Memories of Mission
Stories from the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

Judith Lamb*

Australian Catholic women religious have played a significant role in the spread of the Gospel and in the provision of services, especially in education and health care, from the middle of the nineteenth century. One such group is the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH). From their base in Sydney in 1885, missionaries were sent to remote communities in Australia, Papua New Guinea and beyond. In 2011, as part of the celebration of the centenary of the promulgation of the Australian Province, the Provincial Council invited sisters to tell their stories in a series of interviews. These interviews have been used to provide personal perspectives on the challenges and rewards of missionary life.¹

Who are the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart?

The Society of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was founded by Jules Chevalier in Issoudun, France, in 1874.² From the very earliest days, the

* Judith Lamb was an educator for forty years until her retirement in 2007 as Principal of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College in Bentleigh, Victoria. She holds a degree and a post-graduate diploma in Theology, and is completing her Masters at MCD University of Divinity (CTC). She has continued to work with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in documenting the biographies of individual sisters as a significant dimension of the history of the Australian Province.

1. Summaries of the interviews are available in booklet format published by the OLSH Australian Province for private circulation under the title Memories of Mission. Audio recordings and interview logs are held in the OLSH Australian Provincial Archives at Kensington, Sydney. Seventeen stories have been accessed for this paper.

2. Twenty years earlier, Chevalier had founded the clerical Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart with the work of ‘missions among pagan peoples’ written into its constitutions and the two shared a common motto ‘May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved.’ Mary Venard, The History of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Papua New Guinea (published for private circulation, 1978), 5.
mission ‘Ad Gentes’ was recognised as the key focus for the work of the sisters. In 1884, despite the congregation having only five professed sisters, three were sent from France to New Britain (now part of Papua New Guinea). They were accompanied by two sisters who had made their vows on the evening of their departure. En route, the group of five sisters arrived at Botany, NSW, on 31 January 1885, and this foundation became the base for their missions. Since that time, the story of the sisters has two parallel yet intertwined dimensions: the apostolate in mainland Australia and the missionary apostolate in remote Australia and the Pacific.

By the early 1950s, forty years after the foundation of the Australian Province, the sisters were well established in eastern Australia and in the mission areas of Northern Territory, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Nauru. The need to balance the congregation’s response to demands from both the ‘at home’ and distant foundations was a constant challenge, but priority was always seen to be the ‘foreign missions’.

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart made a greater contribution to the missionary effort than any other congregation based in Australia, both in sheer numbers and as a proportion of their total membership. As O’Brien’s research indicated,

The largest order of missionary sisters was the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart…Between 1886 and 1968, 944 women entered…though of these only 339 spent their lives as missionaries, the rest providing for the missions by teaching Australian children.

There were many other sisters who spent time on the missions, although not their whole lives. Data collected for the National Missionary Council in 1972 indicated that 219 OLSH sisters were involved in work on the missions, mainly in PNG (113) and aboriginal communities (fifty-eight). This is over three times as many as the next group, the Mercy Sisters, with sixty-two. It is also almost twice the number of MSC priests and brothers in the missions, who numbered 114. Thus, the OLSH sisters had a huge impact on the church, education and health care in these missionary areas.

3. According to the Constitutions: ‘The principal form of apostolate is to bring the Christian message to those people and groups among whom the church has not yet been planted.’ (Constitutions 11) Venard, The History of the Australian Province, 92.
4. Western Australia was the only state in which the sisters did not minister.
5. Each Provincial Chapter, from 1968 onwards, specifically reaffirmed this priority.
7. Eight of the seventeen sisters interviewed had spent time in both Australia and mission areas, while eight spent most of their life on the missions. Only one had no missionary experience.
Over the period of sixty years from 1951 to 2011, significant change occurred in numbers, apostolates and living situations for the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, as it did for other congregations. The total of 350 sisters in 1951 increased to a peak of 460 in 1971 and then fell to 163 by 2011. The traditional apostolates of teaching and nursing became much more individualized, with ministries ‘full-time, part-time, voluntary, remunerated, within and outside the community’. Large convents were replaced or restructured, so that the sisters lived in smaller communities and sometimes alone. Missionaries, who had spent many years overseas, returned to Australia, increasing the need for aged care facilities, and the mission ‘Ad Gentes’ extended beyond the Pacific region to areas of Africa and Asia.

