Cyril Flynn arrived, as a novice, three weeks after St. Anne's opened. She states that Josephine came for Retreat at the end of the year and remained.
9. Moynihan Notebook, p.43, ACAP.
10. Press release, Moynihan Notebook, p.61, ACAP.
11. 31.8.1955, c17/10, ACAP.
12. 31.5.1957, *ibid.*
13. 8.5.60, *ibid.*
14. *Sunday Times*, 13 11 1966.
15. 8.10.59, c17/10, ACAP.
16. Sisters of Mercy file, 1961-, ACAP.
17. To Mgr. Hogan, 4.12.64.
18. 28.6.66.
19. *West Australian*, 16.11.1967.
20. WACR, 23.7.1970.
21. Sister M. Christina Matthews in *The Link*, September, 1980.
22. WACR, 26.9.1985.
23. Cutting, n.d., Moynihan Notebook, ACAP.
24. 17.11.1960.
25. Cutting, n.d., Moynihan Notebook, 24.6.1969.
26. *Daily News*, 21.8.1969, Moynihan Notebook, ACAP.
27. c17/6, ACAP.
28. c17/7, ACAP.
29. Carol Chambers, *op.cit.*

30. Gail McMaster followed through the programme of innovative teaching of music that Sister Tarcisus had trained for and was not able to put into action. She died at 47. Hal Davies guided the drama department to its high standard, with its challenging annual productions.
31. Mr Frank Owen. Successive principals after Sister Bertrand were Sisters Stephanie Horne 1961-66; Martha Hayward 1967-70; Consilii Flynn 1971-5; Perpetua della Marta 1976-79; Sheila Sawle 1980-88.
32. Carmen Lawrence, 1964. Frances Keating, Sister M. Casimir.
33. It is hard to pinpoint the change of name to Our Lady's College. Sister M. Paul de Carne in her 1900 Diary calls it by the two names. *The Record*, 1.10.1910, p.13, refers to it as "The Ladies' College". S.M. Christina Matthews knew it as Our Lady's College about 1926.
34. Rose Beard, *The Link*, November, 1984.
35. At the 1939 Schools' Musical Festival, the Girls' Choir at Victoria Square College won first prize; the Primary School Choirs of St. Joseph's School, first prize. The Percussion Band at Santa Maria College won second prize. Altogether, they won 23 prizes.
36. S. M. Raphael Coady also later put many sisters for ATCL and other speech exams. Up to the 1960s, every Sister was also encouraged to learn music. It had a high cultural value as well as monetary. Beginning with Sister Francis Gool, there have been at least fifty Perth sisters involved in teaching piano, organ, singing, violin, and harp. Rolf Harris of international fame learnt how to use his talent for rhythm at Bassendean convent.
37. Also taught by Sr. M. Margaret Hehir.
38. *Record*, 20.10.1938, details some prizes won by St. Joseph's School (under Sr. Dymna) — Maureen Cream won the State Medal for Trinity College Intermediate Theory; there were lots of prizes at the Musical Festival and the Royal Show. Other outstanding music students who keep on being mentioned include Frances Moran from Coolgardie and then Victoria Square, who at 10 years of age, had won state medals in piano and violin. *WACR*, 14.5.1938, p.29.
39. For example, the Carney, Smith, Bernet, and Hanley families. Other very efficient music teachers were Sisters M. Aquinas O'Connell and Eunan Clohesy. The latter had her Licentiate in piano, violin, and singing, and did great things for Santa Maria and Victoria Square until her retirement in 1990. In 1940, four pupils from Victoria Square won University Music Exhibitions — Margaret Hanley, Margaret Carney, Mary Bernet, and Rosemary Payne — the last a pupil of Sr. M. Aquinas O'Connell. The school won seven state medals for Trinity College exams; 1 LTCL and 4 ATCL in music, and 2 LTCLS and 2 ATCLS and 1 LASA in Art of Speech. *WACR*, 18.1.1940, p.18c.
40. Honor Pusenjak, *As It Seemed to Me*, Nedlands, Apollo Press, 1988.
41. Names of Sisters buried at Victoria Square are: Catherine Gogarty, 1846, 29 years; Baptist O'Donnell, 1862, 45; Magdalene Dillon, 1871, 45; Ignatia de la Hoyde 1875, 77; Ignatia McEnroe 1886, 21; Bridget Aylward 1886, 32; Patrick Robinson 1887, 29; Catherine Strahan 1889, 67; Magdalen Quillinan 1891, 33; Gertrude O'Meara 1891, 67. Catherine Gogarty and Baptist O'Donnell were originally buried in the church grounds attached to the pro-cathedral. In 1872, they were transferred to the new convent cemetery.
42. For example, 12.10.1918.
43. *WACR*, 19.1.1939, pp. 28-9, shows that 13 passed Junior from the College and 14 from St. Joseph's. There were no Seniors. Commercial work was a feature, under Sister Joan Rodoreda, herself the recipient of gold medal for accountancy. In 1940,

