



SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF AUSTRALIA

1838-2013

*175 years*  
impelled by Christ's love

COLLECTORS EDITION 1 / SEPTEMBER 2013

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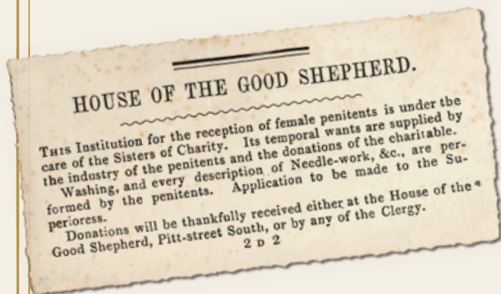
*After four and a half months at sea aboard the Francis Spaight, the Sisters landed in Sydney Cove in December 1838, where they were overwhelmed by the heat, mosquitoes, and the sound of cicadas. It wasn't until June 1839 that Mary Aikenhead was informed of their safe arrival.*

# A snapshot of Sydney in the years 1838-1845

Material prepared for the historical articles on pages 2-8 prepared by Sr Moira O'Sullivan, our Congregational Historian, and Denise Corrigan, our Archives Manager



In the 1830-40s the look of the Colony was still strongly identified with the home countries of England and Ireland. It was largely a mix of Neo-classic Georgian and Gothic Revival architecture. John Verge was a popular architect of the day, and Tusculum House and Elizabeth Bay House in Potts Point are surviving examples of his work. The villa 'Tarmons', also in Potts Point (and home to our own St Vincent's Hospital Sydney from 1857-1870), is thought to have been built by John Verge.



Transportation had come to an end in NSW in 1840, and with it came the rise of free 'government assisted' immigration. The needs of the British penal system, however, prevailed in Van Diemen's Land where more than 30,000 convicts were off-loaded in the 1840s. The growing population of working people settled around Sydney centre, numbers doubling every decade. This largely unplanned growth of Sydney put pressure on services such as clean water, sewerage, and street alignments.

*The Oxford Companion to Australian History* tells us that most of these immigrants were in their 20s and 30s and predominantly male. Males outnumbered females by 3 to 1 in 1828 and by 3 to 2 in 1851. Caroline Chisholm (who arrived in the Sydney in 1838, the same year as the pioneer Sisters) greeted every free immigrant ship that arrived because she was alarmed by the neglect shown to the female travellers by the government once here. The Sisters of Charity were constant visitors to her Immigrants' Home in Bent St, Sydney in 1841, where she assisted these women with accommodation and employment. Recording in their annals, the Sisters said they "consoled, advised, and administered medicine".

By 1841 Governor Gipps could report that "the old distinction between Free Settlers and persons who have been convicts or are of convict origin, is still presented, but the virulence, with which it was formerly marked, is very happily subsiding."

However, he went on to report that –

*"drunkenness, the fruitful parent of every species of Crime, is still the prevailing vice of the Colony."*

Above left: When the Sisters left the Parramatta convent in 1847, they joined the Sydney community in an overcrowded rented house in Burdekin Terrace. M. M. John Baptist De Lacy saw that this would help solve two problems, serving the best interests of the penitent women in residence and housing some Sisters to avoid paying yet more rent. The House of Refuge was renamed the House of the Good Shepherd. Advertisement from *Australasian Catholic Directory* 1857.



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One of the Sisters' early works was to help the many women wandering the streets in degradation and misery.

The Colony's first Irish Governor, Sir Richard Bourke (1831-1837), had made some great leaps forward on behalf of the Irish Catholics in the Colony by the time our pioneer Sisters had arrived. He had abolished the right of the Anglican Church to be the state church in NSW in the 1830s. During his governorship, well-known Catholics (like Roger Therry, and John Hubert Plunkett) were, for the first time in the history of Australia, appointed to positions of any importance under the Crown.

But his reforms had also fuelled religious intolerance between Protestants and Catholics. Our Sisters were not immune from religious intolerance: it crossed their paths on more than one occasion during their ministrations to the poor. Governor Bourke's proposal for government funded schools with separate religious instruction once a week (based on the Irish National system) was abandoned because of Protestant opposition.

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Centre, top: The pioneer Sisters regularly visited the Benevolent Asylum, which provided relief and accommodation to the infirm and destitute, including the ageing convict population. Courtesy State Library NSW SPF/245.



Left: Watercolour by John Rae, showing Burdekin Terraces where our pioneer Sisters lived when in Sydney. Hyde Park had originally been used as a race track. Courtesy State Library NSW DG SV\*/SpColl/Rae/19.



Right: *The Old Tank Stream, Sydney*, John Black Henderson (1852), originally the freshwater supply for the Colony. It became heavily polluted, and by 1826 it was no longer used for drinking water. Courtesy State Library of NSW SSV1/1852/2.

Governor Gipps (1838-1846), under pressure from the rapid population increases, pushed through with a comprehensive education system, which included state aid to denominational schools. Up until 1840, there were 6 Catholic schools in Sydney central, one school at Parramatta, and at least 4 more in outlying districts of NSW. Our Sisters were ready and able to take up this growing area of work.