**What did they do?**

With their foundational mission to make the love of God known to all people everywhere, the sisters worked in a range of apostolates, as well as in a number of different geographical areas. The great majority were teachers or nurses (especially in the missions) or worked in the ‘apostolate within the community’. Throughout the history of the congregation, although many sisters had one main apostolate, at least for the majority of their working lives, none was restricted to this area: their apostolates were multi-dimensional. Particularly in the missions, there were many needs to be met, and each gave herself in response to these needs.

Within the broad apostolate of education, the majority of sisters were in primary schools, both in Australia and overseas. Within Australia, the problems of huge class sizes and lack of equipment were experienced by Catholic schools generally. These demands were exacerbated for the OLSH sisters because they chose to work in poor and remote situations. Sr Jeanette Balding recalled teaching ninety-five preps in one class when she was at Bentleigh, Victoria, in the mid-1950s, and then a Grade 3 with no textbooks. ‘We were very poor,’ she said, ‘there was no government help.’ Another factor contributing to this demanding apostolate was that OLSH sisters were supporting those on the missions, so funds, which could have been used for education locally, were diverted to other priorities.

Also challenging for the sisters was the spread of schools across five states, with five different curricula, and the frequency of transfer between these schools. Sr Joan Tierney taught in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, as well as Thursday Island and Nauru, and she was, more often than not, principal of the school.

11. This apostolate included clerical work, administration, cooking, sewing and housekeeping.
The education of girls was a particular focus for the sisters, both on the
mainland and in the mission areas. They pioneered secondary education for girls
in the Northern Territory, PNG and Kiribati.\textsuperscript{14} In the mission areas, in addition
to mainstream secondary education, the sisters offered vocational training to the
girls, covering cooking, cleaning, and sewing as well as English and Arithmetic.
Sr Patricia Clarke told of setting up a Vocational Centre at Sideia when the high
school moved to the mainland and, after retiring from there, she set up another at
Yule Island.\textsuperscript{15} As happened in the primary schools, local lay teachers gradually
took over more roles, and eventually the sisters remained in the schools mainly
in support roles (welfare, remedial education, library) rather than as classroom
teachers and administrators.

The training of adults was another dimension to the sisters’ role in education.
Initially, they had their own teacher training facility in Sydney and nurse training
at Randwick Hospital. In PNG and Kiribati, they set up teacher training colleges
and sisters held significant roles in Catholic education. In addition to providing
training facilities, sisters supported teachers in the field, often supplying
curriculum materials as well as practical advice. Recognizing that the local
teachers ‘were struggling…no chalk, no blackboards, no desks,’ Sr Delia
Donahoe spent fourteen years as Co-ordinator of Schools in the Milne Bay area
of PNG.\textsuperscript{16} She was responsible for forty-three schools spread over fifteen islands.
Visiting them involved an enormous amount of travel, by truck, boat and foot, on
unmade tracks, rough seas, rivers and mud.

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart were also involved in
training local people in catechetics, in the Northern Territory, PNG and Kiribati.
Pastoral training centres were set up, educating and empowering the local lay
people to minister to their own communities where priests were often not
available. Sr Delia described the three-week program Hagita Pastoral Training
Centre, where catechists learnt how to preach and how to bury someone: ‘I’d
draw cement graves all over the veranda and they’d all stand at the head of a
grave, and…we did pretend burials.’\textsuperscript{17}

In the broader context of Catholic education, sisters have been in senior
positions in Catholic Education Offices in Sydney, Darwin, PNG and Kiribati.
For six years, Sr Robyn Reynolds was lecturer and the first Dean of Catholic
Students at Nungalinya College, an ecumenical training institute for religious
leaders of indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Sr Robyn
completed this assignment when one of her students was appointed to the staff:
the first aboriginal teacher to hold such a position. ‘As missionaries, we live to

\textsuperscript{14} The OLSH sisters built the first Catholic Secondary School for girls in the Northern Territory;
campaigned to have post-primary education for girls recognized in PNG, and, despite
opposition, set up OLSH High School for girls there; and opened the first Catholic secondary
school for girls in Kiribati.

