Mercy in Action:
Women in the Mission of the Church

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¹ Pseudonyms are used for those Sisters who requested their real name not be used or for those still working in East Timor or Pakistan, in line with H.R.E.C. requirements.
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**Abbreviations**

The abbreviations most often used in this text:

- **R.S.M.** – Religious Sister of Mercy
- **I.S.M.A.** – Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia
- **M.R.S.** – Mercy Refugee Service
- **J.R.S.** – Jesuit Refugee Service
- **S.J.** – Society of Jesus
- **S.V.D.** – Divine Word Missionary
- **O.C.D.** – Order of Discalced Carmelites
- **O.S.F.** – Order of St Francis or Order of Franciscan Sisters
- **S.G.S.** – Sisters of the Good Samaritan
Some Terminology Related to the Australian Sisters of Mercy

- **Australian Union of the Sisters of Mercy** – Formed by eight of the Australian Congregations in 1954, with a Superior General and Council in Canberra.

- **Federation of the Sisters of Mercy** – Formed in 1957 by the remaining nine Congregations (Brisbane, North Sydney, Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, Ballarat East, Grafton, Parramatta and West Perth).

- **Conference of the Sisters of Mercy** – An interim body formed in 1977 to work towards the creation of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

- **Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia** – Formed in 1981 and approved by the Holy See in December of that year, to unify all seventeen Australian Congregations. However, in keeping with a tradition of de-centralisation of authority amongst the Sisters of Mercy, each Congregation has full power to deal with regional matters. The Congregations which form I.S.M.A. are: Adelaide, Ballarat East, Bathurst, Brisbane, Cairns, Goulburn, Grafton, Gunnedah, Melbourne, North Sydney, Parramatta, Perth, Rockhampton, Singleton, Townsville, West Perth and Wilcannia-Forbes.

- **National Chapter** – Holds the greatest authority among the Australian Sisters of Mercy when in session. The first was held in August and December 1981, and a Chapter is held every six years or whenever the office of National President becomes vacant.

- **National President** – A major Superior, who promotes unity, a wider vision, and the sharing of resources among the Australian Mercy Congregations. She is also responsible for convening and presiding at national meetings, including the national Chapter. She heads the National Executive Council.

- **National Executive Council** – Helps implement the acts of the national Chapter, interprets and develops common policies, including fiscal policies, conducts research, circulates information, facilitates communication among the Congregations and works for the common good of the Sisters of Mercy.
• National Plenary Council – Consists of the National Executive Council and the Congregational major Superiors. It makes recommendations to be implemented at both national and Congregational levels. It works through mutual consultation, discernment and decision-making, and meets at least annually, usually six-monthly.

• Congregational leadership – Each Congregation has a major Superior and Congregational Council who implement the actions of Congregational Chapters and administers and works for the common good of the Congregation.

(Based on the *Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia: Constitutions and Directory*, 1981 and on conversations with Patricia Pak Poy, R.S.M..)
Abstract
This study examines two initiatives of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia: their foundations in Pakistan and their work with East Timorese people, both in Australia and East Timor. These recent endeavours are placed in the context of women in mission and late twentieth century discussion of mission in the Catholic church. Additionally, the religious, political and socio-economic contexts of Pakistan and East Timor are considered. Attention is given to the understanding of “mercy” in scripture and theology, the charism and practice of Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, and the approach of the Australian Sisters of Mercy to their ministry in these new settings.
Chapter One: Introduction

Active and public ministry in response to the needs of the poor, particularly women and children, has defined the Sisters of Mercy since the time of their foundation by Catherine McAuley in nineteenth century Dublin. They were not an enclosed order, but worked among the people. Since their establishment in Australia in 1846, the Sisters of Mercy have been active in the fields of education, health care and welfare. The ministry of the Australian Mercy Sisters first reached beyond Australia in the mid-1950s, with a mission to the then Australian territory of New Guinea. In the 1980s, the Sisters moved into new ministries, as following Vatican II, the laity took greater responsibilities in their schools and hospitals. Catherine McAuley’s tradition of service to the poor was expressed in new ways, including the establishment of Mercy foundations in Pakistan, and a growing connection with the people of East Timor. This thesis explores the ways the Mercy ethos has been expressed in these two mission experiences.

The Australian Sisters of Mercy have worked in Pakistan since 1985. The first foundation was an initiative of the Melbourne Congregation, but the second foundation in Peshawar included Sisters from various Australian Mercy Congregations,
and that diversity of Sisters has continued to this day. The Mercy Sisters’ work in East Timor has been more organic in its development. In 1988, the Ballarat Sisters became involved in supporting a young woman whom the Jesuits had brought to study in Australia. From that initial personal connection interest in East Timor was sparked among some Ballarat Sisters who became more and more committed to helping the people of East Timor. That commitment has taken the form of welcoming, accommodating and supporting East Timorese students in Ballarat, as well as visits to and ministry in East Timor.

Following the 1999 East Timorese referendum on independence, Sisters of Mercy from other Congregations have worked in East Timor under the auspices of the Mercy and Jesuit Refugee Services.

In previous research I had examined the first Australian Mercy foundation in Pakistan.² This thesis extends that earlier study and sets it in a conversation with missiology and understandings of “mercy”. Both Pakistan and East Timor are newsworthy. Like many other Australians, I have a long-held interest in the East Timorese cause and the fluctuating relationship Australia has with its neighbour. Australia’s alliance

with the United States brings events in Pakistan into sharper focus. It is significant that the Sisters of Mercy are found in these places of instability and need.

This thesis examines how the Sisters have ministered in such diverse settings – one an overwhelmingly Muslim country, the other strongly Catholic. Is there a “Mercy approach” that has been common to both situations or have cultural differences dictated diverse ways of ministering? Was there a consistent motivation that inspired these initiatives? Have the Sisters worked within or created different structures in each country? By examining more than one initiative, a better sense of recent Mercy overseas ministry and of what has characterized “mercy ministries” are discovered.

My past experience of studying in the fields of Church History and Missiology has brought to light the insufficient attention paid to women’s contributions to the life of the Church. Too frequently women have been been under-acknowledged, left unnamed, or have had their voices muted. Consequently, there are unacceptable omissions in accounts of the mission of the Church. Part of the motivation for this study is to expose the vital ministry of some Australian Catholic women, to demonstrate their part in the mission of the Church, and to bring to light stories that might otherwise go untold, except within
Mercy Congregations. As someone who has taught in a Mercy secondary college for twenty years, I have been formed in the Mercy ethos and want to highlight its value to Jesus’ mission today and the significant role of Mercy women in the Catholic Church.

This study is based on interviews with Sisters, questionnaire responses, archival research and use of secondary sources. Use of this variety of sources is interwoven throughout its chapters. After an initial consideration in Chapter Two of the literature of the relevant fields, Chapter Three provides justification of the methodology employed and the process of data gathering. In Chapter Four, various understandings of the concept of “Mercy” from Catholic scriptural and theological studies are explored. Catherine McAuley’s vision and practice are the focus of Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, the history and role of women in mission, an important aspect of the context for both Catherine McAuley and also for the Sisters in Pakistan and East Timor, are examined. Recent Catholic missiological thinking forms the focus for Chapter Seven. The following chapter employs a series of images to examine the approaches taken by the Sisters to their ministry with the Pakistani and East Timorese people. In Chapter Nine, the study then turns to the context in which the Sisters worked in Pakistan, before a detailed
examination of their Pakistani ministry is presented in Chapter Ten. Chapter Eleven contains the interwoven religious, political and social contexts of East Timor, whilst Chapter Twelve explores in detail the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy with the East Timorese people. The concluding chapter, Chapter Thirteen, is based on a contemporary quote often applied to mercy, and draws together key themes of the study.

This thesis, “Mercy in Action: Women in the Mission of the Church”, aims to draw elements from a variety of academic fields and incorporates a unique range of sources in order to acknowledge the too-often untold ministry of Australian Sisters of Mercy in the Catholic Church.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Against a background of culture, theology, spirituality, and politics, this interdisciplinary work interweaves missiology, in particular the story of women in mission, with church history, particularly recent, oral history. As a result, it draws on work from several fields. This study has combined particular academic works in new ways, and additionally brings to the foreground sources not found in the public domain: the stories of particular Sisters of Mercy gathered in interviews or in written questionnaires, items provided by Sisters of Mercy themselves, and materials from the archives of the Sisters of Mercy.\(^3\) In such a way, this thesis which aims to acknowledge the unique contribution of the Australian Sisters of Mercy to the people of Pakistan and East Timor, allows these women’s voices to be heard along with those of academia.

Missiology

It is clear that the role of women in mission has too often been unrecognized or un-recorded. For example, in Stephen Neill’s classic work of some four hundred pages, A History of Christian Missions, women barely rated a mention. Whilst Catholic orders of priests and brothers were named, the female equivalents were

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\(^3\)See Chapter Three for further information on the use of the archival materials.
described collectively as “Sisterhoods” and given two brief references. Even in the vast sweep of mission history and analysis found in David J. Bosch’s great work Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, little consideration of women or gender in the history or shaping of mission is entertained. In researching this thesis, works that provided a sound sense of the contemporary analysis of mission as a discipline have been sought. There is also a concentration on sources that contain the stories of mission practitioners, particularly women missionaries. This selection of sources consolidated my understanding of Catholic mission theory and practice, and helped dispel the silence around women, particularly Catholic women, in mission.

As an overview of Catholic missiology, the work of Stephen Bevans S.V.D. has been highly influential in this study. Bevans, a contextual theologian, has developed various classifications of mission models. In his work *Models of Contextual Theology* in the early 1990s, he considered five models of contextual theology, and examined each model’s

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5 Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991). Although Bosch notes women’s role and opportunities in mission, there are only four entries under the term “women” in the index to this influential work. They total less than a page in this almost 600-page book.
terminology and presuppositions, before critiquing it and
describing key practitioners and examples of the model. His
inclusion of practical examples enfleshed the examined theories
of mission.

In the 1990s, Bevans co-edited with James Scherer a
series of books which brought together influential writers on the
theology of mission. Book One in the series contained valuable
official documents on mission from Roman Catholic, Eastern
Orthodox and Oriental, and Evangelical Protestant churches, as
well as various ecumenical statements from the mid-1970s to the
1990s.7 This work provided helpful background material for this
study, as it helped set the “missionary” foundations of the Sisters
of Mercy in context.

The second book in the series focused on theological
foundations, and David Bosch’s chapter on “The Vulnerability of
Mission”8 resonated with this research on the Sisters of Mercy.
Whilst the Sisters have not been martyrs for their faith, their
vulnerability in East Timor and Pakistan and the dilemmas they
have faced in working with the poor, have been significant.

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7Scherer, James A. and Stephen B. Bevans (eds.) New Directions in Mission and
8Bosch, David J. “The Vulnerability of Mission,” in Scherer, James A. and Stephen B.
Bevans (eds.) New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 2: Theological
Bevans’ own chapter “Seeing Mission Through Images”\(^9\) painted a series of human images for the term “missionary”, and gave concrete examples of missionary practice. Although his classifications were not an exact fit for the Sisters of Mercy, they provided the springboard for this study’s chapter on the Sisters’ approach to mission (Chapter Eight).

In the third volume, the co-editors’ introductory chapter “Faith and culture in Perspective” provided a clear sense of the issues surrounding inculturation, as well as outlining some important developments in ecumenism and Christian missions in the twentieth century.\(^{10}\) Hong Kong Biblical scholar, Kwok Pui-lan’s chapter “Hearing and Talking: Oral Hermeneutics of Asian Women”\(^{11}\) underlined the importance of oral strategies in faith development and resonated with some of the strategies employed in the health education programs of the Mercy Sisters in Pakistan.


Bevans’ latest co-authored work\textsuperscript{12} is a most impressive sweep of mission theology and history. The two Divine Word Missionary priests, Roger Schroeder and Stephen Bevans, have classified Christian missions from the time of the apostles until the current day according to a schema which takes into account the “constants” of Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and salvation, as well as anthropology and culture. Various approaches to mission have been illustrated by exemplary practitioners, and it is heartening to see that women have been included in their number. Bevans’ and Schroeder’s systematic approach does not readily apply to the Sisters of Mercy, who are not a Congregation with a strong missionary self-image, but the books provided a comprehensive analysis of mission through the ages and is ecumenical in approach. The work examined Protestant, Orthodox Christian and Roman Catholic missionary endeavours and documents.

\textbf{Women in Mission}

Much of the missiological literature that informed this thesis is the work of writers who have uncovered, acknowledged and honoured the contribution of women in mission. Significant amongst these writers is Dana Robert, who has written largely from a social history perspective. Although most of her book

American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice focuses on American Protestant missionary women, it has been very instructive for this study. Robert identified the distinctive features of the practice and the methodology of the women missionaries she studied, and there is common ground with today’s Sisters of Mercy: concern for women and children, priority given education and health, and a holistic attitude to physical and spiritual needs. That Robert is interested in individuals and groups’ mission theory as well as practice enriches and enlivens her study. Her clear classification of eras of female missionary activity from the early nineteenth century parallels the timeframe of the Sisters of Mercy as an order.

Robert’s more recent work, Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century, has brought together significant writers in the field, and placed their work in a clear historical framework. Whilst the bias in the publication is American, it does offer a broader range of women missionaries’ experience. Again, Robert’s ability to effectively synthesise studies is demonstrated in her excellent preface and introductory chapter. There Roberts outlines some of the key

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issues for women in mission, the chronological framework that she utilizes, and the key developments in American women’s mission history, including that of Roman Catholic women.

This last aspect is amplified in three chapters specifically on Catholic women in mission. One of the contributors, Angelyn Dries, O.S.F., has written her own work *The Missionary Movement in America Catholic History* which examines both male and female Catholic missionaries. The work contains the wonderfully instructive quote on mission of Edward Kinch, O.S.M., a Servite friar in South Africa in the 1950s, who claimed that “All missionary work is a kind of improvising to a certain extent.”

Many writers in the field of women in mission wish to redress the imbalance in missiology and rightly acknowledge the tremendous female contribution to the life of the Church. Significantly, the South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies devoted a 1995 issue to women in mission as an admission of the under-representation of women in missiological works and of the insufficient acknowledgement of women’s contribution in this field of ministry. Ruth Tucker’s *Guardians of the Great*

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16 Kinch, Edward, O.S.M. quoted in ibid., 255.
17 South Pacific Journal of Missionary Studies 2, no. 11, (July 1995).
Commission: *The Story of Women in Modern Missions*\(^{18}\) nominates issues or developments in the history of women missionaries from the nineteenth century onwards and illustrates them with fascinating case studies of individual women missionaries. The paradox of Western mission women experiencing a degree of freedom unknown at home whilst working within a patriarchal church structure was examined, as well as the cross-cultural issues they encountered. Several other works in this field develop similar themes. These include *Women Missionaries and Cultural Change*,\(^{19}\) with its lively account of Dominican Sisters in Nigeria, *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*\(^{20}\), *Women’s Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia*\(^{21}\), and *The Hidden Journey: Missionary Heroines in Many Lands*\(^{22}\). In the last-mentioned book, Byrne makes the telling point that for the missionary women, the journey was as much an inner journey as an external one to


\(^{19}\)Women Missionaries and Cultural Change: Studies in Third World Societies. No. 4. (Williamsburg, Virginia: Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, n.d.).


foreign lands. This certainly rings true with the experiences of the Sisters interviewed for this thesis.

Some works examining the role of women in mission take a much more consciously feminist perspective, and use theoretical concepts and terminology from gender studies or feminist theology. Whilst examining many of the same themes and paradoxes of women’s missionary service, these works were less useful to this study, due to the denseness of their style or their ideological language. In general, they carried a routine but not necessarily justified suspicion of church-based activities.

*Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* presented a strongly theorised approach. Singh’s *Gender, Religion and “Heathen Lands.” American Missionary Women In South Asia (1860s-1940s)* contained a useful introductory chapter on existing academic work in the field, but was hindered by jargon and terminology.

My reading about women in mission was completed by an investigation of works on the role of women and the religious in the Church. Barbara MacHaffie’s *Her Story: Women

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23 Ibid., 3.
in Christian Tradition gave a useful sweep of women from Biblical figures through to feminist theologians. Her chapter on women in mission re-emphasized the moral character women added to nineteenth century mission endeavours. In addition to praising the contribution of women to the Church, American Sister Sandra Schneiders developed an interesting theme of the religious person in the margins of society as a prophetic “outsider” in two works examined for this study. Whilst a missionary is obviously an outsider, I wondered whether it might be easier or safer to fulfil this idealistic and heroic role in one’s own society than as a missionary in some foreign land? Joan Chittister’s compelling book, The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life, lays down the challenge of being with the poor, of being prophetic, taking risks to share the vulnerability others know, and forming the religious for “wild caring.” The book is realistic in its assessment of the costs of service to the Church. Chittister’s passionate writing drew together two key strands of the Church’s and Catherine

McAuley’s mission: faith in God and action in the world.

Chittister’s words resonated with the approach of Catherine McAuley, who held fast to the idea of God’s providence: “Risk walks with God as its only sure companion.”\(^{29}\) The risks, the vulnerability and the struggle have been undeniable aspects of the Sisters’ work with the people of Pakistan and East Timor.

Much work remains to be done towards the Australian history of this field. In my search of libraries and data bases, I was unable to find many Australian academic works on Catholic women missionaries in the public domain. Chapter Seven of Diane Langmore's *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874-1914* examines the work of female missionaries from the Anglican, Protestant and Catholic traditions.\(^{30}\) The implicit yet distinctive and arduous work of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to improve the lot of Papuan women is studied in some detail. Anne O'Brien, in her book, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, devotes a chapter to the work of Catholic nuns, particularly in the teaching field.\(^{31}\) There is some examination of the active ministry to the poor of religious congregations, such as the Sisters of Mercy, founded in the

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 65.


nineteenth century, and of the missions to Aboriginal and Islander peoples by the St John of God Sisters. There is an increasing number of careful histories of Catholic religious orders in Australia, including the Sisters of Mercy.32 Hilary M. Carey's article *Subordination, Invisibility and Chosen Work: Missionary Nuns and Australian Aborigines, c. 1900-1949*33 points to the familiar theme in mission history of the under-valued nature of women's missionary endeavours. The primary concern of the local Catholic hierarchy was with ministry to the European population, which is reflected in the establishment and growth of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Catholic women missionaries are only just emerging as a focus of academic study, and I would suggest that the collective and self-effacing nature of religious life has mitigated against publication. A wider telling of the story of

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these women and of those with whom they have worked will enrich our understanding of missiology.

**Catherine McAuley and Mercy**

Having worked in a Mercy school for almost twenty years, much of the Catherine McAuley story was very familiar to me before I undertook this research, and I was aware of the danger of idealizing Catherine and her story. Mary Sullivan R.S.M. is regarded in Mercy circles as the undisputed expert on Catherine. Her work *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*\(^{34}\) brought together early biographies of Catherine by members of her Congregation, as well as various drafts and copies of the Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy which Catherine wrote in consultation with the Sisters, and other key documents written by the foundress about the ethos of the Congregation. Sullivan’s research, and critical editing of the collection of documents are painstaking, and the work demonstrated the attention to detail necessary for sound historical research. The impact that Catherine made on her contemporaries was strongly illustrated in this resource. In addition, the documents make clear that Catherine’s desire to respond to need clearly preceded any thinking or writing about the Congregation.

Something akin to this pattern is still evident in the way in which

\(^{34}\)Sullivan, Mary C., R.S.M. *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).
the Sisters have responded to needs in Pakistan and East Timor. A presentation given by Mary Sullivan in Melbourne in November 2003\textsuperscript{35} emphasised Catherine’s commitment to God and to the poor, and her entwining of the spiritual and physical care for people.

Mary Sullivan’s more recent work of editing \textit{The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841}\textsuperscript{36} builds on the work of Sister M. Angela Bolster who published \textit{The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley}\textsuperscript{37} in the 1980s. The Bolster collection is approachable and the short commentary accompanying the letters is helpful and lively. It covers the years of Catherine’s life from the time of the planning of the House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Ireland. Sullivan’s tome contains only two letters from her earlier life, but what stands out are the detailed notes that accompany the correspondence. Again, Sullivan’s research is meticulous and impressive. It is a major work, and scholars of the Mercy story are in her debt.

There have been a number of other histories of Catherine McAuley written largely by members of her

\textsuperscript{35}Sullivan, Mary, R.S.M. \textit{The Biography of Catherine McAuley: Have We Plumbed Its Depths?} (Presented at Heidelberg, Melbourne: Our Lady of Mercy College, 7/11/03). Handouts and notes in author’s possession.
\textsuperscript{36}Sullivan, Mary C. (ed.) \textit{The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841}. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).
Congregation. Of these, Bolster’s *Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy* and Australian Sister Carmel Bourke’s *A Woman Sings of Mercy: Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy* are among the best written and most engaging. Bolster wrote glowingly of Catherine McAuley, but her work was based on her research of Catherine’s correspondence and was historically sound. Bourke’s attitude was also admiring of Catherine. This work brought the historical Catherine alive for the Australian Sisters of Mercy in the 1980s. Bourke’s chapter headings are interesting too, and they include “Her Spirit of Mercy”, “Her Concept of Community”, “Her Concept of Authority and Leadership” and “Her Concept of Mission.” This work lent itself to use by the Sisters, particularly in their reflection on contemporary issues for the Australian Congregations which were dealing with new structures and ways of being, having unified in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia in 1981.

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38Degnan, Sister M. Bertrand. *Mercy Unto Thousands.* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, 1958) is named by Mary Sullivan as very important to her work. See Sullivan, Mary C., R.S.M. *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy.* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995),vi-vii. It is a well-researched work.


For a wider sense of the early Sisters of Mercy in their religious context, the search of literature turned to Ann Taves’ work on nineteenth century devotions. There I found parallels between the devotions Catherine included in the Rule for the Sisters, and the practices that were popular according to Taves’ research.41

Many of the sources on aspects of Catherine McAuley’s vision and work have understandably been written by Sisters of Mercy. Irish Sister Helena O’Donoghue R.S.M.’s paper on Catherine’s leadership gives a good, though uncritical, analysis of her approach.42 The international Mercy publication, *The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology (M.A.S.T. Journal)*, provides an indication of the issues that arise for the Mercy Congregations today and reflection upon the Order’s foundress, spirit and charism. Among the writers represented over several years in *M.A.S.T. Journal* of most interest were Marie Noel Keller R.S.M. and Maureen Crossen R.S.M. Keller examined Catherine’s practice in the light of I Corinthians 11-1443. Crossen focused on the importance of God’s

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42O’Donaghue, Helena, R.S.M. *Catherine and Leadership.* (Presented at Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, Dublin, 2/5/03). Copy of transcript in author’s possession.
mercy, the compassionate, forgiving action it invokes in people, and its centrality in the lives of the Sisters of Mercy.\(^{44}\)

Some other in-house writings on Catherine McAuley her mission and mercy were useful in preparing this study. Among them was Sister M. Joanna Regan’s work, *Tender Courage*,\(^{45}\) and Carol Estelle Wheeler’s *Catherine: A Reflection on Values from the Mercy Tradition*.\(^{46}\) Regan’s work is warm in its praise for Catherine. It is an accessible work, and Regan identifies gratitude for the gifts of God’s mercy as Catherine’s hallmark.\(^{47}\) Regan’s work has been influential in the life of the American Sisters of Mercy, for it has been frequently quoted in articles by Sisters in the United States.\(^{48}\) Carol Wheeler R.S.M. examined the values of Catherine McAuley, and whilst no less positive about her contribution, was more analytical in approach. Wheeler drew on wider sources about mercy and provided a


\(^{46}\)Wheeler, Carol Estelle, R.S.M. *Catherine: A Reflection on Values from the Mercy Tradition.* (Baltimore, Maryland: Mercy High School, c1991).


useful overview of Catherine’s mission and reflections on mercy.\textsuperscript{49}

As with the above in-house publications on Catherine, I was guided to sources about mercy, its scriptural origins and theological reflections upon it largely by Sisters whom I know, particularly Madeline Duckett R.S.M. well-known in Mercy circles for her expertise in spirituality, and Veronica Lawson R.S.M., a Scripture scholar of fine repute. Veronica generously gave me a copy of her yet unpublished work on the language of mercy in Scripture\textsuperscript{50}. It is a very detailed and clearly organized work which audits the concept of mercy in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Greek books of the First Testament and in the Christian Scriptures. It was invaluable. Covering similar ground but with accompanying theological reflections was Mercy educator Margery Jackman’s article “Biblical Theology of Mercy” which appeared in the Australian Mercy periodical \textit{Listen}.\textsuperscript{51} It synthesized Lawson’s work and provided real food for thought.

Jon Sobrino’s \textit{The Principle of Mercy} is a major theological work on mercy.\textsuperscript{52} The author’s experience of the

\textsuperscript{49}\textsuperscript{}Wheeler, Carol Estelle, R.S.M. \textit{Catherine: A Reflection on Values from the Mercy Tradition}. (Baltimore, Maryland: Mercy High School, c1991).


\textsuperscript{52}\textsuperscript{}Sobrino, Jon. \textit{The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People From the Cross}. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994). Sobrino’s work on liberation theology also
oppression of the poor in Latin America colours his understanding and reflections upon mercy, which he sees as the central principle of Jesus’ mission. He challenges the church to make Jesus’ mercy an operating principle today. His writing spoke of mercy in concrete social and religious terms and as an antidote to injustice and oppression.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* provided a more traditional treatment to the term “mercy” in Scriptures and Church tradition. God is seen as Father and source of mercy. The encyclical examined First and Second Testament usage of mercy-related terms, and honoured Mary as the “Mother of Mercy”, as well as considering the quest to put mercy into practice. It was encouraging that the Pontiff wrote about such a topic, but after reading Sobrino, the encyclical appeared pious and theoretical.

Australian Sister of Mercy, Patricia Fox has written a very interesting feminist critique of the Vatican’s catechetical text *God, the Father of Mercy*. She examines the way in which the

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maternal imaging of a merciful God had been subsumed into the
title of and devotions to Mary who is seen as the “mother of mercy.”55 It is an encouraging work for women in the Church,
and along with another essay by Fox,56 led me to consider the
way in which the Church has used the term over time. Fox’s
thinking has been very much influenced by her study of feminist
theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, and is in dialogue with other
Australian Mercy theologians including Elaine Wainwright
R.S.M. and Jan Gray R.S.M.

Finally, an examination of songs used by Sisters in
their gatherings and liturgies conveyed both the evolving theology
of mercy and its continued centrality in the spirituality of the
Sisters.57 The songs are interesting, moving and revealing.

Pakistan

As a starting point on the literature about the history
of Pakistan, The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan,
Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives58 was
useful. Lars Blinkenberg, long-time writer on the sub-continent,
was an important source in this field. Volume one of his three-

55Fox, Patricia, R.S.M. “Reading the Vatican’s Official Catechetical Text, ‘God, the
56Fox, Patricia, R.S.M. “The Spirit of the Mercy Dance: Mother of Mercy – A Title
57“Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
58Robinson, Francis (ed.) The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,
Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
c1989).
volume work contained vital information on how Islam spread to the region, and how its attitude to other faiths had altered over the centuries. This reading was supplemented by Schimmel’s work on Islam in India and Pakistan, which contained many interesting visual representations of the faith.

A most useful and detailed account of Catholic Church history is found in the multi-volume “Pakistan Christian Monograph” series edited by Mill Hill Missionary, John Rooney. The series starts with Christianity in Pakistan up to the tenth century, and concludes its study in the 1980s. It is detailed, well-researched and convincingly argued, and as a Pakistan-published work, has an additional sense of local authenticity. Emmanuel Asi, writing from within the Catholic Church in Pakistan, gives a careful analysis of the approach of the Church at different stages of its history, particularly in the twentieth century. Chandler’s book on recent Christian martyrs contains a useful summary of the history of Christianity from the 3rd century on in what we

61Rooney, John M.H.M. Shadows in the Dark: A History of Christianity in Pakistan up to the Tenth Century. (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1984) is the first in the series.
62Asi, Emmanuel, C.C. “Concept, Charism and Practice of the Prophetic in the Church of Pakistan,” in Focus 3, 1988, 155-166.
know as Pakistan. The work encompasses both Catholic and Protestant missionary endeavours, before detailing the disturbing tale of Esther John (Qamar Zia) who was killed in 1960 after converting to Christianity.

The dangers of being a Christian in Pakistan became evident to me when searching a data base for relevant resources.\(^{64}\) Whilst I realize one has to be aware of biases and political ideologies influencing the media, I could not dismiss the fact that 15 of the 24 articles I located were about dangers to, attacks upon, discrimination suffered by, or the deaths of Christian people in Pakistan.\(^{65}\)

In the works on the political, social and economic reality of Pakistan, an extraordinary collection of documents from colonial days\(^{66}\) provided insight into the pre-independence issues. The documents featured members of British Governments, the Indian National Congress and Muslim League, and key players like Nehru, Jinnah and Gandhi. Grover and Aurora’s major three-volume work on the first fifty years of Pakistan’s history, post-

\(^{64}\) Data base ProQuest Religion was searched by this author under the term “Catholic Church Pakistan” on 04/07/2007.


independence, was very useful, particularly volume three’s statistics and chronology of events.\textsuperscript{67} A collection of speeches by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan from his 1950 trip to North America was instructive as to the original ideals of secular Pakistan and made for moving reading, as the Prime Minister was assassinated soon after the publication of this collection.\textsuperscript{68}

Information about the current-day political, social and economic reality in Pakistan was gained from Mumtaz and Mitha’s work. It gave a very readable overview of the society.\textsuperscript{69} For a more detailed study, Noman’s writings provided useful statistics and a sound analysis of the competing factions within the country.\textsuperscript{70} Sathasivam’s work on India and Pakistan’s relationship with the United States\textsuperscript{71} also contained a useful history and profile of Pakistan. Tariq Ali’s work on the military in

Pakistan politics explored a deeper sense of the complex political situation and fragile democracy in Pakistan. Abbas’ work on growing extremism, and Paul’s work which deals substantially with the Kashmir conflict were included in the body of literature studied. For a very readable coverage of the struggle between civilian and military influences in Pakistan politics and an insight into Benazir Bhutto’s rule, I found Christina Lamb’s book invaluable. 

The final area of research about Pakistan was regarding the situation of women. Unveiling the Issues, edited by Nighet Said Khan and Afiya Shehrbano Zia, contained a very interesting and varied collection of articles. Whilst one needed to be mindful that these articles were written by educated, middle class women, they did give a perspective that is not often heard in the West and did examine issues related to women in other strata of Pakistani society. The difficulties for women in terms of social mores, such as purdah, and legal impediments, were well covered.

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73 Abbas, Hassan. Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, c2005).
in Mumtaz and Shaheed’s works.\textsuperscript{77} Finally, the World Bank’s useful data on Pakistani women rounded out the reading in the area.\textsuperscript{78}

**East Timor**

As someone who has long had an interest in the East Timorese political and human rights cause, I was familiar with a number of resources that dealt with the country’s history from the 1970s. It is important to note that the resources in this field, whilst not uncritical of the East Timorese, were generally very supportive of their struggle against the Indonesians.

James Dunn’s two works on East Timor were essential to my understanding of East Timorese culture and history. His 1983 *Timor: A People Betrayed*\textsuperscript{79} conveyed a clear sense of the structure of traditional East Timorese society, as well as a sound grounding in colonial history, the role of the Catholic Church, the events of the mid-1970s and life in East Timor under the Indonesians up to the early 1980s. His later edition of the


work, entitled *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence*\(^{80}\), extended the coverage of events up to 2002.

Taylor’s *East Timor: The Price of Freedom*\(^{81}\) was similarly helpful in its coverage of cultural and religious matters, and its emphasis on the political life of the country. A very useful chronology of events from April 1974 to September 1999 is included in that work. *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation*, edited by Carey and Bentley,\(^{82}\) provided a solid collection of essays on the country’s history, international dimensions of its issues, life inside East Timor, future scenarios and an excellent bibliography and chronology. Archer’s essay on the Catholic Church in East Timor in that collection\(^{83}\) was nuanced and intelligent, and a useful preparation for Smythe’s excellent and comprehensive work on that topic.\(^{84}\) Other short works that provided a clear overview of the Indonesian invasion and its aftermath included those by Jardine and Hull.\(^{85}\) Two other

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\(^{82}\) Carey, Peter and G. Carter Bentley (eds.) *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation.* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1995).


\(^{84}\) Smythe, Patrick A. *The Heaviest Blow – The Catholic Church and the East Timor Issue.* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004).

works rounded out my general reading about East Timor.

Budiardjo and Liang's study of the methods of the Indonesians in
suppressing the local population contained damning statistics and
documents illustrating the Indonesian approach to the people of
East Timor.\footnote{Budiardjo, Carmel and Liem Soei Liong. \textit{The War Against East Timor}. (London: Zed
Books, 1984).} Secondly, a very interesting and often moving work
by Turner\footnote{Turner, Michele. \textit{Telling East Timor: Personal Testimonies 1942-1992}. (Kensington,
New South Wales: New South Wales University Press, 1992).} gave personal accounts of life in East Timor at
varying times during the twentieth century. The accounts of East
Timorese life following 1975 were harrowing to read.

