



INSTITUTE OF  
**SISTERS of MERCY**  
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

# Orientation to Mercy (self-paced) Workbook



The Scriptural quotations used in this booklet are from the New Revised Standard Edition.

This formation resource was first developed for the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea in February 2021 for use by staff new to the Institute and its ministries. On December 3, 2021, *Mercy Ministry Companions*, a ministerial public juridic person, was established, so this updated resource will also be of benefit to those new to *Mercy Ministry Companions* and its ministries.

January 2025.

# ABOUT ORIENTATION TO MERCY

The *Orientation to Mercy* program was originally designed for staff new to the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) and its incorporated ministries, a number of whom transferred to *Mercy Ministry Companions* (MMC) on December 3, 2021. The program is, however, also suitable for those for whom the mercy charism is a core component in their roles, including those from non-ISMAPNG or MMC ministries and schools with a Mercy heritage.

The *Orientation to Mercy* (self-paced) is an 8-module program, with each module designed to take 30-40 minutes. The program was adapted from the one-day *Orientation to Mercy* seminars that were held face-to-face in early 2020. Whilst in-person seminars always bring an added dimension to education and formation, i.e., the ability to interact, network and share stories with the presenter and other participants, bringing people together physically is not always possible or feasible.

The eight topics covered in the Modules are;

- the story of Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, and the sources of inspiration for the work she did
- the early expansion of the Sisters of Mercy
- the *Works of Mercy*, their scriptural basis, and the traditional and contemporary manifestations of these.
- *Care for Our Common Home* (the 8th Work of Mercy) and the interconnectedness of the *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*
- The brief history of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea and the formation of ISMAPNG
- ISMAPNG's ministries
- Mercy Ministry Companions and its ministries
- The wider Mercy family & Mercy Values

Education and formation are not just about receiving input or even mentally processing what has been heard or read. It also involves some critical reflection on the resource material, engaging with it from the head, heart and spirit, being open to new insights. Ideally, formation also moves us into action. As such, each of the modules includes input, short activities and reflective questions.

At the start of each 30-40 minute module, there is a short video clip which provides information about the module. Within the body of the module, there are links to video clips and websites which relate to the focus of the module. There are also suggested short activities and reflective questions for consideration.

At the end of each module is a prayerful reflection. Central to being Catholic are the questions about the ways God is revealed through what we are seeing and hearing, how what we see and hear can strengthen our relationship with God, and the ways we are invited to respond. If you are not Catholic or are unfamiliar with the Christian tradition of prayer and reflection, you are invited to take this time to think about the points in the module which have made an impact on you.

You will need online access whilst participating in this program as there are several links to video clips and websites to which you will be directed as key resource material.

It may also be useful to print out a copy of this document so that you are able to write down your responses to the reflective questions whilst engaging with the content. It is also hoped that the links contained will be useful as resources for further exploration.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country in Melbourne, the *Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation* and in the inner west of Sydney, the *Gadigal and Wangai peoples of the Eora Nation*, (where the presenters taped the introductory video clips at the start of each module) and throughout Australia.

We acknowledge First Nations people throughout the world. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

# MODULE 5

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

Watch the Introduction to Module 5 video clip [here](#).

### Introduction to Module 5

In this module, we briefly explore the formation of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG), tracing its history from the various original foundations located in Ireland, England and Argentina. We also look briefly at the ministries of the Sisters and those who work alongside them today.

### Opening Reflection

#### Mercy

Mercy is a woman of indeterminate age  
and unremarkable appearance.  
She is not fussy about the company she keeps,  
and tends to be full of excuses for her friends,  
having seen life from their angle.

Her heart, like her pockets, is capacious.  
She has a voice rich in tender understanding  
But is at her best in silence  
when she sits alongside  
the grief-stricken and the guilty  
and their sorrow seeps into her soul.

Curiously, she sees herself reflected  
in the eyes of both murderer and victim,  
so sits not in judgement but companionably.  
She is a subtle teacher.

...