\textsuperscript{15} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 20.

\textsuperscript{16} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 31.

\textsuperscript{17} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 31.
allow the local people to take leadership and ministry,’ she commented, reflecting the aims of the sisters in a variety of contexts.18

In the apostolate of health care, the sisters worked mainly in the mission areas in the Northern Territory and PNG, setting up hospitals and clinics, providing visiting nurses to remote communities, educating people about hygiene and nutrition, and training others to minister to their own people. Although the sisters treated all who were in need, there was a special focus on maternal and child health. Over time, as the need for aged care increased, sisters returning from the missions often took up roles at St Joseph’s Nursing Home at Kensington, Sydney. Other sisters were involved in rural district nursing, in training, in health research and as health administrators.

A considerable number of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart were involved in providing practical support for their communities, for the children in their care and for the priests and brothers with whom they worked. They were cooks in boarding schools, hospitals, convents and houses of formation; dressmakers, making and repairing habits and school uniforms; sacristans, looking after the local church; receptionists, answering the phone and the door and providing hospitality to visitors and travellers; drivers, doing the shopping and taking others to appointments; carers, tending to the needs of children and women in need. Sr Claire Mangan, for example, recalled that in PNG, ‘Many mornings I was up at 4.30am to send breakfast down (to the priests going to the mission stations) before the mission boat left, or to make sure that the freezer had been loaded.’19 In addition to actually doing this work, the sisters on the missions taught the local girls and women domestic skills and, almost always, the sisters were also involved in pastoral work, visiting homes and hospitals.

Leadership roles were required of many sisters. Some were community leaders, with as many as eighty sisters under their charge, as was the case with Sr Margaret Kennedy at Kensington from 1990 to 1996. She described the convent as ‘that big place...(where) everything was very institutional and rigid.’20 Often sisters were principals or deputies of primary or secondary schools, both small and large. Some were matrons of hospitals. In some cases, roles were combined: the community leader was also the principal of the school or the matron of the hospital. Some sisters were appointed Australian or PNG Provincial Councillors, including both Sr Kathleen Gaffy and Sr Terie McNamara who assisted with the handover of leadership to local leaders in PNG.21 Other sisters worked for a time at the Generalate in Rome. In 1977, Sr Therese Farrell was asked to go to Rome to help write the new Constitutions. She was away for four years: ‘It was a very busy time...it was a very rich

experience,’ she commented. Sr Marion Whelan was on the General Council in Rome for ten years (1983-1993). Formation of postulants and novices and provision of ongoing formation for sisters after they had been professed was another area of ministry.

**Who was interviewed?**

In response to the invitation of the Provincial Leadership, seventeen sisters told their stories to one of two interviewers. Because these were personal stories, rather than answers to specific questions, not all data is available from every sister. The following summary gives an indication of the background and ministries of the interviewees.

Aged from sixty-seven to ninety-four, all the sisters came from large families of between four and twelve. Five girls from Sr Patricia’s family joined the congregation and three from Sr Margaret’s. As would be expected, the level of education completed by the sisters varied, generally according to when they were born. Surprisingly, of those interviewed, only two were educated by the OLSH sisters. Five attended Mercy schools, and no other congregation had more than one of the interviewees at their schools. Also rather surprisingly, only two of the sisters went straight from school to the convent. Three spent time at home before entering, often helping with sick family members, while the occupations of others ranged from two qualified nurses and one teacher, to banking, public service, clerical and secretarial work, bookkeeping and dressmaking.

The ages of sisters when they made their first vows varied quite considerably, too, with an average age of twenty-three; three were under twenty while one sister was over thirty years old. Apart from those who already had qualifications, there were only two sisters who did not receive any training before they began their first apostolate, with nine being trained as teachers and two as nurses. There were twelve sisters whose main apostolate was education and three in health care while one sister did both nursing and teaching and another was cook and carer.