Much of the literature that informed the East
Timorese chapters of this thesis centred on the role of the
Catholic Church in that country, especially during Indonesian
rule. Smythe's \textit{The Heaviest Blow – The Catholic church and the
East Timor Issue}\footnote{Smythe, Patrick A. \textit{The Heaviest Blow – The Catholic Church and the East Timor
Issue}. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004).} is a most interesting, insightful and critical
study. I was directed to that work by Bishop Hilton Deakin and
Louise Crowe, both of whom have long associations with East
Timor. Smythe's work did not view the Catholic Church as a
monolith, and instead he investigated the attitude of the Church in
East Timor, Indonesia, Portugal, Australia, Japan, the United
States and Britain regarding East Timorese issues. The criteria on
which he assessed these local Catholic Churches were telling – values based on the ministry of Jesus and on Catholic social doctrine. Given a considerable part of Smythe’s research was based on interviews, I was very interested in how he integrated that material with other sources in his work.

Other Church-related sources about East Timor centred on the personalities of key clergy. The tragic story of Bishop Martinho da Costa Lopes, written by Rowena Lennox, is one such work.\(^8^9\) Whilst I found it enriched my understanding of recent East Timorese history and increased my sympathy for an admirable man and the people he was serving, Lennox’s style borders on conjecture at times. More skillfully written was Kohen’s work on Bishop Carlos Belo *From the Place of the Dead: Bishop Belo and the Struggle for East Timor*.\(^9^0\) Whilst obviously supportive of the East Timorese cause, Kohen’s writing was more objective and did not sensationalise the horror facing East Timor nor the difficult path of diplomacy, non-violence and human rights advocacy Bishop Belo undertook. Films like *Sometimes I Must Speak Out Strongly*,\(^9^1\) and *The Martyrs of*  

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\(^9^0\)Kohen, Arnold S. *From the Place of the Dead: Bishop Belo and the Struggle for East Timor.* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999).

Timor\textsuperscript{92} also informed my understanding of the difficult role of the church in East Timor. Briefing papers from the Catholic aid agency Caritas and research body, Uniya,\textsuperscript{93} and the fine collection of Catholic Church documents entitled \textit{Just Reading No. 2: The Church and East Timor: A Collection of Documents by National and International Catholic Church Agencies}\textsuperscript{94} rounded out my sense of what the Church said and did or failed to do during Indonesian rule. The Melbourne Archives of the Sisters of Mercy provided reports from Sisters in the field, and I found those and the \textit{Mercy Refugee Service Newsletter} to be very useful in illustrating the experiences of the Sisters at the time of their ministry. I was able to contrast those with what the Sisters reported, with the benefit of hindsight and reflection, in their interviews or questionnaire responses.

\textbf{Historical Method}

History is the field that unites all the aspects of my work. During the study period, I revisited the historical methodology field from time to time to guide the integration of primary source material with other research materials. The

\textsuperscript{92}\textit{The Martyrs of Timor}. (Video) (Melbourne: Albert Street Productions, 2000).
\textsuperscript{93}One example is: \textit{East Timor: How Long? Uniya/Australian Catholic Relief Briefing Paper 1, no. 6}, (Sydney: Australian Catholic Relief and Uniya, November 1994).
thinking and methodology of historians like Barbara Tuchman\(^{95}\) was important, but because this thesis has a significant component of interview material, more influential were works in the field of oral history.

Michael Frisch’s approach resonated,\(^{96}\) because it is respectful and democratic. It is not history from a “safe distance,” but personal and close. Frisch regards oral history as an alternative to the telling of history from the point of view of the powerful. Similarly, Slim and Thompson’s work on oral history in the field of social justice and development was influential.\(^{97}\) Although not able to interview people in Pakistan and East Timor due to ethical and safety considerations, I found *Listening for Change: Oral Testimony and Development* food for thought, and reinforced my belief in the power of story and in the importance of good listening.

The approach of these two works resonated with the underlying themes of justice, the role of women in the Church and the “preferential option for the poor.” This thesis hopes to acknowledge the stories and contributions of women within the Catholic Church working with the poor. The field of oral history


has been significant in bringing to light the voices of those who have been silent or silenced in traditional historical studies: women, working class people, those marginalized by political, cultural, racial, economic or sexual structures or norms. This point was strongly asserted in the opening chapter of the *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories.*

*The Oral History Reader* is a significant work in this field, with many key exponents as contributors to the work, and many major issues in the field explored. Oral history is narrative, subjective, personal, direct and yet nuanced, rich in the potential to make sense of or gain meaning from experiences in the past. In doing oral history, the historian is drawn into the process, and helps create the recorded historical narrative. He or she chooses the subjects, and according to Portelli: “the control of historical discourse remains firmly in the hands of the historian.”

Frisch asserted that memory should be centre stage in this process, whilst historian Passerini’s interest centred on the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of oral history and what light they shed on a culture’s influence on an individual’s

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memory. Issues in the art of transcription of the oral interview into written history were thoroughly and expertly explored in this work. Anderson and Jack’s chapter on listening highlighted the skill and sensitivity which are needed to draw essential information, memories and reflection from interviewees, and the importance of self-awareness on the part of the interviewer.  

*The Oral History Reader* explored most thoroughly the practice of oral history and its philosophical underpinnings, and confirmed for me the validity and richness of this approach to history. The work illustrated that greater understanding is gained from a combination of more traditional, written historical material with an oral component. These two sources can complement, supplement, or question each other, and create a more realistic or nuanced historical narrative.

Among other helpful oral history references was Lummis’ *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* as it reiterated the difficulties of bias in all sources, the imperfections of memory but the undoubted value of interviews.

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in historical research. *From Memory to History*\(^{105}\) included among the characteristics of oral history the reliance on visual imagery, something of a paradox, but one which I found to be true in the more expansive interviews in my study.

Two examples of history writing with a large oral component particularly influenced this work. McCalman’s *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990*\(^{106}\) was interesting in its history of a particular slice of Melbourne life, but perhaps more so because of the author’s introductory remarks on her approach. She admitted to the difficulties of juggling objectivity and empathy, accountability and flexibility, and respect for memories and evidence, and wisely remembered that people in such a study were to be respected. This attitude towards her interviewees, and her writing about the tension of working in a field that is both an academic discipline and involves “creative writing in which the author is not in control of the plot”\(^{107}\) encouraged and affirmed my work.

*Making Space: Women and Education at St Aloysius College,*


Adelaide 1880-2000 provided further insight into the Mercy priority of the education of women, and additional ideas about ways in which interview or questionnaire material could be integrated into a text.

Finally, McLay’s work on the history of the Adelaide Sisters of Mercy provided food for thought. Her use of the metaphor of a spiral that took the Sisters on a three-cornered journey (Ireland, Agentina and South Australia), and on an inward, outward and onward journey was intriguing. This linking the inner or spiritual life with the outward response to material needs and a view to the future was true to the mission of Catherine McAuley.

This literature for this study has incorporated many fields. Drawing from this vast range has been enriching, but it also created the challenge of understanding others’ perspectives, of sifting and evaluating diverse materials, and of living with the tension of respect for people’s stories whilst remaining true to academic practices. The following chapter examines the methodology used in this study in more detail and its justification.

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Chapter Three: Methodology - Approaches and Frameworks of Understanding

This chapter presents a discussion of the issues raised by an interdisciplinary study, and the experience of working with the history of living people, recent events and an organization with which I have a significant personal relationship: the Sisters of Mercy. The chapter includes consideration of the contexts of this study, a clarification of the term “mission”, before a justification for the research approaches chosen. It follows with an acknowledgement of the limitations associated with historical research, particularly oral history, and the geographical and practical limitations of this study. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the types of resources used in writing this thesis and how they have been integrated.

Multiple Contexts

Context is vital in understanding people and their stories. It provides the landscape of action and the formative influences on people and events that one can then examine at close range. To contextualise this study of two recent initiatives of the Sisters of Mercy, attention is given to the early history of the Mercy congregation, the motivation and ethos of their founder, Catherine McAuley, and the Sisters’ understanding of what mercy is and requires of them. These influences have
shaped the Sisters’ sense of identity and call, and their understanding of what makes for authentic “mercy” ministry. To build a fuller context for this study of women active in the Catholic Church, consideration has been given to the role of women in missions in the nineteenth century, the century in which Catherine McAuley ministered publicly, and in the twentieth century, particularly the post-Vatican II decades, when the Australian Sisters of Mercy began their work in Pakistan and East Timor. Finally, to complete the contextualization of this study, two chapters are devoted to the historical, political and religious milieus of Pakistan and East Timor.

“Mission”

The term “mission” is significant in this study, so it is important to establish the ways in which it has been used in relation to the Sisters of Mercy in this work. From early in their history, the Sisters of Mercy travelled across the world to serve the Church, particularly to serve the needs of the Irish Catholic diaspora. As Catholics, the Sisters would also have had the historical understanding of “missions” as endeavours by church personnel in foreign lands to expose people to Christianity and its pastoral, educational and health services, with the aim of conversion. Indeed, it has been a common practice in Australian
Catholic schools, including those administered by the Sisters of Mercy, to pray for and materially support overseas missions established and run by other Orders or Catholic bodies.\textsuperscript{110}

What has been particularly influential to the Australian Sisters of Mercy has been formation in the understanding of the mission of God as exemplified in Jesus’ mission to the poor and needy. This was obviously close to the heart of Catherine McAuley, and the Second Vatican Council called religious Congregations to re-discover and re-commit to the charism of their founders. From the 1970s, theological emphasis on solidarity with the poor and the liberating power of the Gospel brought impetus to the Sisters’ work among the neediest in society – indigenous Australians, homeless people, refugees, the poor. The Sisters’ Constitution, developed in 1981, is imbued with a passion for social justice which is seen as essential to the reign of God and Jesus’ mission of Good News for the world.

The document talks of searching out “the meaning of God’s choice of the poor”\textsuperscript{111}, discerning what is implied for the Sisters in “the Church’s call to a preferential choice for the poor”\textsuperscript{112}, awakening to oppression in the world and responding in solidarity


\textsuperscript{111} Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia. \textit{Constitutions and Directory}(1981), 1.06.

\textsuperscript{112} ibid., 3.24.
with the oppressed in order to build “a new earth, the place where righteousness and love and mercy will be at home (2 Peter3:14).”\footnote{Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia. \textit{Constitutions and Directory} (1981), 3.26.} This awareness of the urgent need for the followers of Jesus to co-operate in God’s saving mission opened the way for the Sisters’ work in Pakistan and East Timor.

The Sisters who worked with the people of Pakistan and East Timor talk about a call to be with people in need. They believe they contribute to the mission of the Church and God’s mission, and to the vision of Catherine McAuley. They see this action as a continuation of the ministry they have undertaken in Australia. Thus the use of the term “mission” in this study, applied to the Sisters’ outreach to the people of East Timor and Pakistan, is used interchangeably with “ministry” or “work” which supports the mission of God, rather than conveying more technical missiological concepts such as evangelization, catechesis, contextualization or inculturation. The Constitution of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia would support this use of the term “mission”. Writing on the vision of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, the Sisters state that whilst the first Sisters of Mercy heard “the missionary call inherent in our vocation, and crossed the oceans and continents, we too are called to be pilgrims for Christ's sake, whether we stay at home or
move outwards.” The term expresses the Sisters’ participation in Jesus’ call to “bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18).

Consequently, the Sisters see themselves being dedicated to being among “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40) and serving people who suffer from poverty, sickness or lack of education. They are concerned with a practical and active response to the needs of others, as my title suggests.

**Approaches and Methods**

As an associate of the Sisters of Mercy, I based my research in the Congregations of which I had the greatest knowledge: Melbourne, Ballarat and Adelaide. I was aware that my relationship with the Mercy Sisters both privileged me in access to them and their archives, but that it biased my research in certain ways. I have great respect for the Sisters, so unlike an investigative journalist, if I found controversy or conflict, I approached that honestly but did not wish to malign or “dig for dirt”. As historian Janet McCalman wrote in relation to a group biography:

…the practice of oral history imposes a special accountability on the historian: the people in this group biography are contributors and witnesses,

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115 Ibid., 1.06.
historians of themselves and their times, not originators of texts to be deconstructed.\textsuperscript{116}

I was also aware of the power differential that operated in some interviews I conducted. With some Sisters who were former leaders of Congregations, I could not help but approach them with a degree of deference, though they proved to be quite candid in their interviews.

Because of my geographic location, limited time and resources, and my Qualifying essay research into the first Pakistan foundation by the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy\textsuperscript{117}, which is the biggest Australian Congregation, it was to the Melbourne Sisters that I gave most attention. In all three cases, Melbourne, Ballarat and Adelaide, I sought permission from the Congregational Superiors, and once that was gained, the Congregations mailed out my proposal, questionnaire and interview documents. I was then contacted by individual Sisters who were willing to participate in my study. They had the choice of responding to me in writing, or being interviewed, or both. I also approached the Brisbane Mercy Congregation, and whilst the Superior passed on my documents, no Sisters responded. This is, therefore, a limited study. In total, I conducted twelve interviews.


– six in the Melbourne Congregation, four in the Ballarat Congregation, and two in Adelaide. Two of the Melbourne interviewees preceded their interviews with questionnaires, and in addition, another two Adelaide Sisters completed questionnaires but were not interviewed. All participants had spent time in East Timor or Pakistan, either in ministry there or on visitation due to their former leadership roles.  

The questionnaires gave Sisters the opportunity to give responses based on reflection, they could edit their thoughts as they proceeded, and could answer in as much detail as they liked. For some living far away, it was the most practical option. For those who both completed the questionnaire and were interviewed, their written responses were the jumping off point for our face-to-face discussions. I found the interview amplified, clarified and enfleshed their questionnaire responses. In both the written and oral formats, the Sisters’ passion, emotion, commitment and sense of being deeply shaped by their experiences in Pakistan or East Timor were strongly evident.

Researchers face the tension between legislated protection of the subjects of the research and lively, authentic interaction with those subjects. In the interviews, conducted in places chosen by the interviewees, I was very aware of the

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See Appendix 3 for the interview and questionnaire documents.
constraint of having to adhere to the questions approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Melbourne College of Divinity and sent to the Congregations and individual Sisters beforehand. Whilst at times the Sisters’ responses contained information and insights not directly covered by my set of questions, I felt I could not freely delve into new areas as my questions were governed by H.R.E.C considerations. This indicates one of the inherent problems with having to set one’s questions before one’s research is done. This does fly in the face of much oral history thinking, which sees pre-conceived questioning as forcing interviews into artificial sequencing or potentially less valuable directions. However, some Sisters spoke expansively, and I did not stop their recounting because it did not neatly fit into my question schema. I “let the interviewee talk” as well as covering the set agenda, and gained a greater sense of the experiences described, the depth of feeling they engendered and their significance in the lives of these women. As Portelli asserts, oral history done properly is “less about events” and more “about their meaning.” It was interesting to sense the caution in some interviews, to experience the openness of others,

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and to compare the precise, analytical responses of some with the vivid re-living of conversations and experiences in the detailed narratives of others. The interviews provided real insight into personalities, and the process of interpreting and making meaning from one’s personal history. How the interviewee related to me and vice verse also influenced the content of each interview.

Transcribing the taped interview, with my supporting notes taken at the time, brought that learning into sharp focus for me. Transcription is an art that changes an oral source to a written visual one, and they are not equivalent sources. It is also a process fraught with difficulties. When faced with the task of transcribing interviews, one is faced with a choice. Is it best to produce a verbatim account, with all the “ums, aahs” and pauses, which is potentially less readable, or is it best to write the interview into a grammatically correct, punctuated form that may be more fluent but less colourful? Intonation, cadences, pauses, searchings for the right word, emotion and meaning can be lost in the process of transcription.

This study has been an evolving learning experience that needed to be flexible to suit my interviewees. It was influenced by the writings of Michael Frisch who sees oral history

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as a matter of “shared authority”\textsuperscript{123} and of Janet McCalman who sees oral history as a necessarily flexible and organic process that “needs to unfold in the way real lives do – which is that none of us knows what lies ahead.”\textsuperscript{124} Therefore, with some interviewees, who were more expansive and comfortable in the interview, I let the written account be close to verbatim, with the “ums” taken out, as Allen and Montell advise.\textsuperscript{125} In one or two instances, where the conversation was not so free-flowing, I did not tape, but wrote notes throughout the interview. This has obvious drawbacks, but I felt the tone and voice of the interviewees came to the fore when they had the opportunity to edit my transcript. With those Sisters who wrote responses as well as being interviewed, the transcripts were more grammatically correct or ordered to match with their questionnaire responses. I assigned the same authority to the questionnaire and interview material. A copy of the transcript was sent to the interviewee in question for checking and amendment, and those who sent questionnaires were also sent a copy to reflect on and if necessary, edit. I hoped


that this process would give them the best chance of clarifying what they really wanted to say in the most authentic way.

**Limitations**

The interviews and questionnaires gave a lively but necessarily incomplete sense of the Sisters of Mercy at work in East Timor and Pakistan. As stated earlier in this Chapter, some Sisters chose not to participate in the study and so it is based on a small sample of Sisters. Additionally, interviews rely on memory, which is by nature imperfect and subjective. It can encapsulate, emboss, or telescope experiences, but can convey great vibrancy and meaning. Interviews incorporate the mixed blessing of hindsight, which gives one the undoubted benefit of reflecting on experience, but which may replace the initial, immediate experience with a re-organised, re-shaped, edited version. Oral sources are, in the words of Portelli, “artificial, variable and partial”, carrying with them a different sort of credibility. Such sources narrow history to the individual and the personal, but enhance it with their humanness.

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Due to safety and ethical concerns, this study does not contain the thoughts, words or experiences of the East Timorese and Pakistani people who worked with or were ministered to by the Sisters. It would have been most interesting to understand more of the cross-cultural dimensions by interviewing Pakistani or East Timorese people. Additionally, it would have been revealing to have gained the personal views of members of the Pakistani or East Timorese Catholic hierarchy, for example, to have heard their assessment of the Sisters’ work. It may even have been discovered that the Sisters were “dissonant voices” in contrast to the male clergy, for example. I have not contacted Sisters currently in Pakistan for safety reasons, so their views are missing from this study. Like all history, this study is, at best, a part-picture. Nevertheless, this work makes a unique contribution by exploring the life and work of the Sisters themselves in two contrasting contexts.

Due to safety concerns, the two Sisters who have returned to ministry in East Timor have been given pseudonyms, as have their East Timorese colleagues. In addition, one other Sister chose to use a pseudonym in reference to her past work in Pakistan. Where each pseudonym is used for the first time in the

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thesis, a footnote acknowledges this. Whilst the use of pseudonyms is understandable given the instability of the situations in East Timor and Pakistan, it mitigates against clearly identifying and acknowledging particular Sisters’ contributions to the mission of the Church. This is a frustration and a sadness with which the writer must live.

Archival Sources

In addition to the interviews and questionnaires, I conducted research in the archives of the Melbourne Congregation. Again, for practical reasons, including time restraints and location, and because of a familiarity with their breadth, I limited myself to these materials and did not research in the Ballarat or Adelaide archives. As the Melbourne archives contained copies of documents from the national bodies of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, I decided not to undertake research at their Sydney office, although I had received permission to do so. I worked methodically through archival boxes on Pakistan, I.S.M.A. National Projects, Mercy Works, Mercy Refugee Service, and Missions. The archival material ranged from letters, memoires, the minutes of meetings at a national or congregational level, in-house newsletters and circulars through to documents proposing internal structures for communication and accountability, budgets submissions, and
applications. Some of the material was prosaic and functional, whilst other documents spoke of the real life relationships and experiences of people in the field. These documents recorded the Sisters’ grappling with difficulties or exulting in small successes, their need of a life-line and a listening ear back in Australia, and their sense of accountability to but distance from their Australian Congregations and leaders. The articulation of their faith in action jumped out from the pages and elicited a response from this reader—sometimes emotional and usually empathetic.

The difficulty of working with some archival material is the sense of eavesdropping on a conversation or a meeting to which one has not been invited, invading someone’s privacy or opening someone else’s mail. It is both a privilege to gain access to such material, and a burden to be borne. One treads with caution. Respect for the real life people involved is paramount, and I found I could not be clinical about it. I recognized I have a sense of loyalty to the Mercy Order, and a desire to acknowledge the tremendous work the Sisters have done. However, I was also conscious of the “corrective” I needed to apply as a scholar: that of respectful criticism and alert observation.

**Integrating the Sources**
This study integrates archival materials, interviews, questionnaires, and secondary sources. As Allen and Montell
assert, it is much better to weave one’s sources together into a whole account, rather than put oral material into a separate chapter that may be seen as less authoritative. An integrated text may also make for more engaging reading. It was important to honour the stories of the women by giving them equal weighting with the written sources, which contain biases and limitations of their own. Some chapters lent themselves more naturally to this integration than others. Ultimately, this study aims to acknowledge the contribution of the Sisters, and sheds light on two areas of the world where faith that does compassionate action is at work.

The next chapter will examine various understandings of the concept of mercy which have provided formative influences and a spiritual context for this faith in action.


Chapter Four: Some Understandings of Mercy

The Sisters of Mercy have invested time and collective energy in recent years to reflect on the theological virtue of Mercy as the quality that has drawn them together since the time of their foundation. “Mercy” shapes the women who name themselves as Sisters of Mercy, and to better understand their ministries, it is important to consider this principle which underpins their work. In this chapter, the scriptural understanding of and theological reflections upon mercy are examined. Sources include the papal document *Dives in misericordia*, Catherine McAuley’s considerations of mercy, the work of contemporary scripture scholars and theologians, some of whom are themselves Sisters of Mercy, and resources used by the Sisters in their gatherings and celebrations.\(^{132}\)

Mercy in the Scriptures\(^{133}\)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are four key word groups which relate to mercy. The first includes *hesed*, a noun

\(^{132}\) I am indebted to Madeline Duckett R.S.M., well known in the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, for her advice on sources for this chapter, and to Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. who provided me with songs the Sisters use when they gather together.

\(^{133}\) In this section I will draw heavily on the work of Veronica Lawson, R.S.M., renowned in Australian Mercy academic institutions, Mercy Congregations and beyond for her Scripture scholarship, and of Margery Jackman, a lay woman who has long been a leader in Mercy education in Australia.
which means “steadfast love or kindness” and the adjective hasíd, meaning “gracious, constant, merciful or kind.”

These terms are indicative of God’s attitude of loyalty and fidelity, and are associated with “behaviour proper to the Covenant,” such as being in right relationship within another person, the family, the tribe, or community. Hesed is used 245 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It implies a mutuality and permanence, and is “rooted in the graciousness of God.” It appears in many books of the Hebrew Scriptures, featuring heavily in the Psalms, and in the books of the Prophets, where the people of God are called back to the Covenant. “For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love (hesed) of the LORD.”

Hesed is integral to the Exodus story: “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.” It calls the people of God to re-enact the goodness of the God who chose them and saved them.

The second word group includes the terms rahamim (noun), meaning mercy and compassion, and its associated verb

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134 Lawson, Veronica, R.S.M. “A Resource for the Study of Mercy in the Bible.” (Unpublished, 2006), n.p. It is interesting to note that in Adelaide, a Mercy-sponsored community, which works with the poor, bears the name Hesed.


136 ibid.

137 Psalm 33:4-5

138 Exodus 15:13


raham and adjective rahûm, which stem from the Hebrew word for womb rhm. Through these words, the Hebrew Scriptures convey strong feminine imagery for God. This group of words indicates profound emotion, coming from deep within a person, a sort of “womb love” or gut feeling, which moves one to pity and compassion for another, and which is expressed in action to alleviate suffering. 139 “Great is your mercy (rahamîm), O LORD; give me life according to your justice.” 140 Rahamîm and its associated terms indicate a creative, generous, nourishing and natural relationship between God and humankind.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion (raham) on his suffering ones…Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion (raham) for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. 141

The third but less frequently encountered group of

Hebrew terms includes hemlah, which indicates pity, mercy or compassion, and hamal, meaning to have pity or compassion or in

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140 Psalm 119:156
141 Isaiah 49:13. 15. At times, more than one of the mercy-related terms is used in the same verse, thus underlining how essential mercy is to Hebrew Scriptures’ understanding of the nature of God. Exodus 34:6 is one such example. “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful (rahûm) and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (hesed) and faithfulness.”
some instances, to spare someone from harm. In the second chapter of Exodus, Pharoah’s daughter opened the basket and saw the child contained within it. “He was crying and she took pity (hamal) on him.” In some instances in the Scriptures, this pity is denied. “Show them no pity (hamal) or compassion and do not shield them.”

Lastly are the terms hen, meaning grace or favour, hanan – to be gracious, hanûn – benevolent and merciful, and hanînah, cited once only, to indicate grace or mercy. In Psalm 111:4, the LORD is described as gracious (hanûn) and merciful (rahûm). In all four word groups, mercy is always relational, whether it is indicative of God’s covenant with people or the behaviour of God’s people towards one another. Mercy is dynamic, active, experiential and responsive.

There are three main mercy-related word groups in the Christian Scriptures, and one other less frequently used group. The first is eleos (noun) which means mercy, pity or

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143 Exodus 2:6
144 Deuteronomy 13:8
146 The Greek books of the first Testament that have no Hebrew text are so similar in their use of mercy-related word groups to those found in the Christian Scriptures that I have chosen to deal with the words by examining the Christian usage only. For a thorough examination of them, see Lawson, Veronica R.S.M. “A Resource for the Study of Mercy in the Bible ” (Unpublished, 2006), n.p.
compassion, and its related verb *eleeo* -to have mercy, pity or compassion, and the noun *eleemosune*, meaning almsgiving, works of mercy or charity. This term is often used in relation to or by those who were despised or outcast, such as those seeking out Jesus for healing. The blind men in Matthew’s Gospel shout out: “Lord, have mercy (*eleeo*) on us, Son of David,”¹⁴⁷ as do the ten lepers in Luke 17:12. In the face of criticism from the Pharisees, Jesus justifies his focus on sinners by saying: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy (*eleos*), and not sacrifice.’”¹⁴⁸ He is keen to show that mercy is more than a duty, and even more important than strict adherence to the Law, if that precludes the care of people.¹⁴⁹ This same word group is used in Paul’s writings in relation to salvation history and the extension of God’s mercy to Gentiles as well as to the Jewish people.¹⁵⁰

The second word group can be seen as being reminiscent of the *rehāmîm* usage in the Hebrew Scriptures. The plural noun *splugchna* literally means entrails, bowels or guts, but has the symbolic sense of a depth of feeling, or of being moved to compassion from deep within a person. The related verb *splugchnizomai* means to have compassion or pity in the depths

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 20:30
¹⁴⁸ Matthew 9:13
¹⁵⁰ ibid.
of one’s being.\textsuperscript{151} It is interesting to note that it is this verb which is used to demonstrate how Jesus was moved to compassionate action for those in need, such as towards the crowds which had followed him (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32), the leper in Mark 1:41, and the widow of Nain in Luke 7:13. The term indicates how one should act towards one’s neighbour in the face of need, and it is this term which is used to describe the response of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s parable (Luke 10:33). Again there is a sense of mercy as action that fulfils but also extends beyond the Law, for it is someone outside of the Jewish tradition who is seen as best exemplifying what brings eternal life. Powerfully, it is this term which is used to indicate the response of the loving Father towards his sinful son in the parable best known as the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20). In this way merciful, compassionate action is seen as being proper to God. It is God’s way of being moved to respond to his children. As the Australian educator Jackman notes, mercy in the life of Jesus is transformative. It is usually expressed on behalf of the powerless, and is unconditionally offered. Mercy is vulnerable and risks failure. It is initiated by the divine and expressed physically in the human. Thus it is strikingly incarnational.\textsuperscript{152}


Oiktirmos, denoting pity, compassion, mercy, sympathy, and its related verb, oiktiro and adjective oiktirmon are used in the Christian Scriptures less frequently, and most usually to refer to a characteristic of God. “Be merciful (oiktirmon), just as your Father is merciful oiktirmon).153 Again, in Corinthians, this quality is attributed to God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies (oiktirmoi) and the God of all consolation.”154

The final word group consists of the noun charis (grace, favour, credit or joy), the verbs charizomai (to give, forgive, show favour or set free) and charitoo (to bless, show grace, with God as its subject), and the verbal noun charisma (evidence of favour, benefit or gift). Charis is frequently used for the Hebrew word hesed in Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible and is sometimes linked with eleos in the Christian Scriptures.155 This word group appears mostly in Luke’s Gospel, when Mary or Jesus are described as “favoured by God”,156 and in teachings and parables of Jesus regarding cancelling debts, forgiveness and generosity of spirit.157 It is also used frequently in Paul’s writings.

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153 Luke 6:36
154 2 Cor 1:3
156 Luke 1:28, 30; Luke 2:40, 52
as a greeting: “Grace (charis) to you and peace…”¹⁵⁸ Paul draws on this terminology repeatedly to express his understanding of salvation and the generosity of God through Christ: “. . . they are now justified by his grace (charis) as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”¹⁵⁹ In his writings about the spiritual gifts, he uses the term charisma.¹⁶⁰ He calls on the early Christians to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving (charizomai) one another, as God in Christ has forgiven (charizomai) you.”¹⁶¹ In these Christian writings, God’s mercy is portrayed as incarnated in Christ, and being called forth from the believers to grace their relationships as a fitting response to God’s generosity. Mercy is personified in Jesus, is expressed in his mission to those in need and in his preaching, and looms large as a natural but challenging characteristic of a life lived in faithfulness to Jesus.

Theological Reflections on Mercy

The encyclical Dives in Misericordia, written by Pope John Paul II in 1980, describes God as “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4) and as the “Father of mercies” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Jesus is not only the one who teaches about God’s mercy in parables, but

¹⁵⁸ Romans 1:7
¹⁵⁹ Romans 3:24
¹⁶⁰ Such as 1 Cor 1:7, 7:7, and 12:4
¹⁶¹ Ephesians 4:32
the one who incarnates mercy. In Jesus, mercy, God’s special love for humanity, is definitively expressed. “To the person who sees it (mercy) in Him - and finds it in Him – God becomes ‘visible’ in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.” The Encyclical observes people today turning “almost spontaneously” to God’s mercy because of the suffering and threats they are experiencing, and parallels are drawn with the plight of people in the Old Testament. Hesed, the everlasting steadfast love of God for people who sin, who suffer, and who are called back to God by the prophets, is emphasised. God responds to the cries of his people and delivers them from their suffering (Exodus 3: 7). His attitude to Israel is pardoning, tender and intimate, and John Paul II sees this love as more fundamental than justice. The loving fidelity of God to his people is exemplified in the New Testament parable of the Prodigal Son, which the encyclical examines in some detail.

For John Paul II, the Paschal Mystery is the definitive example of mercy in action. Ironically, the encyclical uses exclusive language to express an inclusive sense of salvation. The cross is understood as the culminating revelation of mercy, “which is able to justify man, to restore justice in the sense of that

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163 ibid. 2, 3.
164 ibid. 4, 7.
salvific order which God willed from the beginning in man and, through man, in the world.\textsuperscript{165} John Paul II sees the cross of Christ as a “radical revelation of mercy, or rather of the love that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death.”\textsuperscript{166}

John Paul II names Mary as the one with “maternal charity” for mankind and the most profound knowledge of God’s mercy. As the mother of Christ, mercy incarnate, Mary “knows its price, she knows how great it is.”\textsuperscript{167} In echoing her words that God’s mercy “is from generation to generation” (Luke 1:50), John Paul II reminds the reader of the deep divisions, evils and suffering in this generation, and states that the appropriate response to these challenges will lead beyond justice. The right response will be loving, respectful of human dignity, and will bear witness to the mercy of God, as revealed in Christ. The Church must seek to make mercy “incarnate in the lives both of her faithful and as far as possible in the lives of all people of good will.”\textsuperscript{168} The encyclical states that people are called to reciprocal relationships which bring to life true equality and the forgiveness of Christ. “Mercy has the power to confer on justice a new

\textsuperscript{165} John Paul II, \textit{Dives in Misericordia}, 7; available fromhttp://www.vatican.va/; Internet; accessed 17/1/2007, 12.
\textsuperscript{166} ibid. 8, 13.
\textsuperscript{167} ibid., 9, 15.
content, which is expressed most simply and fully in forgiveness.\textsuperscript{169} In conclusion, John Paul II reminds the Church to refrain from giving mercy a secular definition, but to remember that mercy finds its source in God and that the call for mercy in this life, in this generation, needs expression in ardent prayer to God.\textsuperscript{170}

This call to prayer and right action resonates with the traditional Catholic teaching that there are actions designated as the “corporal” and the “spiritual” works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy have been those named in Matthew 25: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, ransoming the captive, and burying the dead. The spiritual works of mercy have been enumerated as instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offences willingly, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{171} The Latin American Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino has made a distinction between the principle of mercy and acts of mercy.

For Sobrino, the principle of mercy is the basic principle of the actions of God and enfleshed in Jesus, and as

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{169} ibid. 14, 25.  
\textsuperscript{170} ibid, 15, 27.  
\textsuperscript{171} Perrin, J. M. “Mercy, Works of” in New Catholic Encyclopedia. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2003), 9, 505-6.}
such, should be the basic principle of the Church. He describes mercy as primarily “a re-action to someone else’s suffering, now interiorized within oneself- a reaction to a suffering that has come to penetrate one’s own entrails and heart. Secondly, this activity … is motivated only by that suffering.” There are echoes of both the traditional works of mercy and the Biblical terminology in Sobrino’s understanding, but he is at pains to point out that mercy is much more than a sentiment or discreet charitable acts.

It is rather a consistent and radical attitude towards the suffering of another “whereby one reacts to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this reaction to the ought-not-be of another’s suffering, one’s own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance.”