Sydney was enduring a severe drought in 1838. It continued until 1843. It was extremely hot, dry and dusty. Our Sisters in their heavy black woollen serge habits would have walked long distances across rudimentary roads. The depression of 1841 reduced the demand for labour, so there was widespread unemployment. Food shortages, high costs of food, and high rents made life difficult for those with little or no income, including our Sisters who were reliant on a cash-strapped Church. In the census of 1841, there were 35,690 Catholics in a total population of 130,856 in New South Wales (which then included the present States of Queensland and Victoria). This vast diocese was ministered to by approximately 28 priests, with Bishop Polding away in Europe on regular recruiting missions.

*...let us pause for a moment here to pay tribute to the early benefactors of the Sisters of Charity...*

The Colony's poor depended on relief from charities like the Benevolent Asylums which were supported by private donations and small government grants. The Benevolent Society of New South Wales was the largest charity organisation in New South Wales, located at what is now known as Central Railway Station. It assisted a wide range of people in need: the aged, destitute families, penitent women, nursing mothers and the unemployed. Overcrowding in these institutions was the norm, and conditions in some asylums and, even hospitals, were usually pretty poor. The Sisters of Charity visited the Asylum as part of their Sydney mission.

An entry in the online *Dictionary of Sydney* (2013) by Stephen Garton, Professor of History at the University of Sydney, claims "philanthropy and poor relief faced major challenges in nineteenth-century Sydney. The proportion of wealthy citizens was small, and many of those who made substantial fortunes were self-made men more inclined to safeguard their fortune than distribute some of it to the less well off.

Few were inclined to support charities by paying a charity organisation subscription. Even in the 1860s the Secretary of the Benevolent Society was still complaining about the fact that so few people are subscribers and the same people subscribe to them all."

Let us pause for a moment here to pay tribute to the early benefactors of the Sisters of Charity who were committed to serving their community, and committed to the work of the Sisters of Charity: William Davis (who paid for the Sisters' first convent and provided funds for other rental properties for the Sisters); Mary Corcoran (who provided rent from four houses for the Sisters at Parramatta); Mrs Blake (who set up a House of Refuge where the Sisters helped penitent women); John Hubert Plunkett (who provided funds, and, even lent his own new house to the Sisters to live in, as well as raising funds for St Vincent's Hospital); and the many generous in-kind supporters of the Sisters, too many to list here.

# The Sisters of Charity in Australia...

**B**ishop Polding, who had asked Mary Aikenhead, the foundress, to give Sisters for the Australian mission to specifically work with the down-trodden female convicts in the Female Factory in Parramatta, wrote a fulsome account of the good they achieved in an 1842 report to the Roman department that looked after mission countries, Propaganda Fidei. Part of it reads:

*They were quickly blessed by the most consoling results ... The edifying conduct and assiduous attendance of the Sisters led many Protestants to ask insistently to be instructed by them, and every week in this way persons were led to the Faith and to holiness of Life. Besides these duties in the Factory which they fulfilled at least twice a day, these Sisters visited the Women's hospital, and also the sick Women of the City; and moreover they are in charge of a numerous School, and give instruction to those who need it. Also our Orphan School is under their superintendence. The Omnipotent God in his goodness has blessed them, and by inspiring in the Young a vocation to religious life, he has put them within reach of undertaking all these duties with the increase of their number.*

Most of the Sisters' activities involved teaching the truths of faith, visiting the prisoners and sick, and helping the poor. Two of them organised the Catholic Orphanage at Waverley in 1839, another took charge of the Orphan School at Parramatta, some visited Liverpool Hospital (for paupers and soldiers) and the asylums for the poor.

When they came to Sydney, eventually moving there permanently, they visited similar establishments, as well as being responsible for a women's refuge, and later, the instruction of female orphans in the 1850s. The high point of their Sydney successes was the founding of St Vincent's Hospital in 1857, the first hospital in the southern hemisphere conducted by religious women.

The route to this achievement was not easy. First of all, the Sisters of Charity were the first non-enclosed women religious to be allowed perpetual vows and papal approval. Until then, religious women were enclosed,



not allowed to go outside their convents. It was inevitable that the Sydney hierarchy, used to the conventions of enclosed women, would find unenclosed religious strange. In addition, enclosed religious were under the authority of the local bishop. The Sisters of Charity were governed by a superior from among themselves.

Just as it would have been difficult for Benedictine monks (Bishop Polding was a Benedictine) to understand the constitutions of the Irish Sisters of Charity, it would have been equally difficult for these Sisters, coming from a situation where their dowries supported them, to grasp that the emerging colonial church did not have reserves of money nor was it able to rely on wealthy parishioners nor on a steady income in a country where the vagaries of climate were not understood well enough to ward off frequent bankruptcies. The Bishop was unable to meet every need.

Unsatisfactory or unsettled clergy made Bishop Polding believe that the church would be better served if the diocese was staffed by Benedictines who would have severed their family ties and would be bound to obey him as their superior. It was natural to hope that the Sisters of Charity could adapt their way of life to the same spirituality, not realising that papal approval came with sanctions

Left: Brochure produced to help raise funds for the Hospital and Convent.