For their first appointments, most sisters stayed in Australia, with six in the mainland states and two in the Northern Territory missions. Four sisters went directly to Papua New Guinea and one to Kiribati. The apostolates of eight sisters involved both mainstream and missionary appointments, while five spent almost their whole life in Papua New Guinea, one in Kiribati, one in the Northern Territory and one in mainland Australia. Within these general areas, the sisters moved regularly: Sr Catherine Mary Crocker had twenty-four moves in her sixty-five years as an OLSH sister, while the average was fourteen different placements. Sr Catherine Mary recalled that she taught on six of the sixteen islands in her eight years on Kiribati, and, with so many moves, she told Mother Concepta, the Provincial Leader, that she didn’t know whether it meant that she

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was a good or bad religious! The average length of time the interviewees have spent as an OLSH sister is over sixty years and Sr Emmanuel Chapman has been a member of the congregation for seventy-six years.

**Why did they join?**

Although each sister who commented on her vocation has an individual story, there are some factors which recur. Several of the interviewees had relatives who were religious, including three who had an aunt or cousin in the OLSH congregation (as well as the two with siblings as OLSH sisters). Others identified reading *The Annals*, attending a mission and joining a Catholic group for young people as an impetus for considering a religious vocation. All but two of the interviewees said they joined the OLSH congregation because they wanted to be a missionary. Sr Nora Hanrahan had decided to enter when she was about twelve and she wanted to go to the missions because she felt the personal love of Jesus for her: ‘Jesus loved *me* and delivered himself for *me*. I wanted to do something for *him*...I gave up Australia to go somewhere else.’ She said she ‘read all the stories about the sisters up on the missions’ in *The Annals* and she chose the OLSH sisters because she ‘felt it was right.’ Similarly, Sr Robyn had a sense that God had given her (and her family) many gifts and ‘I wanted my life to be a “thank you” to God for all the gifts given to us all...I had experienced the fullness of God’s love.’

Some of the sisters had mixed feelings about joining a religious order. Sr Kathleen said, ‘I always knew I was going to be a nun...but I wasn’t all that keen about it...I thought if I’ve got to be a nun I’ll be a missionary.’ Others took some time before they made their final decision. Sr Carmen Savage had a feeling she should go to the missions, but ‘kept putting it off’ because she could not bear to leave her family. She was in her late twenties when she entered. After an initial conversation with the sisters in Kensington in her early twenties, it took ten years before Sr Constance Daley was convinced she had a vocation.

An attraction to OLSH spirituality provided the incentive for some. Sr Joan recalled considering entering the Mercy sisters, but an invitation to the profession of a family friend brought her into contact with the OLSH sisters. Her mother ‘had always had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady’ and she was attracted by this focus in the OLSH order.

The sisters themselves provided the inspiration for Sr Margaret, who was taught by the OLSH sisters in both primary and secondary schools, and for Sr Delia. Sr Margaret said that the sisters in the school ‘were always talking about

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the missions and black babies.’ 30  Sr Delia ‘did not feel drawn to the Josephites or the Sion sisters’ who had educated her, but after qualifying and working as a teacher in Australia, she went to Port Moresby as a volunteer teacher. There she worked with the OLSH sisters and ‘decided that must be my calling.’ 31

No matter what the motivation, all these sisters strongly felt God’s call and made a firm commitment to answering this call. In the words of Sr Marion, ‘God gives us a little push. God creates the setting for us.’ 32

How were they formed?

