

One hundred and twenty five years of mercy

Weaving the threads of mercy



A message from Congregation Leader Catherine Ryan



In December 1888 when nine Sisters of Mercy from Callan, Ireland arrived in Parramatta, the town was already one hundred years old and boasted many fine stone churches and public buildings which stand today. However,

a large number of the buildings were institutions which reflected the enormous social needs of the time: the George Street Benevolent Asylum, the Macquarie Street Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Men, the Parramatta Gaol, the Hospital, the Lunatic Asylum, and the Girls' Industrial School which had recently taken over the buildings of the Roman Catholic Orphanage that had been managed until 1886 by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

Within weeks the pioneer sisters, clad in the heavy woollen habits best suited to their Irish home, were ministering in all of these institutions, visiting the sick and imprisoned, instructing many for their reception of the Sacraments and bringing the comforts of their faith to the poor and destitute. They immediately took responsibility for the parish primary school (now St Patrick's) and in January 1889 began a secondary school, Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta.

And so began 125 years of Mercy ministry in Parramatta, years of favour for which the Sisters of Mercy today give thanks to our merciful God. Founded by Venerable Catherine McAuley in Dublin in 1831, the Sisters of Mercy have always sought to respond to the needs of the local church wherever they ministered. In the late nineteenth century the most urgent need in New South Wales, following the removal of government funding for church schools, was for the establishment of Catholic schools. Between 1888 and 1985, over forty schools were established and staffed by the Parramatta Mercies in an area that now embraces the dioceses of Parramatta and Broken Bay and the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Besides education, catechesis and visitation, a work dear to Mercy Sisters has been the care of vulnerable children. St Brigid's Orphanage Ryde was opened in 1898 and St Michael's Orphanage Baulkham Hills began in 1902. As models of child care changed, the focus moved to supported accommodation for families in crisis under the name St Michael's Family Centre. Today, while moving away from the provision of direct care,

the Congregation remains committed to the support of women and children at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence.

Other sponsored works of the Congregation include Marymount Spirituality Centre at Castle Hill, the Stella Maris Aged Care Facility at Cronulla and Mamre Plains at Orchard Hills, a place of hospitality and social enterprise responding to diverse needs of people in western Sydney. Mindful of the needs of today, the 2010 Congregation Chapter called the Sisters to *respond mercifully to our suffering earth and its most marginalised peoples, particularly Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander peoples, asylum seekers and refugees.*

In looking back over these 125 years we acknowledge the encouragement, friendship and support of so many: the bishops, clergy and parishioners wherever we have served, our colleagues in ministry and all those

“Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of ‘wounded’ persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love.” Pope Francis



“We can never say, It is enough.”
Catherine McAuley

For Catherine McAuley, holiness was bound up with the works of mercy.

