

**MERCY**  
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy  
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

**One Charism, Many Paths**

## Chapter 6

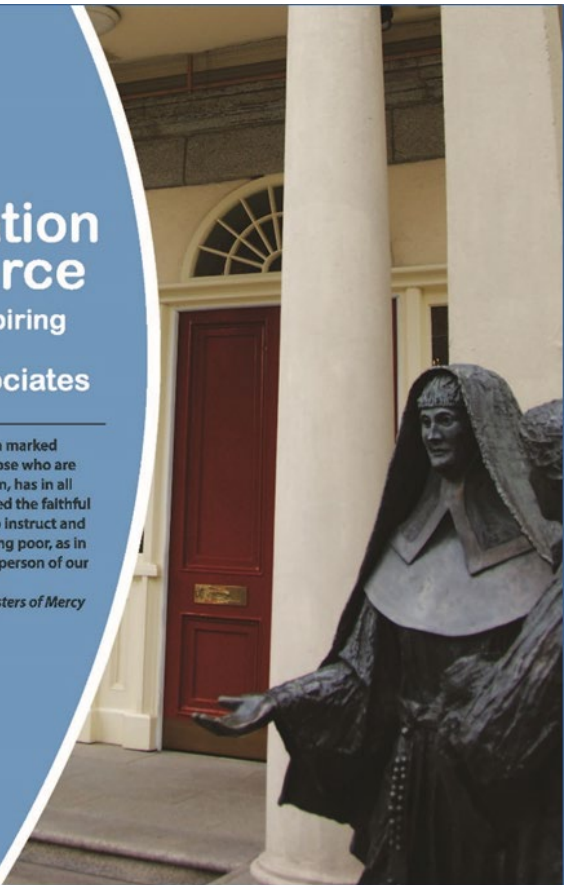
# The Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea

### Formation Resource

for those aspiring  
to become  
Mercy Associates

Mercy, the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our divine Master...

*Original Rule, Sisters of Mercy*



### 6.1 Arrival in Australia and Papua New Guinea

### 6.2 Establishment of Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

### 6.3 ISMAPNG Chapter Statement 2017

#### Notes for users:

The Formation Resource is designed for use by candidates aspiring to become Mercy Associates. This entails proceeding steadily through the resource, guided by a sponsor or other Mercy Associates, with time for reflection, discussion and prayer to discern if Mercy Associates is a suitable pathway for candidates.

The resource has a number of chapters, each available separately on the Mercy Associates screen of the ISMAPNG website: <https://institute.mercy.org.au/become-involved/become-a-mercy-associate/>

**Web edition v 1.2: current @ February 21**

## 6.0 The Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea

### 6.1 Arrival in Australia and Papua New Guinea

The story of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia began in 1846 when, just five years after Catherine's death, Sisters of Mercy made a foundation in Perth, Western Australia. The leader of this first Mercy community in Australia was Ursula Frayne who had lived and worked with Catherine and who also had experience in establishing new communities (*see Appendix at end of chapter for her biography*). Over many decades, new Mercy foundations were established in many locations around Australia, each independent of the other yet all sharing their common Mercy charism.



In most cases, the Sisters who established these foundations came from various places in Ireland, two came from England and one from Argentina. The Papua New Guinea (Autonomous Region of Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (PNG)) foundation was established from Australia in 1956. Appendix C contains an overview of the life of Ursula Frayne (statue pictured) the Sister who founded two Australian congregations – Perth and Melbourne. Details of others can be accessed via the Mercy International Centre website ([www.mercyworld.org](http://www.mercyworld.org)).