For Sobrino, mercy is the test of integrity. This taking on of another’s suffering has serious implications for those who live this way. It can “de-center” or re-structure the Church, putting the suffering ones’ needs before its institutional imperatives. Following the “God of victims” will bring conflict and persecution, but living according to the principle of

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173 ibid., 18.
mercy, which Sobrino sees as a re-statement of the “preferential option for the poor,” will bring hope, the joy enunciated in the Beatitudes, and give the Church credibility.\textsuperscript{175} According to Sobrino, those who live by this principle reveal God to the world, and follow the path of Jesus. This path also demands the virtue of forgiveness.\textsuperscript{176} Obviously, Sobrino’s context of the poverty, corruption and violence of Latin America, its divided Catholic Church and his commitment to the option for the poor shape his understanding of the necessity for mercy. For him “active and effective mercy for a crucified people” is vital in the presence of “active anti-mercy.”\textsuperscript{177}

\textbf{Some Mercy Theologians and Sources on Mercy.}

Whilst the context of her writing may not be as dramatic as that of Sobrino, Australian Sister of Mercy and theologian, Patricia Fox, writes about mercy from the perspective of someone “who has for decades witnessed her sisters revealing

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\textsuperscript{175} ibid, 24-25. The Latin American Bishops’ Conferences, such as those at Medellin and Puebla, made it clear that the Good News is for the poor, and so the Church must give preference to the needs of and issues affecting the poor. See Sobrino, Jon. \textit{Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness}. Translated from the Spanish by Robert R. Barr. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), c 1988, 135. \\
\textsuperscript{177} ibid., 179. Interestingly, the South American liturgy of Trocaire also emphasizes mercy. Part of it states: “To have mercy is to have a broken heart.” Trocaire. \textit{South American Liturgy}, author’s copy, 1981.
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the face of the God of Mercy to the poor.”178 In her examination of the Vatican text “God, the Father of Mercy,” Fox is supportive of the idea that mercy is “proper to God” and claims that Scripture study would support the concept that God’s power has been “consistently manifested as steadfast, faithful love.”179

Fox is critical of the secondary use of female imagery for God in the Vatican text and of the more submissive, sweet character of those images which she feels undervalues the “tough love” inherent in rahamim. Her examination of Hebrew Scriptures leads her to the God of mercy who is “a strong and tender mother… dynamically active to save her people.”180 In contrast to strong devotional emphasis on Mary in the lives of many Catholics before Vatican II, Fox draws heavily on the work of feminist theologian, Elizabeth Johnson in her critique of the Marian title “Mother of Mercy.” Fox believes that the divine merciful attributes of a feminine God have been projected onto Mary, a much less threatening concept to a patriarchical Church. In drawing on prayers, writings of theologians, and devotions from many centuries, Fox illustrates that Mary has been named as saviour, comforter, forgiver of sins, advocate and source of life,

178 Fox, Patricia, R.S.M. “A Reading of the Vatican’s Official Catechetical Text ‘God, the Father of Mercy’” in M.A.S.T. Journal, 10/1 (1999), 32.
179 ibid.
titles proper to God. Fox proposes that Mary needed to be relieved of these projected divine attributes in order to assist women in reclaiming their dignity as created in the image of God. She quotes Sister of Mercy and ethicist Margaret Farley, who has claimed that a crucial criterion for theology is “that there be room… for women to know themselves as images of God, as able representatives of God as well as lovers of God.” She also encourages her fellow Sisters of Mercy to pay much more attention to how they name the God who impels them so that they live consistently within the charism of Catherine McAuley who sought to liberate “poor women from all that kept them bound and dehumanized.” According to Fox, it is the call of the Sisters of Mercy to “mother forth God’s mercy” in order to empower others.

Whilst Catherine McAuley certainly worked to better the lives and uphold the dignity of women, it should be noted that

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Catherine was a woman of her time. There is no evidence of Catherine making a “feminist reading” of God’s attributes. She named mercy as “the principal path pointed out by Jesus”\textsuperscript{185} and believed in a God who was steadfast and merciful. Catherine was also a nineteenth century woman in respect of her religious observance and thinking.\textsuperscript{186} She was not so much concerned with theology as with devoted service and prayer to God. The order was named as the Sisters of Mercy because its foundation house in Baggot Street, Dublin was opened on 24\textsuperscript{th} September, 1827, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. The name points to nineteenth century devotional practice rather than to feminist theology, which one should not use anachronistically.

A short examination of the songs popular in gatherings of the Sisters, such as congregational meetings, jubilees and funerals, lends support to a theology that is other than feminist. The nineteenth century hymn “Mother of Mercy”, traditionally a favourite amongst the Sisters, speaks of devotion to Mary as an intercessor to Jesus. “Jesus will give if thou wilt


\textsuperscript{186} For insights into nineteenth century Catholic devotions, a useful source is Taves, Anne. The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century America. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).
plead.”¹⁸⁷ Even an updated version, written in the mid-twentieth century by Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M., speaks of Mary as God’s “handmaiden” and of God’s “kindness and fidelity” and his love that “endures eternally”.¹⁸⁸ What is notable in post Vatican II songs of the Mercy Sisters is much less emphasis on Mary, and a greater sense of God’s mercy and Catherine’s charism. The Vatican II call to return to the sources, such as to the original vision of founders of religious congregations and to the Scriptures themselves, finds expression in these more recent Mercy hymns. The “Circle of Mercy”, which is a much-loved song among English-speaking Mercy Congregations, speaks of responding to “those who are in misery”, of mercy being “timeless” and a way to be drawn into “the loving heart of God”.¹⁸⁹ The Australian Mercy song “God’s Mercy is from Age to Age” similarly expresses the desire to respond to need and spread “mercy through our land”.¹⁹⁰ “Called to be Mercy” draws on the themes of God’s mercy, which is to be shared, and Catherine’s dream,

¹⁸⁸ “Mother of Mercy”, additional lyrics by Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M. from sheet entitled “Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
¹⁸⁹ Goglia, Jeannette, R.S.M. “Circle of Mercy” from sheet entitled “Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
¹⁹⁰ “God’s Mercy is from Age to Age” from sheet entitled “Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
“which inspires us to reach out in God’s name”. The focus is on God’s mercy and being faithful to Catherine’s vision.

American Sister, Maureen Crossen R.S.M, has also written of the importance of the Mercy of God for the Sisters of Mercy. She sees it as the foundation on which the Constitutions of the Sisters are based. According to Crossen, mercy is a mysterious gift from God which enables humans to offer mercy to others and creation. “Mercy is God’s way of being in the world…God’s response in history is through a divine pathos of mercy.” This gift of mercy summons forth “radical transformation” in people, so that “it is possible for us to love as God loves.” In reflecting on Hebrew Scripture, Crossen writes of God’s heart being stirred (Jeremiah 31:20) and of God’s love sometimes being expressed in anger at injustice and the demand for justice. This call for justice is incumbent on all who follow God, and the love of the mercy of God calls forth compassion and forgiveness, even of one’s enemies. “Mercy comes from the one who makes even the impossible possible.”

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191 “Called to be Mercy” from sheet entitled “Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
193 ibid.
194 ibid.
the mercy of God “is a way of being in the world that marks the world and history as the place of God’s profound presence.”\textsuperscript{196}

In her study of Matthew 25: 31-46, American Sister, Mary Criscione, R.S.M. suggests that the radical call to live out God’s mercy takes one beyond the strict observance of the religious rules, rituals and one’s boundaries to the sort of upending love Jesus exemplified, when he ate with sinners, healed the afflicted and ministered in a self-effacing way.\textsuperscript{197} Criscione describes Jesus’ Law-breaking righteousness to be a higher form of righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees, and sees that it brought to life his instruction to learn the meaning of “Mercy I desire and not sacrifices” (Hosea 6:6). “God’s will of mercy over sacrifice breaks rather than respects boundaries.”\textsuperscript{198} In such a way, mercy is radical and transformative.

**Catherine McAuley’s Understanding of Mercy**

Just as Scripture studies and theological reflections inform the Sisters of Mercy and their understanding of mercy, so too do the writings and example of their founder, Catherine McAuley. Catherine believed mercy was essential as a follower

\textsuperscript{196} ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} ibid., 23.
of Jesus. In her first Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, she wrote:

Mercy… has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and the dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine master, who has said, 'Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.'\(^{199}\)

Catherine identified mercy as an essential characteristic of Jesus’ mission and a requirement of his followers. The works of mercy loomed large for her.

At the bedrock of Catherine McAuley’s faith was her sense of reliance on and gratitude to a merciful God. Catherine had a deep belief in belonging to God who was central to her being. She instructed her sisters to be “as the compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its centre. Our centre is God, from whom all our actions should spring as from their source.”\(^{200}\) In the tiring and difficult times, her trust in God’s providence anchored, sustained and compelled her. She wrote to Mary de Sales White in December 1840:

We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God – for whom alone we go forward – or stay back. Oh may He look on us with love and pity,

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and then we shall be able to do anything He wishes us to do…\textsuperscript{201}

Her desire was to respond to this merciful God with unconditional trust and love, and continual service.\textsuperscript{202}

Sister M. Joanna Regan has identified Catherine’s gratitude to God as her hallmark, which then led her to respond to others with endless hospitality.\textsuperscript{203} In typical nineteenth century Catholic spirituality, Catherine saw God’s love as sustaining and trustworthy above all else, but prayed nonetheless for God’s grace and blessing. She encouraged her Sisters to have “great confidence in God” whose “infinite mercy” they experienced daily as they discharged their spiritual and corporal works of mercy “the business of our lives.”\textsuperscript{204} This duality of perspective was evident also when she explained to Sister M. Frances Warde that “while we place all our confidence in God – we must act as if


\textsuperscript{202} It is interesting to note that in a 1980’s pamphlet about the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, the Sisters wrote that “God’s mercy to us is the heart of our service to others.” “The Sisters of Mercy of Australia”, (n. d.), in author’s possession.


all depended on our exertion.” In her prayer “The Suscipe”, which underpinned Catherine’s religious life, Catherine expressed her longing for complete surrender to her merciful God.

My God, I am Thine for all eternity; teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of Thy Providence with the most lively unlimited confidence in Thy compassionate, tender pity.

Catherine’s sense of the Providence of God, a merciful God who could be trusted, was linked with an equal awareness of the reality of the Cross. Mercy, as practised by Christ, came at a price but was not to be denied. “Mercy not only bestows benefits, but receives and pardons again and again, even the ungrateful.”

One responded to God’s grace by following the example of Christ, including accepting suffering and rejection. She wrote to Sister M. Elizabeth Moore in April 1841 that

we may endeavour to prove our love and gratitude, by bearing some resemblance to Him – copying some of the lessons He has given us during His mortal life, particularly those of His passion.

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Catherine had a strong sense of salvation won through Christ’s suffering and death, and an identification with Christ in the suffering one experienced in life. Mary Vincent Hartnett reported that Catherine’s sensitivity to the suffering of others and her compassion for the suffering of Christ brought “real pain to her”. Catherine spoke of the Congregation being “founded on the cross”, and she wrote from Galway to her Sisters that “independent of the Cross, there is no crown.” When a difficulty arose or a sadness was encountered, she regarded that experience as a “portion of the cross”, or as evidence of being on the “secure high road of the cross.” In her “Spirit of the Institute”, she retold the story of St Thomas Aquinas telling St Bonaventure that the crucifix was his chief source of instruction. “It is by casting myself at the feet of Christ crucified. that I have

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made greater progress, and gained more true knowledge than by reading any Books whatsoever.”

For Catherine, the cross was the definitive merciful exemplar and a deeply meaningful motif in her faith life and in that of her Congregation. Writing to Sister M. de Sales White in England at Easter, 1841, Catherine explained how the Lenten meditations on “Christ’s humiliations, meekness and unwearied perseverance” inspired her and the Sisters to “endeavour to make Him the only return He demands of us – by giving Him our whole heart – fashioned on His own model – pure, meek, merciful and humble.”

The modelling on Christ’s example involved doing works of mercy that were essential to Christ’s mission. These compassionate acts of service to one’s neighbour were also acts of service to Christ. Catherine believed that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy

which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating them from the love of God, unite them much more closely to him, and render them more valuable in His holy service.

True to Catholic tradition, Catherine also believed good works were essential to individual salvation.

To devote our lives to the accomplishment of our own salvation and to promote the salvation of others is the end and object of our order of Mercy.\textsuperscript{217} She held it was in serving the suffering poor that one served God.

“What a consolation to serve Jesus Christ Himself in the person of the poor, and to walk the very same path He trod!”\textsuperscript{218} In serving Christ by serving the poor, Catherine believed one also gave a good example which could have a powerful and edifying affect on others.\textsuperscript{219} She instructed her Sisters to “Draw souls to god by your words, by your actions, by the works of the Institute,” and reminded them that “the proof of love is deed”.\textsuperscript{220}

From a poem attributed to Catherine McAuley\textsuperscript{221}, one gains her understanding of the power of “sweet mercy” to relieve, moderate, and forgive. It is slow to anger, compassionate to all,

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\textsuperscript{218} Mullan, Don (comp.) \textit{The Little Book of Catherine of Dublin}. (Dublin: A Little Book Company, 2005), 16.
\textsuperscript{220} Bolster, M. Angela, R.S.M. \textit{Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy}. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990), 47,75.
\textsuperscript{221} Mary Sullivan cannot rule out that “the possibility that she [Catherine] transcribed some or all of it from another, published source. See Sullivan, Mary C. (ed.) \textit{The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841}. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 387-8, n. 65. The poem is in Appendix 2 of this thesis.
\end{flushright}
and opens “in each heart a little heaven.” In modern parlance, mercy foreshadows the reign of God. Catherine’s concept of mercy is active in its response to suffering, generous, tender, trusting, ready to risk, to witness and to suffer. It is practical and compassionate. It is rooted in a steadfast God, and the way of Jesus. Thus, Catherine’s understanding of mercy shares common ground with the more recent scholars featured in this chapter. Mercy is indeed outward-looking, responsive, active and transformative. With the eyes of mercy, one sees a situation of suffering and is moved to act to comfort those affected and to improve the situation.

This chapter has presented historical and current understandings of the concept of mercy. These interpretations provide an essential underpinning to this thesis. Current Sisters of Mercy are committed to translating Catherine’s vision into new settings, such as Pakistan and East Timor, and are inspired by her story. The following chapter discusses in greater detail Catherine McAuley’s work and faith in action.

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Chapter Five: Catherine McAuley’s Life and Ministry: Faith in Action

If the Sisters of Mercy hesitate to define themselves too narrowly by particular works or even styles of theology, the Australian Sisters and their international Mercy community all affirm the significance of their foundress, Catherine McAuley. She provides inspiration and a template for their lives in ministry. The Sisters in Pakistan and East Timor have looked to the life of Catherine for principles of faith in action. This chapter examines how Catherine McAuley interwove tending to the spiritual and material needs of those who suffered, particularly the women and children of her day. It explains how her active, practical ministry developed, and how she exercised an astute, pragmatic and relational style of leadership underpinned by her faith in a merciful God.

Catherine Before Religious Life
Catherine McAuley (1778?-1841) 223 believed in the power of a good example and an active faith. In her “Spirit of the Institute” she quoted St Ignatius of Loyola:

223 Mary Sullivan R.S.M. records Catherine’s birth as September 17 or 29 in either 1778 or 1781. September 19, 1778 is generally accepted as her date of birth. See Sullivan, Mary C. R.S.M, Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 9.
In the first place, the good example which we give by leading a most holy and Christian life has the greatest power over the minds of others, wherefore we ought to take great care to edify as much as possible by our actions and words.\(^{224}\)

As a young child, she had seen her father, the affluent Catholic builder James Mc(G)auley, extending charity and religious instruction to the needy of Dublin. Whilst the family lived in comfort in Stormanstown House in the northern Dublin area of Drumcondra, James directed some of his wealth to support the poor who gathered around him for weekly catechism lessons.\(^{225}\) One of the first Sisters of Mercy, Mary Clare (Georgiana) Moore wrote of Catherine: ‘She imbibed early impressions of piety from her Father, who was very exact in all religious duties’.\(^{226}\) His twin imperatives of spiritual and material aid were to become Catherine’s *modus operandi*.

Catherine’s activism developed along with changes in fortune in the McAuley family. Catherine’s father died when she was only five years of


age, and family life became less stable in both financial and spiritual terms under in the hands of Catherine’s mother, Elinor. After Elinor’s death in 1798, Catherine, then in her twenties, lived with a series of relatives. With her cousin Anne Conway, Catherine visited the poor, tended the sick and taught children during afternoon outings in Dublin. Hand in hand with this outreach was a growing sense of the vulnerability of life, for Catherine’s Uncle Owen Conway reduced the family’s fortunes to such a dangerous level that Catherine came to know poverty first-hand.

Catherine also met religious bigotry, for when she moved to live with more distant Protestant relatives, the Armstrongs, she was less free to practise her Catholic faith. William Armstrong, a reputable apothecary, held Catholicism in contempt. Catherine’s brother and sister adopted Protestantism whilst in the Armstrong household, but Catherine did not. Biographer M. Angela Bolster R.S.M. claims that although Armstrong disliked her faith, he admired Catherine’s tenacity and commitment.

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not clear if Catherine was able to continue charitable work at that period of her life. Whilst charity may have been preferable to her Protestant relatives to formal Catholic devotions, the Protestant ethos of the time, in contrast to the Catholic tradition of monasticism, was for women to be the Christian and civilizing influence in the home.231

The next phase of Catherine’s life was a happy one, though again, she was not free in the practice of her faith. Through the Armstrongs, Catherine met William Callaghan and his Quaker wife, Catherine. This was to be a most significant friendship and provided the means to Catherine’s establishment of the House of Mercy in Dublin. Catherine moved to Callaghan’s home, Coolock House, a 22-acre estate northeast of Dublin, in 1803. She became the companion of Mrs Callaghan, and cared for both the Callaghans until their deaths. Despite the warmth of their friendship, Catherine again faced difficulties in practising her Catholic faith as William Callaghan, a member of the Church of Ireland, prohibited all “manifestations of popery” in the house.232 However, it is said that Catherine found imaginative ways of finding religious symbols with which to worship, such as finding the cross of Christ in the door and window frames or in the branches of a tree. “She

231See Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes*. rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 114-115, 169-76. There were, of course, key Catholic religious women who broke away from the monastic mould, such Mary Ward and Nano Nagle.

used to pray before the cross moulding on the door, as she dared not have any emblem of Catholicity.”

Christian charity again became the means of public faith expression for Catherine, for what the Callaghans did allow was for Catherine to assist needy people in Coolock village. She visited the sick, trained young girls, gave religious instruction to domestic staff and taught poor children at the gate lodge. One suspects that whilst the Callaghans found the practical expression of her faith more acceptable and more in keeping with Mrs Callaghan’s Quaker practices, they probably did not know the extent of Catherine’s work. In addition to giving to the poor, Catherine instructed children in the practice of their Catholic faith. One of the early Sisters of Mercy, Mary Vincent (Anna Maria) Harnett, wrote:

Her charity did not confine itself to the relief of their temporal wants only; she took pity on their spiritual ignorance and destitution, and remembering the example of her father’s usefulness, she wished in all things to prove herself the faithful imitator of his virtues. She collected the poor children of the neighbourhood in the lodge, which was placed at her

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disposal, and devoted a great portion of her time to their instruction.\textsuperscript{234}

In this way, she was both repeating the example of her father, and setting the pattern for the work of the Sisters of Mercy: an active ministry, which responded to both physical and spiritual needs, especially of the young.

Whilst living in Coolock House, Catherine also had an upsetting experience that would contribute to the shape of her later ministry in Dublin. A servant girl “whose virtue was in danger”\textsuperscript{235} came to her seeking protection from an exploitative master. Although Catherine attempted to assist the poor girl, “in consequence of the delays attendant on secular committees which were attached to the then existing houses of refuge”\textsuperscript{236} Catherine failed to protect her. This failure fuelled Catherine’s desire to set up her own place of refuge, instruction and training for vulnerable young women. After some years, thanks to the Callaghans, she was able to do so. A focus on women’s needs became a key characteristic of the Mercy Sisters’ ministry.


\textsuperscript{236}ibid.
Catherine was a Catholic of her times in that she believed Catholicism was the path to salvation, which is why she worked to convert both Mr and Mrs Callaghan to Catholicism before their deaths. Their conversions underline Catherine’s religious imperative. Her concern for the “salvation of souls” went hand in hand with her pastoral ministry in Coolock, and was to do so in Dublin and beyond.

The House of Mercy

Not long before his death, Catherine had advised William Callaghan that she wanted to dedicate herself to the protection and education of young servant girls and to teaching them the ways of Christianity. At the death of William Callaghan, Catherine was found to be the sole beneficiary of his estate. This bequest gave her the means to build a house to serve the needs of the poor and vulnerable. On the advice of her friends, Fathers Blake and Armstrong, Catherine chose a site in Upper Baggot Street, a fashionable part of town in which Catholic ministry might make an impression on the Protestant citizens. It was Reverend Armstrong’s view that Catholic institutions too often hid their lights under a bushel and operated in obscurity. He

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advised: “.. if you would have a public Institution be of service to the poor, place it in the neighbourhood of the rich.”

Catherine did, despite the opposition of her brother James who dubbed the Baggot Street project “Kitty’s folly”. On 24th September, 1827, the House of Mercy opened its doors to poor, young women. They were to be given training that would allow them to support themselves, and religious instruction – protection for body and soul.

Catherine’s desire was to serve the poor ‘because that seemed to be what God was asking of me.’ She hoped that other women of means might be drawn to offer themselves permanently, but without making vows, so that they might be at liberty to visit their family and remain with them in sickness and affliction.

Young women with a similar desire – Anna Maria Doyle, Catherine Byrn, Mary Ann Delany and Frances Warde - were amongst the first to join Catherine in her ministry at a time when Catherine herself was the legal guardian for several children of

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relatives. The women prayed together, wore modest clothing and were known amongst each other as “Sisters”.

Catherine explained life at Baggot Street to Reverend L’Estrange, O.C.D. in September 1828 in the following way:

Ladies who prefer a Conventual life, and are prevented embracing it from the nature of property or connections, may retire to this House. It is expected a gratuity will be given, and an annual pension sufficient to meet the expense a lady must incur. The objects which the Charity at present embraces are daily education of hundreds of poor female Children, and instruction of young women who sleep in the House.

Catherine was determined to create ministries of quality. She journeyed to France to observe what we might call “best practice” in education. Whilst Baggot Street was under construction, she made regular visits, thanks to her Protestant connections, to the Model School of Kildare Street to observe its modern methodology. Whilst she may have approved of its teaching methods, she was unhappy that Catholic children were being proselytised into Protestantism. One early biographer claims she took note of the names and addresses of the Catholic children there in order to later seek to enroll them at Baggot Street.

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244 Sullivan, Mary, R.S.M. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841.* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 41.
245 Harnett, Mary Vincent (Anna Maria) “Memoirs of the Life of Revd. Mother Mary Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy.” (The Limerick
Catherine was astute and a pragmatist when the need demanded. She “worked the system” to her advantage, for example, when approaching Sir Patrick Dunne’s Hospital in 1828. Writing in the third person, Mary Anne (Anna Maria) Doyle reported:

Our dear foundress, Miss Doyle, Miss Byrne and Miss Warde … went in the carriage to Sir Patrick Dunne’s Hospital where the Physicians knowing Miss McAuley’s family and friends to be all Protestants and probably supposing she and her companions were of that persuasion not only allowed them to speak to the patients, but also gave a general order for their admission in future.

Catherine used connections and her sense of how the system operated to ensure a Catholic influence in the hospital and access to Catholic patients there. By 1829, the key Mercy ministries of giving refuge to and the training of vulnerable women, visitation of the sick, poor and dying in their homes or in public hospitals, ...
the housing of orphans and the education of slum children were underway. 247

Catherine and the Sisters of Mercy

Catherine’s pragmatism was essential in the continuation of her ministry. It was from within the Catholic Church that she faced some of her greatest challenges. These required a practical and determined response. Mary Sullivan R.S.M. writes that Catherine’s Baggot Street community had “aroused intense lay and clerical criticism”, partly because it was not a religious congregation with recognized status and rule. Additionally, in some benefactors’ eyes, it seemed to be in competition with the ministry of the Irish Sisters of Charity. 248 Canon Matthias Kelly, administrator of St Andrew’s Chapel in nearby Townsend Street, felt Catherine had overstepped the mark with her ministry and wanted to turn over her property to the Sisters of Charity. 249 This brought matters to a head, and Archbishop Murray suggested to Catherine that she had founded a convent in effect, and that this required formalizing if she and her group were to continue their ministry.

247 For a clear examination of Catherine’s concerns for the poor, the sick and dying and for women, see Wheeler, Carol Estelle R.S.M. Catherine: A Reflection on Values from the Mercy Tradition. (Baltimore, Maryland: Mercy High School, 1991.) and also King, Marilyn, R.S.M. “Who are We?” in M.A.S.T. Journal 15/3 (2005), 34-38.
Consequently, Catherine and her colleagues took steps to found a religious order of women devoted to ‘the service of the poor, sick, and the ignorant.’ Catherine (then in her early fifties), Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley entered the Presentation Convent on Georges Hill, Dublin to be trained as novices, and took their vows as the first Sisters of Mercy on December 12th, 1831. Catherine and her companions were nothing short of pragmatic. For the sake of serving God through serving the poor, they were prepared to fit in with the Church’s requirements. As Catherine stated: “God can bend and change and form and re-form any of his creatures to fit them for the purpose he designs.”

This formal religious path also gave the women more legitimacy in their spiritual ministry, for their work had an undeniable religious dimension. In her “Spirit of the Institute”, possibly written as early as her novitiate period, Catherine wrote that: “To devote our lives to the accomplishment of our own salvation and to promote the salvation of others is the end and object of our order of Mercy.”

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250 Sullivan, Mary C. (ed.) The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 34.
stake than pride and independence from Church structures.

However, their unenclosed foundations gave them the means to be active and of direct practical service in the community.\textsuperscript{253} It earned them the title of the “Walking Sisters” and in Cork the “Poor, Sick Order.” By adopting an unencloistered life, the Mercy Sisters could be a visible sign of God’s mercy achieved through “the Instruction of poor Girls, Visitation of the Sick, and protection of distressed women of good character.”\textsuperscript{254} By responding to human suffering, God’s presence could be made concrete. Their example was faith in action.

Catherine’s approach to forming new foundations was positive and sensible. As their work grew in Dublin, calls came for the Sisters to minister in other parts of Ireland. Kingstown was the second foundation, established in 1835, and at the time of Catherine’s death in 1841, there were fourteen convents of Mercy in Ireland and England. Although she trusted in God’s call, she was a little more wary of man’s, and did refuse some requests from clergy for assistance if suitable leaders among the Sisters could not be found, if she felt the Sisters would be too thinly stretched by taking on a new foundation, or if financial support

\textsuperscript{253} For a short exploration of the reversal of the requirement for enclosure, see Keller, Marie Noel, R.S.M. “Holding All Your Loves Together: The Lessons of 1 Corinthians 11-14”, in \textit{M.A.S.T. Journal} 15/3, (2005), 21-22.

was lacking for their new apostolate.\footnote{Bourke, Mary Carmel R.S.M.. \textit{A Woman Sings of Mercy: Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy}. (Newtown, Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1987), 66.} When a call for help did result in a new Mercy foundation, she chose its leaders carefully, and it was her practice to stay for a few weeks to help the Sisters settle into their new situation, a sort of “maternal commissioning.”\footnote{Bolster, M. Angela, R.S.M, \textit{Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy}. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990), 49.}

In modern parlance, Catherine was a good delegator of authority and devolved power. Although she did follow her initial stay at new foundations with further visits and letters, she made it clear to the Sisters that they should make decisions to fit the local conditions. “Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings, [and these] must be yielded to when possible.”\footnote{ibid., 50.} The Mercy foundations were self-governing and independent, though they called on the Mother House in Baggot Street for support. Catherine trusted her Sisters with the responsibility of local ministry. “I leave you free to do what you think best. I am satisfied you will not act imprudently, and this conviction makes me happy.”\footnote{Bourke, Mary Carmel R.S.M. \textit{A Woman Sings of Mercy: Reflections on the Life and Spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy}. (Newtown, Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1987), 68.}

Catherine’s approach was supportive, empowering
and after all, pragmatic in a time when travel and communications were slow and difficult.

Her approach to the expanding Mercy Congregation was evident in her writings. “The Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy” was developed in a collaborative fashion with her Sisters after they studied the Rules of other Religious Congregations. It emphasizes the love of God and the poor, the importance of union and charity among the Sisters, and a balance between the active and the contemplative. More typical of Catherine’s writings were her letters—generally short, practical, relational, warm and instructive. She was a prodigious letter writer whose correspondence provided effective support, helped develop the “love and unity” she insisted upon, and created the early Mercy network. In her letters she encouraged, chatted, guided, and occasionally corrected. Her affection for her Sisters was conveyed clearly. In her correspondence she would refer to herself as “Your old mother” and “Your ever fondly attached mother in Christ” and to her sisters as “My dear child” or “My ever dear Sister”. The concerns of the present and of what comes next shape the content of the letters: the reception of new Sisters, illnesses, arrangements for travel, local issues, developments of

new foundations, practicalities, amusing poems and sad news. Her letters give the striking impression of a woman of insight, warmth, practical sense, energy, humility and abiding faith.\textsuperscript{260}

To think of Catherine only as a woman of action would be half the picture. Her activity was underpinned by great faith and spiritual practice. Catherine’s approach to her God and her understanding of Mercy are discussed in the previous chapter, but it is important to note again that for Catherine, the spiritual and the material response were necessarily intertwined. Hers was a faith that sought active expression in the salvation of body and soul. In order for Catherine and her Sisters to be effective in their public ministry, private spiritual practices were vital. In their Rule, recitation of the Office, meditation, Confession and Eucharist, and devotions to the Sacred Heart, Mary, and the Blessed Sacrament were laid down as a regular aspect of Mercy life. Their life was God-centred and God-motivated. “Catherine McAuley gave primacy to a love based on the tender mercy of God”,\textsuperscript{261} and Catherine believed her Sisters would in turn draw others to God through their good example of faith in action.

\textsuperscript{260}Sullivan, Mary C. (ed.) \textit{The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841} (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004) is a wonderful, scholarly collection of Catherine’s writings.
God’s love of the poor shaped the practical content of the Catherine’s ministry, and “God’s compassion drove her out of her private life and into the public domain.” As American Sisters, Helen Marie Burns R.S.M. and Sheila Carney R.S.M. have written:

Catherine’s heart was profoundly moved by God’s loving care in her own regard, and it overflowed with the desire to touch others in a similar manner. She longed, in particular, to offer practical assistance to those deprived of the means to live with dignity. This strong desire in Catherine’s life blossomed into a ministry and a spirituality which have influenced the lives of tens of thousands of Sisters of Mercy and many with whom they minister.  

This practical, astute and warm woman placed her confidence in God, and set in train a ministry that continues to this day to call Sisters “across cultures and faiths... to a spirituality of communion” in many parts of the world, including Pakistan and East Timor. In Catherine’s day, her Sisters ventured to many parts of Ireland and England to respond to the material and spiritual needs of the poor, particularly of women and children. Soon after her death, Sisters of Mercy travelled to

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262 O’Donoghue, Helena, R.S.M. *Catherine and Leadership.* (Presentation given at Mercy International Centre, Dublin, 2/5/03), 6. Transcript in author’s possession.
places far from home, including North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, to continue their ministry. In that way, her Sisters formed part of a growing body of women on the move and at work in the mission of the Church. It is to women’s experience of mission that this study now turns.
Chapter Six: The Experience of Women in Mission, with Some Reference to the Sisters of Mercy

This chapter provides an historical context for the work of the Sisters of Mercy today in Pakistan and East Timor. It focuses on the holistic and unique work of both Protestant and Catholic women in Christian missionary endeavours in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and gives attention to the movement of Australian Sisters of Mercy beyond home shores in the mid to late twentieth century. The nineteenth century saw women engaged in missionary work as never before, and Catherine McAuley’s Sisters were among those women who left Ireland to live in colonies and settlements around the world to respond to needs, particularly of transplanted Irish women and children. The twentieth century brought changes to women’s missionary organizations and new possibilities for Catholic women in mission. What has remained constant is concentration of women missionaries on the needs of women and children.

Women Under-Acknowledged in Mission History

This study of the Sisters of Mercy is part of a rich, but for a long time, under-acknowledged history of women’s contribution to the mission of the Church. Despite women having been followers of Jesus during his lifetime and in the early
Church, important figures in Christian spirituality and
monasticism, and key reformers, they were largely written out
of the history of the Church. Women saints, mystics, and
reformers have played second fiddle to their male counterparts in
the Catholic tradition, until feminist social historians and
theologians in the mid-1970s on sought to uncover and emphasise
their roles. Similarly, women have been under-represented in
mission histories, though in recent years, their significant
contribution has been given serious attention by academics such
as Dana Robert, Angelyn Dries O.S.F., Mary Taylor Huber,
Nancy Lutkehaus and Ruth Tucker. Kirkwood has called
missionary wives a “muted group,” a description that could be

See MacHaffie, Barbara J. Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) for a study of women from the early Church onwards. For an overview of the women in the Church during the Reformation, for example, see Cameron, Jennifer J. I.V.B.M. A Dangerous Innovator: Mary Ward (1585-1645). (Strathfield, N.S.W.: St Paul’s Publications, 2000), 65-84.


accurately applied to women on mission more generally, not only because at the time of their ministry, they lacked the clerical or official status of male missionaries, but also because church histories failed to acknowledge their contributions. From the great age of missions, the nineteenth century, and through the twentieth century, women missionaries have played particular and important but under-acknowledged roles in both Protestant and Catholic missionary endeavours.