- WACR, 18.1.1940, p.18c, gives the results of 1939 examinations for Victoria Square and Santa Maria College as one unit — 8 passed Leaving, 24 Junior.
44. Prendiville to Rev. Mother, 18.11.37, Sisters of Mercy, West Perth, ACAP.
 45. Prendiville to Rev. Mother, 29 July, 1940. See also WACR, 12.2.1938, p.11; 15.2.1938, p.13.
 46. Prendiville to Hon. F.J. Wise, M.L.A., 28.7.1937.
 47. Oral testimony, Sr. M. Raphael Coady. West Perth were sending 2 Sisters to Mount St. Teachers College in Sydney by 1968. Mother Philip to Prendiville, 12.11.1967, ACAP. During the period 1960-1966, Perth Sisters attended the Claremont Teachers' College, Mercy Teachers' College at Ascot Vale, Melbourne, and the University of W.A. 20 Sisters enrolled in a "Teacher Training on a Part-Time Release Basis" programme, offered to teachers in independent schools by the State Education Department in conjunction with the Technical Extension Service.
 48. And \$13,000; this is the building used earlier for a hostel, closed in 1937; ACAP, Sisters of Mercy file 2.
 49. Later, the school was transferred to the Catholic Education Commission. It was closed in 1975, and the land requisitioned by the Perth City Council.
 50. Succeeding principals have been: Sister M. Gerard Dolan, 1972-77; Sr. M. Assisium Wright 1978-.
 51. With convent, 5 acres; without convent, 3.59 acres.
 52. WACR, 12.12.1974.
 53. Victoria House had been leased out as a guest house to a Mr. A. Farnham.
 54. Jennifer Hill. *West Australian*, 15.8.1990, p.42.
 55. Annual report 1978.
 56. Miss Deidre Weston. Previous principals included Sisters Dolores Horne, Joan Rodoreda, and Paschal O'Connor.
 57. Mrs Anne Parker.
 58. Wendy Hay.
 59. Organised by Sister Gerard Dolan, school counsellor.
 60. Secretary, Catholic Church Office to Mother Edmund, 24.6.1970, ACAP.
 61. Paula McAdam.
 62. WACR, 5.12.1974. Enrolments rose from 150 girls in Years 8 to 10 in 1972, to 650 girls and boys, Years 8 to 12, in 1991.
 63. The primary school became a separate administrative unit, with its own principal.
 64. There have been three convents, the first facing Marian Street, the second Franklin Street, the third and present convent facing Marian Street.
 65. Original spelling is Arranmore.
 66. Prendiville College eventually joined with the nearby Christian Brothers College to form the co-educational John Paul College.
 67. WACR, 16.11.1972.
 68. Kojonup took a few pupils for Commercial studies only, in after-school hours.;
 69. Sisters of Mercy file 2, ACAP.
 70. 26.8.1969.
 71. Mercies are not currently in all these schools — some have been closed, some withdrawn from. It may also be worth re-stating here that many of the schools given below were initially established by Congregations other than the Perth Congregation

based at Victoria Square, e.g. some were established by Guildford/Midland Junction, Bunbury or Coolgardie (itself established by Adelaide) or Victoria Park (itself from Derry). West Perth school was itself established by Perth (Victoria Square).