Mary Wickham RSM,  
Extract from *Souvenirs of Spirit: Poems & Prayers*, p. 64

# MODULE 5

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

### Foundations of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea

In the same way that Catherine McAuley sent some of Sisters to start new foundations in England and Ireland, these foundations, once established, sent Sisters to begin other new foundations. **Many of these requests for Sisters of Mercy came from bishops appointed to Australia but with strong links to Ireland.** Between 1846 and 1898, 18 different groups of Sisters arrived in Australia from Ireland, England and Argentina. **By 1907, there were 52 autonomous foundations of Sisters of Mercy in Australia.** (see diagram on p. 29)

**Several of these autonomous groups were amalgamated between 1902 and 1942.** (see diagram on p. 30).

One of the factors which gave impetus to the amalgamation of some of the independent Mercy convents was **the desire of the Australian government in the early 1900s to improve the quality of teacher training.** Consequently, the Australian Catholic bishops in 1905 decided that *"the solution was to consolidate resources and establish centralized novitiates for each religious congregation each with its own training college."* (Kerr, p. 21). In response to this reality, **many smaller Mercy houses joined with larger ones** so that by the early 1950s there were 17 Mercy congregations in Australia.

**Reconfiguring continued in the Mercy world.** In 1954, eight groups formed the Australian Union of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The remaining nine groups formed the Australian Federation of the Religious Sisters of Mercy in 1955. Both groups made their first foundations in Papua New Guinea in 1956 and 1957 respectively. By 1981, the Union and Federation had ceased when the 17 Mercy congregations formed the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (ISMA). In 2010 the Autonomous region of Papua New Guinea was formally established. **On December 12, 2011, 14 Mercy Congregations and the autonomous region of Papua New Guinea formed the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG).**

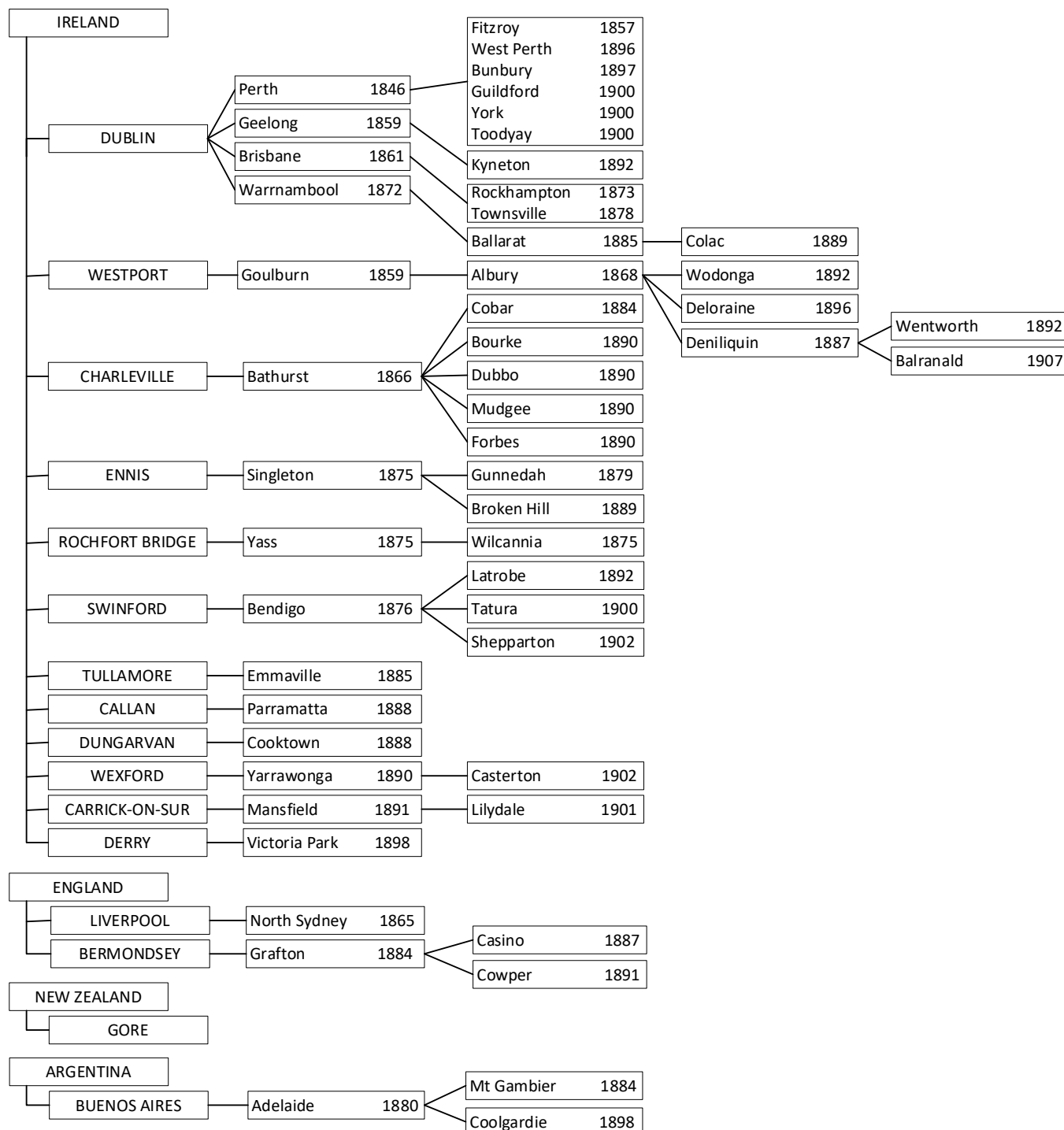
Alongside **ISMAPNG**, the Mercy congregations of **Brisbane, North Sydney and Parramatta** continue to respond to need in a variety of ways. These 4 Mercy groups share responsibility for a number of ministries, e.g. Mercy Works Ltd.