**Mission Expansion and Women Missionaries**

The nineteenth century saw a great expansion in Christian religious endeavours, including the establishment of many Catholic orders such as the Sisters of Mercy. Within the Catholic Church, Irish and French missionary efforts took Catholicism to Africa, Asia, the Pacific and South and North America. Nineteenth century Protestant renewal, the birth of Methodism, and Evangelical Revival in England gave rise to a great multiplying of Protestant missionary bodies. The Enlightenment’s optimism about human progress was an important contributing factor towards the growth of Christian

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270 Ibid., 208ff.
missionary endeavours in that period. Missionaries became “agents of the Western imperialistic enterprise” and the “three Cs” of colonialism… Christianity, commerce and civilization.”

Bevans and Schroeder have named the role of women in nineteenth century mission history as “determined, limited and under-acknowledged” but also as “constant”. The first Protestant women missionaries were unpaid married women who accompanied their husbands on mission, willingly or otherwise. They were seen as “helpmates”, a vital support to the public, preaching ministry of their husbands, a “civilizing” influence on the mission field, and indeed, a means of ensuring the proper behaviour of male missionaries exposed to temptations away from home. The missionary wives’ first sphere was the domestic one, from which they could model strong examples of Christian family life, a “sanctified home life”.

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pointed out the irony of the “weaker sex” being seen as the
civilizing agent, an extension of their similar role in the
Victorian home of nurturing, domesticity and creating a safe place
for family life. From the heart of the home, it was believed
that the “hand that rocked the cradle” could “rule the world” or at
least could influence wider society, be it in Europe or North
America, or on mission fields. It was believed that women could
also represent the “peaceful intentions” of the mission in a
“potentially hostile environment.”

Protestant women came to take on a more active
public role in mission as it was discovered that women could gain
access to local women’s spheres, unlike their male counterparts.
They could penetrate the zenana in Indian homes, for example, or
tend to women in birthing-related matters. “Women’s work for
women” became a catch-cry for recruiting women
missionaries. As an increasing number of single Protestant

279 Flemming reports that this phrase was used by the Woman’s Foreign Mission Society of the American Presbyterian Church for their mission magazine in 1870 because it was the phrase most often used by overseas missionaries and their supporters to describe women’s missionary activity. Flemming, Leslie A. (ed.) Women’s Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989), 1.
women became missionaries and worked in the fields of medicine, education (particularly of girls), child care, preaching and Biblical translation, they experienced a greater degree of freedom than at home. Byrne has argued that the mission field involved a liberating and empowering journey for many women missionaries who experienced a God “who would take women to the furthest ends of the earth to demonstrate what this empowerment could look and feel like.” In the mission context they were able to travel, to make judgments, and to exercise leadership that was denied to them in their home Churches.

Theirs was a holistic mission, tending to body and soul, a meeting of practical needs and evangelism, but this was not without problems. For example, female medical missionaries working in a hospital setting from the 1870s on “represented both a point of contact between the women of two cultures and a site of struggle between the beliefs and practices of the medical mission and those of the patients in their care.”

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footbinding issue of the late nineteenth century saw women missionaries active in the dual purposes of enacting a healing Gospel of body and spirit. However, the “double cure” of healing patients and winning converts “was more a hope than a reality.”

284 Flemming has rightly pointed out that one needs to read stories of missionaries’ successes with some reservation, as they are told only from the point of view of the missionaries and may exaggerate the “ability of missionaries to effect lasting change.”

285 It is not sufficient to describe Protestant women’s missionary efforts as starting in the home, having a particular concern for women and children, and being practical, personal and holistic. To that characterization of social improvement and edification must be added the attitudes of cultural superiority or maternalism that were evident in women’s mission to women.

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Singh has rightly pointed out the dual rhetoric of “redemption and rescue” in women’s missionary literature.  

Flemming has noted that the denigration of local women by some women missionaries in India and the missionaries’ sense of cultural superiority pointed to an ambivalent attitude among the church personnel to their mission context.

The female missionary endeavour was also to be found in the home countries of the overseas missionaries. Protestant women supported the missions through fund-raising, publications and public-speaking in Britain, Europe, and the United States. Through membership of mission societies which promoted missionary commitment, speaking in Churches and the publication of women missionaries’ books, women at home could be informed about, share in and support their sisters overseas work. Some were even inspired to become missionaries themselves. Similarly, in the Catholic Church, fund-raising and tales of missionaries’ courage were promoted “back home”. In nineteenth century France, Pauline Jaricot was the pioneer of the

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fundraising campaign for Catholic missions, Propagation of the Faith.\(^{290}\)

Protestant women missionaries faced an array of difficulties: diseases, premature death through giving birth in difficult conditions, persecution, the death of their children, sexual discrimination, culture shock, and if their missionary husbands died, they were often expected to leave the mission and return home. As Protestant women missionary numbers grew in the early twentieth century, their separate mission bodies often merged with male mission societies\(^{291}\). Ironically, what could be seen as building gender equality brought a waning in the influence of women in formal missionary organizations. Coupled with this was the early twentieth century movement towards biblical fundamentalism and literalism in some North American Baptist Churches, and so a re-emphasis on the subordination of women to men worked to marginalize women missionaries in their missionary organizations.\(^{292}\) The year 1910 was an acknowledged high point of Protestant missionary optimism with the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh and American


\(^{292}\)Ibid.
Woman’s Missionary Jubilee occurring, but it also marked the beginning of the decline of women’s missionary agencies.  

Within the Catholic tradition, women religious led many mission endeavours. Anne-Marie Javouhey, who founded the missionary order the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny in France in 1807, is credited with “initiating nineteenth century Catholic mission efforts in Africa.” Nonetheless, Catholic women missionaries were seen as auxiliaries and subordinates to their male, clerical counterparts in the “public world of saving souls.” I have argued elsewhere that whilst Protestant women missionaries were often named, if not fully acknowledged, the story of Catholic religious sisters was obscured even more, due to the male-dominated structures of the Catholic Church and the perceived virtue of the self-effacing Sister who gave “sacrificial service.” Many know of Damian of Molokai, for example, but

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few have heard of Mother Marianne of Molokai. This underacknowledgement of women in Catholic missions reflected the dominant view that in life, women and men had separate and different spheres of influence. However, Huber and Lutkehaus have pointed out that the servitude model did not always sit well with some of the feisty women who went on mission. In step with their Protestant sisters, Catholic women missionaries were able to make contact with local women who were out of the public sphere due to cultural practices and taboos. In his study of American Dominican Sisters in Nigeria, Salamone has described competent women missionaries who set out to improve the lives of the women they encountered in Northern Nigeria. For example, Sister Marietta described her work as “to get at the women. The fathers cannot do it… African men will not let foreign men near their women. They will let us women there.”

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297 Robert describes her as “one of the first American Catholics to become a foreign missionary.” Ibid., 415.
298 This attitude was perpetuated until recent decades. For example, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, writing in the mid-twentieth century, held that men were to “rule over the external world and subject it; women’s mission is to prolong life in the world and rule it in the home.” Quoted in Dries, Angelyn, O.S.F. *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History.* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1998), 265.
Like their Protestant sisters, Catholic missionary women were often involved in a ministry that was holistic, combining concerns for the body and the worldly with those of the soul and the spirit. They, too, had a focus on women and children. However, it is interesting to note that it was not until 1936 that the Canon Law, which forbade women religious from assisting at childbirth or attending women in maternity homes, was lifted. Similarly, a 1917 Canon Law forbade women religious from practising medicine and surgery, so they were more restricted in these respects than Protestant women missionaries. However, Dries has argued that following Vatican II, more Catholic women became missionary leaders in their own right, or shared mission team direction with men. She believed they had the advantage of a shared sisterhood, with its communal living arrangements and inbuilt support system for their missionary endeavours.

The Paradoxes of Mission for Women Missionaries
For both Protestant and Catholic women on mission, their experiences contained some paradoxes. They sought to

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bring a freeing Gospel to people, whilst often being part of an imperial or colonial power that oppressed local populations.

Although the missions were often the colonial institution closest to the local people and could act as the conscience of the colonies, women missionaries were influenced by Western values and cultural norms and contributed, in some instances at least, to a “missionary imperial feminism.” Women missionaries, despite their competence and professionalism, were often denied real power by patriarchal missionary organizations and structures, whilst being given a freedom to travel, explore and to take initiatives that would have been denied them on home soil. In their studies of the Holy Spirit Sisters in colonial New Guinea in the twentieth century, Lutkehaus and Huber note the paradox of the greater freedom of these German Sisters in the mission field, but the gendered division of labour and expectations thanks to their relationship with their allied Divine Word Missionary brethren.

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Western women influenced by feminism continued to represent a missionary Church in which they themselves were marginalized.

Catholic women religious are very conscious of the ambiguity between church dogma that limits formal power to men in sacramental ministry and the range of grassroots ministries they practice on the mission field.  

Since the 1970s, Catholic women’s religious orders in the mission field have been influenced by liberation theologies which emphasized human rights, societal change, the dignity of the poor and making God’s reign manifest. There has been much less focus on individual salvation as the aim of the mission.

Maher, in her study of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Missionaries in post-Vatican II Latin America, has characterized these Missionary Sisters’ lifestyle as reflecting a desire to be in solidarity with communities of poor people….They committed themselves to accompany those communities in processes of empowerment by which the people themselves might transform their human situation.

This adoption of liberation theology and an expansion of non-missionary women’s congregations working overseas with poor

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communities, came at a time when the number of women religious fell significantly. As a result, since the 1970s, some religious orders have found their numbers stretched in their home countries. For example, when the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy considered going to Pakistan, this stretching of an already diminished number of Sisters was one of the major objections raised to the idea.\textsuperscript{309} New pursuits might bring new life to Congregations seeking to develop their identity in the post-Vatican II Church, but they could also threaten their existing ministries.

The Sisters of Mercy and Mission

The Sisters of Mercy, the focus of this thesis, were not founded as a missionary order, but rather as a group of women who responded to local need. The education of women and children, the protection of the poor against exploitation, visitation and nursing of the sick and dying, firstly in Dublin, then in provincial Ireland, were the hallmarks of the active ministry of the Mercy Sisters. However, even in Catherine McAuley’s time, Mercy endeavours reached across the sea to tend to the immigrant Irish in England, with foundations in Bermondsey in 1839 and Birmingham in 1841. Further initiatives followed in

Newfoundland in 1842, to Pittsburg in 1843, in Perth in 1846, Glasgow and Auckland in 1849, to Buenos Aires in 1856, Melbourne 1857, Brisbane in 1860, Adelaide in 1880, Belize in 1883, Jamaica in 1890, and to South Africa in 1897.\textsuperscript{310} Many of these “missions” followed and focused on Irish settlers, though they also sought to work with Indigenous people in some instances. For example, in the case of the Perth foundation, Ursula Frayne R.S.M. declared a hope to work with the indigenous people of the area. She found the Nyungar people “extremely intelligent, gentle, physically attractive, stately and majestic.”\textsuperscript{311} The ministry of the Sisters of Mercy has been motivated by a desire to respond to perceived need, and this has led them at various stages of their history to missionary endeavours.

For the Australian Sisters of Mercy, overseas outreach began in 1956 with the mission to New Guinea, undertaken by the Brisbane Congregation. In 1983, the Mercy Refugee Service was established and its work at that initial stage focused on the Indo-Chinese in refugee camps in Malaysia and Hong Kong. Its focus later widened to include other parts of Asia, as well as Africa and East Timor, and throughout its existence, it has worked closely

with the Jesuit Refugee Service. According to Margaret Moore, who worked with the Mercy Refugee Service from 1993 until 2003, the Sisters of Mercy wanted to avoid being seen as “helpmates” to the clergy and so have not fully merged their structures with the Jesuits. Whilst the Jesuit Refugee Service organised refugee projects, the Mercy Refugee Service advertised for personnel amongst the Sisters and set up their own recruitment and induction programs.\textsuperscript{312} This way of operating led to certain Australian Sisters of Mercy taking up ministry in East Timor, for example. This delineation has ensured a degree of independence and control for the Sisters, though it has not been without its problems.\textsuperscript{313}

In 1993, Mercy Overseas Aid was formed to support health, welfare, advocacy and other services and programs that would help and empower women, refugees and other disadvantaged groups.\textsuperscript{314} Today its successor, Mercy Works, co-ordinates the overseas support of Australian Sisters of Mercy working in Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, South East Asia and Africa, as well as those assisting Aboriginal, refugee and asylum-seeking people within Australia. This, like the Mercy Refugee Service, is a national body, and it allows the Sisters and their

\textsuperscript{312}Moore, Margaret R.S.M. \textit{Interview with author.} (Melbourne, 28/8/06), 1.
\textsuperscript{313}See Carole McDonald’s comments in Chapter 12 of this thesis.
collaborators to manage and sustain these overseas works. Whilst the organization of the Mercy Refugee Service and Mercy Works has evolved over time, they have been initiated and administered at a national Institute level from the outset, in contrast with the initial work in Pakistan led by the Melbourne Congregation and the Ballarat Congregation’s work the East Timorese people in Ballarat.

This chapter has described the position of both Protestant and Catholic women missionaries. Women have contributed greatly to the work of the Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in ways that have not been accessible for men. Their ministry has been practical, a combination of care for body and soul. The Sisters of Mercy, though not strictly a missionary order, have fitted into that holistic role. This study now turns to recent Catholic missiological thinking as part of the religious context of the Sisters’ work with the people of Pakistan and East Timor.
Chapter Seven: Some Developments in Catholic Missiological Thinking

This chapter provides a snapshot of some of the missionary documents and missiological thinking in the Catholic Church in the second half of the twentieth century, when the expansion of the Sisters of Mercy’s endeavours into Pakistan and East Timor took place. The discussion will move through an account of changes in Catholic approaches to mission, to the increasing awareness of the “option for the poor” and liberation theology, and the “corrective” to those offered by Papal documents. Finally there is a brief consideration of how theories of mission may have influenced the Sisters of Mercy in Australia.

Changes in Catholic Approaches to Mission

Changes in mission in the latter half of the twentieth century were in response to criticisms of Western missionaries “saving souls, planting churches, and imposing their ways and wills on others”. As missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder recently concluded, mission in the late twentieth century could no longer be conceived in terms of church expansion, individual conversion ensuring salvation, support for

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colonial powers, and conferring the blessings of a Christian, Western civilization on peoples in a “non-Christian or religiously underdeveloped South”.  

Nineteenth century Catholic missionary activity had been cultivated in part due to Papal centralization. This brought about the re-establishment of the Jesuit Order, as well as the recovery of French orders lost in the Revolution, and the establishment of new orders which were either entirely mission-focused or which gave substantially of their resources to mission work.  

Devotional Catholicism grew popular in the nineteenth century, possibly in response to the intellectualism of the Enlightenment, and led to a desire amongst some to serve the Lord in new fields. As well, an awareness of the missions in Catholic circles was generated by the organization, the Propagation of the Faith, founded by Pauline Jaricot, through which ordinary Catholics could support the missions. Until recent decades, the mission box was a fixture in Catholic schools, and it was a way of raising awareness of missionary endeavours.

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as well as raising money for the missions. Publications like *Annals of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith* educated generations of Catholics about missionary efforts, and inspired support as well as new missionary personnel.\(^{318}\)

The renowned Protestant missiologist, David Bosch, asserted in the 1990s that mission was never only an “empirical project”\(^{319}\), and that it strove to be more than simply a “cargo cult” or practical aid. That “more” was the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. Emphasis on “the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus”\(^{320}\) was a distinguishing trend in late twentieth century missionary enterprises and documents in the Roman Catholic Church. A humbler, more open and respectful approach that took people’s lived experience seriously was required of those “preaching, serving and witnessing to the


work of God in our world”. Missionaries could then be described as living and working as partners with God in our world…. in the patient yet unwearyed work of inviting and persuading women and men to enter into relationship with their world, with one another and with Godself.

In the decades following World War II, the change in approach to missionary activity was not confined to the Catholic Church. Thinking shifted from “missions” to “mission”, that is, Jesus’ mission, as denominations re-evaluated and re-constructed their missionary endeavours. R. Pierce Beaver wrote in the 1960s of the adoption of dialogue as a necessity in communicating the Gospel. He noted that “Christians are trying to put off their sinful spiritual pride and infuriating attitude of superiority with respect to each other and persons of other faiths.” From the time of Vatican II, the Catholic Church’s official statements on mission have reflected this more self-effacing, respectful and engaged approach. A brief examination of key developments in Catholic missiology will illustrate both this more open approach and the internal tension it has engendered within the Catholic Church.

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322 ibid.
Since the 1960s, Vatican documents have reflected a sense of engagement with the world, whilst retaining a fundamental understanding of mission in religious terms. One of the sixteen documents produced at the Second Vatican Council, Ad Gentes, recognized that the pilgrim Church was “missionary by her very nature”. Strikingly, the document announced that the laity had a role in proclaiming Christ by word and deed. Indeed, through Baptism, all followers of Christ had a call to expand and develop Christ’s body in the world. However, the role of the “professional” missionary was still seen as an exulted one which required noble attributes and special spiritual and moral training. The desired characteristics of the missionary included being ready to take initiative, being steadfast, persevering, patient, strong of heart, open-minded, responsive, and “a man of prayer”. Whilst the gendered language might grate on the present-day reader, the picture was of an active, responsive but sensitive person with a sound spiritual basis, someone who needed to be resilient in the work of God.

Paul VI echoed the call to bring the Good News to the poor in his landmark Apostolic Exhortation “On Evangelization


\[326\text{Ibid., 25, 615.}\]
in the Modern World” (Evangelii Nuntiandi) in 1975. However, the document was concerned in part with countering the growth of liberation theology, which shall be explored later in this chapter.\textsuperscript{327} Paul VI saw proclamation of the Good News of the kingdom of God as an essential task of the Church. To evangelize, the Church first had to be “evangelized herself”\textsuperscript{328} and then continue to respond to God’s call.

Paul VI recognized the evangelization of cultures as being of the utmost importance. The human person was named as the starting point for evangelization. The need to constantly return to the person’s relationships with others and God as reference points in the process of evangelization was acknowledged.\textsuperscript{329} The interplay of the Gospel and life could not be denied, and this had implications in the mission context and “at home”.

The church ... has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children – the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization.\textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{329}Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{330}Ibid., 95.
A promise of heavenly rewards was not sufficient. Rather, those involved in the mission of the Church needed to work for the amelioration of this life, according to Evangelii Nuntiandi, though it did not advocate liberation theology.

John Paul II, elected Pope in 1978, was shaped by his experience of Communist Poland, and so was a critic of the Marxist influences in liberation theology. Against them he emphasized the unchanging and saving message of the Gospel, whilst affirming that religious truth could be translated meaningfully into different cultural contexts. For example, in his address to indigenous people in Alice Springs in November 1986, John Paul II stated:

> Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God...Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.\(^{331}\)

Indeed John Paul II believed culture was the vehicle through which to express and spread the Good News. Catechesi Tradendae, promulgated by John Paul II in October 1979, held that catechesis had its origins in Jesus’ ministry, and was an essential aspect of the Church’s mission. The document stated

\(^{331}\) Address of Pope John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 29 November 1986, 12 (North Sydney: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, c 1986), 5-6.
that all Christians needed continual catechesis and that it was a
ministry shared by all members of the Church. In using the
term “inculturation” for the first time, John Paul II was
acknowledging cultural and religious thinking of the 1950s and
1960s. He stressed that the Gospel message needed to be
expressed within and in dialogue with cultures, but that it would
seek to transform and regenerate them. Again, the reality and
setting of people’s lives were taken seriously, but there was less
emphasis on social, political or economic liberation.

The belief in the unchanging truth of the Gospel was
reiterated in John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* of December
1990. The proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour was re-
emphasized as essential missionary activity. John Paul II’s
Christocentric document “sought to counter various movements
within the church which were de-emphasizing ... Christ and the

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church’s central role in the history of salvation”. Whilst this can be seen as a cautionary note struck about interreligious dialogue, alongside the reserve was a vision of people of various faiths sharing dialogue for the sake of “integral development, social justice and human liberation.” In later sections of the document, John Paul II recalled the Pentecost event and re-stated the urgency of proclaiming the Good News. He instructed that the evangelizing Church must employ methods that are based on Jesus’ pedagogy. The proclamation of the Gospel must be confident yet humble, faithful, respectful, dialogical and inculturated. In undertaking the dual and difficult tasks of dialogue and proclamation in a “climate of expectation and listening”, Christians would be assisted by paying close attention to the way in which Jesus conducted his mission. This may well have encouraged the Sisters of Mercy, among other Catholics in Australia, to continue their use of dialogical pedagogy in their schools and tertiary training institutions of the 1980s.

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336 *Redemptoris Missio* 44, in ibid., 187. This desire by John Paul II for dialogue was demonstrated by his initiative of holding an inter-faith gathering in Assisi in October 1987 to pray for peace.
338 Ibid., 85-6, 198.
The Vatican statements in the last third of the twentieth century emphasised Jesus’ saving mission and his definitive modeling of the Church’s missionary work. They are pervaded by a call to engagement with the world, but caution being too much “of the world.” True liberation in this missiological tradition is a spiritual quest with Jesus as its source and destination, not a programme of social and economic reform.

**Increasing Awareness of the “Option for the Poor” and Liberation Theology**

The practical and political implications of engagement with the world have certainly been controversial in the recent decades in the Catholic Church. From the time of the Latin American Bishops’ at Medellin in 1968, the concept of engagement with the poor of the world, of the “preferential option for the poor,” became a catch cry in the documents issued from various synods of Bishops. The 1971 Synod of Bishops declared action on behalf of justice to be a “constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” and of the “Church’s

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mission for the redemption of the human race”. This prioritizing of poor people and their needs signalled what could be considered a restatement of the “agenda” of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus’ mission: “to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). The growth of Latin American liberation theology, with its emphasis on critiquing political and social structures, encouraged this view of the mission of the Church “from below,” and practical action taken with and on behalf of the poor. Proponents of this “praxis model”, such as Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino and the Franciscans Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, challenged the church to “right action” or “ortho-praxy”. The starting place for liberation theology was the concrete experience of oppression and injustice. It called for scriptural re-reading and reflection in the light of that experience, and then for action as the fruit of theological process. Liberation theology both amplified and made vulnerable the Church’s option for the poor.

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The Marxist influences inherent in the ideological framework of liberation theology provoked condemnation at the highest level of the Catholic hierarchy. *The Instruction on Liberation Theology*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984, and approved by John Paul II, made it clear that whilst the “preferential option for the poor” was a legitimate call within the Church, concepts borrowed from Marxism used “in an insufficiently critical manner” were “damaging to the faith and to Christian living”. 342 This document was followed in 1986 by the *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*. It linked sin and unjust structures, recalled the liberating acts of God, the teachings of the prophets and Good News of Jesus for the poor, and placed liberation squarely in the social doctrine of the Church. This later document was more tempered towards the Latin American experience. There was much in it that affirmed the central claims of the liberation theologians, whilst reminding its audience that true liberation would be found in its fullest expression in the Kingdom of God, and would be not totally fulfilled in this life. However, it implied strong criticism of the contextual method, and it cautioned theologians not to project

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onto the Word of God meanings that “it does not contain” and instead allow the “pastors of the Church, in communion with the Successor of Peter” to discern the authenticity of the experience of the Church.  

The “option for the poor” that the liberation theologians claimed for the Gospel brought to the fore the social and political divides that had long existed within Latin American societies. It also created martyrs, such as El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero, lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Australian Josephite Sister Irene McCormack. Martyrdom served as both a sobering reminder of the cost of the Gospel and an inspiration to others within the Church to continue the mission to and with the poor.

In their analysis of Christian missions, Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today, Schroeder and Bevans have offered a model of mission which synthesises the key elements of the late twentieth century mission theology. They


344 Jon Sobrino gives a list of 36 religious who were “persecuted and assassinated for the reign of God in Central America” between the years of 1971 and 1982, but admits there were many other lay people, human rights activists, and Protestant church workers who were killed “for the reign of God.” See Sobrino, Jon. The Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness. Translated from the Spanish by Robert R. Barr. (Marknoll, New York: Orbis Books, c1988), 87-88.
have named this as “prophetic dialogue”. It is a mission involving the baptized to witness and proclaim, to live in the light of faith, both as individuals and as a corporate or institutional body. According to this model, the proclamation of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection and the call to live in his way again needs to be embodied by individuals and church communities. As Bosch wrote: “The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty.” Believers must worship, pray and contemplate, and so be able to live according to the Good News and be ready to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The mission is cosmic in scale, directed at all of creation, and offers holistic salvation. It is a mission that involves inter-religious dialogue, inculturation and reconciliation.

The church, in this model of mission, is a sacrament, servant and herald. It takes its context seriously, critiques society, and whilst it is active in the world to bring it to wholeness, it is not of the world. It invites, responds to questions and problems, it is humble and vulnerable, and especially attentive to and respectful of the poor and marginalized. Echoing Redemptoris Missio’s words that mission today is paradoxically a “single,

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346 Bosch, David quoted in ibid., 359.
347 ibid., 351.
complex reality”. Bevans and Schroeder point to the “centrality of Jesus Christ, the importance of the church, the urgency of the message in the light of the world’s end, the proclamation of salvation, the importance of the human person and human culture”

as being constants in mission. The challenge to be sensitive to developments in politics, culture, spirituality and thinking forms part of the context for mission today. This dynamic activity, the mission of God,

must be dialogical, since it is nothing else finally than the participation in the dialogical nature of the triune, missionary God. But it must be prophetic as well, since… there can be no real dialogue when truth is not expressed and clearly articulated.

Through this model, the different strands and tensions of Catholic missionary thinking in recent decades are drawn together to form a new pattern for mission.

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349 Ibid.

Changed Theories of Mission and the Australian

Sisters of Mercy

How might the recent writing on mission have impacted on the Sisters of Mercy as they have considered their recent overseas initiatives?

The Sisters of Mercy do not have a self-concept of being a missionary order in the traditional sense of being sent to foreign lands to convert and save souls, so they are not as well-versed in missiology and cross-cultural training as an order such as the Columban Fathers whose charism is squarely mission-focused. Nonetheless, some of the Sisters interviewed for this study had undertaken training at the Columbans’ Mission Institute at Turramurra in Sydney.351

There they gained a good grounding in missiological thinking. Other Sisters brought a more general awareness of the missionary heritage of Irish Catholicism and of developments in Church thinking to their work. All were used to praying for and supporting missionary efforts. The language of Jesus’ mission, of the Gospel call to bring the Good News to the poor, was evident in the Sisters’ documents and discussions. The first National Chapter Statement of the early 1980s, a most significant document for the newly united Australian Sisters of Mercy, spoke

351“Nola” R.S.M. was one such case. “Nola”, R.S.M. Interview with author. (Ballarat, 21/2/06), 1.
of God’s work and Jesus’ mission as “a work and mission of liberation”\textsuperscript{352}, and pointed to the call of the “poor, sick and ignorant of our world .. calling us to choose again with a new consciousness our stance among them.”\textsuperscript{353} The statement acknowledged that “this may involve a serious consideration of what it means to take a ‘preferential option’ for the poor.”\textsuperscript{354} Whilst this option was discussed in local Australian terms, it is not difficult to imagine how this statement was extended to include overseas ministries. In fact, when Gabrielle Jennings sought responses from Sisters in the Melbourne Congregation to the idea of a foundation in Pakistan, references abounded to the National Chapter’s call to work with the oppressed and respond to “the cry of the poor”.\textsuperscript{355} In addition, the Sisters’ reading may well have encouraged this stance with the poor and developed it in recent decades. For example, when approached for some guidance as to readings on “mercy”, Madeline Duckett R.S.M. recommended the liberation theologian Jon Sobrino.\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{353}ibid.
“Mercies are doers”, proclaimed Kathleen Tierney R.S.M., current leader of the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy at the Eucharist to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Sisters’ arrival in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{357} The Mercies are practical, needs-driven women, and so it is in responding to others’ need that they have moved beyond ministry located in their home Congregations. In this day and age, their work is not considered in terms of “saving souls” but of walking with and working with those in need in the context of a religious commitment to the Good News of Jesus. Chapter statements of the Sisters since the 1980s testify to the “option for the poor”. For the Sisters, Jesus’ ministry to the outcast and Catherine McAuley’s response to the poor of her day have long been the living documents and templates for their work. This work, though generally not described by the Sisters as “missionary”, is placed squarely within the mission of the Church. Their approach as practitioners in that mission will be the focus of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{357}Tierney, Kathleen, R.S.M. “Occasional Address at the Eucharistic Celebration of the Sisters of Mercy 150 Years in Melbourne, 1857-2007”. (Melbourne: St Patrick’s Cathedral, 11/03/07).
Chapter Eight: The Australian Sisters of Mercy and Their Approach to Mission in Pakistan and East Timor

In this chapter I draw fruitfully on Stephen Bevans’ essay “Seeing Mission Through Images”, in which he describes eight different yet sometimes overlapping approaches to mission, in order to explore how the Australian Sisters of Mercy have approached their ministry with the Pakistani and East Timorese people. Interesting and useful as missiological models are, the Mercy missionary experience in the East Timorese and Pakistani contexts is better captured in a series of images. The Sisters see themselves as doing mission-related work because they are religious women who wish to relate to, accompany and help people in need. Their 2005 Direction Statement echoed this understanding.

We are women of mercy, passionate and practical, vulnerable with the vulnerable. Women in relationship – aware of interdependence with all creation; women of diverse gifts, influenced by local and global concerns, moved to action by gospel imperative: “Go out. . . Welcome in.”

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Thus, a framework that highlights a personal, relational aspect to mission is appropriate here.

Bevans contends that the images of treasure hunter, teacher, prophet, guest, stranger, migrant worker, partner and ghost are the lenses through which missionaries view their role\textsuperscript{360}, and which help us see the shape of their commitment more clearly. These images go some way to accurately characterising the approach of the Sisters of Mercy in their work with East Timorese and Pakistani people, but additional material drawn from interviews, written responses and secondary sources is needed to more faithfully describe the Sisters’ approach. The evidence suggests that the Sisters have a sense of being active, practical and competent women with skills to share, women who are open to others and wanting to respond to need. In some instances, they are the wise grandmotherly women who relate with warmth and authority to younger locals. The perspective examined in this chapter is largely that of the Sisters themselves. Due to ethical and safety considerations, I was not able to contact the East Timorese or Pakistani people with whom they have worked. A valuable source of information has not been tapped.

The Missionary as Treasure Hunter and Teacher

Bevans wrote of the “treasure hunter,” as a missionary who has “some idea of the worth of the treasure buried in the soil of another people”, and the “missionary as teacher” as one who assists his or her “students” to become aware of how much they already know. Such missionaries hold the hope or belief that the people with whom they work have the means to transform their own lives. Rosemary Patterson, R.S.M. went to East Timor after the crisis of 1999, with the aim of being a teacher educator, one who built on the skills and experience of those already working in schools. She found that due to an educational setting and practice that were very different from that in Australia, her expectations had to be re-assessed.

I had no idea until I experienced it that the (local) teachers’ only method of learning was rote learning. They had no curriculum to follow and were teaching everything from what they knew themselves.

Rosemary realized that the leadership skills which she had assumed people would have and which she hoped to develop further were lacking due to the long years of colonialism followed

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362 ibid., 161.
363 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 31/05/06), 1.
by Indonesian occupation.\textsuperscript{364} In addition, the people were still experiencing trauma after the 1999 destruction of much of Dili and many other parts of the country.

The people were always smiling but filled with apathy. I had no idea of the fear and lack of trust that was so much part of their lives.\textsuperscript{365}

In coming to terms with the reality she faced in East Timor, Rosemary taught English in junior secondary schools in Maliana and Luro, and befriended people. “It was a huge learning curve for me, with the first step being to become their friend and form a relationship with them.”\textsuperscript{366} It was towards women that she gravitated. “Women talked to me more, they are the ones who collect water. I naturally had more contact with them.”\textsuperscript{367} Echoing Bevans’ observation that a missionary operating out of the image of “teacher” should also learn from his or her “students” (those to whom he or she ministers), Rosemary became aware of the gifts of the East Timorese people: their endurance, flexibility and sound observational skills. She learned to rethink her assumption that people needed to be qualified in order to work effectively in health and education\textsuperscript{368}.

More recently, in her Australian-based work for Carmelite

\textsuperscript{364}Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M., “Questionnaire”, (Melbourne, February 2006), 1.
\textsuperscript{365}Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M., “Questionnaire”, (Melbourne, February 2006), 1.
\textsuperscript{366}Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{367}Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 31/05/06), 2.
\textsuperscript{368}Ibid., 3.
ministries in East Timor, Rosemary has turned to the example of Catherine McAuley for guidance.

Catherine walked with people and I am learning to apply this now. Catherine had the patience to walk with the needy and know how to do this in her time. I am needing to learn how to do this in the twenty-first century.  

The mutual learning of “teacher” and “student” was not only confined to the Sisters’ work in East Timor. Carmel McCormick, R.S.M. found that in Peshawar, Pakistan, she too learned and received from the local people with whom she worked. She cited the example of women who said: “It is my duty”, and the great commitment of people to one another, especially in difficult times, such as funerals. “Noreen”, R.S.M. wrote that during her times at Notre Dame Institute of Education in Karachi what helped sustain her were the relationships she had formed. “My work with the students and interaction with them, staff and other people on campus was life-giving and sustaining.” Bernadette Marks R.S.M. also commented on the resilience of the Pakistani people in the face of the great daily challenges they face. “They are very creative, and taught us about putting up with a lot.”