The table below lists the congregations in existence in 2011, at the time of the establishment of ISMAPNG. Other foundations had been established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however in some cases, to accommodate local needs, there were amalgamations over the years.

|    | Congregation     | Date | Foundress                  | From                    |
|----|------------------|------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1  | Perth            | 1846 | M. Ursula Frayne           | Dublin, Ireland         |
| 2  | Melbourne        | 1857 | M. Ursula Frayne           | Perth to Fitzroy        |
| 3  | Goulburn         | 1859 | M. Ignatius Murphy         | Westport, Ireland       |
| 4  | Brisbane **      | 1861 | M. Vincent Whitty          | Dublin, Ireland         |
| 5  | North Sydney **  | 1865 | M. Ignatius McQuoin        | Liverpool, England      |
| 6  | Bathurst         | 1866 | M. Ignatius Croke          | Charleville, Ireland    |
| 7  | Rockhampton      | 1873 | M. de Sales Gorry          | Brisbane                |
| 8  | Singleton        | 1875 | M. Stanislaus Kenny        | Ennis, Ireland          |
| 9  | Townsville       | 1878 | M. Benigna Desmond         | Brisbane                |
| 10 | Gunnedah         | 1879 | M. Aloysius O'Driscoll     | Singleton               |
| 11 | Adelaide         | 1880 | M. Evangelista Fitzpatrick | Buenos Aires, Argentina |
| 12 | Grafton          | 1884 | M. Stanislaus Simson       | Bermondsey, England     |
| 13 | Ballarat East    | 1881 | M. Agnes Graham            | Warrnambool, Vic        |
| 14 | Parramatta **    | 1888 | M. Clare Dunphy            | Callan, Ireland         |
| 15 | Cairns           | 1888 | M. de Sales Meagher        | Dungarvan, Ireland      |
| 16 | West Perth       | 1896 | M. Berchmans Deane         | Perth                   |
| 17 | Wilcannia Forbes | 1932 |                            | Amalgamation            |
| 18 | Papua New Guinea | 1956 |                            | Australia               |

**\*\* The congregations of Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane, North Sydney and Parramatta did not join ISMAPNG and have remained independent congregations**

In your location, how much do you know of the history of the Sisters? Their efforts were extraordinary especially in the pioneering years when conditions were often challenging to say the least. What can you learn about the story of the Sisters of Mercy and their legacy from local sources? Perhaps your group can draw up an overview of the history of the Sisters of Mercy in your area.

The range of ministries in which the Sisters of Mercy have been engaged is extensive: they include educators, health professionals, theologians, scripture scholars, writers, publishers, researchers, historians, musicians, artists, ethicists, ecumenists, canon lawyers, lawyers. Some are pastoral associates, advocates for justice, some provide outreach to asylum seekers and refugees, some work in prison ministry, some in interfaith relations, in media and communications technology, in governance and administration ministries, and as environmentalists and ecologists. Others offer hospitality in a variety of ways. All also contribute to bringing God's mission of Mercy to our world through prayer.

Often people in the general community know little or nothing about ministries the Sisters are involved in, yet these ministries are of immense importance to those served by the Sisters. The more visible legacy of their work is the schools, hospitals, aged care services, community and social services that continue to operate now, often under lay leadership and with mostly lay staff.