Centre: John Bede Polding, Australia's first Catholic bishop.

Right: Representation of the *Francis Spaight*, the ship that brought the pioneer Sisters to Australia.

against changing their constitutions. This led to continual misunderstandings, and an eventual relocation of three of the pioneer Sisters to Tasmania.

From 1848, the main focus of the remaining Sisters was in Sydney, some living in the House of Refuge, later renamed the House of the Good Shepherd, and others in a rented house. Since the latter meant frequent changes as rents increased, a permanent convent for the Sisters became urgent. Bishop Davis gave permission for an appeal to buy a permanent house for the Sisters of Charity, since the Benedictine nuns who came in 1848 with Polding to Australia had a large property on the outskirts of Sydney, at Subiaco. The appeal resulted in the purchase of Tarmons in 1856, which was to become convent, hospital and school. The House of the Good Shepherd was handed over to a new active Benedictine congregation of women religious, founded by Polding in 1857 who became the Good Samaritan Sisters.

# The Sisters of Charity and the Female Factories



SISTERS  
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1838 – 2013

175 years  
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The nineteenth century in Britain was an age of reforms, for parliament, social institutions and religious tolerance. In the colonies, religion was seen as a civilising influence, so clergymen and others were allowed to visit prisoners. However, given that many convicts were actually criminals, it is not surprising that some chaplains, notably one who visited the Hobart Female Factory, were jeered by those they came to instruct. In contrast, the Sisters of Charity were welcomed by the women in the Parramatta Female Factory. Drought and free immigrants meant that convict labourers were less needed, and so the Female Factory at Parramatta was seriously overcrowded when the Sisters began visiting there in 1839. (Colonial authorities were expected to look after the women in the Colony until such time as they were employed or married). The Sisters came from Ireland and were Catholic, like many of the women, and so knew how to speak to them. The great number of Catholics among the convicts was why Polding asked Mary Aikenhead for Sisters of Charity. The Sisters were sympathetic with the women, and understood, for example, when the women rioted it was because they were being cheated of their proper rations.

The following note in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7 May 1842 shows how daunting the number at Parramatta was. It lists 327 women who were there because of offences in the colony; 734 serving out their original sentence, 11 in solitary confinement, 33 in hospital, and 18 confined 'by order of the Matron', so that the total number of women was 1141 and of children 263, far more than the original design of the Factory was ever intended. It also meant that corruption and sickness were never far away.



Above left: *A View in Parramatta looking East*, Augustus Earle, 1828. Courtesy State Library of NSW PXD 265/3.

Right: *Female Penitentiary (or Factory)*, Augustus Earle. Courtesy National Library Australia nla.pic-aa2818460.

Centre: Contemporary interpretation of tapestry produced by the women at the Factory for Polding's ordination to Archbishop by artist Diane Zimatat. It was exhibited in the Women Transported Exhibition at Parramatta Heritage Centre in 2008.

The British government sent NSW governors exact instructions on how women prisoners were to be housed and employed. Governor Gipps, now acknowledged as a reforming governor, in one report, listed the various employments he had devised for the women at Parramatta, trying one after the other according to their success. Several occupations that Gipps tried by 1840 were: the dressing and manufacture of NZ flax (for fishing nets or protective nets for orchards); washing for the military barracks and hospitals of Parramatta; manufacture of straw hats and bonnets. Other proposals were to take in washing for private individuals and, for the unskilled convicts, unpicking oakum (old ropes). Gipps wrote: 'I tried also the manufacture of articles of Needlework for sale, and for this purpose caused, during my summer residence of 1838 at Parramatta, a quantity of materials to be purchased, and worked up under the immediate superintendence of Lady Gipps and her housekeeper.' The small profit on these, and the impossibility of continuing when away from Parramatta, meant this plan was abandoned.

Gipps was prepared to allow one-sixth of what the women earned to be used by them to get tea, sugar, bread, meat and vegetables. Management of the Hobart Female Factory was apparently less enlightened, though much of the blame could fall on the bitterness of the climate, in which the women did laundry in the open, in cold water and standing in cold water. It was more difficult, even a much longer walk from their convent, for the Hobart Sisters to visit.

The gentleness of the Sisters with women convicts, and the kindness and the care with which Bishop Polding welcomed the male convicts, had major influence on the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. Perhaps sensing this, there was a bigoted backlash against the Sisters' presence in the Female Factories. At the same time, other Protestants offered them land in other places where religion was needed. Both reactions actually attest to the impact they made, even if the Sisters did not have the praise lavished on them by Dr Ullathorne and Polding for the improvements they made. The women's appreciation for the visits of Polding and other priests was recorded by some women in a tapestry they worked depicting one ceremony.

# About the Five Pioneers

## Sr M. John Cahill

To support his daughter entering religious life, Margaret Cahill's father sold his share in his shop to provide an allowance for her. (In those days, women entering religious life had to bring enough money to support them for life).