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369 Ibid.
370 McCormick, Carmel, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/06/06), 2.
372 Marks, Bernadette, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide., 21/9/06), 3.
The Missionary as Prophet

Bevans identified the missionary as “prophet,” one who calls for the often difficult transformation of society. For practical and political reasons in both East Timor and Pakistan, the Sisters of Mercy did not operate in such a bold or dangerous way. In East Timor, which has been trying to rebuild itself after the destruction of 1999 and more recent violent outbreaks, the Sisters have been involved in restoration rather than the denunciation of ills in society. In Pakistan, as Western Church workers, it is not always easy to obtain entry visas. As part of a disadvantaged Christian minority, the Mercies would risk much if they became too vocal. It could be said that their Pakistani ministries are concentrated in institutions. Nonetheless, small gestures speak of this prophetic thread in missionary life. For example, a Sister of Mercy announced the birth of a baby girl with equal joy as that of a boy, or a Sister worked in small ways to counter some of the negative effects of local midwifery beliefs and practices. Additionally, the inter-faith, inter-regional student population at Notre Dame Institute of Education in Karachi can be seen as potentially transformative, breaking down barriers between faiths and ethnicities. The Sisters stated at their Assembly in Pakistan on the occasion of their tenth anniversary in that country:

In the midst of constraints of all kinds, and the constant threat of violence, our women continue to stand in

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solidarity with the women and children, trying to model an alternative value system.\textsuperscript{375}

The tentative language points to the context of their work in Pakistan, and the limitations placed on their hope to empower and liberate. As Carmel McCormick R.S.M. stated:

We had to have some humility and realize the limitations of our ministry. We enabled women to do some things, but the difference we made is minute given the cultural limitations.\textsuperscript{376}

In a Western setting, Sisters were able to use their experience, particularly regarding East Timor, and assume to a greater extent the role of prophet. In Australia, they have advocated for the rights of East Timorese people or the need for action by the Australian Government. Anne Forbes R.S.M. escaped from East Timor as the post-referendum destruction gained momentum in September 1999. Upon her return, she was interviewed by Australian and overseas television and radio networks. An Australian radio journalist, Neil Mitchell, took exception to Anne saying that the destruction was caused by the Indonesians “at their worst.” He felt it wasn’t very charitable for a Sister to make such a comment, and ended the interview prematurely.\textsuperscript{377} Perhaps he could not reconcile his image of the “good sisters” with political advocates. Anne urged the

\textsuperscript{375}“Pakistan Assembly” in Tracking Mercy, (March 1996), 5.
\textsuperscript{376}McCormick, Carmel, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/06/06), 5.
\textsuperscript{377}Forbes, Anne, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 12.
Australian Government to send troops to restore the peace in East Timor. Being part of advocacy groups, such as Friends of East Timor networks, has been typical of the Ballarat Congregation’s approach to East Timor, and this advocacy included the call to transform East Timor into an independent nation.

**The Missionary as Guest**

Another of Bevans’ images is the missionary as “guest,” preferably a humble, respectful guest, not an arrogant visitor.\(^{378}\) The Sisters of Mercy have been careful to cultivate the former attitude. Janice Geason R.S.M., who has been involved in Pakistan as Melbourne Congregational leader, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia leader and teacher educator at Notre Dame Institute of Education, named being sensitive and respectful of the ancient culture of Pakistan and “not acting like all-knowing Westerner” as part of the challenge of the work there.\(^{379}\) As Anne Foale R.S.M., who worked in health care in East Timor, wrote:

> I think the time is past that ‘missionaries’ launched into other cultures (including ‘youth’ culture) to proselytize and convert. Today, we need to maintain respect for people’s culture, language and beliefs, and continue to live out our faith in Jesus.\(^{380}\)

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\(^{379}\) Geason, Janice, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/06/06), 2.

\(^{380}\) Foale, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (September 2006), 8.
This points to the importance of witness of the guest missionary, and a healthy letting-go of control and power, so that one is open to receiving from another. This can seem to be the reverse of the traditional understanding of Christian service. Such openness demands a humility and mutuality of the missionary. Carmel McCormick R.S.M. spoke of this when she fondly remembered how a fellow teacher at the school in Peshawar often brought her a cooked lunch.\footnote{McCormick, Carmel, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/06/06), 4.} Carmel also praised the generosity of people who shared their coconut milk drink after the day’s fasting during Ramadan, and of the poor who shared their rice with the Sisters. She also noted how people would buy special things for their guests.\footnote{ibid., 2.} The Mercies, who have the dictum of providing “a comfortable cup of tea”, were recipients of that same hospitality, both in a physical and spiritual sense. Carmel spoke movingly, too, of an old, ill woman for whom the Sisters had cared and had visited in hospital. The woman survived unexpectedly, and later massaged Carmel’s arms and legs in thanks.\footnote{ibid.}

The Missionary as Stranger and Migrant Worker

Very soon after going to Pakistan in 1985, the Sisters of Mercy made the decision to wear local dress, the \textit{shalwar}
From a practical point of view, it was comfortable, and culturally, it would allow the Sisters to dress in a way that was respectful of social mores. It also set them apart from many other Congregations in Pakistan. Nonetheless, as Western, professional, educated women belonging to the Catholic Church, they would always be the “stranger,” in Bevans’ terminology, in Pakistan. The Sisters admitted that themselves.

As Sisters of Mercy living in the Christian community, and trying to identify with them, we too experience living on the edge of insecurity, the insecurity of always being a foreigner.

Similarly in East Timor, the local concept of a “madre” (religious sister, literally “mother”) is one who wears a veil and a habit, unlike the Mercy Sisters. Additionally, they have distinguished themselves in East Timorese society by not establishing a religious congregation there. “Nola”, R.S.M. commented:

It is most unusual for them (the East Timorese) to have only one Sister (in their community). They are used to communities of sisters, a different model of religious life. I am asked when someone else is coming to live

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386 Newsletter of the Sisters of Mercy, Pakistan. 1/2 (March 1993), 1.
with me, when the Mercies are going to take candidates.\footnote{“Nola” R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 21/02/06), 3. Pseudonym used for ethical reasons.}

However, as a stranger, one can be in a position to help people understand their culture from another point of view or add a new perspective. “Nola” R.S.M., for example, is in a unique position as a Western woman in her village: “I sit with the men at meetings, but also talk with the women, so I have a foot in both camps.”\footnote{ibid., 2.}

Paradoxically, the missionary can also become a stranger in his or her own culture upon return, again bringing new insight into what had previously been thought familiar. Maureen Sexton R.S.M. echoed this sentiment.

While I became more settled and at home over time in my stay in Pakistan, I was always an ‘outsider’. Coming home I felt an ‘outsider/insider’ and still today I feel this – in fact I feel it is important to hold on to this feeling. I have a sense that my experiences are every missionary’s and as such are important for the whole Mercy group.\footnote{Sexton, Maureen, R.S.M. “Memories of Gujrat.” in A Tribute to Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. : The Australian Sisters of Mercy in Pakistan: An Edited Collection of Material on the Australian Mercy Story and Ministries in Pakistan from Unfinished Research Papers and Interviews Conducted by Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M., 25th March 1933- 7th January, 2003, compiled by Mary Stainsby R.S.M., 40, in Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 720/289 (11).}
Bevans’ category of missionary as “migrant worker” also encompasses the sense of someone who is an outsider, but who has the added difficulty of being viewed with suspicion or being engaged in unpopular or unappreciated work. This is the image of a vulnerable missionary. Whilst the Sisters have not viewed their work in Pakistan or East Timor with such negativity, they did admit a sense of vulnerability at times. This vulnerability was particularly evident when several Sisters became gravely ill during the early years in Pakistan. Some of the Sisters experienced a “home invasion” along with other Church workers in Lahore, bomb scares and civil unrest, and tension at certain times during the Gulf War and Iraq War. In East Timor, Anne Forbes was present for the referendum and left East Timor in the face of escalating violence in September 1999. The ministry of Sisters against the backdrop of various Australian Government travel warnings points to the dangerous context of the Mercy involvement with the people of East Timor, and the vulnerability it entailed for the Sisters.

The Missionary as Partner

Bevans characterised one missionary approach as that of a “partner” who needed to have “a strong sense of the fundamental equality of the church they are forming.” Learning to be a partner, not a servant or a ruler, is indeed a challenging way of ministry. This term echoes much of what the Sisters have described as their approach to mission, though they did not consciously think of it in terms of forming the church, but rather as assisting people to live more fully. Whilst the Sisters are conscious of working through institutional church structures and are well-formed in the Vatican II ecclesiology that speaks of the Church as the people of God, their primary focus is on people and their needs. Phrases and words such as “accompany the poor”, “enable”, “be with, speak for the poor”, “empower and educate,” “work alongside” peppered the interviews I conducted with the Sisters and their written responses to the questionnaire. This could be indicative of the influence of liberation theology of the 1970s. Margaret Moore R.S.M., commented on this ministry of accompaniment and partnership: “We are in someone else’s garden and we are helping them to till their soil.” This is indeed

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393 Moore, Margaret, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 28/08/06), 2.
a challenge for educated, professional Western women as has
been noted previously.

Partnership has also occurred on a more formal basis,
through working with the Catholic Church and Bishops of
Pakistan, for example. It was a request from the Catholic
hierarchy in Pakistan that brought about the Mercy initiatives in
Pakistan. The Sisters lived within the Church compound in
Gujrat, and near the Cathedral in Karachi. They have run Church
schools and a hospital, a teachers’ college, welfare services, and
sat on educational advisory committees, so they are inextricably
and necessarily linked to the Catholic Church in Pakistan. As one
group within a minority religion in Pakistan, it would be
impossible to work without the legitimacy of the hierarchy’s
auspices. Whilst the devotional and in some cases, pre-Vatican II
style of Catholicism found in Pakistan has been very different
from the Church to which the Sisters belonged in Australia, they
have learned to adapt. For example, Lexie Brooks R.S.M.
incorporated locally popular dramatic devotions into Holy Week
ceremonies in Gujrat.394 The relationship with the hierarchy has
been a mutually beneficial one. For example, Carmel
McCormick R.S.M. commented that the Sisters sometimes acted

394Doherty, Laura. “Embodying a Tradition: The Australian Sisters of Mercy in
Pakistan”. (Qualifying Essay, Masters in Theology. Melbourne College of Divinity,
2004), 44.
as a “sounding board” for one Bishop regarding his hopes and vision, and that the local Church hierarchy relied on the Sisters for professional organization and management of services. 395

Through the development of Notre Dame Institute of Education, the Sisters have also established formal links with Karachi University and the Australian Catholic University.

Partnerships have also occurred in the work of the Sisters in and for East Timor. These include relationships with local service clubs 396 and various Australian/East Timor Friendship networks. Most importantly, the work of the Sisters in East Timor built on the established relationship the Mercy Refugee Service had with the Jesuit Refugee Service,

The Mercy Refugee Service was formed in the 1980s when the first Australian Sisters felt called to work in South-East Asian refugee camps. As the need for structures became obvious, the Sisters looked to the model that the Jesuit Refugee Service had developed. The Jesuits already had overseas networks and had strategies in place that allowed them to negotiate with government bodies. These factors convinced the Sister to link in with the Jesuit Refugee Service. 397 It would appear also to have

395McCormick, Carmel, R.S.M., “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/06/06), 3.
396For example, in East Timor, Beverley Malcolm R.S.M. handed over birthing kits organized by the local Zonta group. Malcolm, Beverley, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 12/02/06), 5.
397Moore, Margaret, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 28/08/06), 1.
been a pragmatic decision taken to avoid the duplication of structures. Through this network, several Sisters of Mercy applied for positions in East Timor after the 1999 Referendum.

The Sisters of Mercy see themselves as a link, a bridge between cultures and organisations. Anne Foale R.S.M. commented on having “a sense of sharing the load with people, of being a conduit between the Australian community and East Timorese community.” When Carole McDonald R.S.M. worked in East Timor after the destruction of September 1999, she became a part of a formal network of emergency relief. In her role of assessing needs, particularly in education, she was a member of a Non-Government coalition.

We would attend joint N.G.O./U.N. meetings at 5p.m. each day. There we would share plans, (be) told where it was safe to travel, where the militias or the Indonesians were, where there was water, how to get communication/messages around, often through Parish Churches… It was decided that J.R.S. workers could be based in Lehare (Dili), Maliana, and then Odafuro… I met with the U.N. and let them know what was needed in these areas… Carole was a link in a most practical and necessary way when the needs of the people were extreme.

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399 McDonald, Carole, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 20/02/06), 1.
The Missionary as Ghost

Bevans’ final category, the missionary as “ghost”\textsuperscript{400} refers to someone who builds up community or ministry, but leaves it to another to develop in his or her own way. Moving on and allowing the local community to take over can be painful but in letting go, one is allowing the fruit of one’s labours to mature. Few of the Sisters whom I interviewed spoke of this approach, though issues of formation of local Sisters and the future of the work in Pakistan are certainly on the Congregational agenda.

Former Executive Director of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia\textsuperscript{401}, Patricia Pak Poy R.S.M. felt that the Sisters had insufficient exposure to development theory and so they would not easily take on this “ghosting” role. However, Anne Foale R.S.M. stated that she thought it appropriate to not put “the tent pegs in too deeply. There is a sense of being a pilgrim – moving on readily as needed, and shaking the dust off my shoes when it is time to move on.”\textsuperscript{402} This resonates with Catherine McAuley’s readiness to create new foundations, when and where there was a call for help.

\textsuperscript{401}The Conference of the Sisters of Mercy was the interim body established in the late 1970s which prepared the way for the creation of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.
\textsuperscript{402}Foale, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (September, 2006), 6.
The Missionary as the Elder

When considering the work of the Ballarat Sisters in assisting the East Timorese, I would add the image of a wise elder, a grandmotherly figure to Bevans’ categories. Anne Forbes R.S.M., who provided a home for East Timorese students, was instrumental in helping the students negotiate the Australian culture, the secondary educational system, and tertiary entrance requirements. She offered a welcome and the hospitality of a family home, complete with homework assistance! She is even called “Granny” by the child of one of the former students.

The Ballarat Sisters have been seen as trusted elders by the East Timorese community. One of the leaders of the East Timorese community in Melbourne approached Anne to return to East Timor, as it was not possible for East Timorese living in Australia to do so, and entrusted her with a considerable sum of money which they had collected for “Maria” who was to be professed in her East Timorese order in 1998. The East Timorese had gathered money to support her grassroots ministry with the poor and needy. The fact that the local East Timorese community trusted Anne and felt that she had a better chance of

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403 Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 5-6.
404 Ibid., 8.
405 Pseudonym used for ethical reasons.
406 Rogers, Benedict. The Secular Institute of Brothers and Sisters in Christ. (Dare: no publisher, 2002), 4.
delivering the money speaks volumes about the standing of the Ballarat Sisters with the East Timorese. As Mark Raper, S.J. commented about the Sisters of Mercy: “Your advocacy grows out of your accompaniment.”

During and after the 1999 referendum, Anne stayed with “Maria”, and assisted looking after the children in her care. Each night, she would help them say their prayers and drill their English vocabulary, pointing to eyes, ears, nose and so on. Soon after, some of the children had to be moved from the site for their safety. Anne spoke movingly of them sending a message to her before she was evacuated: “We send kisses to Madre’s eyes, ears, nose.” This suggest a close, loving relationship had developed.

This warmth and trust is also evident in the ministry of “Madeleine” R.S.M. who has lived with “Maria’s” community for some years in East Timor. She describes her role in the following way:

I am not a mover or shaker, but certainly provide a worthwhile presence. I am looked up to as someone with a rich variety of experience, and respected. I have been given the name “avo” (grandma)… I am a companion, friend, teacher, advisor, helper and assistant, and hope to be an inspiration as my being active gives them hope.

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408 Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 9.
409 Pseudonym used for ethical reasons.
410 “Madeleine” R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 19/01/06), 5.
In such a young nation, the wisdom and encouragement of elders are much appreciated.

**The Pragmatism of Mission**

I would argue that responding to a call for help is the primary characteristic and key motivation of the Sisters of Mercy who have left their own lands to minister or who have taken up the cause of the East Timorese in Australia. Need impels them to action. “As Sisters of Mercy, I think we are good at hands on, and getting the job done… responding to people’s needs, women and children in particular.” The over-riding image of the Sisters in this study is of practical, pragmatic, professional and competent women with skills, expertise and experience to offer. Regarding their work in Pakistan, Janice Geason R.S.M. commented: “We went about things in a practical way and in a professional way.” Those who have been involved in the East Timorese and Pakistani ministries include former school principals, past leaders of Congregations, teachers, nurses, and midwives. They have all wanted to be of use. “Noreen” R.S.M. commented on her experience at Notre Dame Institute in Karachi. “I believe our ministry to be to the needs of the people as they see

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411 Foale, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (September, 2006), 8.
412 Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13//06/06), 2.
it – in this case good education…” Looking back on her visits to Pakistan as Congregational leader, Helen Delaney R.S.M. described the approach of Mercy Sisters there as “Come in and roll up your sleeves and get to work and do what you can with what you’ve got.” She saw the Sisters very much as ministry-focused. Bernadette Marks R.S.M., who was at one stage leader of the Sisters of Mercy in Pakistan, supported this observation:

The Sisters were doing a lot. There were schools, after-school programs, visitation of people, of prisoners, so much – it was very impressive. Often the Mercies were strong, feisty women. They were very hospitable.

For the Sisters, being active in response to people’s needs has been vital.

The Sisters’ approach has picked up that biblical notion of being moved to compassionate action and incarnating mercy in one’s setting. In 2002, Mark Raper S.J., the then Australian Provincial of the Society of Jesus, observed: “You (Sisters of Mercy) are immersed in local communities, you serve people where you are.” This immersion in the local community is true of the work of the Sisters in Pakistan, where they have run hospitals, schools, teacher-training institutions, women’s centres and been involved in local church life. I have already noted the

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414 Delaney, Helen, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/06/06), 7
415 Marks, Bernadette, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 2.
ministry of “Madeleine” R.S.M. who has been living with a local secular institute, teaching and acting as a spiritual mentor. In Ballarat, Sisters of Mercy are well known in the “Friends of Ainaro” Group, which has twinned that Australian city with the East Timorese region of Ainaro. In addition to having created a home for East Timorese students studying in Ballarat, the Sisters now hold a seat on the local Council’s Committee which co-ordinates support for East Timor.

The Sisters’ emphasis on the local, the poor and the immediate need is true to Catherine McAuley’s way, for she responded with urgency to the suffering she saw in her day. “The poor need help today, not next week.”417 This sense of immediacy was noted by Mark Raper S.J. in the refugee field and to illustrate his point, he quoted Jan Gray R.S.M., “You (Sisters of Mercy) are ‘concerned with what is closest...with what is now...with what is next.’”418 As a result, reflection on mission and putting a formal theological or theoretical framework around ministry happens more regularly away from the mission, in Mercy governing bodies and chapter meetings, and in occasional assemblies of those on mission. According to Margaret Moore, R.S.M., former co-ordinator of the Mercy Refugee Service, “The spark is the

responding to need, get there, do what one can, then later put structures around the work.” 419 The Sisters of Mercy appear to be less the theoreticians and much more the pragmatists. It is not that the religious rationale of their ministry is unrecognized by the Sisters, but rather that witness through service is often necessary, sufficient and most appropriate in the circumstances. It can be left to those at some distance, such as Joan Wilson R.S.M., the then Melbourne-based editor of the *Mercy Mission Newsletter*, to provide the theoretical underpinnings of missionary activities.

In conclusion, I borrow from Karl Rahner in remembering that salvation in Christ is truly humanizing, bringing peace and creating the Church… For the goal of evangelization is to bring the hope of transformation to all the people of the world – a hope and power that is embedded in the meaning of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus for the life of the world. 420

Whilst many of Bevans’ missionary images held true to a large extent for the Sisters of Mercy in their work with the people of Pakistan and East Timor, they were not sufficient. The over-riding image of the Sisters at work is of women who are active, practical, competent, pragmatic, and in some cases, elders or grandmotherly figures. They seek to respond in useful ways to people in need, especially relating closely with women and

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419 Moore, Margaret, R.S.M., ”Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 28/08/06), 2.
children. In such, they are remaining true to the vision and practice of their founder, Catherine McAuley. This study now turns to the context in which they have translated that vision and practice in Pakistan.
Chapter Nine: Pakistan Context

This chapter outlines the social, political and religious context of Pakistan, with a special emphasis on Christianity in that country. It makes no claim to be a comprehensive account but is offered here in order to better situate the Sisters of Mercy in the Pakistan context. Essentially Pakistan is a highly diverse community in which Islam is a unifying force. The statistics that sketch the reality of life in Pakistan give special note to those affecting women and children, for they are of particular concern to the Sisters of Mercy. This section concludes with a consideration of the place of Christianity in Pakistan as this church context is central to the work of the Sisters of Mercy.

Pakistan: Religious, Social, and Political Contexts.

Pakistan grew out of the struggle for independence from the British on the Indian sub-continent and the increasing sense of a need for an Islamic voice to represent the many Muslims of the region. The Partition of 1947 saw the creation of two nations, India and Pakistan (then comprised of East and West Pakistan).\(^{421}\) Islam is the unifying bond in Pakistan.. Islam

\(^{421}\)For an examination of the development of the Muslim League and the creation of Pakistan see Noman, Omar. Pakistan: Political and Economic History Since 1947. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990), Chapter 1. See also Syed, Anwar Hussain. Pakistan: Islam, Politics and National Solidarity. (New York: Praeger, c1982), Chapter
has given Pakistan a sense of community, identity and a moral code, and has linked, sometimes more effectively than others, a diverse mix of people: Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans (those who migrated from India at Partition), Baluchs, and millions of Afghan refugees. The diverse people of Pakistan live in arable lands, huge cities, sparsely populated areas, deserts, or among soaring mountains. They speak a variety of languages including Urdu, the official language, spoken by only eight per cent of the population, Punjabi, Sindi, and English, the language of commerce and of the educated elite.

Islam was introduced to the area around 711 by Muhammad ibn al-Qasim, who conquered Sindh, the lower Indus Valley and the area including Multan, incorporating these areas into the Arabic Empire. It spread little by little thanks to the Sufis, Persian mystics whose converts comprised mainly Hindu

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423 ibid, 28. See also Nomar, Omar. Pakistan: Political and Economic History since 1947. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990), 199. In 1984, a year before the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Pakistan, there were approximately three million refugees in 189 camps in the North-West Frontier, the Tribal Areas and Punjab.

424 Sathasivam, Kanishkan. Uneasy Neighbors: India, Pakistan and United States Foreign Policy. (Aldershot: Ashgate, c 2005), 32. The Australian Sisters of Mercy have learned Urdu in order to assist their work in Pakistan.

425 ibid., 14.

untouchables. Many centuries later, at Partition, Pakistan saw itself as a place where its people could practise their faith “in freedom and lack of fear.” The early prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan said, in 1950:

Pakistan stands firm, with its steadfast faith in its own ideology, earnestly endeavouring to apply it to the practical world of human affairs, in order to promote the welfare of mankind… We emerged as a new nation because we believed in it. This way of life is not a political creed with us. It is our religion.

Today 97 per cent of the Pakistani population is Islamic (77 per cent Sunni and 20 per cent Shi’a), with Christians numbering about 3.5 million.

In the mid-1980s when the Australian Sisters of Mercy made their first foundation in Gujrat, Punjab, they discovered a country facing serious challenges. Women had a life expectancy of 51, with males at 52 years. Childbirth-related deaths were at the rate of 600 per 100,000 live births, among the

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highest in the world. The population was growing by 3.1 per cent annually. Whilst 61 per cent of primary-school aged males were enrolled, only 32 per cent of female children attended primary school. For secondary schools, 24 per cent of males and only nine per cent of females were enrolled. The national literacy rate stood at 46 per cent.\textsuperscript{432}

Government expenditure on defence, education and health for the year of 1986 was respectively 33.9 per cent, 3.2 per cent and one per cent,\textsuperscript{433} reflecting Pakistan’s concerns with its security at home and within the region. Journalist and writer Christina Lamb commented despairingly on the poverty, insecurity and violence of the Pakistani situation:

\begin{quote}
Twelve thousand more people will be born in Pakistan this day. Two thousand will be dead within a year. More of them will learn to use a gun than to speak the national language… only a third will have access to clean drinking water and only 15 per cent will have sewerage. A quarter will go to school. Many will become heroin addicts. This is a country killing its future.\textsuperscript{434}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{433}All the statistics are to be found in Women in Pakistan: An Economic and Social Strategy. (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, c1989), xv-xxx. See also Noman, Omar. Pakistan: Political and Economic History Since 1947. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990), xi.

Since nationhood, Pakistan has struggled with India over the disputed territory of Kashmir.\textsuperscript{435} The insecurity of Pakistan \textit{vis-à-vis} its neighbour’s capabilities – economic, military and nuclear, led Pakistan to seek the support of the United States of America from the 1950s onwards. Recently this relationship has heavily involved Pakistan in the United States’ “war on terror.”\textsuperscript{436} As well as neighbouring India, Pakistan shares a border with Iran, China and Afghanistan which, in the current political climate, puts it in the most sensitive of regions.

Within Pakistan there has been a struggle between the more secular, democratic elements and dictatorial, military-led governments that have often enlisted religion as a form of social control. For example, in the late 1970s under General Zia ul-Haq, Pakistan moved to a “state Islam” which instituted the seventh century Arabic penal code.\textsuperscript{437} Political coups, suspension of the Constitution, assassinations and executions have been recurring themes in Pakistani politics at the highest levels. In the 1980s, when the first Australian Sisters of Mercy arrived in Pakistan, Afghan refugees had fled the Soviet Union’s invasion, deposed

\textsuperscript{435}India also played a pivotal role in the loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in Pakistan’s civil war of 1971. See Sathasivam, Kanishkan. \textit{Uneasy Neighbors: India, Pakistan and U.S. Foreign Policy}. (Aldershot: Ashgate, c2005), 9-10.
Prime Minister Bhutto had been executed, the army had put down a revolt in Sindh against military rule, and General ul-Haq had declared himself “elected” President after a referendum.

The process of “Islamization” was well and truly underway in Pakistan by the mid-1980s. In 1979 the Hudood Ordinances were introduced to implement Shari’a Law as the country’s law. The 1984 Law of Evidence had significant implications for women, as in some cases, such as murder the evidence of two women was required to be of equivalent weight to one man’s evidence. In the case of rape, four adult male witnesses to the “act of penetration” were required, and failure to prove rape meant the woman could be prosecuted for accusing an innocent man of adultery. 438 This was the context in which the Australian Sisters of Mercy worked with women, yet that was only part of the picture in Pakistan. At the same time, a women’s lobby organization called the Women’s Action Forum developed among educated urban women 439, and by 1988, Benazir Bhutto, the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan was elected. It was,

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however, to poor women that the Australian Sisters of Mercy
gave their attention.

Christianity in Pakistan

It is important to understand something of the
Christian context in Pakistan in which the Sisters worked.
Christanity has had a long, but somewhat precarious history in
the region. The Thomist Christians of Kerala, Southern India,
claim that Saint Thomas established Christianity in the Indian
sub-continent, was martyred in Tamil Nadu and was buried at
Mailapur.\textsuperscript{440} Certain Pakistani Christians hold that Saint Thomas
actually reached Taxila, a city close to Rawalpindi.\textsuperscript{441} Each year,
Taxila honours Saint Thomas with a special Mass on his feast
day\textsuperscript{442}. Others hold that Christianity reached the area that is
current-day Pakistan in the early third century.\textsuperscript{443} Following the
Moghul invasion of 1526, periods of religious tolerance and
persecution alternated in that region.\textsuperscript{444} The Emperor Akbar, who

\textsuperscript{441} Cited in Cloonan, Elizabeth, R.S.M. “The Early Years of Australian R.S.M.s in Pakistan”, (unpublished), 199?, appendix 15.
\textsuperscript{442} McCormick, Carmel, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Wodonga, 14/06/06), 2.
\textsuperscript{444} See Blinkenberg, Lars \textit{India-Pakistan: the History of Unresolved Conflicts. Volume 1: The Historical Part}. (Odense: Odense University Press, c1998), 24-25, and
came to power in 1556, abolished taxes on non-Muslims and invited Jesuit missionaries from the Portuguese enclave of Goa to his court. He allowed them to preach and convert, and assisted in the building of their first church in Lahore in 1600. Apart from the Jesuit influence, other Catholic orders, notably the Carmelites and the Augustinians, were active in the seventeenth century in Sindh.

Following the British colonisation of the area, Christianity missionary activity of both Protestant and Catholic varieties developed in the nineteenth century in the area now known as Pakistan. Many orders, such as the Capuchins, the Mill Hill Missionaries, the Daughters of the Cross, the Sisters of Jesus and Mary and the Jesuits, sent personnel from Europe. Parishes, schools, orphanages hospitals and chaplaincy to the Irish Catholic soldiers in the British army developed.

Local converts were not numerous and often faced rejection from their families or communities. However, from the


1870s on, a wave of low caste Chuhra people in the Punjab became Christians, and an almsgiving approach to socially outcast Christians became typical of the missions’ operations.

Today, many Pakistani Christians are descendants of the Chuhras and are a marginalized people, still doing dirty, dangerous and stigmatized work. Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M. noted a synergetism still evident in the early 1980s: “The simple faith of the Christian (street) sweepers seems to be mixed up, at time, with superstition and many former Hindu beliefs and practices.”

Elizabeth also testified to the people’s respect for Christian teachers and symbols:

I shall long remember the way in which some ‘sweepers’ on the outskirts of Lahore were listening to a young Columban priest speaking to them in Punjabi language, and also the pride of place given to a little crucifix on the wall of their poor hut.

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449 Asi, Emmanuel C.C. “Concept, Charism and Practice of the Prophetic in the Church of Pakistan”, in *Focus*, 3/1988, 159.

450 ibid., 105.


452 ibid.
Today Christians, who are mostly very poor, and members of other minority religions face discrimination in many aspects of Pakistani life.\textsuperscript{453} 

The Partition of 1947 meant that whilst Christian Churches were not operating in a theocracy, they were working in an Islamic state that did not tolerate apostasy. In addition, some Christians were displaced from rural areas by newly arrived Muslims from India and were dispersed into town \textit{baisis} (slums). This made life more precarious for the Christian population, and the organization of ministry more difficult.\textsuperscript{454} As proselytizing is illegal in Pakistan, Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church, have found a place in Pakistan society through providing useful services in education, health and welfare, “thereby building bridges between Islam and Christianity.”\textsuperscript{455}

\textsuperscript{453}Of the 23 articles that I found on the Catholic Church in Pakistan in the \textit{National Catholic Reporter} and \textit{America} publications since 1999, 17 articles deal with violence, persecution or human rights violations towards Christians in Pakistan.


\textsuperscript{455}Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Notes on visit to Pakistan”, 25/9/88 to 7/10/88, Archives, Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, 686/278 (6). It would seem this is necessary for as recently as January 2003, the Pakistani Bishops’ Commission has asked the government to end “hate speeches against minority religions”. See Donovan, Gill. “Bishops’ Commission Condemns ‘Hate Speech’,”, in \textit{National Catholic Reporter}, 39, no. 12. (Jan 24, 2003), 8. It should be noted that the nationalization of education in the 1970s created a serious challenge to Christian formation in Catholic schools. See Rooney, John, M.H.M. \textit{Into Deserts: A History of the
Many of the clergy who have served the Pakistani Catholic Church have been Goan in origin, and have lived in Church compounds associated with British colonial history and the Irish soldiers to whom they first ministered. The first Mercy foundation in Pakistan was located in a Church compound whose address was “Police Lines, Gujrat”, a reflection of colonial times. More recently class division within the Catholic Church in Pakistan was manifested in the differences between the Goan clergy and their *basti* parishioners. The presence of many European-based orders has added to the diversity and division within the Catholic Church in Pakistan.

Since the 1960s, there has been some change within the Catholic Church in Pakistan. Following Vatican II, the liturgy has been celebrated in Urdu and English. A charity model of Catholic ministry gave way to the establishment of community development projects, and in the Punjab, for example,

Catholics’ living standards were improved by the acquisition of


458 Asi, Emmanuel C.C. “Concept, Charism and Practice of the Prophetic in the Church of Pakistan”, in *Focus*, 3/1988, 159.
land for Catholic villages and farms.\textsuperscript{459} Asi, writing from within the Pakistani Catholic Church, has argued that the 1970s heralded awareness-raising and training of local community leaders and “animators”,\textsuperscript{460} reflecting something of liberation theology which was influential in the 1970s and 1980s. In some areas, Basic Christian Communities developed, and in many parts, due to the lack of resident priests, religious sisters, brothers and lay catechists became vital to the religious life of Pakistani Christians.\textsuperscript{461} Devotional Catholicism is still typical of the Pakistani Church.

Since the 1980s, there has been a gradual “Pakistanisation” of the hierarchy and of other aspects of Catholic life.\textsuperscript{462} In 1980, the first Punjabi Bishop, Bishop Joseph, was


\textsuperscript{460}Asi, Emmanuel C.C. “Concept, Charism and Practice of the Prophetic in the Church of Pakistan”, in \textit{Focus}, 3/1988, 159.