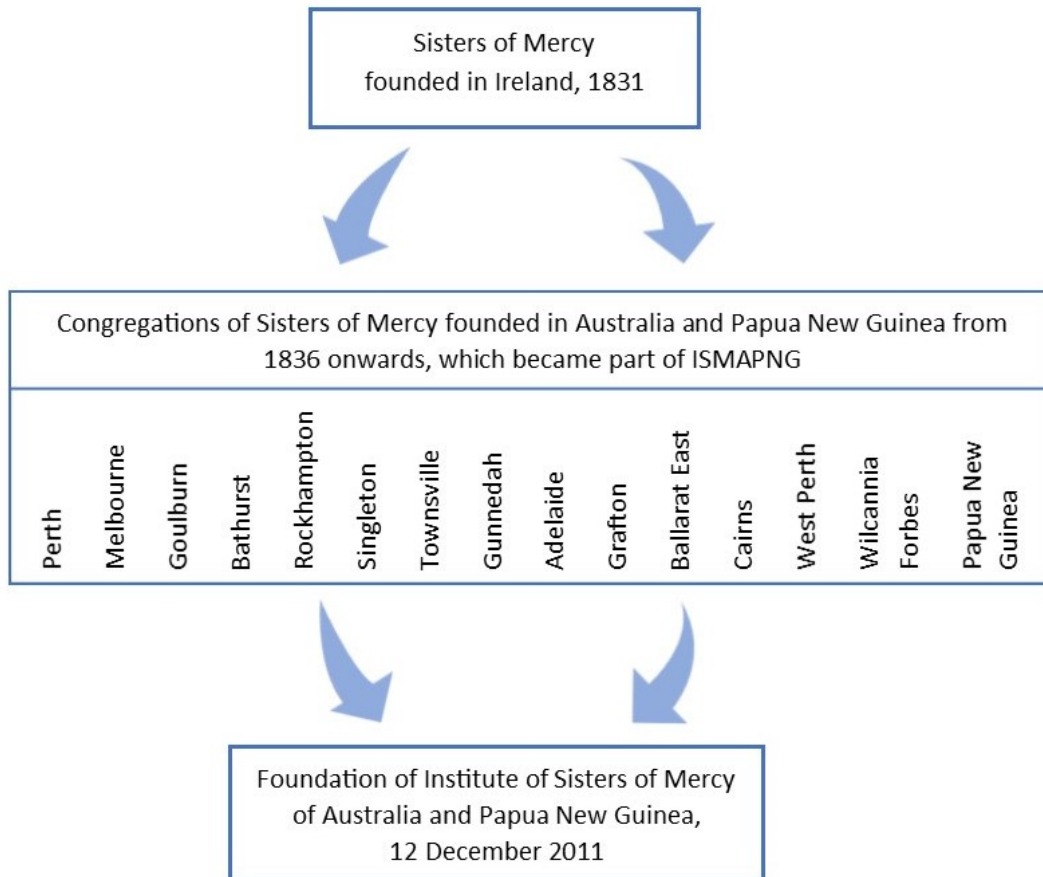
## **6.2 Establishment of Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea**

Since the beginning there were a number of movements towards unity for the various Mercy congregations in Australia. In 2005 the Sisters commenced formally searching for the best way to nurture their unity and to strengthen their capacity for engaging in God's mission of mercy.

The search involved much prayer, frequent theological reflection on the social needs of our time, careful study of the life and ministry of the founder, Catherine McAuley and her vision for religious life, and several comprehensive consultations in which all Sisters were encouraged to participate. Eventually it led the Sisters to the point where, for the sake of the mission, the fourteen Mercy Congregations of Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Grafton, Singleton, Gunnedah, Wilcannia Forbes, Bathurst, Goulburn, Ballarat East, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, West Perth and the Autonomous Region of Papua New Guinea sought permission from the Holy See to relinquish their independence and to come together as one new congregation. Rome granted this permission in July, 2011 to become effective at the commencement of the First Chapter of the new congregation on 12 December 2011, the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland. Three Australian Mercy congregations: Brisbane, Parramatta and North Sydney have remained independent Mercy congregations, though some Sisters from these transferred to the Institute.

*Adapted from:* <http://institute.mercy.org.au/about-us/ismapng/our-history>

The new congregation is known as the **Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (Institute or ISMAPNG)**. The establishment of the Institute brought together over nine hundred Sisters of Mercy and their associated ministries. In forming the Institute, each of the 15 groups ceased to be a separate canonical and legal entity and its Sisters are now members of the new Institute with all the rights and responsibilities of professed Sisters of Mercy.



Within the Institute every sister belongs to a community which takes in a wide geographic area. Currently there are six communities throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The Institute is governed by the **Institute Leadership Team (ILT)** – a Leader and Council elected by the Chapter. This group of Sisters are elected at the Institute Chapter, held every six years and they serve for a period of six years. In the period between Chapters, authority is vested in the Institute Leader. Four Institute Councillors assist the Institute Leader in exercising the role of leadership and together they make up the ILT. The central office of the Institute is based at Stanmore in Sydney.