In the Novitiate

Except for one sister, all interviewees went to Hartzer Park, just outside Bowral, in the Southern Highlands of NSW, for their novitiate. Several sisters commented on how cold and isolated it was, but some found the novitiate more challenging than others. Sr Terie said ‘It was what I expected: an endurance test.’ 33  Sr Kathleen was ‘restless’ when she first entered but ‘we had a little retreat and I settled down. I wanted to stay,’ she said. 34  Sr Robyn recalled that she was very homesick early on: ‘I kind of held my breath when I was in the novitiate...it was pretty strange...I used to think “if I survive this I’ll be OK”.” 35

Although Sr Carmen was twenty-seven when she entered, she found the novitiate a real struggle. ‘Every day I prayed that they would send me home. I missed my family so much,’ she recalled. 36  Sr Jeanette’s parents had both died, her mother shortly before she entered. Sr Jeanette commented ‘for a young religious, the whole idea about suffering and sacrifice and being cheerful about difficult things was paramount, so I didn’t talk to anyone about it (her mother’s death).’ 37  Sr Nora, too, struggled: ‘In the novitiate I got very tense; I was trying too hard to be good, ... to do everything right.’ 38  When she was professed she felt she ‘could relax a bit.’

Spiritual Formation

A highlight for several sisters was the annual preached retreat before Christmas when the missionaries all gathered in the main centres. Apart from this, very few of the sisters commented on their spiritual formation. One exception was Sr Kathleen who had recently written about her spiritual journey before her final profession in the early 1950s:

32. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 73.
34. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 40.
It all seemed to flow along as things seemed to be clearly defined and one never thought to question the status quo...We had extra time for prayer and spiritual reading, but there was little spiritual direction in the modern sense.

After her final profession, ‘I was then expected to be able to care for my own spiritual needs except for an occasional visit from my Regional Superior.’ Sr Kathleen also remarked on her first experience of a directed retreat, in 1975: ‘At that time it was a rather novel idea...I found it an unforgettable experience and a turning point in my spiritual life, which at that time left much to be desired.’ Sr Nora found ‘the biggest challenge spiritually was that you were thrown back on your own resources...but spiritual directors were not often available in Kiribati.’

The sisters made little comment about their spiritual lives on the missions. Two indicated that they had little spiritual help and two sisters also commented on how beneficial they found the experience of a directed retreat. A highlight for several sisters was a sabbatical, which was often taken at the end of their main apostolate.

Several of the sisters interviewed completed spirituality courses, either in Australia or overseas, and commented on how beneficial they found them. Sr Joan felt she ‘needed a spiritual outlet’ after twenty-eight years teaching and did a scripture course in 1985 and another six months spirituality course in 1992, which she ‘really loved’ and felt she ‘profited a lot from it.’ For Sr Jeanette, her three-month sabbatical in the mid-1990s at ‘Wells of Living Water’ in Wellington, NZ, ‘was a kind of watershed in my life, one of those high points that changed my life and it is still fresh with me.’

Professional formation

The professional training of the sisters was a high priority and most completed their training after their time in the novitiate. Two exceptions were Sr Emmanuel, who was sent to Thursday Island before she made her final vows, because ‘they needed someone who could swim,’ and Sr Claire who ‘wanted to be a nurse...but only went to Grade 8, and would have had to study to do nursing.’ She spent two years in the kitchen at Kensington before being posted to Melville Island (NT). Those who already had qualifications (two nurses and one teacher) went straight to their first apostolate.

40. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 42.
41. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 47.
42. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 71.
The Junior Teacher system was used for training many of the teachers. Because they had only one or two years of primary teacher training, those working in secondary schools needed to do additional training to be able to teach the subjects required. Sr Margaret commented, ‘I taught all sorts of things I didn’t know much about;’ Sr Jeanette ‘had a crash course and was catapulted into teaching Leaving Maths;’ Sr Nora learnt Latin and French as well as teaching these subjects. This was not unusual, as Sr Jeanette commented ‘(I was) teaching without any proper background, but most of the nuns were like that, and most of the nuns in the other schools were exactly like that...for a lot of people it meant a lot of anxiety.’

The Provincial Chapter of 1968 recognized the importance of adequate training and recommended ‘full time study after several years of teaching’ as ‘the best time for university work,’ and Sr Therese and Sr Nora completed their degrees in the 1970s, with Sr Jeanette, Sr Robyn, and Sr Joan following in the 1980s. All of these sisters commented on how much they enjoyed and benefitted from this time of study. In addition, Sr Robyn completed her Doctorate in 1998.