\textsuperscript{462}This followed the growth in the number of Pakistani priests. For example, in 1973, 10 of the 40 priests in the Diocese of Lahore were local men, in comparison with one out of 40 priests in 1950. Rooney, John, M.H.M. \textit{Into Deserts: A History of the Catholic Diocese of Lahore, 1886-1986}. (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1986), 93-94.
consecrated. In the early 1980s, Leonie Glennen R.S.M. noted that there were Pakistani women’s religious communities, and that the Presentation Sisters had long taken local novices. She also observed that religious women were indispensable in parish ministry to women, given certain cultural taboos.⁴⁶³

This brief account of aspects of the religious, social, and political life in Pakistan points to a country that is complex and fluctuating. This was to this country that five Sisters of Mercy from the Melbourne Congregation committed themselves in 1985. This study now turns to their ministry.


This chapter gives an overview of the process by which the Australian Mercy Sisters came to work in Pakistan, the shape of their ministry there, and some of the key issues and learnings that have emerged in their twenty years in Pakistan.

The Call

In 1979, the first request from the Pakistani Catholic hierarchy was made to Patricia Pak Poy R.S.M., then Executive Director of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia. Bishop Armando Trindade of Lahore wrote seeking Sisters to work in a variety of ministries.464 At that time, the Sisters were in the process of establishing their new national body, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia (I.S.M.A.), and conducting their first National Chapter. The lack of a national Mercy structure that could authorize a response to such a request was a difficulty, and so the request was deferred.

Bishop Trindade was persistent. After a series of letters from the Bishop, seven different Australian Mercy Congregations responded that they had Sisters interested in going to Pakistan. However, it was discovered that the Lahore Diocese

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already had a number of religious Congregations in ministry there, and so it was felt greater need existed elsewhere in Pakistan. Dorothy Campion R.S.M., National President of newly established Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, indicated this to the Bishop in January 1982, and in May that year, the National Plenary Council of I.S.M.A. decided to take no further action unless a “definite invitation were received.”

The commencement of ministry in Pakistan was driven by the passion of particular Mercy women of standing in the Melbourne Congregation. In the early 1980s, Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M. was invited to the Asian Meeting of Religious in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as she was Vicar for Religious in the Melbourne Archdiocese. Whilst overseas, she visited Pakistan in order to make a report to the Mercy Chapter and also met the Bishop of Lahore. Her colleague, Janice Geason R.S.M. remembers: “She came back with a vision.” Further correspondence ensued between the Church of Pakistan and the Australian Sisters of Mercy, particularly involving Elizabeth

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467. Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06) 1.
Cloonan. This culminated in a formal request from Rawalpindi’s Bishop Simon Pereira to I.S.M.A. in October 1983. The Bishop sought Sisters for hospital administration, midwifery nursing, primary education and pastoral care in the city of Gujrat, one hundred miles from Rawalpindi. “Our requirements would be for a minimum of four sisters, two for the hospital, one for the school and one for the hostel.”468 In consultation with the National Executive Council of I.S.M.A., the Melbourne Congregation sent two members of its leadership team, Mary Harrington R.S.M. and Leonie Glennen R.S.M. to Pakistan to evaluate the Rawalpindi request. The large Melbourne Congregation gladly assumed responsibility for investigating further the possibility of ministry in Pakistan,469 and the Melbourne Congregational Leader Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. shared a passion for Pakistan with Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M. Mary and Leonie reported to their Congregational meeting on 17th March, 1984 on the difficulties of climate and cultural differences, the physical and psychological demands of such a ministry, local health statistics, the lack of services for maternal and child care and education. They spoke favourably of the Bishop who lived a simple life and who was

469Former Melbourne Congregational and I.S.M.A. leader, Janice Geason R.S.M. holds that the pursuit of the Pakistan call was very much due to Elizabeth Cloonan and Gabrielle Jennings. Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 1.
devoted to his people. They recognized that ministry with the marginalized Christians of the area would require a long-term perspective.

The Bishop’s hope is that with better health care and improved education the Christians might get better jobs which in turn would improve their self-image, liberate them, lift them from a certain hopelessness and paralyzing apathy. We may not even see this development. We ourselves may be the ones changed and perhaps in the last analysis see our influence, our mission, as being one of presence, standing with others in faith and hope. Such a witness has far-reaching effects.\textsuperscript{470}

Mary Harrington advised that only volunteers should be considered for such a ministry, that their commitment should be for a five-year period, and that due to the poverty of the Pakistani Church, the Congregation would need to allocate funding to this project. She called such a mission pre-eminently a work of Mercy, especially in the liberation of people through what we can offer by means of our commitment to stand with the poor, to offer our services in better health care, and education.\textsuperscript{471}

Leonie Glennen R.S.M. amplified this call to mercy: “I kept wondering what Catherine McAuley and all those early Sisters

\textsuperscript{470}Harrington, Mary R.S.M. “Report”. Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/358 (30), 4.
\textsuperscript{471}ibid., 5.
who crossed the seas to go to strange lands would want to say to us as we hear this call coming to us."\(^472\)

Setting aside the early history of Irish Sisters working in mainly Irish communities and drawing instead on the foundational experience of the call to serve the poor, the Melbourne Congregation decided that in principle, the call to Pakistan was one to which they should respond. During the Lent of 1984, Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. asked her Sisters to reflect on the invitation, and noted somewhat prophetically that “In some way all of our lives will be affected.”\(^473\) In response, she received over one hundred letters from individual Sisters and from Mercy communities.

The positive responses echoed the Gospel call to move beyond the known in order to fulfil the mission of the Church, particularly to the poor. The Sisters’ National Chapter Vision Statement echoed this “option for the poor”. Their priority for ministry was to be “the homeless, the economically poor, Aborigines, prisoners, the aged and socially disadvantaged.”\(^474\)


\(^{473}\) Jennings, Gabrielle R.S.M. “Letter to Melbourne Congregation”, 28/3/84, Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/279 (14). Gabrielle was to work in Pakistan for eight years as the founding director of Notre Dame Institute of Education in Karachi.

Whilst this was framed with Australian needs in mind, a dominant theme in the Sisters’ positive responses to Gabrielle Jennings was that the call to work with the poor in Pakistan, especially women, would be true to their origins. “The call to Pakistan is certainly a call to be with the poor – a real Mercy call.”\textsuperscript{475} Catherine McAuley’s outward-looking charism and that of the founding Sisters in Australia were cited by Sisters supportive of the Pakistan initiative.

Culture, conditions, insecurity, etc. can all be raised as objections but Ursula Frayne and her companions probably were warned about these too. I guess no mission ever began as a result of ‘common sense’ but as a leap of faith.\textsuperscript{476}

The perception that the call to Pakistan was a spiritual one was underlined by the number of Scripture references sprinkled through the letters supporting the Pakistan development. References to “the suffering servant”, “throw out your nets”, “Go forth and teach all nations”, “Behold I stand at the door and knock”, “the cry of the poor” and “Here I am” were cited.\textsuperscript{477} Thirteen Sisters offered themselves for the mission at

\textsuperscript{475}\textsuperscript{Letter 24 to Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M.”, 15/4/84. Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/279 (14).}
\textsuperscript{476}\textsuperscript{Letter 14 to Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M.”, (20/4/84). Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/279 (14).}
this stage, whilst a number of others indicated a willingness to go at some time should the Congregation need them.

Not all Sisters saw a mission to Pakistan as a sensible move. Helen Delaney R.S.M., Melbourne Congregational leader from September 1993 to early January 2000, was among those who doubted its wisdom. She held that view for many years, until when in her leadership position, she visited Pakistan, and had a change of heart.\textsuperscript{478} Practical concerns dominated the negative responses to Gabrielle Jennings. The drain on resources, both human and financial, was cited as a real problem, given the ageing Congregation. A concern was raised that the Sisters remaining in Australia would be spread too thinly. They believed their first priority should be to their work in Australia.\textsuperscript{479} Given the political insecurity and real difficulties in terms of climate, health and culture of working in Pakistan, the Sisters wondered if such an endeavour would be viable or fair? Could the Congregation sustain such a commitment in personnel and finance it in the long term?\textsuperscript{480}

\textsuperscript{478}Delaney, Helen R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 1.
An awareness of certain religious and cultural difficulties was evident in the negative responses. Could Western women from a minority religion effectively minister in a male-dominated Islamic society? Indeed, would the Pakistan Church be able to accommodate Australian, post-Vatican II religious women in a Church that was devotional, traditional and hierarchical? There were concerns that not all Bishops shared Bishop Pereira’s vision, thus compromising the long-term viability of the initiative and resulting in the possibility of the Sisters ministering to an elite rather than to those most in need. Finally there was a concern that even if the Sisters were to work with the poorest people, that could reinforce their marginal influence as Christian women in Pakistani society.\(^{481}\)

In May 1984, the National Plenary Council of I.S.M.A.\(^{482}\) decided to “support the Pakistan mission as a national project, with Melbourne as the sponsoring group.”\(^{483}\) The struggle between the needs at home and the desire to respond to God’s poor overseas was resolved in favour of the latter. The Gujrat call

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\(^{482}\)The National Plenary Council of I.S.M.A. is the twice-yearly meeting of the seventeen Congregational Leaders and the Institute’s Executive.

was seen as much more in keeping with the Congregation’s vision than previous requests from Pakistan.484

Soon after, four Sisters from the Melbourne Congregation – Elizabeth Cloonan, Irie Duane, Adele (Jean) Walton and Lexie Brooks - were chosen to be the first Australian Sisters to work in Gujrat, Pakistan. After a period of preparation, the Sisters were commissioned to commence their ministry in Pakistan. Accompanied by Gabrielle Jennings, they set off for Pakistan on 18th January, 1985.485 Leaving behind the known, they were to discover, as had Catherine McAuley, the need to trust in God’s providence.

**Gujrat.**

The Sisters were warmly welcomed when they arrived at the Catholic compound in Gujrat, a city with a reputation for drug running, violence and poverty486. There they found the Holy Rosary Hospital, neglected school buildings, a poor hostel for school children, the priest’s house, a chapel, the doctor’s house

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484Pak Poy, Patricia R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 1.
485Gabrielle Jennings stayed a month with the Sisters as they settled in Pakistan. This was very reminiscent of Catherine McAuley’s practice of accompanying her Sisters to their new foundations and remaining with them for a short period. This was also noted in Gabrielle Jennings’ Eulogy, given by Mary Duffy R.S.M., 10/1/2003. “In this, as in so many other ways, Gabrielle was a true daughter of our foundress.” Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/468 (41).
and a vegetable garden. The Sisters made the decision in the first few weeks of being in Pakistan to adopt local dress, both for comfort and to show respect for the culture. In this they distinguished themselves from many other foreign orders.

After being shown around the region by the Parish priest Father Prader and Sister Stephen, a Presentation Sister, an initial settling in period and an intensive language school in Murree in the Himalayan foothills, the Mercy ministry began in earnest. It focused largely on women and children, typical of traditional Mercy apostolates.

Among the challenges facing the new Principal of St Mary’s School, Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M. were the lack of funds (as the often illiterate parents of the children were too poor to pay fees), the lack of sufficient school furniture (with often four children to a desk or no furnishing in some rooms), the lack of trained teachers, limited methodology (with rote learning being the norm), and the spasmodic attendance of children. In addition, St Mary’s School had approximately 270 pupils, of

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487 ibid.
whom only sixty were Catholics.\textsuperscript{491} Elizabeth visited families to encourage school attendance, and over the next few years furnished the school, had two new classrooms built, and provided inservicing to teachers. In addition, Elizabeth and later, Monique Nyland R.S.M., developed a series of cluster schools in rural villages and in more distant parts of the parish. Untrained teachers were given training at St Mary’s, children were driven to school from outlying areas, and in 1990, secondary level classes commenced at St Mary’s. In 1994, the first class of lower secondary students graduated.\textsuperscript{492} St Mary’s School gained new life and direction under the Sisters’ influence, and they added their expertise and vision to Diocesan education and teacher-training.

The Rosary Hospital was a maternity and obstetrics hospital with thirty employees. In addition, outreach dispensaries operated on a fortnightly basis in Jhelem and Mandi Bahauddin.\textsuperscript{493} Unsanitary conditions near the hospital, the lack of doctors, limited training among the nurses, poor health and living standards of the women and children, unsafe or superstitious

\textsuperscript{491} Ibid.
traditional practices, the lack of reliable utilities and infrastructure, and financial worries made administering the hospital a huge challenge for the Sisters. Often the patients who reached the hospital were emergency, and frequently, life or death, cases. Over time the dispensary service closed, but outreach to some villages continued. New equipment was bought and staff trained in its use. Jean Walton R.S.M. worked in the nurseries and supervised the kitchen and domestic organization of the hospital. Community health programs commenced under the leadership of Irie Duane R.S.M. and Maureen Sexton R.S.M., in partnership with lay workers. Local people were trained as health workers and literacy teachers. Through drama and other means, health and social issues and preventative strategies were communicated to local communities, and valuable links were made between the hospital and local groups in the process.

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495 Ibid., 40-1.
Pastoral work in Gujrat took many forms. Jean Walton R.S.M. saw women in Gujrat’s prison.\textsuperscript{499} Lexie Brooks R.S.M., along with a local woman parishioner, visited homes, taught prayers, prepared children and adults for sacraments and encouraged interest in education, liturgy and parish activities. The Sisters found that institutionally, the Pakistani Church was largely unaffected by Vatican II. The Sisters built positive relationships with the clergy and the parishioners, and were able to encourage people to be more actively involved in worship\textsuperscript{500}. Lexie reflected on her visitation insights in a letter to Gabrielle Jennings: “The need for education at every level in this country is great and until it happens in a greater way the dignity and rights of the people will be ignored.”\textsuperscript{501}

In a manner that reflected Catherine McAuley’s Baggot Street House of Mercy, Lexie developed the Our Lady of Mercy Hostel to educate young women in sewing, literacy, numeracy, health, household management, religion and prayer, and recreation. She saw the need for such a skills-based programme for young uneducated village women approaching marriageable age. With the support of Bishop Pereira, she

\textsuperscript{499} Doherty, Laura “Embodying a Tradition: the Sisters of Mercy in Pakistan”. (Masters Qualifying Essay, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2004), 42.
\textsuperscript{500} For a description of the Holy Week ceremonies which the Sisters organized see ibid., 47.
commenced her project in September 1986, after much visitation
to villages to encourage participation and to assure families of the
bona fides of the program. She hoped the course would give each
young woman

  a greater appreciation of herself... an understanding of
  her giftedness and potential... an understanding and
direction for the future... a greater love for Jesus and
an awareness of Jesus’ love for each one. 502

It seemed this mix of religious and secular instruction worked, for
one graduate was able to say in 1993:

  During my course, we have had the opportunity to pray
together at daily Mass and our Rosary. What is very
good in this hostel is that no difference is made
between educated and uneducated girls. Everyone is
welcome... We have had a good time learning things we
can use in later life, faith development, how to help
ourselves, how to take a stand in society. 503

With overseas funding 504, the program was extended and
continued to be popular until the Sisters left Gujrath in 1998.

  During the thirteen years of the Gujrath mission, the
ministries of education, health, pastoral care and religious
instruction continued with changes in Mercy personnel, drawn

502 Brooks, Lexie R.S.M. “Submission to Missio”, 7/10/87, Archives, Melbourne
Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/279 (21).
503 Sisters of Mercy, Pakistan Newsletter, 1/ 2, (June 1993), 1. Archives, Sisters of Mercy,
Melbourne Congregation, 686/278 (8).
504 Various overseas Non Government Organisations, mission organizations, Australian
Mercy Hospitals, Schools, associated parishes, Catholic groups, Mercy Congregational
bodies and the Australian Overseas Service Bureau assisted with funding and staffing of
the Gujrath mission. See “Pakistan Country Program Strategy Document.” Annexe B:
Project Profiles, 12/5/98, 2-4. Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy,
686/468, (21).
from various Australian Congregations. Illness, death, the sheer
difficulties of daily living, isolation and cultural differences made
sustaining ministry in Gujrat extremely challenging.\(^{505}\)

Nonetheless, at the end of their time there, Gabrielle Jennings
R.S.M. wrote:

> Last night we had a little formal farewell and reflection
> about Gujrat. Bishop Lobo commented on the great
> work the Mercies had done in such a difficult place and
> said we should not see leaving now as regrettable but a
> step along the Gujrat and Mercy journey.\(^{506}\)

### Peshawar

Early in 1986, the second Australian Mercy
foundation was established in Peshawar, again following a
request from Bishop Pereira. The focus of this foundation was
the educational needs of girls and pastoral care in the Parish of St
John Vianney\(^{507}\). Peshawar, a large city of three million people
and close to the Afghanistan border, was politically unstable. Its
population included approximately one million Afghan refugees
at that time. The second Mercy community consisted of Sisters
from several Australian Congregations – Abina Looney R.S.M.
(Brisbane), Winifred McManus R.S.M. (Melbourne), Colleen

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\(^{506}\) Jennings, Gabrielle, R.S.M. “Letter to Elizabeth Cloonan, R.S.M.”, 18/10/98 quoted in ibid., 71.
\(^{507}\) “Requests for New Ministries”. Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy, 686/279 (19).
Livermore R.S.M (Goulburn) and Fran Gillis R.S.M (Bathurst).

Once again, Gabrielle Jennings, and additionally Mary Harrington, accompanied the group for an initial period.\textsuperscript{508}

St John Vianney Girls’ School opened in September 1986, with the old church utilized as classrooms. Seventy of the initial enrolment of one hundred pupils were Muslim. It was the first time provision for girls’ education had been made in the area. Colleen Livermore became the Principal of this Urdu-medium school. Over the years, new buildings were added and classes extended, so that by 1991, students ranged from Kindergarten to class 10 (Matriculation).\textsuperscript{509} In addition the Sisters assumed responsibility for primary and later, secondary classes at St John Vianney Boys’ School, and offered inservice training to other schools in Peshawar.

St Thomas’ School, Lahori Gate, had provided an impoverished education to children from one of Peshawar’s slums. It was a most unhygienic and unwelcoming place. There was no furniture, or sanitation, and the school master was harsh


and difficult. Over the next few years, under the guidance of the Sisters of Mercy, the school building was improved, two toilets were built, uniforms were introduced, furniture was purchased, and the increased number of teachers were supervised. Plans were set in place for the rebuilding of the school, first in one location, then on the existing site. Serious difficulties arose with the old school master but in May 1996, at the farewell to the old school, he was invited to speak and it would seem that some bridges were mended. When the replacement school opened in October 1997, there were 181 Christian children enrolled.

The Sisters’ involvement in education in Peshawar was quite extensive. Several Sisters offered inservices for teachers and the staffs of other schools in the city. Elizabeth O’Connell R.S.M took charge of Charagh Comprehensive School in Phundu Road which was attended by many children who had not been to school before. That school also promoted literacy to women and the families of the pupils, and provided an

511 Ibid., 17, 18, 25, 27, 28.
512 Ibid., 28. By this stage, Irish Sister Mary O’Toole, R.S.M., who had been in Pakistan from 1981, was in charge of the school.
educational facility to an otherwise uncatered for population. A sports’ programme was offered at St John Vianney’s for boys and young men to provide them with a positive recreational and social outlet. Local men were employed as coaches and supervisors, with funding provided by the Albury Rotary Club.

Again the desire to give women improved prospects in life led to the creation of Mercy Women’s Centre. Flo O’Sullivan R.S.M. set up the Women’s Centre in the area beneath the parish church. There basic literacy, sewing, drafting and embroidery classes were held, as well as coaching for examinations. Later on other craft lessons, a beautician’s course and recreation for girls and women were held at the Centre. In 2003, it was reported that women from a variety of social backgrounds gathered at the Centre to share about their lives. “For women who live in closely confined situations.. the

515 ibid., 5.
education program can provide enormous mental health
benefits.518

Other pastoral care was commenced by Win
McManus R.S.M., who offered retreats, prayer days and
recollection days for the Catholic clergy of the
Rawalpindi/Islamabad Diocese.519 Jean Walton R.S.M. visited
the Women’s Prison and Mental Hospital in Peshawar. This
difficult ministry developed a school for the children of the
women prisoners, literacy and sewing classes, as well as a half-
way house for released prisoners who were unwanted by their
families.520 Carmel McCormick R.S.M. worked with Mercy
Family Services from 1999. She spoke of teaching Afghan
refugees as well as visiting the prison and mental hospital.

There were children born and living in jail. We would
take soap, rugs, etc. into the mothers in jail, and
sometimes a change of suit for the women. I would
help in the school in the jail. We tried to brighten up
the school there, and fortunately, some of the children
were allowed to go out of the jail to school.521

Under the leadership of Patrice Orchard R.S.M. the welfare
services gave priority to keeping mothers and children together,

519 ibid.
521 McCormick, Carmel R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/6/06), 1.
and to measures, such as literacy and other skills, which could improve their life chances and could prevent them from going to prison.\textsuperscript{522}

In 2002, the Sisters closed their residence in Peshawar, but importantly, one of the local women who was professed as a Sister of Mercy in 2003 took over supervision of the Women’s Centre there.

**Notre Dame Institute of Education, Karachi**

Most of the Mercy ministries in Pakistan were framed in terms of existing Catholic Church of Pakistan institutions such as schools or hospitals, with a few new developments, such as the Mercy Hostel in Gujrat or Mercy Family Services in Peshawar, evolving after some time. The development of Notre Dame Institute of Education in Karachi was different, for although the Sisters had already identified and responded to the need for teacher education in Pakistan, this time they were creating a new institution with the support of the hierarchy in Pakistan and Australian educational bodies.

In 1989, Deidre Jordan R.S.M., Chancellor of Flinders University in South Australia, was invited by Bishop Lobo, Chairman of the Bishops’ Conference for Education in Pakistan, to advise on the possibility of establishing a teacher-training programme in Karachi. Bishop Lobo had long held a dream of advancing the lot of his people through an improved education system. Deidre’s trip interestingly was sponsored by a Muslim educator and philanthropist.\(^{523}\)

It was believed that due to the nationalization of education in the 1970s, standards had fallen, and little had been done to effectively encourage a variety of teaching methodologies or to stamp out cheating amongst students. Teacher morale, commitment and conditions were poor. A small, properly run institution, with a formal relationship with Karachi University was proposed and upon her return to Australia, Deidre Jordan approached Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. and Bernadette Marks R.S.M. to gauge their interest in the project. \(^{524}\)

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In September 1990, Gabrielle and Bernadette, along with Janice Geason R.S.M., then Congregational Leader of the Melbourne Sisters of Mercy, travelled to Pakistan to further investigate the viability of such an initiative. The staff of Australian Catholic University in Melbourne (Mercy Campus) and North Sydney, Macquarie University and the University of Sydney, and the Catholic Education Office in Sydney helped prepare course material and organized resources. Various schools in South Australia and Victoria donated additional educational resources.\textsuperscript{525} Accompanying Gabrielle and Bernadette to Karachi as founding staff members of Notre Dame Institute of Education were Mary and Matthew Coffey of Adelaide.\textsuperscript{526}

Notre Dame Institute of Education became a joint project of the Adelaide and Melbourne Congregations, with the two Sisters seconded for an initial period of three years. Deidre Jordan continued to oversee the initiative and recruit staff.\textsuperscript{527} Bernadette Marks recalls how the staff visited all the Pakistani Dioceses in August and September of 1991 to promote the new institution, and how the electricity was only connected on the day

\textsuperscript{525}Schneider, Annette R.S.M. A Study of an Innovative Approach to teacher Education in Pakistan. (University of Melbourne: Faculty of Education, 1997), 67.
\textsuperscript{526}ibid.
that Notre Dame Institute of Education was opened, 1st October, 1991.  

Despite delays in accreditation of courses, difficulties with local examination schedules, and the unpredictability of life in Pakistan, Notre Dame Institute of Education has developed over the years since its inception a reputation for fine teacher-training and educational soundness. On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, Gabrielle Jennings wrote of “ten of the richest, most colourful, educationally exhilarating fascinating, frustrating, frightening and heartening years imaginable.”

From an initial enrolment of sixteen students most of whom had teaching experience but no training, it had grown to having thirty-one students in 1995/6, drawing them from many parts of Pakistan and from a variety of religious backgrounds. In 2006, there were forty-four Bachelor of Education students and six enrolled in the Masters of Education course. Funding for the Institute has come from the Non-Government Organisation, Misereor, fees, and donations, particularly from I.S.M.A. and

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528 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 1.
532 Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne:13/6/06), 5.
Mercy educational institutions. Scholarships, some of which have been organized through Mercy Works, the fundraising body of the Sisters in Australia, have allowed students who would otherwise not be trained as teachers to study at Notre Dame Institute of Education.534

The number of courses and services provided by the Institute belie its small size. Notre Dame Institute of Education offers a Certificate in Education, Certificate in Secondary Teaching, an International Graduate Certificate of Education (through Australian Catholic University), a Bachelor of Education, a Masters in Education (Preliminary), and a Masters in Education (through Karachi University and Australian Catholic University).535 In addition, the Institute offers professional development workshops, school development projects, assistance with school administration, inserviceing of Diocesan and other schools’ staffs on methodology, teacher appraisal and administration, and analysis of school needs, and is involved in Muslim/Christian dialogue and educational research.536

535 Schneider, Annette R.S.M. A Study of an Innovative Approach to teacher Education in Pakistan. (University of Melbourne: Faculty of Education, 1997), 68.
Over the years, staff members have had to be adaptable and flexible, teaching out of their traditional disciplines. Bernadette Marks, more at home in the fields of Maths and Science commented: “We taught all sorts of subjects. I found myself teaching sociology, and Gabrielle was amazing. She taught Pakistan History.” The staff has included Sisters of Mercy, there for some years or for shorter stints of several months, personnel from Australian Catholic University, and Overseas Service Bureau volunteers. Janice Geason R.S.M. has made regular trips to teach short courses in General Studies and Religious Education as part of the enrichment studies in the Bachelor of Education course, and has also taught English as a second language. “Noreen” R.S.M. has spent two three-month periods at N.D.I.E., working with individual students and small groups in English, basic Maths, in the library, in the inservice programme, and in preparation for and observation of lessons during Teaching Practice. She wrote of her work with the students and staff as being “life-giving and sustaining,” and of the experience as “incredibly worthwhile and satisfying beyond my wildest dreams.” Increasingly, staff members are themselves

537 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 1.
538 Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 4.
539 “Noreen” R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (21/7/06), 3-4.
graduates of Notre Dame Institute of Education. “There is an increasing number of local staff at N.D.I.E. That’s the future.”

**Rawalpindi**

The final location of Mercy ministry in Pakistan is Rawalpindi. In 1993, Eileen Anne Daffy R.S.M. arrived in Pakistan at the invitation of Bishop Lobo to take up the Principalship of Saint Michael’s Convent School, Rawalpindi. The plan was to develop the school as a model school in association with Notre Dame Institute of Education. Unfortunately, this did not eventuate, but instead Eileen Ann became the Principal of Saint Mary’s Academy in Lalazar, Rawalpindi, and since then, a whole school development project has been established with Notre Dame Institute of Education. This school is a large boys’ primary and secondary school, with many Muslim children, sons of army personnel, in attendance. Eileen Ann has also been involved in the Diocesan Board of Education, working for educational reform on many levels. Additionally, she has been instrumental in Caritas’ outreach to basti schools and refugee children, and recently

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540 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 3.
received a Queens’ Birthday Honour for her services to education, both in Australia and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{542}

Carmel McCormick R.S.M. worked at the school between 1997, and 1999, and her focus was in primary school curriculum development in association with the teachers. In addition she taught afternoon school for poor students and arranged sewing classes for children. As Carmel instructed in English, the teachers would translate into Urdu.\textsuperscript{543} This mix of teaching in what might be seen as an elite setting and also with the very poor is not unlike the early days of Mercy education in Ireland and indeed in Australia.

\textbf{Some Concluding Remarks}

What sense of how the Mercy Sisters operate in the mission of the Church can be gained from examining their rich twenty-year history in Pakistan?

Firstly, Mercy Sisters respond to need first and foremost, and later, internal organizational structures are established. “There was a need and we responded to it. Later on there was reflection.”\textsuperscript{544} The Sisters were motivated by a desire to care for people, especially women and children, whose needs

\textsuperscript{542}“Queens Birthday Honours”, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, (11/6/2007).
\textsuperscript{543}McCormick, Carmel R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/6/06), 1.
\textsuperscript{544}Geason, Janice R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13.6/06) 1.
were not being met. Helen Delaney R.S.M., former Melbourne Congregational leader who visited the Pakistan community regularly, stated: (The Mercy women) “were all very ministry focused.”

Initially a Mission Superior was appointed to oversee the workings of the Mercy women and to be the conduit of communication. Later, structures to facilitate the workings of the Mercy community, accountability and reflection upon their ministry were put in place. Perhaps this was in part to combat an individualized way of working that was immediately effective but not always sustainable in nature. Possibly, the strong personalities of some of the Mercy women contributed to both the resilience of the mission but also to some of its difficulties. The former Executive Director of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy, Patricia Pak Poy R.S.M., commented:

The Sisters were very vigorous, had lots of initiative and drive, looking for the poorest .. but it wasn’t always development work, and (it was) hard to sustain. They were generous, finding things to do, but they needed to reflect on what was appropriate… Who would take over after them?

In 1987, the Sisters of the then two Pakistan foundations met formally in Peshawar for the first time.

Significantly the meeting commenced on the feast day of Our

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545 Delaney, Helen R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 3.
Lady of Mercy, 24th September. The Sisters came together to share the stories of their ministries, and to discuss the role of Mission Superior and the issue of formation of local women in the Mercy tradition. Similar gatherings of the Mercy Sisters in Pakistan became a regular event, as did theological reflections led by Sisters of Mercy on visitation from Australia.

In 1989, a Mission Statement of the Sisters’ was enunciated.

…we come as Sisters of Mercy, women of the Church, in response to the call of the local Church: to allow ourselves to be drawn by the Spirit into assisting/promoting the development of the people, especially through education, health care, pastoral work and a Hostel…to be empowered and to empower persons to live with dignity and to search for and attain justice.\[548\]

The statement underlined the Sisters’ particular ministries within the Church, and their hope to assist in the liberation of those who lived diminished lives. In addition, the Sisters made recommendations about the preparation of Sisters for the Pakistan mission, visits by I.S.M.A. executive members, decision-making, communication, review and evaluation of the mission, and

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accountability. A supportive structure for the Sisters’ ministry was developing.

In 1995, at the celebrations marking the ten-year anniversary of the first foundation in Pakistan, a vision statement of the Sisters of Mercy was developed:

The clear expression of the Providence of God, the invitation of the Church and the need of personal liberation call forth the Sisters of Mercy to become inserted in the life and culture of the Islamic State of Pakistan. In solidarity with the Pakistani people we listen, identify and discern where we, as Sisters of Mercy can work in partnership with them.

This second statement was more measured in its tone and aspirations, but true to the sense of the Mercy call, of God at work in the ministry, and of the Sisters’ working within the Church structures and mandates, very necessary in a setting where one was in such a minority situation. The statement also pointed to the starting point for the Sisters’ ministry being the culture and life of the people.

The issue of the formation of local women as Sisters of Mercy has heightened the tensions and complexities of working in Pakistan, and it has only been in recent years that this

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549 Ibid., 2-4.
issue has been resolved. From the early days of the mission, some Sisters believed that the spirit at work in the hearts of some young Pakistani women should be nurtured, whilst others advised caution.\footnote{McCormick, Carmel R.S.M. “Interview with Author”. (Wodonga, 14/6/06), 4.} Cross-cultural issues, sustainability of the Mercy mission, and the relationship with other orders in Pakistan were some of the difficulties which surfaced in consideration of formation.\footnote{McCormick, Carmel R.S.M. “Interview with Author”. (Wodonga, 14/6/06), 4.} These are issues common to missions, and go to the heart of ministry in a foreign setting. In 1998, the first Pakistani woman joined the Sisters of Mercy, being first professed in 2003, with another in 2004.\footnote{See also Doherty, Laura. “Embodying a Tradition: the Sisters of Mercy in Pakistan”. (Masters Qualifying Essay, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2004), 56-59.} Ministries in Gujrat and Peshawar have been handed onto others, but there is sufficient hope in the Mercy future in Pakistan to nurture local vocations, if only on a small scale.

It would be remiss not to give some attention to the real difficulties and struggles of the Pakistan mission. The debilitating heat, minor illnesses, language difficulties, poor facilities, unreliable utilities, local bureaucracy, and corruption have been some of the difficulties and frustrations for the Sisters in Pakistan. They had to learn to do things according to local ways and rhythms. Political instability, the Gulf Wars, and the

\footnote{ibid., 63.}
“war on terror” added to the backdrop of insecurity. The grinding poverty and unsanitary conditions faced by many people, and the limitations placed on Pakistani women were hard to cope with. Helen Delaney commented once after a visit to Pakistan, that if anyone said anything about women being badly done by in Australian society, she would probably respond with something she would regret, because of the oppression of women she had witnessed in Pakistan. Although not oppressed, the Mercy Sisters felt certain restrictions of movement accepted as the norm for women. “Noreen” R.S.M. wrote of seldom going out alone, and how, after “9/11”, “we seldom left the campus, and only with a College driver.” At times, there were bomb scares, and a violent incident in Lahore in 1997 left a lasting impression on some of the Sisters. In the minutes of some of the Sisters’ meetings, a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability were expressed. Words such as “crisis”, “overwhelming”, “isolation’ and “struggling to accept reality” indicate the depth of difficulty experienced by the Mercy women at some times in their mission.