The day to day work of leadership is shared with the Institute Sisters Leadership Forum (ISLF) which includes six **Community Leaders**. The main role of the Community Leader is to create bonds of unity among the members' and to help them grow in fidelity to the community's life and mission and also to contribute to the larger life and mission of the Institute. Community Leaders are appointed by the Institute Leadership Team for a period of three years.

There are Mercy Administration Centres in Melbourne, Lewisham (Sydney), Newcastle, Rockhampton; Ballarat, Perth, Canberra, Adelaide. Additional to these locations, a small number of Sisters are ministering in other countries, e.g., Timor Leste.

## All Sisters in the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

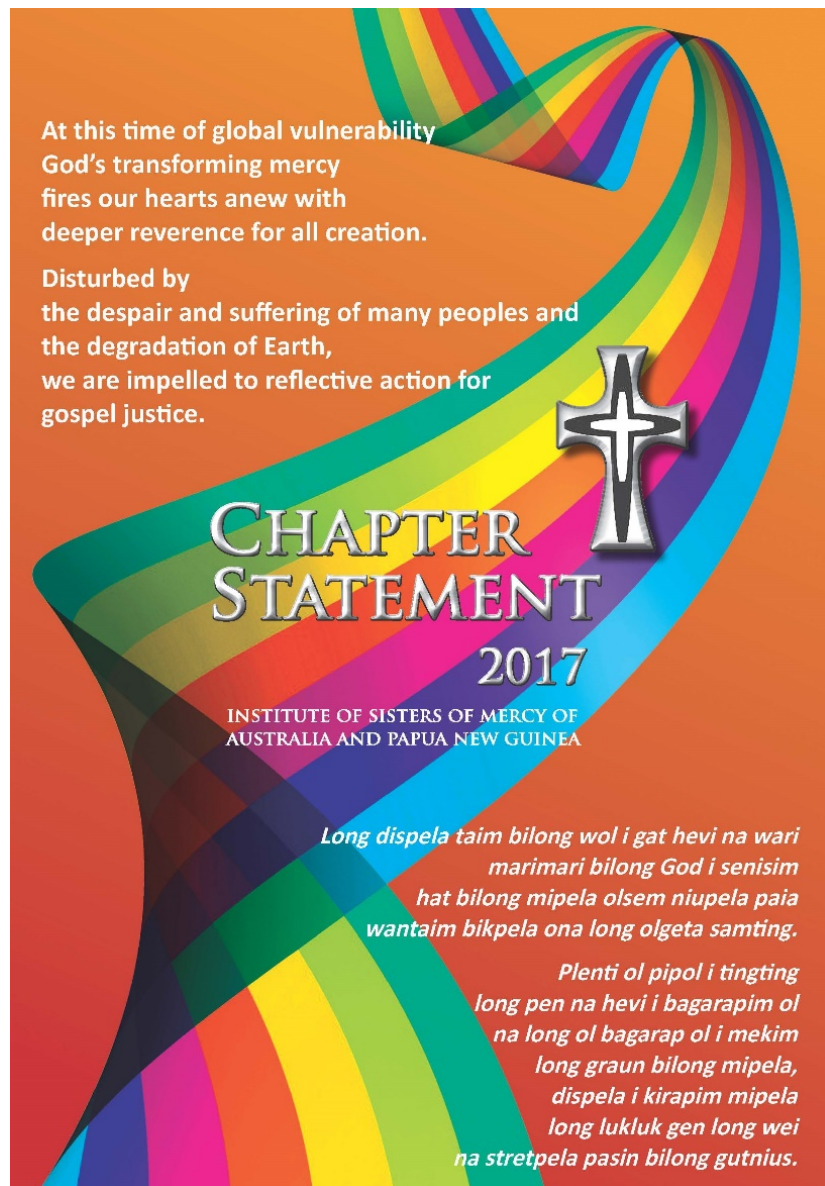
**Institute Leadership Team (ILT):** the  
Institute Leader and four Councillors;  
elected by the Sisters at their Chapter.