72. Irena Kasprzyk.
73. Principal was Sr Maura Kelleher.
74. Sister Leonie O'Brien was the first principal and had much to do with the success of the project.
75. Maura Kelleher and Margaret Lipsett.
76. Oral testimony, Justina Talty. Mother Kieran Murphy's report says 1970.
77. In February, 1923, Mgr. McMahon held a conference to explain his scheme and ask for volunteers. M. Augustine (Loreto) Sr. M. Ligouri Lawsen (Victoria Square) and Sr. M. Ignatius Stritch (West Perth) volunteered. Later, Sr. M. Alphonsus Kennedy (Victoria Square) and then Sr. M. Winifred Hayden helped. The Bushies scheme declined as the Education Department abolished one teacher schools and as the church developed Motor Missions. In the late 1960s, Sisters Justina Talty and Joan Eileen Carroll of Perth began organising catechetics in government schools through the Catholic Education Office. Sister Justina worked at this until 1982. In 1974, she studied catechetics in Dundalk, Ireland, and was thereby the first of the Perth Mercies to do an overseas study course.
78. Sisters of Mercy file 2, ACAP.
79. c17 86/7, ACAP.
80. To Secretary, c17 10/8; see also B23, files 12,13; Box 22, file 7, ACAP.
81. Sr. M. Carmel O'Keefe and Sr. M. Rose Jones in *Leaves from the Past*, op.cit.
82. 20.4.37, C17 99/6, ACAP.
83. WACR, 13.2.1918.
84. A cheque book for 1924 indicates expenses for such things as "National Dancing", Subiaco Brass Band (six nights), R.S.L. Band, Coastal Scottish Pipers Band, I.O.R. Band, Clontarf Orphanage Band, advertising in the *West Australian* newspaper, hire of machine for Picture Show and operator's wages, as well as other expenses, all apparently for "Orfania".
85. WACR, 9.3.1918; 19.11.1921.
86. WACR, 26.4.1925.
87. 15.12.1937, c17 121/4, ACAP.
88. 31.10.1968, cutting, Moynihan Notebook, ACAP.
89. To Reverend Mother General, 25.5.1944, c17 39/8, ACAP.
90. *West Australian*, 20.6.1989.
91. Keegan.
92. Glenys Brazell (Minney), n.d. but 1979.
93. WACR, 8.11.90, p.10.
94. *Encounter*, 19.8.1990.
95. Statement of re-development programme, non-current files, Wembley.
96. Bruce Dufty, *A Review Report*, August 1988.
97. Quoted in *Mercy*, Perth Congregational Newsletter, August 1987.
98. There is a touch of irony in the use "Salvado" here, for the establishment of the urban monastery at Subiaco by Bishop Serra was a bone of contention for Bishop Salvado.

99. Statement of Congregational Superior, Joan Flynn, WACR, 6.2.1975.
100. Administration was temporarily carried on from the holiday house at 10 Sholl Avenue, North Beach, after the departure from West Perth. The first beach house was at Trigg Island Beach, but this had been overwhelmed by sand dunes. In the late 1940s or early 1950s, a house had been purchased at North Beach. The present building was constructed about 1971.
101. As at date of writing, exact title uncertain.
102. WACR, 22.6.1947.
103. WACR, 7.2.1963.
104. Rev Hilton Deakin: *The Aborigines and the Church*, 1975, mimeographed account, Box 116, ACAP.