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554 Delaney, Helen R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 4.
555 Noreen” R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, 21/7/06, 3.
556 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 2.
One of the greatest challenges to the fledgling Pakistan mission has been serious illness and death. In that, they mirrored Catherine McAuley’s experience in the early years of the Sisters of Mercy. Various sisters had to take leave from Pakistan due to illness. In 1988, a reoccurrence of cancer meant that Abina Looney R.S.M., then Mission Superior based in Peshawar, had to return to Australia and she died in Brisbane in 1989. In 1989, Lexie Brooks R.S.M. left Pakistan after she was diagnosed with cancer, and died in Melbourne in May 1991, whilst still in her early 30s. Matthew Coffey took ill even before Notre Dame Institute of Education opened. Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. experienced a reoccurrence of cancer during her eight years in Pakistan, and died in January 2003. The option for the poor meant real physical difficulties for the Sisters. Pakistan certainly brought them face to face with what missiologist David Bosch called the “vulnerability of mission”.

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558 Catherine McAuley commented that “the tomb seems never closed” as a number of the early Sisters died in a relatively short space of time. See McAuley, Catherine. “Letter to Sister M. Teresa White”, 17/10/1837 in Sullivan, Mary C. (ed.) The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 99.
560 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. ”Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 3.
They learned about the stark physical cost of mission, and “the Cross” to which Catherine McAuley so often referred.

In other more positive senses, their suffering also brought them close to some of their foundress’ ways. For one thing, letters from home, like the early letters from Catherine to her foundations, were a vital support and link. In 1986, the Sisters reported to Institute Plenary Council that the support of the Sisters in terms of resources and letters was “quite overwhelming.” Prayer, both individual and communal, was an essential support and connecting thread for the Sisters in Pakistan. Be it the Rosary, Scripture applied to the local setting, gathering for evening prayer, or praying Catherine’s Suscipe, spiritual nourishment and sustenance became vital for ministry. Like Catherine, a reliance on God to ease their anxiety and to provide was essential to the Mercy mission, and perhaps came more naturally in a setting that was foreign, difficult and unsettling.

Clearly, what has been learned from the Pakistan mission has not only been in terms of vulnerability. The Sisters have also referred positively to the hospitality and “richness of the

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welcome” they encountered, “a profound experience of trust and confidence” and “being on a journey in faith with our God.”

Bernadette Marks R.S.M. spoke of the sustaining power of being “part of the Church there, part of a whole body,” and how important daily Eucharist was to her in Pakistan. Whilst the Church practices were different from Australian experiences of Church, the Sisters’ membership of the Church was nourishing and sustaining.

The Sisters also learned to appreciate the gifts of the Pakistan people amongst whom they ministered. Bernadette Marks R.S.M. spoke of her admiration for the Pakistani people:

Pakistan people are very creative, and have taught us a lot about putting up with many difficulties. They are very resilient. They are very respectful, hospitable and attractive people. They have very strong family relationships. Family loyalty is important.

Similarly, Carmel McCormick R.S.M. applauded the generous, resilient and hospitable Pakistani people, especially the women who said: “It is my duty,” and those who shared their food with the Sisters when they broke the Ramazan (Ramadan) fast.

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566 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 3.
567 Marks, Bernadette R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Adelaide, 21/9/06), 3.
568 McCormick Carmel. “Interview with author”, (Wodonga, 14/6/06), 2.
On a Congregation-wide scale, Helen Delaney R.S.M.
believes the Pakistan experience has broadened the horizons of
the Melbourne Congregation, and has taught this large and
somewhat self-reliant body about working with other Mercy
Congregations.569 These competent, professional women have
been reminded of the possibilities for learning, the insecurity and
the required trust in God of the mission experience. Supportive
structures, prayer, respect for culture and a realistic vision have
developed over the twenty years as a vital foundation for the
Mercy mission.

In 2005, the Sisters of Mercy in Pakistan were able to
create a very hopeful Assembly Statement which, whilst noting
the tension and relative newness of their mission, gave expression
to joy and growth:

We, Sisters of Mercy of Pakistan, delight in our
emerging identity. In our prayer, in our ministries, in
our life together, we are fired by the call of the Gospel
and the spirit of Catherine McAuley’s vision of Mercy. We are called ... to read the signs of the times of
Pakistan, and where, within this, Mercy can be alive
and active.570

The Mercy ministry in Pakistan, although vulnerable, has been
built on a spirit of passionate faithfulness to a call to serve God’s
poor, and has proven to be resilient.

569 Delaney, Helen R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 13/6/06), 3-4.
570 Tracking Mercy: Newsletter of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.
(March 2005), 2.
The call to work with the poor of East Timor developed in different ways, but the Sisters’ response has shared many features of Mercy ministry evident in Pakistan. This study now turns to the context of the Sisters’ East Timorese ministry.
Chapter Eleven: East Timor: Context.

The Indonesian invasion of East Timor in December 1975 and the subsequent years of oppression shaped the awareness of many Australians, including the Australian Sisters of Mercy, of that small country situated approximately 600 kilometres from Darwin. This discussion draws on political and religious sources that were largely written during the period of Indonesian rule in East Timor. Material from the Sisters of Mercy who have supported and worked with East Timorese people has also been incorporated into this chapter which examines and interweaves the history, religion, culture, politics and socio-economic life of East Timor.

Portuguese Colonialism

Portuguese navigators first reached Timor in 1512 or 1514, but did not establish a settlement for another fifty years. What they did engage in immediately, like the Chinese before them, was the sandalwood trade. The first Portuguese settlement was established by a Dominican friar, Antonio Taveira, on the island of Solor. He set about converting the locals to

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Catholicism, and a fort was constructed to protect the converts from Muslim raiders. From the 1640s, the Dutch vied for Timor’s sandalwood, its territory and its people for slaves. Despite a long struggle for control of the island, the official division of the island into West (Dutch) Timor and East (Portuguese) Timor did not occur until 1913. In 1950 West Timor became part of the new Republic of Indonesia.

Portugal ruled East Timor for over 400 years, and its administration could be described as both exploitative and neglectful. Its administration overlaid the existing structures of Timorese society: kingdoms (*rais*) consisting of a number of *sucos* or tribal groupings headed by a *liurai*. Some of the less pleasant administrative jobs and the collection of taxes fell to the heads of tribes, and many of these *liurais* became pillars of Portuguese colonial society. It was often this elite who converted and sent their children to Catholic schools, though traditional animist beliefs and practices remained. Cultivation of cash crops, forced labour, economic exploitation, seizure of land

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572 Dunn, James. *Timor: A People Betrayed*. (Milton, Queensland: The Jacaranda Press, 1983), 15. This motif of the Catholic Church’s protection of the people against largely Muslim forces was to be developed in the twenty-five years of Indonesian rule following the 1975 invasion.


and mistreatment of the local people led to some local rebellions against the colonial ruler, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{575}

For much of the twentieth century, East Timor was “the most backward and remote of Portugal’s colonies.”\textsuperscript{576} Little concerted development had taken place, and on the eve of World War II, the capital, Dili

had no electricity and no town water supply; there were no paved roads, no telephone services (other than to the houses and offices of senior officials), and not even a wharf for cargo handling.\textsuperscript{577}

After World War II, Portugal was the poorest country in Western Europe, and East Timor was not a priority for the fading colonial power. In the latter years of Portuguese rule, malnutrition was widespread in East Timor, infant mortality was often as high as fifty per cent. The majority of the population lived by subsistence farming. Although the numbers attending school increased in the 1960s and 70s, 93 per cent of the population was still illiterate in 1973.\textsuperscript{578}

De-Colonisation and Indonesian Occupation

In April 1974, a left-wing military coup ousted the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal and this led to stirrings for independence from its colonies, including East Timor. Three main parties formed in East Timor: the União Democrática Timorense (U.D.T.), the Associação Social Democrática Timorense (A.S.D.T.), and the Associação Popular Democrática Timorense (APODETI). The largest of these, the U.D.T., identified with the colonial regime and called for a Portuguese-speaking federation of self-governing states. The A.S.D.T. consisted of some Jesuit-trained seminary graduates and military men with socialist ideology, whilst the smallest group, the APODETI, called for union with Indonesia. Indonesia saw decolonization as the opportunity for integrating East Timor into the rest of its territory, and was encouraged in this regard by the visit of Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to Jakarta in September 1974. Indonesia began a campaign of pro-APODETI


and pro-Indonesian propaganda in East Timor, and the A.S.D.T. re-named itself Fretlin (Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente.) The U.D.T. and Fretlin joined forces, despite Fretlin’s increasingly Marxist leanings, and pressed for independence for East Timor. The Indonesian government held talks with both parties and successfully “divided and conquered” the two groups, using the fear of Communism as a tool. A civil war ensued in August-September, 1974, taking 1500 East Timorese lives. Meanwhile Indonesia readied itself and on 7\textsuperscript{th} December, 1975, its invasion began\textsuperscript{581}.

The twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation brought some benefits to, but extracted an enormous price from, the East Timorese people. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, schools and clinics, was developed under Indonesian rule\textsuperscript{582}, but was also used in a regime of oppression of the people. Human rights abuses such as forced sterilizations, forcible removal off land, discouragement or banning of traditional cultural practices and languages, sexual abuse, disappearances, torture, massacres and deliberate starvation were some of the tactics used to subdue


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{582} East Timor: How Long? Uniya/Australian Catholic Relief Briefing Paper 1/ 6, (Sydney: Australian Catholic Relief and Uniya, November 1994), 2.}
the East Timorese people.\textsuperscript{583} In 1984, the death toll was estimated at 200,000,\textsuperscript{584} and ten years later, it was thought that one-third of the East Timorese population had perished since the invasion.\textsuperscript{585} East Timorese armed resistance, \textit{Falantil}, carried on a long guerilla campaign. Thanks to its leader, Xanana Gusmao, the work of East Timorese representative Jose Ramos Horta, and the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Bishop Carlos Belo,\textsuperscript{586} the East Timorese were able to capture international attention from time to time.

\textbf{The Catholic Church in East Timor}

The Catholic Church’s role grew during the period of Indonesian rule. From colonial times the Portuguese Church had influenced the elite of East Timor. The 1940 Concordat between the Vatican and the Lisbon Government had given the Church prime responsibility for education through its “civilizing

\textsuperscript{586} Most prominent amongst this was Max Stahl’s footage of the Santa Cruz massacre in November 1991. See Kohen, Arnold S. \textit{From the Place of the Dead: Bishop Belo and the Struggle for East Timor}. (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999), 202-203.
mission. However, little more than thirty per cent of East Timorese ever belonged to the Catholic Church until 1975. Nonetheless, the Church had the respect of many, particularly when it intervened on behalf of Timorese because of injustice or need. The visits of clergy were much more frequent than those of Portuguese administrators, so it fell to the Church to collect statistics and information from the people. The Church was not free of its ties with the colonial state but it did provide an important network of communication and training. The Jesuit-run seminary in Dare, for example, educated the elite, including those men who would go on to be Fretlin’s leadership.

The Indonesian invasion brought the Catholic Church’s role to the fore in East Timor. It smuggled out reports of human rights violations and Fretlin’s guerrilla activities, noted sinister population declines, and assessed humanitarian needs. In addition, it procured aid from the Catholic Church elsewhere, and spoke directly to the Indonesian authorities in support of the local people, particularly regarding famine, disappearances and

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588 ibid.
589 Dunn, James. *Timor: A People Betrayed*. (Milton, Queensland: The Jacaranda Press, 1983), 51-2. This was to prove vital later on, during the years of Indonesian occupation, when population statistics maintained by the Church indicated the drastic impact of Indonesian occupation. See ibid, 322.
torture. Anne Forbes R.S.M. recalled a local priest going to identify bodies during her first visit to East Timor in 1996, and reporting that “all that was left were bones.” On her second visit, a Jesuit scholastic pointed his village out to Anne and told her the story of how twenty-three people were killed by the Indonesians but the villagers were not allowed to bury the bodies.

The situation took its toll on the clergy, particularly the Church leadership. The head of the East Timorese Church at the time of the invasion, Bishop Ribeiro, resigned due to being overwhelmed by the abuses perpetrated against the people. His successor, Monsignor Mantinho da Costa Lopes, who condemned atrocities and massacres in his country, was interrogated by Indonesian military intelligence, was discredited by the Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, and was sadly removed from office by the Vatican.

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591 Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 3.
592 Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 5.
Bishop Carlos Belo began his appointment in a way that avoided political partisanship, but it soon became evident to him that the human rights abuses the East Timorese people suffered required increasingly outspoken condemnation and attention. He was also prepared to criticise the East Timorese for their internal divisions. Belo spoke in terms of Catholic social teaching, including the need for political and social participation and expression. In 1993 during a visit to Australia, he described the role of the Church in East Timor in the following terms:

- to be with the people...
- to speak out about human rights...
- to put it into the hearts of the young that we must live in hope to become a new society...
- to help in justice, peace and reconciliation, to be the 'voice of the voiceless.'

The membership of the Catholic Church grew enormously during the Indonesian occupation. Among the factors contributing to this growth were the pastoral ministry of the Church, the material and spiritual support it could provide and its mediating role vis à vis the Indonesian authorities. In addition, the strong connection the Church had with pre-Indonesian Timor, its network throughout

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595 Smythe, Patrick A. *The Heaviest Blow: The Catholic Church and the East Timor Issue.* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 40.
the country, and the trust in which it was held contributed to the
Church’s growth during the Indonesian occupation. In a letter to
the Pope regarding his controversial 1989 visit to East Timor, the
East Timorese community in Australia put it plainly:

The historical circumstances of the Timorese people’s
mass conversion to the Catholic Church cannot be
ignored. Our people have turned to the Church for
protection and the advocacy of their rights.597

Approximately ninety per cent of the population called
themselves Catholic during Indonesian rule,598 despite retaining
strong animist traditions. “Nola” R.S.M. commented that there is
even today “a thin veneer of Latin Catholicism over very strong
animist practices and beliefs.”599 The patriarchal Church in East
Timor was an anchor for the people during the twenty-five years
of Indonesian rule.

The Road to Independence
By the time Ramos Horta and Bishop Belo jointly accepted the
1996 Nobel Peace Prize,600 Indonesia’s grip on East Timor was starting to
look shaky. After the financial collapse of Indonesia in 1997 and the

597 “An Appeal to the Pope from the East Timorese Community in Australia”, Just
Reading No. 2: The Church and East Timor: A Collection of Documents by National
and International Catholic Church Agencies. (Melbourne: Catholic Commission for
598 Smythe, Patrick A. The Heaviest Blow: The Catholic Church and the East Timor
Issue. (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 48.
599 “Nola” R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 21/02/06), 1.
600 For the script of Bishop Belo’s acceptance speech see “The Nobel Lecture given by
the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 1996, Carlos Filipe Ximines Belo”, Oslo, 10/12/96
resignation of President Suharto in May 1998, East Timor’s chance at freedom seemed possible. This hope grew when the new Indonesian President Habibie made a surprising offer of either autonomy or self-determination for East Timor.\textsuperscript{601} Around this time, the Australian Government reversed its policy and stated that East Timor had the right to self-determination. President Habibie announced in January 1999 that he was willing to hold a referendum on East Timorese independence.\textsuperscript{602}

In the months leading up to the vote, armed gangs threatened and in some cases, killed local people. The April massacre at the Liquica church was one such incident. Two thousand people had sought shelter at the church from paramilitary groups. On April 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1999, an assault was launched on those in the church, resulting in the deaths of over fifty people (including clergy), the wounding of thirty-five and the disappearance of fourteen.\textsuperscript{603}

In June 1999, the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor began to monitor preparations for the referendum. The plebiscite was twice delayed due to intimidation and violence by pro-integration paramilitary gangs, but eventually took place on 30\textsuperscript{th} August, 1999. The United Nations estimated the voter turnout at 90 per cent.\textsuperscript{604}  

\textsuperscript{603} ibid., 224. See also Dunn, James. \textit{East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence.} (Double Bay: Longueville Books, 2003), 354. and \textit{The Martyrs of Timor} (video) (Melbourne: Albert Street Productions, 2000).  
R.S.M. witnessed the vote. “People were dressed in their best. I can remember seeing an old man being carried in by his grandson to vote.” On 4th September, the result was announced: 78 per cent of East Timorese voters rejected the Indonesian government’s autonomy proposal in favour of self-determination and independence.

**Post-Referendum Violence**

Sadly, a period of widespread violence and massive destruction of infrastructure by militias and gangs followed the referendum result. Bishop Belo’s Dili residence was attacked, and he was evacuated. Tens of thousands of people were forced to flee their homes and villages, some being forced across the border into refugee camps controlled by militias in West Timor. Some caught ships from Dili only to be murdered on board and their bodies dumped into the sea. Anne Forbes R.S.M. recalled a Caritas worker commenting that he was “worried about those boats.”

The boats were going out towards Atauro. This was the day after they had killed so many people in Bishop

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605 Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 9.
608 Possibly 200,000 people were forcibly relocated, and by late September, approximately ninety per cent of East Timor’s population had been displaced. Kohen, Arnold S. *From the Place of the Dead: Bishop Belo and the Struggle for East Timor.* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999), 353.
609 Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 10.
Belo’s compound. (The boats) stopped half-way.
They were dumping the bodies.\textsuperscript{610}

Thousands sought refuge in the United Nations offices and church
organisations. On 13\textsuperscript{th} September, President Habibie agreed to the
deployment of United Nation peacekeepers, and on 20\textsuperscript{th} September, over one
thousand troops arrived in Dili as part of the Australian-led force to start the
process of establishing peace, security, law and order in East Timor.\textsuperscript{611}

In the post-referendum period, the Church and its agencies were
vital in assessing the needs of people, and yet still under attack. On 28\textsuperscript{th}
September, two East Timorese nuns and two local seminarians were
murdered in the Lospalos area as they travelled to assess what could be done
to assist displaced people.\textsuperscript{612} It was into this unstable post-referendum
situation that Sisters of Mercy from the Melbourne and Adelaide
Congregations went to work in East Timor, adding to the Ballarat Sisters’
well-established involvement with the East Timorese people. The following
chapter will examine the ministry of these Sisters in detail.

\textsuperscript{610} ibid.
228-230.
\textsuperscript{612} ibid., 230. See also \textit{The Martyrs of Timor} (video) (Melbourne: Albert Street
Productions, 2000) which examines this incident.
Chapter Twelve: The Australian Sisters of Mercy in Action:

East Timor

This chapter explains how the Sisters of Mercy came to be involved with the people of East Timor, the differing nature of the Sisters’ ministries and the commonalities, and the way in which the Sisters saw their ministry relating to Catherine McAuley’s original vision of mercy. Their experience of ministry with the East Timorese is very much an experience of mutual learning.

The Ballarat Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy have had a very personal and local ministry to East Timorese people, particularly the East Timorese in Australia. Their ministry grew from contact with one person to involvement with local justice and a Friends of East Timor group, then to visitation and ministry in East Timor, and the provision of a home and education in Ballarat for young East Timorese people. In contrast, Sisters from the Melbourne and Adelaide Congregations participated in a national initiative, auspiced by the Mercy and Jesuit Refugee Services, to provide key skills and assistance in post-referendum East Timor. Ministry through this channel has been of a shorter-term and of a specific nature in the areas of health and education.
The Ballarat Congregation

In 1988, an East Timorese woman “Bella” came to study in Australia, thanks to contact with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Jakarta. Through personal contact between the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and the Mercy Sisters in Ballarat, “Bella” moved to Ballarat to study nursing at the Mercy-run Aquinas College, and lived in a residence provided by the Sisters. The hospitality and support given to this woman led to the beginnings of a relationship with the wider East Timorese community. In considering this introduction to the East Timorese people, Anne Forbes R.S.M. said of “Bella”: “She was such a gutsy person, a real survivor, a wonderful woman. So that was a start. That certainly was influential.” From the very start, there was a mutuality to the relationship.

The next step in the growing awareness and involvement of the Ballarat Mercy sisters was through a parish justice group to which Anne Forbes belonged. One of the members kept a file of newspaper cuttings on East Timor to keep informed about the situation. The Wendouree Parish was also visited by an East Timorese cultural group who, as well as performing for the locals, showed them graphic pictures smuggled out from East Timor of the mistreatment of the people.

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613 Pseudonym used for ethical reasons.
614 Malcolm, Beverley, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. Ballarat, 12/02/06), 1.
615 Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. Ballarat, 18/02/06), 1.
there. Anne came into contact with the activist Abel Guterres, now Consul for East Timor. He was to be another influential figure in the development of Anne’s commitment to the people of East Timor. Anne said of him: “He was just so devoted to the cause, and I think it was his optimism, really, that got to me.”

Direct experience was the next step in the Ballarat Congregation’s relationship with East Timor. Four members of the Parish justice group, including Anne and the parish priest, travelled to East Timor for about ten days in 1996. On that trip, they met Bishop Belo, religious sisters and clergy, visited many parishes, and gained a clear insight into the difficulties of life under Indonesian occupation. Movingly, they also met the dying father of “Bella” who had lived with them in Ballarat. Although the hope of a parish to parish relationship could not be realized, Anne’s passion for the East Timorese cause was fired by this visit.

The Ballarat Sisters’ relationship with East Timor took another significant step in 1998, when Abel Guterres approached Anne Forbes to visit East Timor on behalf of the East Timorese community in Australia and attend the profession of “Maria”,

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617 Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. Ballarat, 18/02/06, 4.
who established a religious institute, the Secular Institute of Brothers and Sisters in Christ (ISMAIK), to work with and for the poor. The community asked Anne to deliver the considerable amount of money they had collected for “Maria’s” grassroots ministry. The then Congregational Leader, Rita Hayes R.S.M. hurriedly gave permission for Anne to travel “next week” and the relationship with both “Maria” and the East Timorese people grew in strength.

The needs of East Timorese asylum seekers and refugees in Australia became an urgent and personal issue for Anne Forbes. She knew that Abel Guterres had stressed that East Timor would need educated people. At a meeting in Melbourne, Anne and Rita heard of the needs of some East Timorese boys. This led to an offer by Damascus College in Ballarat to waive fees for one boy’s year 11 and 12 education, and Anne becoming a “house mother” to him. Some time later, the boy approached Anne about two of his friends who would also love the opportunity to be educated. Anne wrote to her Congregational Council, seeking permission to use one of the then recently vacated houses in Victoria Street owned by the

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618 For a history of and insight into the ministries of the Institute see Rogers, Benedict. *The Secular Institute of Brothers and Sisters in Christ.* (Dare, no publisher, 2002).
619 Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 4-5.
620 Ibid., 5.
Mercy Sisters as a supportive home for East Timorese students.

She wrote:

All I ask is that we do not fall into the temptation of the economic rationalists and begin from the consideration of what the properties are worth, rather than seeing there is an opportunity to carry out what we said at the last Chapter, which urged us to find our place among the vulnerable in our society. The thought of starting a new venture at this stage of my life is rather daunting…But I can’t bear to think that these asylum seekers’ lives are on hold because no one will give them a chance.\textsuperscript{621}

The Congregational Council responded affirmatively to Anne’s request, noting her commitment to the East Timorese cause and to the first student. The Council hoped that the initiative would go a small way to re-dressing the lack of action of Australian governments regarding the needs of the East Timorese people.\textsuperscript{622}

Anne became house-mother, tutor, careers counsellor and confidant to a succession of East Timorese students over the next six years. At one stage she had six students living with her, as well as others visiting for weekends and holidays. All of them had experienced trauma.\textsuperscript{623} She assisted students through Years 11 and 12, and also with tertiary studies, not to mention through many personal highs and lows. Due to the visa provisions of

\textsuperscript{621}Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 6. Anne read out her submission and the response she received from the Congregational Council during the interview.

\textsuperscript{622}Hayes, Rita. R.S.M. “Letter to Anne Forbes”, August,1998. Read to author by Anne Forbes during “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 6.

\textsuperscript{623}Forbes, Anne R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 6-7. Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (January, 2006), 2.
some of the students, the Ballarat Sisters provided total financial support to particular individuals.\textsuperscript{624}

Anne Forbes also became directly involved in the dramatic events of 1999 in East Timor. Through her role as Diocesan Director of the Catholic aid agency, Caritas, Anne was asked to be an observer of the 1999 Referendum in East Timor. She was in the country for two months, based herself with “Maria’s” community, and helped care for people who had travelled some distance to vote\textsuperscript{625}. After the referendum, Anne assisted with displaced people and the children for whom “Maria” cared. Anne commented on the constant sound of gunfire in the background and smoke from the destruction of Dili. “…We had such a ringside view. Dili was just below us.” \textsuperscript{626} Anne agonized over whether to follow the Caritas protocol of leaving if in danger, and after much heart-felt prayer, she decided to leave in order to be able to inform Australians of the reality of the post-referendum violence. Her trip to the airport was unsettling and frightening, and if not for the assistance of a Jesuit priest, Anne may not have made it to the United Nations compound, where she met with a journalist from \textit{The Age} newspaper, Lindsay

\textsuperscript{624}Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06),7.
\textsuperscript{625}Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 7-9.
\textsuperscript{626}Ibid., 10.
Murdoch. Through him, she was able to give an Australian voice to the dire situation in East Timor.

Advocacy through the Australian and international media was the next step in Anne’s journey with the East Timorese people. She was frustrated at the apparent lack of political will in Australia and internationally to intervene in Timor for the sake of protecting the local people. Unbeknown to Anne, Ballarat Mercy Sisters, associates, friends and members of Ballarat parishes were faxing, emailing and telephoning Australian Government Ministers’ and United Nations’ offices pleading for peacekeepers to be sent to East Timor. Focussed by Anne’s presence, the proportion of advocates for East Timor among this section of the Ballarat community surely exceeded the norm for Australia, even as the level of general awareness and activism rose. Soon after Anne’s Hercules landed in Darwin on 10th September, 1999, Anne was interviewed by A.B.C. television’s 7.30 Report. Other interviews followed, including those with international media organizations, and so Anne fulfilled her

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]

\[\text{627}^{\text{ibid., 11.}}\]
\[\text{628}^{\text{ibid., 12.}}\]
\[\text{629}^{\text{Malcolm, Beverley R.S.M. “Interview with Author”. (Ballarat, 12/02/06), 7.}}\]
\[\text{630}^{\text{These interviews included one with a German television outlet and an Irish radio company. Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06), 12.}}\]
commitment to raising awareness of the urgent need for intervention in East Timor.\textsuperscript{631}

On a return visit to East Timor, Anne asked “Maria” if her community had been worried that she had walked out on them. “Maria” explained to Anne that they had seen her on the television and that they knew that she had kept her word to advocate on behalf of the East Timorese. “I was so relieved that I hadn’t let them down.”\textsuperscript{632} Anne has continued to support her former East Timorese students and the wider East Timorese community, although the Victoria Street house is no longer needed by them.

In reflecting on her motivation, Anne cited Catherine McAuley’s initial vision of serving “the poor, sick and ignorant, and those words were included in the vows I took as a Sister of Mercy.”\textsuperscript{633} She also identified with the mission of the Church that she believes to be the same as Jesus’ mission “to bring (and to be) good news to the poor.”\textsuperscript{634} Anne’s work with the East Timorese has been very much an example of faith in action, of a strongly personal and mutual relationship of deepening commitment.

\textsuperscript{631}Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 18/02/06,) 13.
\textsuperscript{632}Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{633}Forbes, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (January 2006), 3.
\textsuperscript{634}Ibid.
Beverley (Bev) Malcolm R.S.M. also advocated for the East Timorese community, though her work took a different path to Anne’s. She, too, was first introduced to East Timor through “Bella”, with whom she had a strong relationship. Bev also came in contact with the students living with Anne, as their houses were only a few doors apart in Victoria Street. Bev’s major work for East Timor was through a local, grassroots friendship organization.

Bev became an active member of the local branch of the Australia-East Timor Association in 1999, and in the following year, Ballarat was assigned the district of Ainaro to help rebuild. The Ballarat Association became known as the Friends of Ainaro, and in 2002, a trip was planned to East Timor to assess needs and build further links between Ballarat and Ainaro. Through the initiative of Veronica Lawson R.S.M. and the hosted students, an East Timorese cultural night was organized and the proceeds paid for Bev’s airfare and for funds for the community in East Timor. Due to the Australian Government travel warnings, some of Ballarat’s civic leaders withdrew from the delegation. Well-meaning people had tried to

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635 Since the writing of my first draft, Bev Malcolm lost her battle with cancer. Bev died in July 2007, and the author trusts this section of the thesis is a fitting tribute to a passionate supporter of the East Timorese people.

636 Malcolm, Beverley R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 12/02/06), 1.

637 ibid., 6. Bev commented that at the start of the Ballarat Friends group, it was dominated by Sisters of Mercy.
dissuade her from going, but she took a lesson from Catherine McAuley’s trust in God.

Catherine McAuley, she made a couple of dangerous journeys… I just felt this was the time to trust in God’s providence. I felt so strongly the call to go…So it was for me, personally, it was a soul-searching time and also changed my life around, trusting and knowing this was a call to mercy.  

Bev travelled to East Timor with two other members of the Friends group.

The group visited East Timor for twelve days. They spent most of their time in the Ainaro area, meeting community representatives, seeing first-hand the need for housing, sanitation, clean water and the re-building of infrastructure, and assuring the people of Australian support. Bev handed over a sample of a birthing kit from the Ballarat Zonta group to a small clinic, befriended children and heard stories from the local sisters, clergy and others of the traumas of the recent past.

I kept thinking about Catherine McAuley, you know about the gentleness, the smile, the kind, compassionate look… because …. most of the visitors they’d had before were people who killed them.

The advocacy of the group intensified upon their return to Australia. They met with the Ballarat Council, and over

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638 Malcolm, Beverley R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 12/02/06), 2.
640 Malcolm, Beverley, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Ballarat, 12/02/06), 3-6.
641 ibid., 6.
time, their work has resulted in the Council taking overarching responsibility for the relationship with East Timor, thus assuring it of some on-going financial stability. A new Council committee, on which the Sisters of Mercy are represented, has been formed to co-ordinate the inter-country activities. Over recent years, various community leaders from East Timor have been sponsored to visit Ballarat, observe Australian practices and share their stories.  

The personal commitment Bev had to East Timor led her to speak and act publicly in support of East Timor. Another way she witnessed to her commitment to East Timor was by wearing an East Timorese ta’is, a woven scarf-like garment. She used this outward sign of her involvement as a way of starting conversations with others about East Timor and of spreading the awareness of the needs and beauty of the country.

Bev’s commitment to East Timor was founded on her faith in a loving God and her role as a Sister of Mercy. She saw Catherine McAuley’s insistence that “The poor need help today, not next week” as being very relevant to the East Timorese.

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642 ibid., 7-8.
643 ibid., 8. Bev’s ta’is featured in her funeral ceremonies and in the photo of Bev printed on memorial cards.
situation and to her motivation to help. \textsuperscript{645} Likewise, she identified her advocacy for East Timor with the Church’s liberating mission. “I mean to bring about the vision and reality of the reign of God and to work towards creating a better world.”\textsuperscript{646}

Sometimes major developments in life commence almost by accident. Such is the case of “Madeleine” R.S.M. and her work for East Timor. Her involvement with the East Timorese people began in 1999 with an appeal made at a Congregational meeting for Sisters to visit Pukapunyal, where 1800 people had been given safe haven from the violence that accompanied the East Timorese referendum. During her first visit to Pukapunyal, a young East Timorese man approached “Madeleine” and asked her for rosary beads. From that, a friendship ensued, and “Madeleine” came to know his story.

I befriended him. I wept. He’d never known his parents. His father was shot in 1975, and his mother died of starvation he was led to believe.\textsuperscript{647}

“Madeleine’s” awareness of and commitment to East Timor grew.

The young man was given permission to stay in Ballarat, and he shared his stories of East Timor at the Mercy school at which “Madeleine” was teaching. After a brief visit to

\textsuperscript{645} Malcom, Beverley R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (January 2006), 3.
\textsuperscript{646} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{647} Madeleine”, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 19/01/06), 1-2.
East Timor, he was able to return to Ballarat to study for two years. He came to see “Madeleine” as a mother figure, and their friendship led to her first visit to East Timor in 2004 to see him, his wife and first child. Whilst she was there, she met with “Maria”, at Anne Forbes’ request, and a seed was planted.648

What developed was “Madeleine’s” commitment to work in East Timor. “Maria” requested that “Madeleine” help her with her ministry. After six month’s discernment, and with the permission of her Congregational leader, “Madeleine” left for a six-month “trial period” in East Timor.649 “Madeleine” was attracted to “Maria’s” ministry with the poor. “Her heart is with the absolute poor… ‘Maria’ is a very creative person. She doesn’t always have a plan. Things just happen.”650 This responsiveness to the needs of people has resonated with “Madeleine’s” understanding of Catherine McAuley’s vision:

Catherine McAuley said not to look to do the extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things extraordinarily well. She responded where the need was. ‘Maria’ is very like Catherine.651

Like Catherine, too, “Madeleine’s” ministry has combined both the practical and the spiritual. She has worked largely in the formation house of “Maria’s” secular institute,

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648Madeleine”, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 19/01/06), 2.
649Ibid., 2-3
650Ibid., 3-4.
651Madeleine”, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 19/01/06), 4.
Brothers and Sisters in Christ. She also has taught English, helped children with maths after school, and assisted local women. In addition, “Madeleine” has been of pastoral and spiritual support at the “Open House for the Suffering” in Tibar for people with tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and leprosy. She has even taught staff about cleaning to limit cross-infection. Her ministry is very practical!

“Madeleine’s” age (she is in her sixties) and experience have also been respected and appreciated in East Timor. She has been a sounding board for “Maria”, whom she sees as being “at the edge” where raw needs are to be found. Like Catherine McAuley’s mission, “Maria’s” work has been unpopular at times with some elements within the Church.

Some priests and other congregations found “Maria’s” ministry a bit of a threat as she is so dynamic, she is leaving them behind. “Maria” sees a need and responds to it … can’t wait for the rest of the Church to catch on.