**Community Leaders:** one for  
each of the six community areas;  
appointed by the ILT.

### 6.3 ISMAPNG Chapter Statement 2017

The 2017 Mercy Chapter Statement is an exciting, practical and empowering one:

A Chapter is held every six years, with the above Chapter Statement being an outcome of the one held in August 2017. The next Chapter will take place in 2023.



Can you see ways that you could  
use your gifts and talents to serve  
the Mercy Mission? Does the  
Chapter Statement give you ideas  
and inspiration about how you  
can complement the work of the  
Sisters of Mercy?

## Appendix C - URSULA FRAYNE (1816–1885) – FOUNDESS IN AUSTRALIA

Clara Frayne (1816-1885), mother superior, was born on 5 October 1816 in Dublin, Ireland, daughter of Robert Frayne, a prosperous businessman, and his wife Bridget. In 1834 she entered the Institute of Mercy, founded in 1831 in Dublin by Mother Catherine McAuley, and took the name Ursula. She worked closely with Catherine and was recalled to Dublin to nurse Catherine as she in her final days in 1841. In 1842 she was appointed Superior of the institute's first foreign mission foundation in Newfoundland and in 1845 went on to establish the first Australian foundation in Perth, WA, at the request of the newly consecrated Bishop John Brady for Sisters to staff his proposed schools. She and her companions arrived in Perth on 8 January 1846.



From the outset the Sisters of Mercy experienced great hardship. So small was the Catholic population that government aid, granted to denominational schools in 1849, was insignificant and the bishop, who was close to bankruptcy, could not be relied on for support. Shocked by the conditions under which the Sisters worked in the first two years, the Dublin mother-house sent money for their return passages. This money Mother Ursula gratefully acknowledged but she refused to abandon the mission. However, she soon realized that the Sisters would have to supplement their meagre income. In 1849 she opened the first secondary school in Western Australia, a 'select' fee-paying school catering for an almost exclusively non-Catholic clientele; it brought much-needed security. This school was located on the site now occupied by Mercedes College. Its success determined the pattern

of future Mercy expansion, which was to establish, almost simultaneously and often within the same building, three separate schools: a 'select' fee-paying school, a primary school and an infants' school. By 1856, despite the impending withdrawal of government aid, the schools of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia were flourishing. Probably with some relief, having experienced the bitter Brady-Serra dispute over ecclesiastical jurisdiction and seen Brady recalled to Rome, Ursula Frayne responded to a request from Bishop James Goold for a Victorian foundation.

She arrived in Melbourne in March 1857 and within six weeks had raised loans to pay off the mortgage on her convent in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy. Rapid expansion followed. Large building programmes were undertaken for educational and social work, culminating in the erection of the first wing of the present 'Academy' in 1870 at a cost of £6000. The Sisters of Mercy were the first teaching nuns in Victoria and under the vigorous leadership of Mother Ursula their establishment included a boarding and day school for girls, together with two primary schools and a domestic training school for orphans. She also founded the St Vincent de Paul's Orphanage at South Melbourne and managed it until the Christian Brothers took over the boys' section, leaving the girls under the care of her Sisters. Although the 1872 Act caused temporary retrenchment in Catholic education, it resulted in expansion for the Nicholson Street community, and Sisters replaced lay teachers when salaries could not be met. Ursula Frayne's first Victorian country foundation was at Kilmore in 1875 and was especially dear to her for its rural setting. She died at Nicholson Street on 9 June 1885.

Her letters give evidence of the qualities which distinguished her as a religious woman: intelligence, blended with shrewd, practical wisdom; tenacity and great powers of endurance; strict and loving observance of the Rule; and a keen Irish wit. A fine Gothic chapel was built by her successor as a memorial within the convent grounds at Nicholson Street. There her remains were interred in a vault flanked by a Celtic cross, reminiscent of her origin.

*Imelda Palmer, 'Frayne, Ursula (1816–1885)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/frayne-ursula-3572/text5527>, published first in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 14 June 2017. (with minor editing)*