9 THE HUMAN AND THE SACRED ORDER OF THINGS

1. The half-hour of recreation was a concession to newcomers.
2. Anne Tormey, *Teaching Orders in Catholic Education in Western Australia 1955-1975: A Historical Study of Changes and Repercussions*, unpublished dissertation, M.Ed., University of Western Australia, 1976.
3. Quoted M. Joanna Regan & Isabelle Keiss, *Tender Courage A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine McAuley, First Sister of Mercy*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1988, p.125.
4. In the 1920s and previously, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was very central in the piety of the Victoria Square community. Sister Mary Kevin Deasy promoted this devotion greatly. Many sisters and pupils joined the Archconfraternity of the Guard of Honour of the Sacred Heart.
5. 7.3.1903.
6. Dr. Grant, bishop of Southwark, 1874, London, Burns & Oates — reprinted from unpublished edition, 1863.
7. *The Nun in the Modern World*, London, Burns & Oates, 1962, p.20.
8. 1.7.1909, Gibney files, Sisters of Mercy, ACAP.
9. WACR, 28.9.1912.
10. 23.8.1848.
11. Sister M. Philomena Sanders' Retreat notes, about 1925.
12. *ibid.*
13. Marion Woodman, *Addiction to Perfection*, Toronto, Inner City Books, p.31.
14. March 24, 1840, *Letters of Catherine McAuley*, ed. Sister M. Ignatia Neumann, Baltimore, Helicon Press, p.206.
15. *Half the Sky*, ed. The Bristol Women's Studies Group, Virago Press, London, 1979, p.98.
16. 4.3.1910, Sisters of Mercy, Gibney Box, ACAP.
17. Box A9 38/11, ACAP.
18. During the period 1960-1966, 19 sisters were sent to Ireland by the Perth Congregation to quest for postulants. Twelve girls entered as a result. This procedure, however, seems to have also been tied up with the fact that Irish Sisters were not yet allowed a home visit. See General Report to Chapter, June, 1966.
19. 10.9.1846.
20. Sister Benignus Sheehy in *Joining in the Dance*.

21. Archbishop William Foley at Mass to close Year of Mission, WACR, 25.5.1989, p.1. "The isolation which is the mark of this city penetrates like an infection in the midst of us... country from city ... divisions of physical, cultural, religious and sociological differences and limitations."
22. A.A. Philips.
23. *The Age*, 15.3.1986, quoted in Cross in Malone ed. *Discovering an Australian Theology*, Homebush, St. Paul Publications, 1988, p.107.
24. Much of this analysis has been helped by reading Malone, op.cit.
25. *Congregations of Religious Women in Australia an Overview 1838-1938*, op.cit.

10 COPING WITH CULTURAL CHANGE

1. John Naisbitt, *Megatrends Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, New York, Warner Books, 1982.
2. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, London, Paladin Books, 1982.
3. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, London, Bantam Press, 1988.
4. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1987.
5. Diarmid Ó Murchú, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, London, Excalibur Press, 1989, pp.i,20.
6. See data gathered by Carmel Leavey, O.P. Her *National Statistical Survey of Religious Personnel: Australia — 1976*, National Assembly of Major Superiors of the Religious of Australia, gives the membership of Women's Religious Institutes in Australia, 1901-1976: 1901 — 3,622; 1926 — 8,141; 1951 — 11,245; 1966 — 14,622; 1971 — 13,869; 1976 — 12,619. Some updated figures are 1983-84: 10,929 professed; 298 candidates. These latter figures are taken from Catholic Year Book and given in PICT, *The Church's Mission in Australia*, p.9.
7. Perth — 21 Irish postulants in 1929 and 22 in 1938; West Perth, 18 in 1933.
8. 256 permanently professed, 14 temporarily professed, 16 novices, 3 postulants — Report of Mother Kieran Murphy; the numbers for West Perth also include postulants, novices, and temporarily professed.
9. Stannage, C.T. (ed.), op cit., pp.287, 462. In 1947, the population was just over half a million. By 1971, it had more than doubled.
10. Gerard Windsor, "The New Zealand traveller sketches the ruin of St. Patrick's", *Eureka Street*, vol.1, No. 7, September, 1991; see also Patrick O'Farrell, "The Writing of Australian Catholic History 1980-1990", *Australasian Catholic Record*, April, 1991, Vol. LXVIII, No. 2.
11. Mary Rose MacGinley, through her current research into Australian religious women, says there was no real legislative control of groups with simple vows until the 1917 Code. Then legislation and control began to be much more constricting.
12. Victoria Square Generalate/Provincialate Chronicle 1948-1959.
13. All three visitators spoke of lack of depth in education; the first warned against university attendance; see also Prendiville to Rev. Mother Ignatius, 11.9.1947, ACAP.
14. There have been a number of public statements during the late 1980s, early 1990s, along these lines, made or written by past pupils of Convent schools.
15. Maryanne Stephens, "Catherine "patron" or prophetic disciple?", article published by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 1989.