Cahill was the first to volunteer for the Australian mission and, at 45 years of age, the oldest of the pioneer Sisters. She visited and instructed prisoners in Ireland and would also have been amongst the group of Sisters in Ireland who worked courageously to care for the sick during the terrible cholera epidemic in Ireland in the early 1830s.

Mary Aikenhead had been John Cahill's novice mistress. A biography of Mary Aikenhead published in 1924 reported that: "It was often said of the old Sisters who had been her [Aikenhead's] novices, that if the rule book was lost they would be living exponents of everything contained in it". John Cahill the oldest of the group, would have thought of herself as the guardian of Mary Aikenhead's spirit in this new land. A good example of this is when John Cahill refused the payment offered by Downing Street to the Sisters as she saw this as going against the Sisters' constitutions.

*"All must remember who are under the obedience of the Congregation that whatever is done in the service of the sick poor must be done gratis, not demanding nor accepting any retribution or alms by which any of the duties in which, according to the institute, they are employed may seem to be recompensed".*

Sr Xavier Williams said Cahill was the best missionary of the pioneer group. She had a very musical voice and had a way with words. During her time in Van Diemen's Land, she regularly gave religious instruction to a crowded audience. Despite her stern appearance, she was described as having a cheerful countenance. She died in Hobart in 1864.

Above left: Crucifix belonging to Mother M. John Cahill. Notice how well worn the crucifix is from rubbing.

Centre: Sisters of Charity attending to the sick.

Right: Three of the five pioneer Sisters – S. M. John Cahill, S. M. Xavier Williams and S. M. de Sales O'Brien. No images of Srs M. Lawrence Cater and M. Baptist De Lacy are known to exist.

## Sr M. Francis de Sales O'Brien

Sr M. Francis de Sales O'Brien was born into a well-to-do family and had been educated in France. She had a vast network of relations in Ireland and a cousin, Roger Therry, prominent in Catholic affairs in Australia. O'Brien's father and four of her sisters had died before she entered the convent.

As a novice, she was ready to stand with the poor and suffering – she begged Mary Aikenhead to allow her to accompany the professed Sisters to the hospital during the deadly cholera outbreak in the 1830s. Both she and Sr M. John Cahill had the advantage of Father Kenny's instruction in the novitiate in Ireland and were very adept at instructing others. De Sales O'Brien was of one of the three Sisters sent to Paris

by Mary Aikenhead to study hospital administration in preparation for the opening of St Vincent's Hospital Dublin. She was also recognised for her teaching skills and, as for Sr M. Lawrence Cater, the English Government agreed to pay a stipend for her to teach in the NSW Colony. She was 29 years of age when she arrived in Sydney.

As head superior of the Parramatta community, she came under pressure to adopt Benedictine ways, but with the support of Mother John Cahill and Sr M. Xavier Williams, she chose instead to relocate to Hobart to continue working within the Sisters of Charity Constitutions and to continue helping the downtrodden women in the gaols. She died in Hobart in 1871.

*Sensible, prudent, humble, fervent and cheerful, their holy lives are a continued lesson of edification; and my only regret is that I have not more to aid them.*

Extract from a letter from Bishop Willson of Hobart Town to Mary Aikenhead, 1849, about the Sisters of Charity and their presence in Van Diemen's Land.





Copy of the signed vows of Julie Matilda Cater (Sr M. Lawrence) sent to the Archives from Ireland earlier this year.

### Mother M. Xavier Williams

Eliza Williams, born in 1800, grew up caring for her mother and her brothers and sister as her father was away in the army. She also taught in a school owned by her aunts. When her mother died, Eliza joined the Sisters of Charity. Eliza was given the name of the great missionary patron, St Francis Xavier, one of the first seven Jesuits who studied under Ignatius of Loyola. Sr Mary Francis Xavier was still a novice when she came to Australia at 38 years of age in 1838, and was the first woman to be professed on Australian soil at St Patrick's Church, Parramatta, 9th April 1839. It was a very special occasion for the Sisters and the Colony's burgeoning Catholic community.

Sr Xavier witnessed the painful separation of the Tasmanian and Sydney communities in 1847 when Polding's Vicar General usurped the head superior's (de Sales O'Brien) authority, and she chose to accompany two of the pioneer group of Sisters, John Cahill and de Sales O'Brien, to Tasmania, because she wanted to stay loyal to the Congregation's Constitutions as well as look after the other Sisters. The Sisters in Van Diemen's Land undertook very similar work to that which was undertaken in Sydney. They visited the female penitentiary, an institution of far more misery than the Female Factory in Parramatta; they visited schools, and also the sick and poor in their homes and hospitals. The poverty in which the Sisters lived in Tasmania meant that they could not accept candidates who did not come with a dowry. As Van Diemen's Land Catholics were generally poor, the Sisters' numbers took many years to grow. Bishop Willson, whose diocese was also laden with debt, said the three pioneer Sisters in Tasmania did as much work as 15 Sisters in Ireland.