The diagrams which follow provide some details about **the significant dates and locations of the unfolding story** of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

# MODULE 5

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

### AUTONOMOUS FOUNDATIONS OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY OF AUSTRALIA: 1846-1907

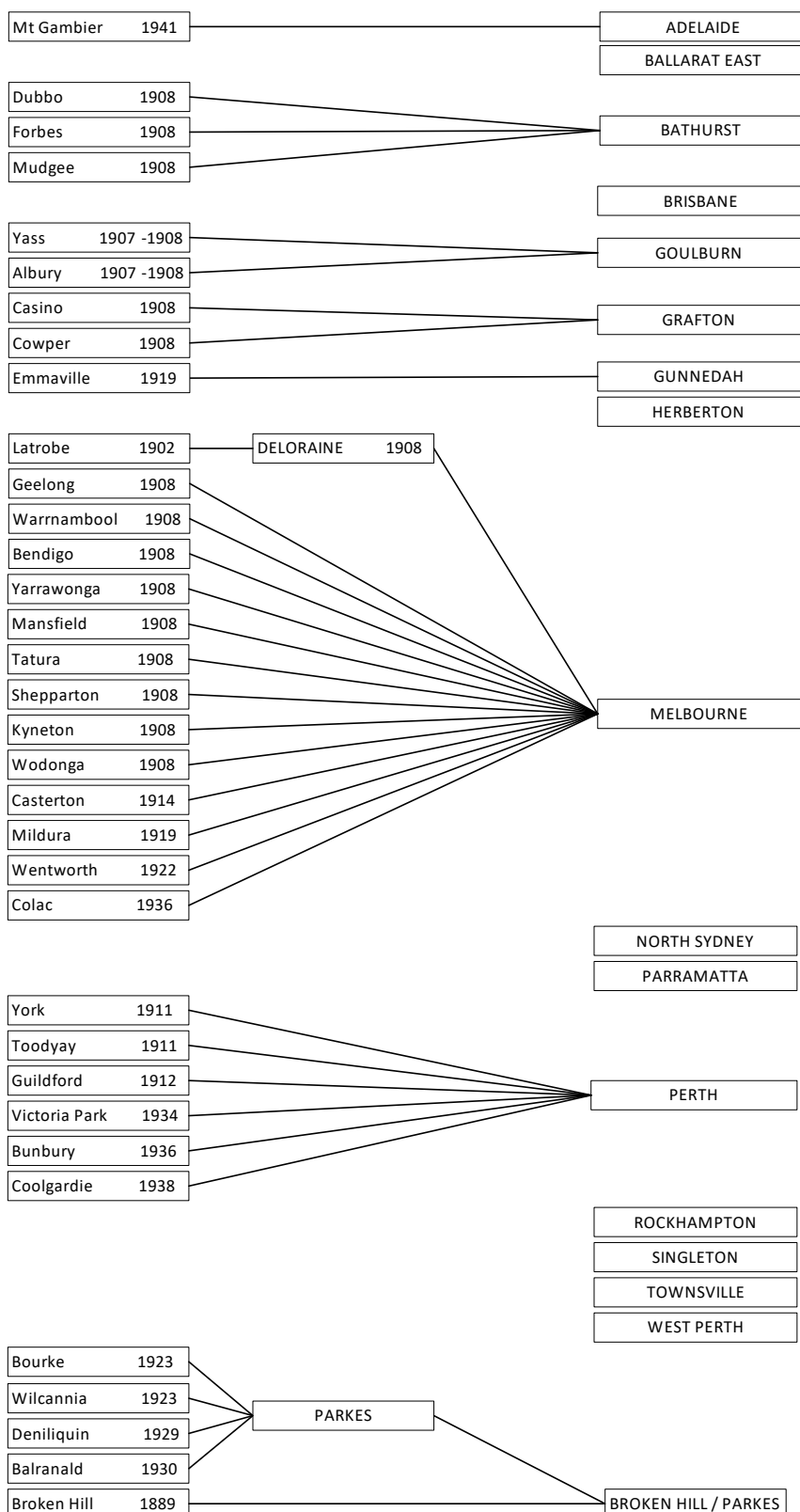


