



Sisters of Charity
of Australia

**HERITAGE CENTRE
and ARCHIVES**

Mission and formation exhibition guide • planning your visit

The recommended timing in each section is based on a 60-minute visit to the space and is intended as a guide only to help you plan your visit. Groups with a specific focus such as health care, education, or social welfare many wish to spend more time in these specific areas of the exhibition. We recommend that you leave ample time to experience the *Fourth Vow* interactive at the conclusion of your exhibition tour.

Introduction to the Heritage Centre: Foyer and lounge (8 minutes).

Artwork: Journey of Spirit Coming Together, by Lisa Buxton and Julieanne Manson.

This work was commissioned for the Heritage Centre and is very special to us. Each painting within the triptych (three panels) contains sky (spirit), earth (people), and water (journeys or connections). While each painting contains different imagery there is a continuous theme. Read the painting right to left.

The artwork contains themes which represent communities and connection to country; education; healing; communication; and spirituality. Heritage Centre staff are happy to give a presentation explaining the themes in detail upon request.

Mary Aikenhead showcase.

This display houses items pertaining directly to the life and work of Mother Mary Aikenhead and includes items such as a page from Mary Aikenhead's prayer book and fragments of her coffin preserved as a holy relic, as well as numerous leaflets and sketches of Mary's homes and local community in Ireland.

Section 1: Exhibition entrance (2 minutes)

Acknowledgement of Country; reproduction of a bust of Mother Mary Aikenhead.

Mother Mary Aikenhead was the founder of the Sisters of Charity in Ireland and sent the first Five Sisters to minister in the Australian colonies in 1838. At the age of 15 Mary Aikenhead was inspired by a sermon on Dives and Lazarus (in which the poor man enters the kingdom of heaven, while the rich man does not) to devote her life to the service of the poor. She undertook her spiritual training at the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in York and went on to found the Sisters of Charity in 1815.



Section 2: Beginnings (5 minutes)

The origins of the Sisters of Charity in Australia and their foundational work in the service of the poor.

The show case includes original items brought to New South Wales by the first five Sisters, including the black crucifix, mass charts, and hymn book. On the facing wall are replicas of the vows of the first five Sisters and in the farthest case the original key to *Tarmons*.

The first five Sisters were Mother M John Cahill, Sr M Lawrence Carter, Sr M de Sales O'Brien, Sr M Xavier Williams, Sr M Baptist De Lacy. These original Sisters of Charity of Australia were the first to travel to Australia. They were not only the first Sisters of Charity in the colonies but also the first women religious in Australia.

The first five Sisters ministered to and educated women convicts in the Female Factory at Parramatta; visited the sick in their homes; provided pastoral care to men in prison; and worked as teachers educating poor children. In 1856 they bought *Tarmons*, a house which stood immediately to the south-west of where the heritage centre is today, behind the chapel. In 1857 they opened the first St Vincent's Hospital in this house, followed by a day school for poor children in 1858. The school grew to become St Vincent's Ladies' College. The hospital and school were founded on the principle first espoused by Mother Mary Aikenhead: to provide services "where the poor could be given for love what the rich obtain for money," and were available to anyone in need regardless of religion or creed. Their non-sectarian approach won them much loyalty from the broader community, but also drew censure from some quarters of the Catholic Church.

Section 3: Health (5 minutes)

The history of the Sisters' work in healthcare in Australia, with a focus on the network of St Vincent's hospitals and health care services.

Mary Aikenhead was the daughter of a doctor and understood that poverty and disease went hand in hand. Aikenhead ensured that many of the Sisters receive formal training in nursing, including three of the five who first travelled to Australia.

This section begins with the original St Vincent's hospital at *Tarmons*, before expanding to the new (and current) site in Darlinghurst in 1870. The Sisters founded more hospitals in the St Vincent's network, including Melbourne in 1893, Brisbane in 1957 (as Mt Olivet), Toowoomba in 1922, and Launceston (by acquiring St Margaret's Hospital) in 1944. The Sisters also founded or assumed operational control of many other health services in the eastern states, including Sacred Heart Hospice in Darlinghurst, St Joseph's in Auburn, and regional hospitals in Lismore, Bathurst, Cootamundra, and other towns and suburbs. This section also briefly examines the Sisters' involvement in other healthcare initiatives including medical research, nursing education and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.