Mother Xavier was 79 years of age when she established St Joseph's Orphanage in 1879. The Sisters worked tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of the poor. On the celebration of her Golden Jubilee in 1889, "the Sisters entertained three hundred poor people at a meal where the tables were filled with festal food." Mother Xavier also negotiated for two years to restore unity between the Sydney and Hobart communities which eventuated in 1890. She died in Hobart in 1892.

### Sr M. Lawrence Cater

Sr M. Lawrence Cater (also known as Sr M. Magdalen Chantal in Australia) was 27 years of age when she came to Sydney. She was the youngest of the Sisters and the only Englishwoman amongst the pioneer group. She was born into an upper class family with strong connections with the Catholic community and clergy. She was one of the two Sisters the English Government agreed to pay for their teaching services to the Colony. Dr Ullathorne acknowledged her wit and solid education.

Cater, like Cahill and O'Brien, wrote home in the early years to Ireland to try to reclaim her dowry to alleviate the financial deprivation the Sisters suffered in Australia. The Sisters found it both embarrassing and distressing to deprive the mission in Australia of the small aid it received from overseas funding by accepting funds from the Church.

As well as visiting the Female Factory, Cater was given the position of head of the Catholic Orphan School at Parramatta, and she also instructed the novices for a short time. She returned to Ireland in 1846, but eventually left the Irish Congregation, later joining the Benedictine Oblates. She finally left religious life and took the position of governess in a French family.

### Sr M. John Baptist De Lacy

Sr M. John Baptist De Lacy entered the Sisters of Charity in Dublin specifically for the Australian Mission. She was 39 years old when she arrived in Australia, and had trained as a nurse in the newly opened St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin.

Sr M. Baptist took a leading role in organising the Catholic Orphan School at Waverley in 1839, one of the Sisters' earliest ministries, as well as going on to introduce order and method to the Catholic schools already in the Colony. She also visited Darlinghurst Gaol with Sr M. John Cahill two or three times a week when residing in Sydney. Sr M. Baptist wrote the annals for the Sisters. Much of our knowledge about the work of the early Sisters in colonial Sydney is gleaned from her writing.

Sr M. Baptist went on to found St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, in 1857. She was well aware of the difficulties of operating a hospital with limited financial means. She used her skills to negotiate the financial and practical needs of the institute, co-opting both Protestant and Catholic supporters and staff. She was an extremely hard worker, and assisted at all levels of hospital management including nursing and the dispensing of prescription medications, and she also trained other Sisters who worked in that Hospital.

Sr M. Baptist implemented the policy of the Sisters of Charity which she had learned from Mary Aikenhead, that the Hospital accept people of any race, colour or creed. Sr M. Baptist returned to Ireland less than two years after the Hospital's opening and worked as a Sister of Charity there for another twenty years before dying in 1878.



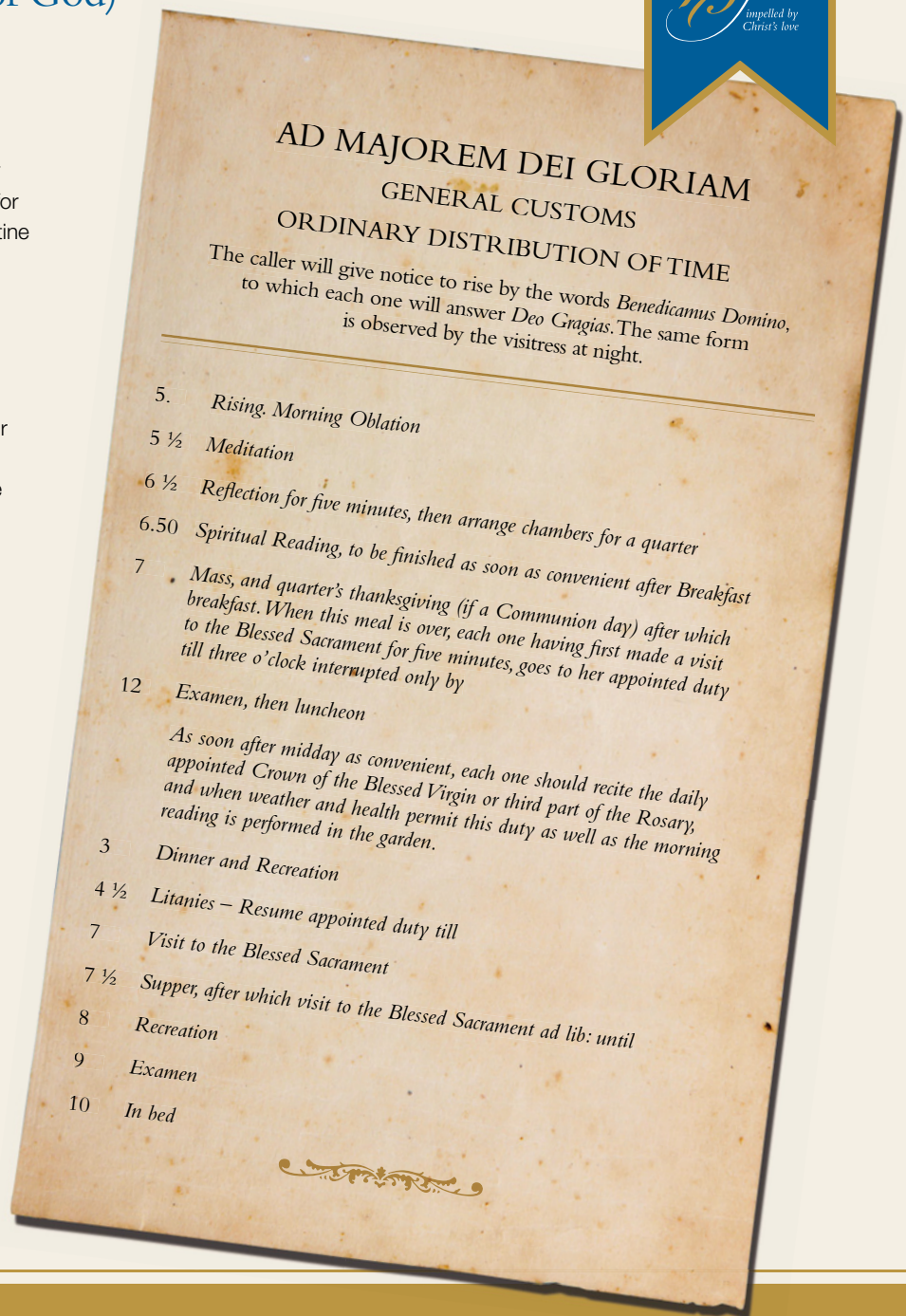
# Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