Berenice Kerr, *The Land that I Will Show You*, p.20

# MODULE 5

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

MERCY AMALGAMATIONS NSW (1907 – 1942), VIC/TAS (1902-1941) and in 1950



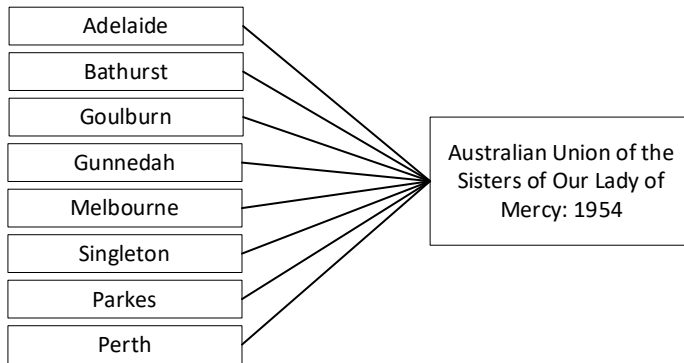
Berenice Kerr (2011), *The Land that I Will Show You*, pp. 21-24



# MODULE 5

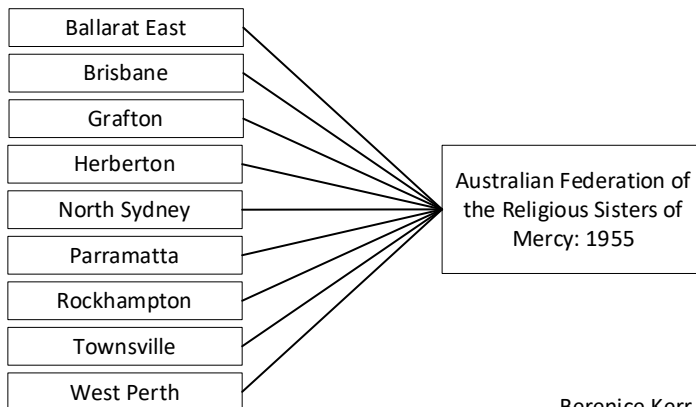
## Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