16. The influence of French spirituality is confirmed by the many books of devotion in French, as well as English, in the early library at Victoria Square. However, the contemplative spiritual system of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, for example, were — at least in later years — considered dangerous. Much of the spiritual nourishment offered was based upon the Exercises of St. Ignatius, but it was during the period when even the Society of Jesus interpreted their founder's system in a relatively barren manner.
17. Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1988, p.17, cites Helen F. Ebaugh, *Out of the Cloister*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1977, for a sociological study that demonstrates this relation in American Catholic religious communities of women.
18. Sandra Schneiders, *New Wineskins*, op.cit.
19. 1957-1962; 1963-68. For personal details about M. Philip, see section on Lesmurdie, Chapter 5.
20. In the 1986 Chapter, West Perth altered its term to five years.
21. Mary Rose MacGinley, *Women Religious in Australia Choice at a Crossroads*, Sydney, Institute of Religious Studies, 1989, states that the first ten years after the period of Special General Chapters in most Australian Congregations (1968-71) were years of "rapid and pro-active change". The next years were a "living with the consequences ... a more patent re-active response to factors beyond the control of the congregations..." She adds that the past 25 years have seen the "virtual disappearance of what the average Australian Catholic recognised, at least externally, as a religious community of women."
22. These included Brother Ronald Fogarty, FMS, Fathers K. O'Shea, CSsR, Luke Fay, CSsR, Tony Kelly, CSsR, and Desmond O'Donnell, OMI.
23. Visiting lecturers included nine priests, two religious brothers, and one religious sister. Three were from overseas. Study courses comprised graduate and post-graduate courses in child care; social work; physiotherapy; medicine; education — including art, administration, music, and religious education; librarianship, nursing, pastoral care; communications; spirituality.
24. Marie Augusta Neal, *From Nuns to Sisters an Expanding Vocation*, Mystic, Ct, 23rd Publications, 1990, p.34.
25. John XXIII began the change in the church's social teaching even before Vatican II. He moved it from an anti-communist, anti-socialist, anti-state intervention stance to that of the state needing to take action to protect those being victimised. For a clear account of the church's re-appropriation of its mission to the poor and the effect on religious orders of women, see Marie Augusta Neal, op.cit.
26. Religious orders were exhorted by Rome to study their original charism or founding gift and to re-interpret this in terms of the signs of their time.
27. Report of Sister Beverley Stott, 1986, p.14. One significant leadership role was that of Sister Mary Berry in the Maranatha Institute, established by the Major Superiors in 1977 for semi-retired Sisters moving into new pastoral roles, then extended to lay people, and later opened to all ages. Mary retired at the end of 1991, but continued as the Vicar for Religious in the archdiocese.
28. Elizabeth Devine, Perth Congregational Report, 1983.
29. During the years 1984-89, over 60% of the 54 Perth Sisters between the ages of 36-65 changed their ministry. In 1989, there were four remaining in primary education and another four in secondary. (Congregational Report, 1989).
30. WACR, 22.4.1976.
31. Another West Perth Sister, Noelle Thompson, was also instrumental in keeping the centre going.