(for the greater glory of God)

This is the earliest surviving program of General Customs held in the Archives, sent from Ireland in 1860 to our early Sisters. It sets out a daily schedule for the Sisters. Our pioneer Sisters' daily routine would not have fitted neatly into this grid.

The Sisters visited the Female Factory at Parramatta twice daily from 6-7 morning and evening. One can imagine that the Sisters rose earlier to accommodate their visits to the Factory, and took their supper later. Most likely, our Sisters would have taught in the morning, whilst others in the Convent would have visited the sick.

A similar routine would have occurred in the afternoon, except teaching was probably confined to the morning. We do know from our records that the Sisters' recreation time would involve mainly sewing – embroidering vestments, making altar linen and shirts and caps for the priests. It was a long, busy day, more often than not with sparse meals. The Sisters would have had a live-in servant to help.



## FROM THE ARCHIVES NUMBERS IN THE CONGREGATION

It's difficult to know the numbers of our early Sisters in Sydney as our records are incomplete. No formal records were kept for those who entered but did not stay. In a letter written by Sr M. de Sales O'Brien to Mary Aikenhead on Passion Sunday 1847 (just before the three pioneer Sisters went to Hobart), she writes:

*“we are at present 8 professed, and 7 novices incl. 3 lay Sisters.”*

The records we do hold show that seven Sisters departed the Congregation (three died) after June 1847, and one Sister entered before Tarmons was purchased in 1856.



# Loving congratulations to our Jubilarians!

## 4th August Diamond Jubilarians (1953-2013)

### Sr Patricia Coyle

Sr Patricia celebrated her Jubilee at the Sunday Eucharist at St Brigid's Church, Red Hill with her community and friends. Sr Annette Cunliffe, the Congregational Leader was also in Brisbane on that day, and was able to join the celebration and present a Papal Blessing to Sr Patricia. After Mass all guests gathered for lunch in the beautifully decorated community hall at St John the Baptist Retirement Centre where Patricia's sister, Carmel, resides. The sisters and friends enjoyed the time to gather and relax over lunch. Mr Bob Ikin, a good friend, spoke beautifully about Sr Patricia's gifts of presence and wisdom and her availability to people. Sr Patricia responded, thanking all for their presence and Sr Carmel for her enormous contribution to the occasion. The cutting of the cake followed.

### Sr Lorna Moylan

To celebrate this special Jubilee, Sr Lorna and her sister Helen were guests of Sr Eileen Thynne on the actual anniversary day. It was such a happy occasion for Lorna. Later in the month, a most enjoyable Afternoon Tea celebration was arranged by Mary Gabrielle Clarke and Anna Parlevliet at Corpus Christi Clayton for Lorna and the sisters at Clayton. Helen was a special guest as was Joan Gasparini, the Manager of the Day Centre at Caritas Christi Kew. The table was beautifully decorated and all enjoyed the assortment of dainty cakes and sandwiches. To conclude the celebration, Gaye, on behalf of Sr Annette, presented Lorna with her Papal Blessing.

Below: Sr Patricia Coyle (third on right) with Srs Carmel Coyle (her sister), Anne Crowley, Margaret Mines, Maureen Parker and Cate O'Brien.