### THE AUSTRALIAN UNION OF THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF MERCY



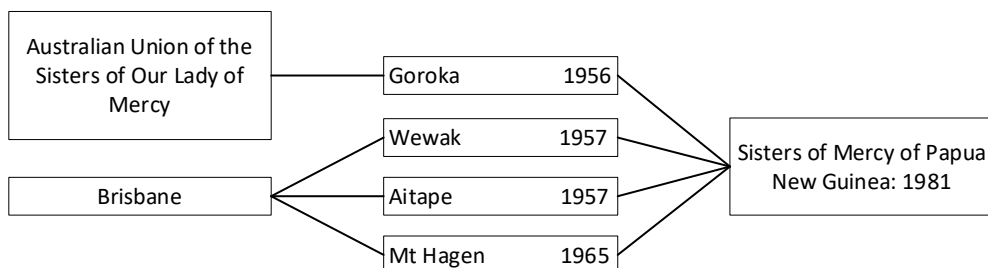
Berenice Kerr, *The Land that I Will Show You*, p.34

### THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF THE RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF MERCY



Berenice Kerr, *The Land that I Will Show You*, p.38

### SISTERS OF MERCY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA



# MODULE 5

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

### ISMAPNG Today

View the short video clip on the formation of ISMAPNG <https://vimeo.com/285699965> (5 min 56 sec)

**What do you know about the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy which established your Mercy ministry? Using the diagrams on the previous pages, trace this Congregation back to its foundation house in Ireland, England or Argentina.**

### Activity

- ✚ There may be Mercy sisters living in your local area, If so, try to make contact with them. As part of your Orientation, invite them to share their local founding story and their current involvement in the local community. Some of them may still be involved with your ministry.

Many stories can be shared over 'a comfortable cup of tea'! The sisters will also be interested to learn of the current developments in the Mercy ministry that you have recently joined.

# MODULE 5

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

### ISMAPNG Constitutions and 2017 Chapter Statement

The Works of Mercy, central to Catherine and the first Sisters of Mercy, continue to be so for the Sisters, their associates, staff and volunteers today, as these core documents show.



At its centre, the diagram above has the aim and purpose of ISMAPNG as stated in section J2.10 in the ISMAPNG Constitutions. Take some time to reflect on the diagram.

Which work(s) of mercy do you think are the most challenging for people involved in your Mercy ministry? Why might that be the case do you think?


# MODULE 5

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

### ISMAPNG Chapter Statement

At this time of global vulnerability  
God's transforming mercy  
fires our hearts anew with  
deeper reverence for all creation.

Disturbed by  
the despair and suffering of many peoples and  
the degradation of Earth,  
we are impelled to reflective action for  
gospel justice.



# CHAPTER STATEMENT

## 2017

INSTITUTE OF SISTERS OF MERCY OF  
AUSTRALIA AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA

*Long dispela taim bilong wol i gat hevi na wari  
marimari bilong God i senisim  
hat bilong mipela olsem niupela paia  
wantaim bikpela ona long olgeta samting.*

*Plenti ol pipol i tingting  
long pen na hevi i bagarapim ol  
na long ol bagarap ol i mekim  
long graun bilong mipela,  
dispela i kirapim mipela  
long lukluk gen long wei  
na stretpela pasin bilong gutnius.*

# MODULE 5

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

**Which of the words or phrases in the ISMAPNG 2017 Chapter Statement are significant for you in your life and work?**

### Prayerful Reflection

Whilst Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy, neither she nor the Sisters of Mercy have a monopoly on mercy. At the heart of the mercy that Catherine and the Sisters of Mercy live and practise, is God's mercy.

The theme of mercy is expressed throughout the Christian Scriptures. In the gospels, Luke begins his story of Jesus, with the portrayal of Mary (Lk 1:50.54) who praises God for the mercy shown to Israel and to the whole of humanity in the Magnificat: "*His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.*" (1:50) God intervenes in the world for the salvation of humankind through Jesus, who is seen as an agent of God's mercy. Jesus also reflects God's mercy as he reaches out to people with mercy and compassion.

*"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:20-49),*

In his Gospel, Luke highlights 'mercy' as an attribute of God and invites us to be 'merciful' in the same ways as God is merciful.

- ✚ Think of someone you know to be a merciful person. In what ways does that person reflect God's mercy?



# References & Acknowledgments

## References

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