32. Aborigines comprised 2.4% of the general population of W.A. and 34% of the prison population — WACR, 9.1.1986.
33. cf. her testimony to the Muirhead Enquiry re black deaths in custody.
34. 7.8.1961, Sisters of Mercy 1961-file, ACAP.
35. West Perth, Sister Kathryn O'Callaghan at Mulan; Perth, Sisters Dolores Coffey and Josephine Dillon at Billiluna, Marie Fitzgerald at Balgo. All have been teachers.
36. The request was for either Newman or Roebourne or both.
37. Later one; W.A. Sisters who worked in Newman were Benignus Sheehy, Margaret Tallon (West Perth); Joan Kelleher, Rose Beard (Perth).
38. Sisters who have worked in PNG are: Bernard (Mae) McMurrough, West Perth; Elizabeth Devine, Julian Clarke, Noreen Collins, Xaveria (Therese) Quinlivan, Pauline Masters (Perth).
39. Flo O'Sullivan.
40. Mercy Endeavour Australia entails ex-students coming together on Mercy Day each year, to share a simple meal to raise awareness of the plight of refugees, and to contribute a small sum of money to Mercy Refugee Service.
41. Joan Kelleher.
42. Between 1987 and 1983, the Perth Congregation had set up advisory boards (with a fair degree of actual management power) for each of its institutions. A Formation Committee and a Finance and Property Committee also operated. Between 1984 and 1989, new participative structures included Council of Administrators, Strategic Planning Committee, Mid Life Committee, Life Span Development Committee, and Mercy Associates Committee.
43. Neal, op.cit. Her research shows that North American women religious consider as fundamental to their continuing mission the following: learning responsible participation based on interdependency, not dependency; recognition of a new authority shaped and grounded in trained and apostolically committed competency; a shared use of human skills; other insights of resourceful collegial governance. The draft final version of the Mercy Constitutions, which the Sisters used for several years, can be compared to the definitive version to see the amendments made by Rome.
44. 1969 and 1972.
45. For example, Henri Nouwen, Matthew Fox.
46. M. Angela Bolster, *Catherine McAuley Venerable for Mercy*, Dublin, Dominican Publications, 1990, p.39. Catherine was declared Venerable (the first stage on the path to being declared Saint) on 9 April, 1990, the first Irishwoman to be so titled.
47. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1978.
48. Rosemary Haugton's visit to W.A. was also sponsored by the Mercy Congregations in 1985. One talk given at St. Hilda's Church by Beverley Stott was later distributed in booklet form by the Women's Desk of the Australian Council of Churches, W.A.
49. For example, the Perth Ministries Commission initiated the 1986 visit to Perth of North American theologian, Sister Margaret Brennan. Noelle Thompson of West Perth was strongly involved in the establishment of CFC, a Women-Church type of spirituality group. Amy Hearne (Perth), as member of WATAC, contributed to the programme of the first Women's Spirituality weekend in 1989. On a number of occasions, Elizabeth Devine (Perth) lectured to the clergy on women's issues. Beverley Stott, Anne Tormey, Noelle Thompson and Lee Joyce (Perth) helped organise public liturgies. One liturgy in King's Park was televised.

50. Naomi Turner, *Which Seeds Shall Grow? Men and Women in Religious Life*, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1988, p.107.
51. In preparation for the Second ISMA Chapter at the end of 1987.
52. John Thornhill in Introduction to a translation by M.R. MacGinley of M. Dortel-Claudot's *The Evolution of the Canonical Status of Religious Institutes with Simple Vows from the 16th Century until the New Code*, Sydney, Institute of Religious Studies, 1989.
53. Dortel-Claudot, op.cit. Solemn vows entailed strict enclosure and complete renunciation of personal property. Solemn vows contained in themselves the power of invalidating contrary acts. Simple vows did not necessarily entail either of these two conditions and rendered acts contrary to the vow only illicit.
54. Sandra Schneiders, *New Wine-Skins*, op.cit., was illuminative when she pinpointed the important distinction between religious life as a movement and as an institution. To consider religious life theologically was to consider it as a movement. To consider it juridically was to consider it as an institution. The first encompassed a much wider scope of phenomena.
55. Mary Celeste Rouleau, "A New Paradigm for Mercy", *The MAST Journal*, vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1990. (The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, Omaha, Nebraska.)
56. Mrs Theresa Gibson, staff member of Mercedes College. She set up *Young Mercies*, an association of young women, with some common experience of the Mercy ethos, coming together to support each other in their life and faith. It commenced, at Mercedes College, in February, 1991, with students and ex-students, the latter taking the leadership roles.
57. In 1991, a house was purchased in Perth by the two congregations with the programme scheduled to begin in 1992.
58. By 1990, Associate programmes were much more developed among the North American Mercies. They claimed that many women and men were desirous of identifying with the Sisters and the charism of Mercy. Some associates had sought fuller incorporation through a more inclusive but non-canonical membership (i.e. not under vows). *The MAST Journal*, op.cit.
59. Carmel Leavey, op.cit.
60. Arbuckle, Gerald, *Out of Chaos Refounding Religious Congregations*, New York, Paulist Press, 1988; Mary Jo Leddy, *Re-weaving Religious Life Beyond the Liberal Model*, Mystic, Ct., Twenty-third Publications, 1990. Elizabeth McDonough, in "Beyond the Liberal Model: Quo Vadis", *Review for Religious*, March-April 1991, strongly criticises this model.
61. For data about the views of the future of religious life by religious themselves and by lay women and men, see Naomi Turner, *Which Seeds Shall Grow?*, Melbourne, Collins Dove, 1988, together with the reflections on its data in Anne McLay (ed.), *Men and Women in Religious Life*, Melbourne, Collins Dove, 1990.
62. For a comprehensive analysis, by various writers, on the state of religious life in the mid-1970s, see Carmel Leavey, op.cit.
63. 24.10.1988.
64. World Union Catholic Women's Organisations, "The Situation of Women in the Catholic Church, Developments since International Women's Year", *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin*, No. 83, October, 1980; Eileen Diesendorf, "Why Women leave the Church", *Women-Church*, an Australian Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion, No. 2, Autumn, 1988, pp 25-30 (based on findings from the 1983 Australian Values Survey).
65. In Leavey, op.cit.