### Sr Josephine Hodges

Sr Josephine had a Eucharistic celebration at St Joseph's Village Auburn. A number of Sisters who have shared different stages of Sr Josephine's life, family members, her current community, staff and residents of the Village also joined in the happy celebration. Fr Ray, who has known Josephine for a number of years, spoke during the Mass of her dedication to those in need. Morning Tea in the beautifully decorated Activity Room followed the Mass. Josephine's two surviving sisters, Nora and Nell, her brother Leo and other family members were special guests. Her nephew Michael spoke at the Morning Tea highlighting Josephine's love of family and their pride in her life of service and commitment. Josephine responded and sincerely thanked the many people who had shared her life and those who had contributed to the occasion.

### Sr Margaret Costigan

Sr Margaret chose to have a quiet celebration and in her Thank You cards expressed her gratitude for the cards, messages, positive wishes and gifts she had received.



Above: Sr Josephine Hodges (on right) receives her Papal Blessing from Sr Annette Cunliffe.

Left: Sr Lorna Moylan (middle) with her sister Helen (left) and Sr Eileen Thynne.

# Loving congratulations to our Jubilarians!

continued from page 09

## 8th August Golden Jubilarians (1963-2013)

### Sisters Helga Neidhart and Patricia Walker

Sr Helga and Sr Pat chose to have quiet celebrations with their communities, Sr Helga's on the actual day and Sr Pat's on the 7th. Each received a Papal Blessing during the Eucharist of celebration.

### Sr Claudette Palmer

Sr Claudette is currently in ministry with Solidarity with South Sudan. She will have a small celebration when she returns to Australia for a holiday.

### Sr Margaret Beirne

Sr Margaret's celebration, which Helga and Patricia attended, was held on 10th August in St Francis of Assisi Church, Paddington. Parishioners of Paddington and Edgecliff and a large number of Sisters of Charity, including her community, joined Sr Margaret and her family and friends, colleagues and students from St Andrew's College in the celebration of the Eucharist. The choir of St Francis, under choirmaster Noel Debien, led the singing and the wonderful music was a fitting highlight of the occasion.

During the Eucharist Sr Margaret was presented with a Papal Blessing by the Congregational Leader, Sr Annette Cunliffe. Afterwards all shared a lovely lunch in the Parish Hall. Two of Sr Margaret's brothers spoke of their pride in Sr Margaret's commitment and her achievements and Sr Margaret responded, thanking all who have supported her over the years. Finally, the cutting of the cake took place.

Below: Srs Helga Neidhart, Margaret Beirne and Patricia Walker in Sydney for Margaret's celebration.

Bottom: Sr Claudette in ministry in Southern Sudan.



# Celebration!

15th August 2013

From a Letter Received from  
Sr Philippine Humphreys rsc

*"Thursday 15th was one of the happiest days of my life! St Joseph's Village Auburn put on a wonderful day and the residents crowded in. We had a finger food lunch at noon in the Activity Room and then saw the webcast of the Book Launch at Government House. It was wonderful to see everyone there and we all loved the talks.*

*We are so blessed at the Village as we keep up all our Congregational Feasts. In the afternoon we had the presentation of Certificates to Carers who have worked here for 18, 12 and 10 years and that put the icing on the cake for a wonderful day. At 3pm we had a party and most of the residents were present.*

*At the end of the day we were presented with a lovely framed photo of Sr Maurus with her "boys". The people loved the stories we told them about Sr Maurus. We will hang the picture in the Activity Room where it will remind us of what life is all about.*

*I know that if all our sisters were here, they would feel the great spirit of Mary Aikenhead. We celebrate her quite often. The Pastoral Care group is aware of our special days and always arranges some form in which we can take part. We live in a Sister of Charity - Mary Aikenhead Campus!*

*Thank you for enabling us to see you all at Government House. It really meant a lot to us. Thank you for the way you help us to keep in touch."*



Sr Philippine Humphreys at St Joseph's Village special celebration.

# Icon writing

by Margaret Fitzgerald rsc

In March this year I had the privilege of entering a Renewal program at Springbank Retreat Centre, Kingstree, South Carolina called, 'Eco-Spirituality and the Arts.'

The first session I was there for on the 19th March was the 'Icon Painting and Prayer' Workshop, consisting of eight full days and several evenings. It was the week before Holy Week so the invitation was to enter the deep prayer time of Lent through the writing of an icon of the Visitation, through learning basic techniques and symbolism. The iconographer was a Franciscan Sister from Philadelphia.

Over the years I've been attracted to icons and their meaning but this was the first opportunity to actually join a group to write an icon. We were told that an icon can be compared to a carefully constructed poem; that's why it's generally called 'icon writing' rather than painting. It was emphasised that an icon is a window, not a picture, first and foremost a sacramental and then a work of art. Icons are not "realistic" paintings, rather they are symbols that reveal, in an artistic manner, a profound spiritual truth – the mysterious reality of God's presence in human life.

We were introduced to the workshop through prayer and reflection after the reading of the Gospel story of the Visitation.