For “Madeleine”, it has been a life-giving experience to live in “Maria’s” community as a respected elder, and to be given the name “avo” (grandma). She has provided encouragement and a reflective, helpful and wise presence to the community.

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652 ibid., 3.
653 ibid., 4.
654 ibid., 7.
655 ibid., 6.
656 Madeleine”, R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 19/01/06), 5.
“Madeleine’s” life in East Timor has not been comfortable. “I live very simply – there are no taps, we scoop water to bathe ourselves…. I can hear the rats in the roof at night.”⁶⁵⁷ There are other difficulties such as malaria and language and cultural barriers, but it is an authentic mission of mercy for her, one that responds to real needs and which demands reliance on God’s providence.

… everything I need for the ministry is there already, it has been given. Just trust God and all will be well. The gifts are there. As Catherine McAuley said: “We belong to God. All in us is his.”⁶⁵⁸

Whether it is by accident, fate or God’s spirit at work, “Madeleine” has discovered a life-giving ministry which is personal, mutual and linked inextricably to that of Catherine McAuley and God’s poor.

Catherine McAuley regarded education as a transformative ministry. It is in that field that “Nola” R.S.M. of the Ballarat Congregation has worked for many years. She first visited East Timor in 2000, and brought to her ministry there much valuable experience, including teaching East Timorese children in Darwin, working in Kimberleys and studying for a year at the Columban’s Mission Institute at Turramurra. Thanks to her connections with the Claretian priests in Darwin, “Nola”

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⁶⁵⁷ ibid., 4.
⁶⁵⁸ ibid., 8.
came to work in an education team, along with a Claretian priest and brother. Their role was to support teachers and offer them retreats in the Fohorem area. They visited fifty schools on a regular basis, concentrating on faith development and skills for teachers.\textsuperscript{659} In addition, “Nola” team-taught with the English teacher at a junior high school. She found as a madre she was well-respected, but the local people also respected her because she “got in and did things”, including digging in the garden.\textsuperscript{660}

Like “Madeleine”, she saw her role as partly to be a presence, and partly to use the skills she had in education and English with the community. Bringing hope to the East Timorese was an important aspect of her being with the East Timorese. “The people feel like no one cares…They feel abandoned. It’s important to be there for them.”\textsuperscript{661} “Nola” believed that Catherine McAuley would be there, walking with the poor in East Timor – “We see a need and step in and do it”\textsuperscript{662}, but it was crucial not to develop a hand-out mentality amongst the people.

We must do it their way, not the way we do it here in Australia. We must gain their trust through developing relationships. Without trust, nothing happens\textsuperscript{663}.

\textsuperscript{659}“Nola” R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 21.02/06), 1.
\textsuperscript{660}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{661}\textit{ibid.}, 3.
\textsuperscript{662}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{663}\textit{ibid.}
“Nola” has felt many resonances with Catherine McAuley during her time in East Timor, and felt her presence communicated mercy to the local people. As a white, middle-class woman like Catherine McAuley, she could use her influence with the rich, especially with those back in Australia, to help the poor, particularly the young population of East Timor, and with the women she met, the foci of the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy.664

The Ballarat Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy has developed a strong commitment to the people of East Timor, both within Australia and in East Timor itself, through personal contacts, the willingness to respond to calls for help, their sense of what Catherine McAuley would do, and through enabling structures or personnel such as supportive Congregational leadership, a local Australia-East Timor group, a Parish justice group, Caritas and the Ballarat Council. Their response has been practical, public, sometimes political in its activism, often individual but with the encouragement or support of others. Their work has been personal, relational, and mutual, has drawn on their expertise and experience, and has evolved over the years as needs and circumstances have developed or changed. This

664Sixty per cent of the population is younger than sixteen years of age according to “Nola”. Nola” R.S.M. “Interview with author”. (Ballarat, 21.02/06), 1.
ministry has made a profound impact on the Sisters most involved, inspiring and stretching them, and asking them to trust in God as they moved well beyond their comfort zone to translate Catherine McAuley’s vision for the “poor, sick and ignorant” in new twentieth century settings. Reflecting on her experience, Anne Forbes has been able to say that she has gained far, far more than she has “ever given to the East Timorese.” She is typical of the Sisters in this summation of their experience with the people of East Timor.

**Melbourne and Adelaide Congregations.**

As well as the Ballarat commitment, the Mercy Refugee Service, a national body of the Sisters of Mercy, has responded to the recent needs of East Timor. It organized support through the visitation of and practical assistance for those East Timorese who were granted “safe haven” in Pukapunyal, Darwin and Sydney after the 1999 Referendum. Additionally, the Mercy Refugee Service arranged for several Sisters from Melbourne or Adelaide to work in East Timor after the Referendum when positions were advertised by the Jesuit Refugee Service. These initiatives developed as needs became known, and they involved the response of individual Sisters to a

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666 Moore, Margaret, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 28/08/06), 1.
call. Unlike the Ballarat efforts, Sisters were seconded to East Timor for a set time in a pre-determined role that drew on their particular skills in education or nursing. However, these roles in practice did not always resemble their advertised descriptions, and like the Ballarat ministries, the Sisters found themselves called out of their comfort zones and into a greater reliance upon God.

Carole McDonald R.S.M., of the Melbourne Congregation, had years of experience in refugee work which had taken her to Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Afghanistan. In October 1999 Carole responded to a request from the Jesuit Refugee Service for someone to investigate how to re-establish education in East Timor following the post-referendum destruction. As a member of Christians In Solidarity with East Timor, Carole had taken more than a passing interest in the country. She was shocked to see “the place so totally burned.” She stayed for a month in that year and described the scene in the following terms:

It was a disaster scene. Everything was burnt out in the city and the countryside…. There was twisted iron: the remains of beds, uprights of houses. There were burnt out buses and cars. In one area… Maliana…we visited twenty-three schools in three days. Only two or so of them could function. The crops were burnt, animals

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667 McDonald, Carole, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 20/02/06), 1.
668 ibid.
were killed, though there were mangy dogs. Cars, buses were taken to West Timor.\textsuperscript{669}

The United Nations aimed to give the children a sense of normality and security by re-establishing the education system. Carole reported that the children would ask: “When can we go to school?”\textsuperscript{670}

Her work during 2000 was a very practical, hands-on ministry which involved the transporting of goods and equipment to schools. Carole divided her time between three areas – two weeks per month in Dili and one week in each of Maliana, close to the border with West Timor, and Odafuro in the Lospalos area. The Jesuit Refugee Service team of which Carole was a member encouraged the teachers and anyone who would listen to start or re-start schools. “Some built bamboo seating for kids, or straw roofing for the school. It gave the adults something useful to do.”\textsuperscript{671} This was a ministry that encouraged people at the grassroots to start to rebuild their lives and their hopes for their children.

Carole’s living conditions were difficult. There was a lack of water and food, as well as the absence of infrastructure and transportation. Relationships were often strained amongst the

\textsuperscript{669}\textit{ibid.} See also, McDonald, Carole, R.S.M. “Report for M.R.S. Regarding My/Mercy Involvement in East Timor”. Archives, Melbourne Congregation, Sisters of Mercy. 687/403 (16), 2-3.

\textsuperscript{670}McDonald, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 20/02/06), 1.

\textsuperscript{671}\textit{ibid.}, 2.
clergy of different nationalities, which made working through the Jesuit Refugee Service difficult. Carole faced loneliness and material poverty, but was sustained by prayer and her Mercy network. Additionally, the courage and hospitality of the people encouraged her, as did their determination to be self-governing, and their nurturing prayerfulness. In December 1999, Carole wrote:

> It was extraordinary to witness the overwhelming joy of a people at ‘becoming free’ after 400 plus 24 years of colonisation, and their acceptance of this paradoxical poverty that was the price of this freedom.

Carole’s ministry involved seeking assistance for those most in need of it. As her time in East Timor drew on, Carole became increasingly concerned with the influence of the some non-government organisations that had established very different standards of living for their workers from that of the East Timorese people. By the end of 2000, Carole was able to write of signs of hope of peace, reconciliation and the re-establishment of communities, but she urged her fellow sisters to pray that it will be these initiatives (that) become more common and the U.N. agencies can step aside to

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672 ibid.
allow the Timorese people to get on with the business of rebuilding a lasting peace in their own land.  

Upon her return to Australia, Carole wrote of the inspiration and call of the East Timorese people:

The people cry out to our hearts of Mercy for mercy and compassion. In their joyful acceptance of suffering and poverty in order to be free and independent, they teach us much about what it is to receive mercy and to be mercy.

Carole’s active, practical ministry in the field of education was enriched by her experience of a mutual and humbling sharing of faith, hope, and, tellingly, of what mercy entailed. She saw her role as part of the Church’s mission of justice to hear the stories of the people, to be a presence and a voice for them. She also viewed her work as part of the legacy of Catherine McAuley, who “was with those who had nothing.”

Rosemary Patterson R.S.M., also of the Melbourne Congregation, travelled to East Timor in October 2000 to take up a position as a teacher educator with the Jesuit Refugee Service. She worked in three communities during her three years in East Timor: in Luro, a remote village in the east of the country, in Maliana, and in Baucau, East Timor’s second largest town.

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677 McDonald, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 20/02/06), 3.
Rosemary found the level of trauma very significant amongst the adults, and that much of the rubble and many of the damaged buildings from the 1999 destruction had not been dealt with. “Every building was black and shattered in Dili. After twelve months, nothing seemed to have been rebuilt or repaired.” The people’s fear had numbed them and so the country remained in disrepair.

Additionally, Rosemary discovered that education in East Timor was very different from Australia. Teachers were often untrained, had no methodology other than rote learning, and that there was no documented curriculum. She had to re-assess her expectations of how to go about teacher-inservicing and what she might be able to achieve. In Maliana, she taught English two days a week and did three days of teacher education in four different schools.

I found it good to go out to schools and show teachers how to teach through practical resources. Even then, it didn’t always work…. It was difficult, but I loved it.

Rosemary found the process of learning to understand the needs of the East Timorese from their perspective a real challenge. “It was a huge learning curve for me with the first step being to become their friend and form a relationship

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678 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, March. 2006, 1.
679 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, March. 2006, 2.
680 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 31/05/06), 1.
A relationship of trust was necessary before any development could take place, and the process was one of mutual learning, vulnerability and humility. Rosemary, like Catherine McAuley, came to rely on the providence of God in the difficulties of her ministry.

I soon discovered in East Timor, a country in which I was so unfamiliar with the culture that without God and knowing and believing that God was leading me, I would not have had any direction or focus to move forward.

Rosemary learnt not to assume, but rather to walk with and beside the people at their pace, and to listen to their priorities. Learning to work out how to operate with God’s help was “also a connection point with the people.” Enabling people to believe in themselves, to articulate their needs and to see that God “is alive in the suffering people of East Timor” as well as in the good things of life was, to Rosemary’s view, the mission of the Church and her mission in East Timor. Again a Sister of Mercy discovered much about faith and mercy in her endeavours to be of practical help to people in need. She felt Catherine McAuley’s ministry to the poor of her times involved risk-taking and that has sustained and inspired her in her work for East Timor.

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681 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (March, 2006), 2.
682 ibid., 3.
683 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Interview with author”, (Melbourne, 31/05/06), 2.
684 Patterson, Rosemary, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (March, 2006), 3.
Catherine was always taking risks and finding new foundations. I believe these foundations symbolize the challenges and struggles that I needed to move forward with today.\textsuperscript{685}

Rosemary has continued to work for the East Timorese people through taking a position as the East Timor Mission Co-ordinator for the Carmelites, based here in Australia.

Anne Foale R.S.M. of the Adelaide Congregation worked for two years in the area of health care in East Timor from early in 2000. As a registered nurse with experience in midwifery and intensive care, she was part of a multi-disciplinary Jesuit Refugee Service team which supported widows and vulnerable people in the aftermath of the 1999 violence. Anne assessed patients for evacuations to hospitals and clinics, and worked to improve the outcomes for women who were too often dying “because of pregnancy, childbirth, labour and early post-partum problems.”\textsuperscript{686} Being a \textit{madre} often persuaded local people to follow Anne’s assessment and advice, though their hesitation was understandable, given that many people “simply disappeared in the previous years” from hospitals.\textsuperscript{687} Anne participated in regular clinics in several districts, and although drawn to longer-term community development projects, her

\textsuperscript{685}ibid.  
\textsuperscript{686}Foale, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (September, 2006), 2.  
\textsuperscript{687}ibid.
mandate was really attending to practical needs (often emergencies) as they arose.

Like Rosemary Patterson, Anne found expectations about what could be achieved and working in the situation of an “infrastructure totally obliterated” two very different things. The time-consuming work that was necessary just for survival on a day-to-day basis, cultural and language differences, the humidity, the understandable lack of trust of the local people, and the lack of understanding by others at some distance as to what was possible on the ground were some of the challenges Anne faced. However, the beauty of the country, the growing trust of the people, and the sense of working together with them for a common goal were some of the positive aspects of the experience for Anne. She identified greatly with the words of a Mercy prayer:

In Your tender Mercy, you have given us one another. Fill us with your Spirit of Compassion, so that, knowing Your Mercy, we ourselves may be merciful.

For Anne, the call to action that required a merciful response typified Mercy life, and resonated with her ministry in East Timor.

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688 ibid., 4.
689 ibid., 2-4.
690 ibid., 4.
691 Foale, Anne, R.S.M. “Questionnaire”, (September, 2006), 6.
Some Concluding Remarks.

The Ballarat Congregation led the way for the Sisters of Mercy’s involvement with East Timor, thanks to the initiative of key individuals, existing structures and organizations, and supportive leadership. Whilst the involvement of Sisters from other Congregations, notably Melbourne and Adelaide, has been organized in a different manner through the Mercy Refugee Service, all the Sisters would attest to the profound affect East Timor has had on them. Their ministries have involved new experiences which have been challenging and uncomfortable. The Sisters have developed a great admiration of and affection for the East Timorese people. A common thread among the interviewees was the mutuality of mercy – of it given but it also received in executing their ministries, and how it is found in the context of relationship.

All see a strong connection between their East Timorese work and Catherine McAuley’s practical and active mission to people in need, particularly to women or children. As educated women they have brought certain skills and expertise to their ministries, but have a clear sense of the need of trust in God to provide in the difficult times of their mission. They worked within male-dominated Church structures and encountered practices very different from the Australian Church. However, as
Western women, they have been able to work more closely with East Timorese women and to minister in a way that was seen as different but acceptable. In being women in active and practical ministry in the mission of the Church, they have been taken out of their comfort zones and into situations that demanded faith, hope and trust as did Catherine’s McAuley’s ministry.
Chapter Thirteen: Conclusion.

Theologian Wendy Farley has written that compassion is “a mode of relationship and a power that is wounded by the suffering of others and propelled to action on their behalf now.” 692 This quote has been applied to “mercy” by the American Sisters of Mercy in their daily prayer book, which has been used also by many Australian Mercy communities in recent years.693 This concluding chapter draws on their reflections, and offers some suggestions about how this concept of wounded compassion propelled to action might apply to the work of the Sisters examined in this study.

Mercy as a Mode of Relationship.

The term “relationship” infers an on-going connection between people, a bond that has a history, and that has developed, evolved and continued for some time. It is not momentary or without feeling. It is personal, steadfast and loving, as the term hesed for “mercy” indicates in the Hebrew Scriptures. Mercy as a “mode” of or approach to relating has been described as “a habit

of mind and heart”. The connection of the Sisters of Mercy for the people of both Pakistan and East Timor has lasted approximately twenty years to date.

The Sisters involved in this study have understood their work as a ministry with personal encounters at its heart. The encounters have been with God’s poor, whether that be the East Timorese refugee or asylum seeker in Australia, the women collecting water in East Timor, or the slum children in Pakistan. Encounter implies a two-way relationship, and the Sisters have discovered the mutuality of mission in their ministries. In Pakistan, the Sisters have been recipients of acts of kindness and hospitality from those with little to give in material terms. In East Timor, as the Sisters came to grips with what was possible given the trauma people were living through. Humility and a need for reliance on God were experienced. For the Sisters, ministry overseas has meant accompaniment at a pace and on a path not primarily of their making. In Pakistan, these competent, educated, professional women learned the importance of humility as guests and as a part of a minority faith. They have adopted the dress of local women as a sign of respect for the Pakistani culture. In East Timor, as elder, “grandmother”, teacher, or nurse, the foundation

\[694\text{ibid.}\]
of their ministry has been respect for the people and a willingness to befriend.

Encountering the poor has led to the Sisters encountering their own poverty in the face of trauma, illness, material deprivation and practical difficulties. This poverty has underlined the necessity for trust in God. The words of Catherine McAuley’s “Suscipe” resonate here:

Teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of your loving Providence with the most lively, unbounded confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.⁶⁹⁵

In both the case of the Pakistani and of the East Timorese people, the relationship has evolved. The early foundation in Gujrat, for example, has been handed over to others to continue, and new developments, particularly in teacher education and formation have occurred in Pakistan. In Pakistan, two local women have been professed as Sisters of Mercy. In East Timor, personal encounters and community connections nurtured a deepening commitment of the Ballarat Sisters to the people of East Timor. The commitment grew from supportive care based in Australia to ministry in East Timor and advocacy.

More recently, Mercy ministry has extended to include Sisters from other Australian Congregations who have served directly in East Timor.

**Mercy as a Power**

Mercy as a power is not what first strikes one about the work of the Sisters in Pakistan and East Timor. Rather it would appear that the Sisters have had to let go of power lest they be seen as “all knowing” Westerners in their ministry. Yet the power of feisty, passionate women to make new ministries happen is evidenced in this study. Where would the Mercy mission to Pakistan have been without the vision, energy and persistence of Gabrielle Jennings R.S.M. or Elizabeth Cloonan R.S.M.? Where indeed would the advocacy and pastoral work of the Ballarat Sisters for the East Timorese people have been without the courage and tenderness of Anne Forbes R.S.M. and Bev Malcolm R.S.M.? Women with years of experience and expertise in professional life, and with the passion to make things happen have extended education, health care and pastoral care to needy communities and individuals, and in the case of the East Timorese people, have advocated meaningfully on their behalf.

Belief in the power for change in these places of ministry has had to have been scaled back at times. In East Timor, the trauma of the people after 1999 created a legacy of
apathy and mistrust, and certain skills or practices could not be assumed to exist for further development. In Pakistan, where the idea of “empowering” the poor and especially women has needed to be modified or re-assessed, a sense of powerlessness has sometimes touched the Sisters. With the radical transformation of society clearly impossible in Pakistan, the witness of their practical ministries in education, health and pastoral care, and of standing with the powerless may well have been the strongest actions available to them. The advocacy in Australia on behalf of the Timorese, the praising of the birth of a girl in Pakistan, the skilling of women at the Gujrat Hostel for future married lives, and encouraging the people served by “Maria’s” community in East Timor are small but potentially influential examples of working for God’s reign in the here and now. There the Mercy Sisters have learned too that being powerful in the conventional sense is not what is required when working with God’s poor.

**Mercy Wounded by the Suffering of Others.**

Being moved by the suffering of others has been characteristic of the Sisters’ motivation to work with the people of East Timor and Pakistan. Like the “womb love “ of the Hebrew Scriptures or the deep movement of compassion in the Christian writings, the call for help has elicited a strong response from the
Sisters. The mission of Jesus, the “preferential option for the poor” of the post-Vatican II decades, and the example of Catherine McAuley to move beyond comfort for the sake of the poor have pushed the Sisters to action in new settings. Just as the poor in Catherine’s day were women and children, these are the needy ones on whom the Sisters have focused in East Timor and Pakistan.

Letting another’s suffering penetrate one’s being and moving one to action can involve a vulnerability for the one taking action. This has been true for the Australian Sisters of Mercy working with the Pakistani and East Timorese people. Living in unsettled or potentially violent situations with difficult day-to-day conditions, a harsh climate and a lack of infrastructure and resources has been part of the reality of the Sisters. Working with those who are not valued, dealing with cultural differences and different world views, being the “outsider”, ministering within a Church that is very different from the one “back home”, and facing personal difficulties, illness and death have been some of challenges faced by the Sisters in Pakistan and East Timor. In these ways, the Sisters have identified with the poor and have had to rely on God’s providence to see them through. Letting go of valuable personnel for these endeavours has meant loss and a risk in many ways for the Australian Mercy Congregations, not the
least of which has been a potential diminishment or curtailment of their ministries back in Australia. A declining number of Sisters can only be stretched so far.

**Mercy Propelled to Action on Their Behalf Now.**

Catherine McAuley’s outreach has shaped the Sisters of Mercy as ministry-focused women who have run hospitals, refurbished schools, educated, advocated publicly, visited the poor, and created places or opportunities for training people or pastoral care. Catherine McAuley’s sisters were known as the “walking nuns” for their visibility and effective ministry in the community, and their practical spirituality lives on today. True to Scripture, mercy is active, responsive and people-centred.

Catherine believed in not attending to the urgent needs of the poor next week but rather doing something about them immediately,\(^{696}\) by using the means she had at her disposal. In order to do that, the Sisters working in Pakistan and with the people of East Timor have used existing Church and community structures, as well as creating new partnerships. In both Pakistan and East Timor, the Sisters have been working within a Church that is traditional, patriarchal and devotional, and so quite different from their Australian experience of Church. However,

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that affiliation has been most necessary for practical reasons. The Sisters have worked closely with the Church hierarchy in Pakistan, where it would be unwise and impractical as a minority faith to do otherwise. In the case of Notre Dame Institute of Education, partnerships with Karachi University and the Australian Catholic University have ensured legitimacy and support. The Mercy endeavour in Pakistan has gone beyond the confines of institutions, to grassroots but church-connected works such as visiting women and children in prisons, creating or supporting slum schools and education programs for women and children, community health initiatives, and working with Afghan refugees. In East Timor, all Sisters have worked within the trusted, socially and politically significant Catholic network, one of the few remaining infrastructures in the country. In Australia, Catholic and wider community groups have been important to the development and support of the Sisters’ work with East Timorese people.

The ministry of the Sisters has centred on the reality of poor peoples’ lives, and has aimed to relieve suffering and so bring the reign of God into those places. In both cases, what has called the Sisters of Mercy to action is need. They would say that ultimately, they have responded to a call from God to accompany people who are poor, marginalized, fearful, oppressed, displaced,
or lacking in life’s essentials. In the tradition of Catherine McAuley, they have responded to a call for help, and their response has been practical and active. Jesuit Mark Raper described the Mercies as being “Damn it do it” people.\textsuperscript{697} As a result, theological reflection on issues, and the development of processes have generally occurred later on, after the Sisters have “rolled up their sleeves” and helped out as they could. The practical approach the Sisters of Mercy have followed in these endeavours reflects that of their founder, Catherine McAuley.

**Mercy in Action – Women in the Mission of the Church.**

To talk of mercy in action is something of a tautology for to talk of mercy without action is to empty the term of meaning. Mercy is fundamentally responsive and active. In recent decades in Pakistan and with the people of East Timor, Australian Sisters of Mercy have taken particular actions as they have been seeking to bring the reign of God to situations of suffering and need, especially to situations affecting women and children.

In a Church where women’s contribution has been under-acknowledged, this thesis has placed the Sisters alongside

countless women who have moved from their culture or comfortable settings to new places of service in the mission of the Church. This mission of “bringing the good news to the poor” has largely focused on women and children, and as women, they have been able to work in ways not available to male missionaries because of cultural practices. In both East Timor and Pakistan, Sisters of Mercy have been working with women who have a much lower status than men in the society. However, due to the Sisters’ Western background and education, they have been seen as being in a different social position to the local women. In the Catholic Church, as the sacramental ministry is not available to women, their work has been in the fields of education, health and pastoral care, witness and advocacy. The Sisters of Mercy have ministered in these fields which may not be as officially powerful as those of their male counterparts, but nonetheless are vital to the hope-filled and loving mission of the church.

This thesis has shown that the Sisters of Mercy who have worked with the people of East Timor and Pakistan are action-oriented women whose focus is on meeting needs. That focus called Catherine McAuley from her comfortable life to serve the poor, particularly women and children, in Ireland. It called her Sisters to leave Ireland to serve the needs of the Irish diaspora in the nineteenth century. In the second half of the
twentieth century, it called Australian Sisters of Mercy to New Guinea, to refugee camps, and to work with the people of Pakistan and East Timor. Their charism, active, practical and relational, is based on gratitude to a merciful God who provides and sustains. The Sisters have worked in Pakistan and with the East Timorese people because they believed these to be genuine calls to mercy, and settings where Catherine McAuley would have been found. Their way of working has been ministry-focused, and they have come to understand the mutuality of mission. Whilst operating as teacher, outsider, guest or respected grandmother, the Sisters have learned what it is to accompany, befriend, trust and be vulnerable, despite their status as educated, Western women with skills to share.

The ministries of the Sisters of Mercy have been practical, responsive to needs, relational and mutual. In contributing to the mission of the Church in Pakistan and with the people of East Timor, the Sisters of Mercy featured in this study have honoured the charism of Catherine McAuley. They have taken their place in an ongoing “Circle of Mercy”, celebrated in song as a powerful connection with the lives of those in need.

In Mercy, we touch the hearts of those who are in misery. In Mercy, we’re touched by them and feel their strength and courage. In Mercy, we heal the pain of those who are in sorrow. In Mercy, we're
healed by them and see the face of hope. For the circle of Mercy is timeless. It is spirit of life itself, which roots us in faith, and lifts us in hope, and holds us in God’s loving care, and holds us in God’s loving care.\textsuperscript{698}

\textsuperscript{698}Goglia, Jeannette, R.S.M. “Circle of Mercy”. (Song) From sheet entitled “Mercy Songs” provided by Carmel O’Dwyer R.S.M. In author’s possession.
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Appendix 1: Maps

- Pakistan – Mercy Foundations
- East Timor – Places of Mercy Ministry or of Interest to this Study
EAST TIMOR - Places of Mercy Ministry or of Interest to this Study
Appendix 2: Suscipe and Poem of Catherine McAuley
Suscipe.

Catherine McAuley.

My God I am Thine for all eternity; teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of Thy Providence with the most lively unlimited confidence in Thy compassionate, tender pity. Grant, O most Merciful Redeemer, that whatever Thou dost ordain or permit may always be acceptable to me; take from my heart all painful anxiety, suffer nothing to afflict me, but sin; nothing to delight me, but the hope of coming to the possession of Thee, my God, in Thy own everlasting Kingdom. Amen.


Poem on Mercy.

Catherine McAuley

Sweet Mercy 1 soothing, patient, kind
Softens the high and rears the fallen mind
Knows with just rein, and even hand to guide
Between false fear, and arbitrary pride
Not easily provoked, and soon forgives
Feels for all, and by a look relieves
Soft peace she brings where e’er she arrives
Removes our anguish and reforms our lives
Lays the rough paths of peevish nature even
And opens in each heart a little heaven.

Appendix 3: Letters, Questionnaire and Interview Materials.
Dear Sister,

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a research project I am undertaking for my Masters thesis through the Melbourne College of Divinity. As a teacher with a long association with the Sisters of Mercy I am very interested in the history of the Sisters of Mercy, and in particular, how Mercy is lived out and expressed in ministry in recent times. For my Masters Qualifying thesis, I examined the mission of the Sisters of Mercy in Gujrat, Pakistan, in the 1980s, and how that venture embodied the vision and charism of Catherine McAuley. I would like to build on that study, and in my Masters thesis explore what the Sisters’ work with the Pakistani and with East Timorese people (both in East Timor and Australia) show about Mercy women in the mission of the Church, and new ways of translating Catherine McAuley's charism. My new study is entitled "Mercy In Action - Women in the Mission of the Church."

I approach this study as a laywoman formed in the Mercy story, (I have worked at Sacred Heart College, Geelong since 1988), and as someone with great respect for the Sisters of Mercy. I want to better understand and acknowledge the work of the Sisters, to learn about new expressions of Catherine McAuley's vision, and to add to academic studies of women's contribution to the Church's mission. An explanation of my project is attached for your information.

I have written to and gained permission from your Congregational leader, Sr Kath Tierney, to contact Sisters who have been involved in the Pakistan and East Timorese works. This letter has been sent to you via the Congregational Office. Access to Congregational archives has also been granted to me. I have also attached the letter giving permission for my project by the Melbourne College of Divinity's Ethics Committee.

I wondered if you would be interested in being a part of my study? You will find attached a copy of the questionnaire I would ask participants to complete, with the option of a more in depth interview. A range of possible interview questions is attached.

I would ask you to think carefully over the attached material before deciding whether or not to participate. You may also choose to be involved but not to answer some questions. I realise that for some participants, strong and perhaps being involved in this project may arouse even upsetting memories and emotions, I understand that your Congregational leadership team is the point of referral to support services for Sisters.
Given the unstable situations in Pakistan and East Timor, I will give pseudonyms to those people whom you mention who are stRI in those countries. I have chosen not to contact any Pakistani or East Timorese people for my study. These measures are for the sake of the safety of all concerned. You may choose to use a pseudonym yourself in this study, but even so, I cannot guarantee your complete anonymity given the small number of participants and the relatively small number of Sisters who have been involved in these works. You need to consider this when weighing up whether or not to participate in this project.

At the completion of my writing, in early 2007, I will send a copy of the finished 50,000 word thesis to the Melbourne College of Divinity for assessment. Unfortunately, at this stage, I am unable to say whether I will be able to send a summary of the completed project to each participant and a copy to the Congregations involved, as I have been instructed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Melbourne College of Divinity that the Committee wishes to read the thesis before deciding upon its distribution. You should also note, that my supervisor, Professor Katharine Massam, will be aware of its contents, as will Sr Jan Gray who will be my supervisor during the absence of Professor Massam in second semester 2006. The Melbourne College of Divinity will retain data (in electronic form) from this project for five years.

I need to state that the only financial gain that I have received from this project was in the form of part-time sponsorship to study during 2005 from the Catholic Education Office. My motivation is to help acknowledge the contribution of the Australian Sisters of Mercy to the mission of the Church and to the continuation of Catherine McAuley's vision in our world.

If you wish to be involved, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the stamped self-addressed envelope by the end of January. I will contact you a fortnight after I have received it, remind you of the potentially upsetting aspects of the project, and ask you to return your written response to me within a month. I will send you a photocopy of your response for verification and for your own records. Changes can be made or withdrawing from the project can occur within a fortnight of your receipt of this copy.

For those who agree to an interview, I will wait a fortnight as a cooling off period, then contact you to arrange a mutually suitable time, format and place for the interview. You may ask a third party to be present at the interview. I will need to audio tape the interview or make notes during it. I would remind you that you may decline to answer some questions, to withdraw during the interview or to withdraw the written
transcript of your interview or part thereof within two weeks of returning the verified interview transcript.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on the numbers listed above or at my email address: ldoherty@shc.melb.catholic.edu.au if you have any concerns or comments. My supervisor, Dr Katharine Massam at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, is also available as a point of contact for you. Her number is (03) 9347 7199.

Thanking you for considering this request,

Yours sincerely,

Laura Doherty.
QUESTIONNAIRE "MERCY IN ACTION - WOMEN IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH"

1. Personal details:
   Name:
   Contact Details: Pseudonym
   (Optional):

   In which country did you work? Please circle -
   in Pakistan     in East Timor     in Australia with East Timorese people

2. What was the time span of this work?

3. What first attracted you to work with the Pakistani or East Timorese people and why did you as a Sister of Mercy feel called to respond?

4. Describe something of that lived experience:
   This could involve
   - the people and their needs
   - their experience of Church
   - the shape of your work with the Pakistani / East Timorese people
   - your sense of Mercy community support as you undertook this work
   - what sustained you
   - issues encountered
   - learnings / gains / human costs of the ministry
5. What do you believe were the connections between that ministry and a) the charism of Catherine McAuley b) the mission of the Church?

6. Other comments?

Sincere thanks, Laura Doherty.
POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS "MERCY IN ACTION - WOMEN IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH."

It is envisaged some of the following questions would be included during an interview. Of course, some of the interview's direction would be guided by the contents of the questionnaire response, in the case of those participants who choose to respond both in writing and in an interview. Please note, participants are not obliged to answer all questions put to them.

- What preparation did you have for your involvement with Pakistani /East Timorese people?
- What is your sense of the decisions made that led to Mercy involvement (or developments in the works) in or with Pakistan / East Timor?
- (For those who went overseas) What were your impressions of the country, culture and your role in that place?
- How did your ministry develop?
- What were some of the challenges you faced?
- What was your sense of connection with the charism of Catherine McAuley and this work?
- How would you describe the Catholic Church in East Timor / Pakistan?
- Were you aware of that model of church before you started this work?
- How would you describe the relationship between the Sisters of Mercy and the local Catholic hierarchy in Pakistan / East Timor?
- Did this model and living out of Church impact in any way on your ministry?
- Did this work involve developing relationships with other Congregations, Churches, organizations, or working with lay people? If so, how?
- For those in Pakistan - what was it like to be a Western woman working in a Muslim country? What did you learn from that experience?
- For those in East Timor - What was it like to be a Western Catholic woman in that predominantly Catholic country?
- For those working with the East Timorese in Australia - What was it like to be an
Australian working with / for the East Timorese?

- How would you describe the Mercies' relationship with secular authorities in Pakistan / East Timor/ in Australia in relation to the East Timorese situation?
- Re East Timor - Did your involvement involve political action in Australia? If so, in what form?
- Looking back on that experience, how do you think Mercy was communicated to the people with whom and for whom you worked?
- Has this experience developed your understanding of Mercy and what Catherine McAuley set out to do?