Nurses, too, received additional training: Sr Benedicta Carroll did midwifery in 1949 after completing her general nursing training in 1946, Sr Constance trained as a theatre nurse in the late 1950s and Sr Carmen upgraded her nursing qualifications in 1971.

Formation for mission

Because of the centrality of missionary work to the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the Congregation responded to the directives of Ad Gentes regarding the need for specific formation of those who are to work in the missions. By 1974, they had developed a three-stage formation process: a general introduction to missiology before going; a short orientation on arrival and formation with experienced missionaries; and further study after the experience.

Many of the participants in the Memories of Mission interviews had their first mission experience well before the Second Vatican Council and most of these went to the missions before they made their final vows. Some, like Sr Constance, received little preparation for the trying situations in which they found themselves. Although she was a qualified and experienced nurse, in 1951, Sr Constance’s first appointment was to Channel Island leprosarium, where she found the conditions were terrible but she didn’t complain because she was ‘so

46. This involved teaching under supervision and studying, for a one or two year period.
47. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 5.
young in religious life."  
   Two years later, to her ‘great relief,’ she was called back to Randwick.

   For those whose first mission experience was later, some preparation was available: Sr Nora was posted to a small primary school in Kiribati where she spent a year (1964) so that she could learn some language before she began teaching in the secondary schools; Sr Robyn taught at St Mary’s in Darwin for two years before being posted to Port Keats; Sr Delia spent five years at the International School in Port Moresby, before being ‘sent to the bush’ to her ‘great delight’ in 1971. In contrast, after completing her teaching qualifications in 1962, Sr Terie was immediately appointed to PNG. She reported that she could not be part of the ceremony to receive her mission cross because she ‘couldn’t miss the boat’ to take her to the Trobriand Islands.

   It seems that there were opportunities for spiritual and professional formation for those who spent most of their religious life in mainland Australia, but for many of the sisters who worked in the missions, these opportunities were limited. There was little comment from the sisters about their formation for mission, but it seems some went to the missions with little specific preparation for the environment in which they found themselves.

What were the challenges and the rewards?

   A Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, particularly in the mission context, could expect to live in very challenging conditions. Tropical climates and remote situations, Spartan living conditions and heavy workloads were part of life as a missionary. Less obvious were the emotional and spiritual demands of this calling. Sisters could also identify many rewards and blessings in their lives, particularly in relationships with others and in opportunities they received to study and to travel.

   In addition to the heat and humidity of the tropics, sisters also described being in cyclones. Sr Joan was in Darwin when Cyclone Tracy hit and she described taking shelter in the bathroom block, with terrifying noise all around, and being convinced that everybody else was gone ‘and we were the only ones left.’

   Tropical diseases were rife throughout the mission areas, with many of the sisters suffering with malaria. Sr Terie was very ill and hospitalized with chloroquine-resistant malaria and also spent nine months suffering with Hepatitis A. Sr Jeanette’s hearing was impaired because of the anti-malarial medication and one of the reasons Sr Delia returned to Australia was that she was ‘getting

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52. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 46.
knocked around by the two strains of malaria.\textsuperscript{57} Thus the missions took their toll on the health of many of the sisters.

The remoteness of the mission stations caused practical difficulties with food supplies, travel and communication. Sr Emmanuel remembered Port Keats where, in the wet, the boats could not get to the mission and their diet consisted of fish, cheese, goannas and bully beef.\textsuperscript{58} Recalling having sour margarine every day in PNG, Sr Patricia described the day a sister returned from holidays with several containers of butter and the whole community celebrated. ‘Bread and butter, what a joy!!’ she exclaimed.\textsuperscript{59} In a similar fashion, Sr Catherine Mary related that they only once ran out of flour when she was in Kiribati, and they couldn’t bake bread. When the supplies arrived, school was cancelled and she made the best bread everyone ever tasted: ‘It was a bonanza!’\textsuperscript{60} Even in Darwin, Sr Carmen recalled that the local women had a pantry tea each term to stock the sisters’ larder.\textsuperscript{61} So even the basic requirement of food was problematic at times.