Each participant was guided on how to start, and then directed step by step towards completing this traditional Byzantine icon. The Iconographer demonstrated how to mix the paints using the traditional colours, which are very significant, e.g., the background is gold, a colour that symbolizes the glory of Heaven and then we followed her instructions to do this, followed by gradually working on the painting of the many layers, washes, highlights etc., The colours for the Mother of God's clothing are the reverse of Christ's; Her inner robe



is blue, (human), but covered with a cloak of red, (divine). In the evenings we were given sessions on the history, style, meaning and symbolism of Byzantine Iconography, including different painting, finishing and gold leafing techniques. The latter proved to be a very delicate process, indeed!

A few days into the workshop the local Bishop, with the Parish Priest, came to celebrate Mass during which he blessed our *unfinished* icons. Within our group there was a variety of artistic skills. It certainly was a very intense, but at the end, an extremely satisfying experience. Right up to the last minute, as individuals finished their icon there was a sense of amazement with the outcome!

*It is said that a good icon inspires prayer. The mind, soul, heart, body and will of the person who prays, becomes still, attentive, attuned and peaceful, constantly receptive to the presence of God.*

# Then & now

by Laurie Wolfe

How times have changed! With the implementation of iPads this year at Mount Carmel, we continue our remarkable technological journey with enthusiasm. But what was it like when one of our oldest Old Scholars, Sister Josephine Cannell rsc, first started at the State School in New Norfolk in 1924 and then later went on to St Joseph's School in Molle Street.

Sister Jo commenced her writing career with a slate. Sometimes she used chalk, but this was rather thick, so more often than not the students used fine skewers of slate. In Prep, exercise books were introduced – double-lined books in which rows of pothooks and other letters were duly executed. The lower case letters were written strictly between the train lines.

In Grade 1 single-lined exercise books were used in conjunction with copy books, where lines of beautifully written text had to be accurately imitated down the page, often using lead pencils. The next step was to use pen and ink, the ink being kept in ceramic inkwells set into each desk. The pens had wooden handles with a steel holder for the nibs. Because the ink remained wet for some time, blotting paper had to be used. It was easy to smudge the work, and many a page had to be done all over again!

In secondary school, pad paper could be used instead of exercise books, but there were no paperclips or staples, dressmaking pins were all the go. Pencils were used for quick work but fountain pens were now in vogue. These had a rubber tube attached to the nib and were housed in a Bakelite tube. A little lever allowed the ink to be sucked up and everyone brought along their own bottle of ink. This commercial ink was a much better texture than the old, black, powdered kind which you mixed up yourself – and it was the most glorious colour of blue. In the 1930s biros came onto the market and co-existed with the fountain pens.

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# Annette's Feast Day Celebrations in Tasmania

by Anne Turner rsc

This year, Sr Annette chose to celebrate her Feast Day with us at Taroona. We were delighted when we heard that Annette planned to share this special occasion with us as we are only a few in Tasmania now. Josephine and I felt honoured, as did Honorata!

As Annette would be arriving in Hobart on her actual Feast Day, 26th July, we decided to begin the celebrations with a special lunch which Josephine prepared. She had made sandwiches and had baked slices and biscuits. We took our time over lunch, enjoying the delicious food while chatting and catching up with news of Sisters, family and friends. Later in the afternoon, we had a short prayer session and presented Annette with a lovely blue Casaveen jacket, some Tasmanian lavender products and a candle to mark the occasion. The Casaveen Company is uniquely Tasmanian and all its knitwear begins with the spinning of the yarn on the premises, which we consider makes this jacket quite special. We hope Annette enjoys it for many years. After our prayer and gift-giving we took Annette to the Pier One Restaurant at Wrest Point for a delicious, leisurely dinner, giving us a chance to 'play ladies' and a fitting conclusion to an enjoyable day.

To continue our celebrations on Saturday, we decided to take Annette to lunch at the Boathouse Restaurant at Cornelian Bay where we sat in extremely comfortable wicker armchairs, ensconced in cosy cushions, eating delicious food and watching children, adults, dogs and birds playing in the water or walking along the beach. It was a delightful way to spend an hour or two. After lunch we visited our Sisters' graves at the nearby cemetery and then returned to Taroona to visit Honorata at Mary Potter House.

Honorata was a little sleepy when we arrived but brightened up when we told her that 'Mother General' had come to visit her!

The weekend concluded with Annette, Josephine and I celebrating Sunday Eucharist at St Pius X Church at Taroona. Soon afterwards, we farewelled Annette as she returned to Sydney. We will have happy memories of Annette's visit and hope she enjoyed it as much as we did.



A happy snapshot of Sr Annette (on right) with the Feast Day organisers, Srs Anne Turner (standing) and Josephine (seated).

## Then & now

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Sister Josephine went from student to teacher at St Joseph's. After three years of her being in the classroom, biros completely eclipsed ink for her students and the days of blotting paper were over!

In 1987, when writing her first book on the history of St Columba's in Victoria, Sister Josephine used an electric typewriter and then gave the copy to a secretary at the school who word-processed the text.

In 2007 when she wrote her book on the history of the Sisters of Charity in Tasmania, Sister Josephine typed everything up on her own computer and then took the text on a USB to the printer!

From slate to computer – what a journey! Certainly a great achievement for someone in their 89th year!