Section 4: Theatrette (optional stop)

In this space you can request to view a selection of films which can be previewed on our website or use this area as a contemplation and prayer space as you move through the exhibition. Chairs can be provided upon request if you wish to hold an extended discussion or viewing.

Section 5: Education (5 minutes).

An overview of the schools founded by the Sisters of Charity, and the changing educational needs of students under the instruction of the Sisters over two centuries.

Prior to the founding of their own school at *Tarmons*, the Sisters taught in other schools founded by the Catholic Church. The Sisters' initial focus was on the children of convicts and the poor. As time passed and basic education became more accessible through the public school system several of the Sisters' schools became girls' schools, as the Sisters' recognised that girls were less likely to receive a comprehensive education, which left them more vulnerable to the cycle of poverty. Many of the co-educational primary schools founded for the children of the poor also continue to run today.

In this display here you can see a number of objects relating to these schools, including many school badges and crests. The Sisters' commitment to the empowerment through education began in the nineteenth century and continues today.

Section 6: Overseas Ministries (5 minutes)

A selection of artefacts received by the Sisters during their health and education missions in Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

The Sisters travelled to many countries in the Asia Pacific region as well as Africa, providing not only health care and education but also empowering local communities by providing training in these areas so that future generations could care for themselves.

Section 7: Outreach (5 minutes)

The contemporary Ministries of the Sisters of Charity, founded in 1990.

This section explores the development of the Sisters' Outreach services. Outreach was founded in 1990 to provide a broad range of services to people the Sisters felt were falling through the cracks. As Mary Aikenhead once said: "the need for care is the signal which provokes the dynamic response." Outreach has worked to provide crisis accommodation and counselling; transport and accommodation for country patients travelling to major centres for medical treatment; housing and education opportunities for asylum seekers; and counselling and support for those affected by

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drug and alcohol abuse. The Outreach service needed to be flexible as it provided assistance to a wide variety of people from victims of domestic and family violence, to supporting young parents, visiting people requiring assistance in remote areas, and continuing the early work of the Sisters through visits to court, gaols and private homes. For many years the program has provided much needed assistance to people in regional and rural areas of Australia, and has assisted new migrants to Australia as well, particularly in spoken English tuition. Outreach services have always been provided free of charge, so another challenge was to be found in funding the program, thus part of the mission included fundraising.

This service now operates as Open Support based at St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst, run by a team of lay staff who continue their work in the spirit of the Sisters of Charity.

Section 8: (5 minutes). Creative arts.

Many of the Sisters are blessed with artistic talents. The following exhibition space contains some examples of the works that have been produced by Australian Sisters of Charity over the years in various media. Some of these works document the everyday lives of the Sisters on their Mission both in Australia and abroad, such as Sr Myrna Lynch's sketches of the troubles faced by the Sisters Ministering in Papua New Guinea, including broken hot water boilers and livestock damaging precious kitchen gardens. Sr Myrna's sketches illustrate these troubles in a light-hearted manner, demonstrating that a positive attitude could help to overcome challenges the Sisters faced in difficult circumstances. Other works serve to illustrate the Sisters' faith and devotion to their work, such as Sr Ursula Smith's three beautifully illuminated Mass charts.

Section 9: (15 minutes). The Fourth Vow.

The final stage of the exhibition space is *The Fourth Vow* interactive, where groups are invited to actively participate in a virtual decision-making process. This activity is designed to help visitors understand the challenges faced by those in need and offers a number of different scenarios to explore. Our staff can help you choose which interactive best suits the focus of your group.

We highly recommend including this experience in your visit, as it is a valuable tool in understanding the perspective of people in need. This space is also suited to group discussion and contemplation of the lessons learned on your visit.

Additional visitor information

If you are visiting the contemplative courtyard or chapel please arrange this with our Centre Manager prior to booking your visit.