66. *Religious Life for Women in France*, Episcopal Commission for Women Religious and the Union of Major Superiors of Women, February, 1974, trans. Leavey, op.cit., p.106.
67. cf. Andrew Greeley about the North American situation; the children of migrants, he claims, will not enter, they have not got a sufficient sense of identity.
68. Tony Kelly in *The Church's Mission in Australia*, National Catholic Research Council's PICT series, Melbourne, Collins Dove, 1988.
69. See also a follow-up, based on five congregations, of which Perth was one, viz., Ross-Smith, Anne, *Organisational Communication and the Analysis of Organisational Culture*, 1990.

11 AFTER WORDS: WHERE IS THEIR SPHERE NOW?

1. This number may not be exactly correct, on account of deficiencies in the registers. It includes those who remained for only a short period as postulants. Names entered count to 525 Perth (Victoria Square), 168 West Perth, 60 Bunbury, 48 Coolgardie, 23 Victoria Park, 17 Midland Junction, 4 Toodyay, 0 York. Where the Sister had already entered a Western Australian Convent and transferred, she was not re-counted.
2. The ISMA Culture Study pointed this out, as well as the potential energy for renewal contained in the issue.
3. Recent studies that attend to this historical aspect include: Mary Rose MacGinley, *Women Religious in Australia Choice at a Crossroads*, op.cit., which is based on a talk given about her major work in progress into all women religious groups in Australia; Marie Augusta Neal, *From Nuns to Sisters an Expanding Vocation*, op.cit.; Diarmuid Ó Murchú, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, op.cit.; Sandra Schneiders, *New Wineskins Re-imagining Religious Life*, op.cit.
4. Raymond Hostie, *Vie et Mort des Ordres Religieux*, Desclee de Brower, 1972; Lawrence Cada, Raymond Fitz, et al., *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*, N.Y., The Seabury Press, 1979.
5. For a fuller treatment of enculturation in a gospel context, see D.A. Amalorpavadass, "Theological Reflections on Inculturation", *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol. XXVII, Nos. 3/4, Sept./Dec. 1990; Michael Casey, "Adding depth to our response to local culture", *Discovering an Australian Theology*, ed. P. Malone, Homebush, St. Paul Publications, 1988.
6. Ó Murchú, op.cit.; Schneiders, op.cit.; Mary Jo Leddy, *Reweaving Religious life Beyond the Liberal Model*, op.cit.; Gerald Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1988.
7. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, op.cit., p.xxiii, says feminist and chaos (a male-dominated theory of evolutionary change in systems) theories have much in common. Both focus on transformation leading to a different kind of future. Both posit the possible alternative of breakthrough rather than breakdown.
8. See ISMA Organisational Culture Study. In 1991, ISMA held a conference in Sydney, "Tracking Mercy Future", attended by several Sisters from W.A. Possibilities of future action were shared, and these "seemed to hold a promise of great energy for networking across the Institute" and the "uncovering of new traces of... future direction..." (Letter to participants, National Executive Council, 11.9.1991).
9. At a W.A. Regional meeting in 1987, facilitator Sister Patricia Pak Poy saw among the group a creativity and realism, a diligent stewardship of institutions, together with a willingness to question, a vitality which was energising.
10. J.M.R. Tillard.
11. *Theological Investigations* VIII 75-93, New York, Herder & Herder, 1971; Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1988, p.43.

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