A very time-consuming, and sometimes dangerous, aspect of the missions was transport. Many of the outstations, especially in PNG and Kiribati, required travel by boat and by foot, across treacherous seas and rough terrain. These stations were visited by area superiors, school co-ordinators and nurses as they ministered to the most remote villages. An example of the conditions was given by Sr Patricia, who was on a boat sitting on a deckchair on a calm sea, when suddenly the sea came up and the boat was rocking so badly that all the supplies were washed off. One of the crew held on to Sr Patricia while she clung to the rail, fortunately with a rope tied around her.\textsuperscript{62} Sr Margaret volunteered to go to Kiribati in 1972 after two sisters were lost at sea, along with two boatmen.\textsuperscript{63} Over time, transport improved, with motorboats, motorbikes and aeroplanes providing faster and safer means of travel.

A similar situation occurred with communication. Sr Catherine Mary thought the hardest part of being a missionary in Kiribati was when the boat came in without the mail.\textsuperscript{64} At one time, twenty-four letters from her mother arrived in one batch. When she first went to Kiribati, Sr Margaret recalled, she found the lack of communication very difficult.\textsuperscript{65} Initially, telegrams were the only means of sending and receiving messages and they took four days to get to or from the main island. The introduction of two-way radios was a great improvement and made the missionary experience less isolating. On the positive side, some sisters loved the tropical climate and there was gratitude and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{57} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 32.
\bibitem{58} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 16.
\bibitem{59} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 18.
\bibitem{60} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 24.
\bibitem{61} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 66.
\bibitem{62} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 19.
\bibitem{63} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 50.
\bibitem{64} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 24.
\bibitem{65} Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 50.
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celebration for every improvement, whether it was fresh butter or bread, a new motorbike or more regular contact with the outside world.

Living and working conditions were very arduous, both in Australia and in the missions. Hospitals and schools had little or no equipment and housing was basic. Sr Margaret recalled classes being held in the convent or on the veranda while schools were being built in Enfield, SA, and Alice Springs. Sr Jeanette judged that, for a junior professed, trainee teacher, the physical work was ‘beyond your capacity.’ Setting up the theatre in the hospital at Randwick, ‘was a lot of work,’ Sr Constance said, ‘Things were almost impossible at times.’ Sr Catherine Mary summarized the attitude of many of the sisters when she said, ‘It was a tough life, but you just got on with it.’ Commenting on her move from the Northern Territory to PNG, Sr Benedicta found ‘You still had nothing and you made your own decisions.’

Few sisters made direct comments about the emotional demands of being a missionary. Some expressed their fear in the face of the cyclones and Sr Delia was in Rabaul when the volcano erupted in 1994 and some people ‘lost their nerve.’ Violent attacks were also part of missionary life for some. Sr Kathleen described the break-in, attack and pack rape of a young woman who was staying with the sisters in Goroka. ‘It was a shocking ordeal for her as well as for us...It was a terrible time, terrible, terrible,’ she exclaimed. Also in PNG, Sr Jeanette was in a community in which a young, female volunteer teacher was murdered. She commented, ‘I didn’t know until then what fear was...That was a very difficult time.’

On a less dramatic note, many sisters felt under-qualified and underprepared for the work they were doing, which caused them some anxiety, and others found the constant changes in role and location very unsettling. Even those close to home had demanding situations to deal with. As community leader at Bentleigh, Sr Margaret commented on coping with the deaths of two sisters and the local parish priest. ‘You have to do what has to be done,’ she said, ‘but afterwards it really hits you. They were all a shock and took a while to get over.’

Although some, like Sr Catherine Mary, felt ‘there was no time for loneliness, you were so busy,’ others often felt isolated when they moved to a new environment, especially if they were overseas. The death of a family member sometimes resulted in feelings of isolation. Sr Therese commented that she had
not been able to attend her mother’s funeral because ‘if they were already dead, you didn’t go home...which was pretty hard.’ 76 Others felt somewhat lost when they returned from the missions. Unlike Sr Delia who ‘didn’t have the miseries for long,’ Sr Nora felt alone and unsure of what she was going to do with herself when she returned from Kiribati. 77 She attended a seminar for returned missionaries where she was relieved to find that other missionaries were experiencing the same feelings. One of the positives identified by many of the returning missionaries was the opportunity to re-connect with family, especially if they had been on the missions for a long time, with visits home only every four years.

Many of the rewards and blessings of life as an OLSH sister were concerned with relationships, both within the congregation and with the local people. Although some sisters identified difficulties with other members of the communities in which they lived, especially if they were in leadership roles, most valued these experiences. For Sr Joan, the convent had a family atmosphere: no matter where you went, you always had friends. 78

The opportunities for further education and for travel were also seen as great gifts by those who experienced them. Sr Jeanette found the difficulties of her apostolates in South Africa and Rome were compensated for by the natural beauty of the wildlife parks in Africa and the richness of the history, culture, art and religion of Italy. Sr Constance learnt china painting which she ‘thoroughly enjoyed...and met many nice people.’ 79

There is no doubt the missionary experience had a huge emotional impact on many of the sisters who felt a very close connection to, and affection for, the people. Several said that they did not ever expect to be coming back to Australia. Sr Kathleen recalled, with great feeling, ‘Although I knew it was the best thing to do, I was very sad to go after being there for fifty-five years. We believed we would die up there. I was given a beautiful sendoff.’ 80 Sr Delia Dohahoe said, ‘In effect...I went at age twenty-two and came back at sixty-four...whatever I am, I think New Guinea made it.’ 81

Reflecting on their lives, the sisters often commented that they had a happy life and did their best. Many sisters said, ‘I loved it’ when describing a particular people, place or apostolate. Their gratitude for and appreciation of all their experiences, even the most difficult, was very apparent and many mentioned the abundant blessings they had received. The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart are also women of great faith, which, although not often verbalized, underpins their commitment. Sr Robyn said that her story of mission makes

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76. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 36.
77. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 33.
80. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 44.
sense only in terms of her ongoing, personal journey with God, with Jesus, who ‘holds it all together and makes it what it is.’

The typical attitude of a Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart could be summed up in this comment about the sisters on mission in Sudan: ‘Moir and Mary stand out among the missionaries. They are prayerful women who make no demands. They simply go about their work, day in and day out, quietly serving the people and seeking no acclaim.’

**What was the contribution of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to the church and to the societies in which they worked?**

The life of a Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in 2011 was very different to the life she would have experienced in 1951. In the 1950s and 60s, the congregation was self-sufficient, with its own training facilities, schools and hospitals, experiencing an influx of new candidates and expanding overseas foundations. Teachers, nurses and homemakers were sent to remote and isolated places, often with the expectation that they would not return. By the end of the millennium, most training facilities, schools and hospitals were either closed or conducted by others, vocations were a rarity and most sisters had returned from the missions. Individual sisters volunteered for apostolates or initiated their own, often for a specific length of time. They lived in smaller communities, often beyond the Australia/Pacific region, and led relatively independent lives.

Despite these obvious changes, however, the mission of the sisters remained the same: to bring the knowledge of the love of God to people everywhere, especially to those most in need. They made pragmatic decisions to withdraw from, combine or share particular apostolates so that they could achieve this mission. They made enormous contributions, both in terms of people and practical assistance, to education and health care in the indigenous areas of Northern Territory and in Papua New Guinea, and to education in Kiribati. They supported and encouraged self-determination and worked tirelessly to empower local people to take control of their own institutions. They encouraged, trained and educated girls and women to play a positive role in society, in the workplace and in the home.

The lived experiences of those who made these achievements possible is a significant dimension of the history of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, over the period from 1951 to 2011 and beyond.

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82. Lamb, ‘Memories of Mission,’ 64.
83. *Report on the Australian Province 1999-2001*, 24. In her report to the Province in 2001, Sr Moya Hanlen, the Provincial Leader, shared this comment, which was made to her when she visited sisters working in Sudan.