

**Great Talent for Management:  
Mother Xavier Maguire c1819-1879**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a part chronological and part thematic account of the life of Mother Xavier Maguire who founded the Convent of Mercy Geelong. From a wealthy Irish family, she entered the original house of the newly founded Sisters of Mercy in Dublin and after her profession became the novice mistress and then superior. During her time as superior foundations of Sisters of Mercy were made in Ireland and overseas and she was involved in the planning for the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Dublin.

She was invited to establish a foundation of Sisters of Mercy in the flourishing city of Geelong and arrived there with five companions in 1859. During her twenty years in charge, she established an orphanage and several schools and she and members of her flourishing community undertook visitation to hospitals, prisons and needy families, as well as catechesis in outlying areas, the instruction of converts and the teaching of music. By the time of her death, the community numbered twenty five.

Mother Xavier belongs to that band of intrepid women of different religious congregations who contributed so much to the early history of the Catholic Church in Australia particularly in the areas of education, health care and social welfare and whose contribution is largely unknown and unappreciated. This thesis is an attempt to address this oversight by focusing on the life of one such woman.

## **Declaration of Originality**

I affirm that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no other material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Helen M Delaney

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## Introduction

The contribution of women religious to the growth of the Catholic Church in Australia until relatively recently appears to be largely unknown or overlooked and consequently little appreciated although this gap in history is now to a certain extent being addressed.<sup>1</sup>

This biography of Mother Mary Cecilia Xavier Maguire (c1819-1879), hereafter referred to as Mother Xavier where appropriate, who founded the Convent of Mercy in Geelong, is another attempt to redress this deficiency. Some material relating to her life may be found in histories of the Melbourne Congregation of Sisters of Mercy,<sup>2</sup> and in publications more directly relating to the convent and school which she founded.<sup>3</sup> Other more personal material is available in a collection of some her letters, the originals of which are held in the Mercy International Archives, Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin, and photocopies and some typescripts in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives, Alphington.<sup>4</sup>

In Australia women religious were and still are highly involved in service to the poor and needy, especially in the areas of social welfare, education and health care.<sup>5</sup> The ministry in social welfare began in early colonial times. The Sisters of Charity<sup>6</sup> were the first religious institute to venture to this far away primitive British penal settlement in 1838 and began their work by ministering to the female convicts incarcerated in the Female Factory in Parramatta. Soon afterwards they moved into other areas including the visitation of the sick poor in their homes. Other religious institutes in both formal and informal ways carried out this ministry,

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I for some recent publications relating to Australian religious congregations.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for publications relating to Australian Mercy congregations.

<sup>3</sup> See: Mary Lucina McMaster. *The Foundation, Growth and Development of the Convent of Mercy, Geelong, 1859-1980*. Unpublished manuscript, c1982. Lucina (Monica) McMaster was a boarder at Sacred Heart College. She entered the Sisters of Mercy at Ascot Vale in 1919. In 1955 she became a member of the Geelong Convent and taught at Sacred Heart College for many years. She was known as a meticulous and accurate researcher whose findings were reliable. She died in Geelong in 1996. See also: John Watts, Glenn Turnbull and Kathleen Walsh. *Mercy Girls: The Story of Sacred Heart College, Geelong, 1860-2010*, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives, Alphington, Box 27, Vol. 42#141//58. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from letters used in this study are taken from these sources.

<sup>5</sup> In this study, the women religious referred to are generally non cloistered, ie, were able to work outside their convents. Technically they are known as *sisters* in contrast to those religious women who were cloistered, ie, they did not venture outside their convent walls and are referred to as *nuns*. Both groups usually had the prefixes of either *Sister Mary* or *Mother Mary* before their religious names. These prefixes will be omitted where appropriate in this study. See: Mary Rose MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia*, (Darlinghurst: Crossing Press, 2002) for a comprehensive historical account of the many religious institutes of women present in Australia. A religious institute is an association formally recognised by the Catholic Church in which the members pronounce public vows and live in community. They are known by various titles such as: religious congregation, eg, the Sisters of Mercy; religious institute, eg, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary; society, eg, the Society of Jesus; order, eg, the Carmelite nuns.

<sup>6</sup> The Sisters of Charity were founded by Mother Mary Aikenhead in Dublin in 1815.

including, for example establishing or running orphanages or other enterprises designed to assist the poor.

The Sisters of Charity were also the first to open a Catholic hospital in Australia. In 1857 St Vincent's Hospital began in Sydney. It catered for all creeds and especially the poor. From then on almost all Catholic public and private hospitals were under the auspices of congregations of women religious, principally the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of St John of God<sup>7</sup> and the Little Company of Mary.<sup>8</sup> These hospitals are found in all states and the Australian Capital Territory.<sup>9</sup>

Education was a long standing concern of the Australian bishops and had developed in a relatively unstructured and unorganised way. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, funding for Catholic and other denominational schools ceased as successive colonial governments enacted legislation to provide free, compulsory and secular education. The bishops took the courageous decision to provide a Catholic education to all those who were able to avail themselves of it.<sup>10</sup> Most teachers had sought employment in the new state schools. The consequent staffing of Catholic schools had to depend on members of religious congregations, mainly of women religious, who often replaced lay teachers in many existing schools. As well, primary schools were opened in small country towns, staffed and administered by religious institutes such as the Sisters of St Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy, as well as in larger towns and capital cities where many other religious institutes had answered calls for assistance expressed somewhat dramatically in 1873 by Dean Corbett, the parish priest of the Melbourne suburban parish of St Kilda, to the superior of the Presentation Convent in Limerick:

From the ends of the earth I write to you for help. An Education Bill has recently been passed by our local Legislature which is diametrically opposed to our interests ... Come, then in God's name, and aid us to stem the tide of irreligion against which we must wage war.

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<sup>7</sup> The Sisters of St John of God were founded by Bishop Furlong in the diocese of Wexford in 1871.

<sup>8</sup> The Little Company of Mary was founded by Mother Mary Potter in Nottingham, England, in 1877.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Catholic Health Care Association, *Heritage of Catholic Health Care*, (East Melbourne: Australian Catholic Health Care Association, 1988), 12.

<sup>10</sup> See: Ronald Fogarty, *Catholic Education in Australia*, 2 Vols, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1959), for a comprehensive historical account of the development of Catholic Education in Australia. Volume 2 concentrates on the contribution of religious orders.

This impassioned plea concluded: “I shall be much obliged if you will have the kindness to send me an immediate reply. God grant that it may be favourable.”<sup>11</sup> It was. The Presentation Sisters arrived in Melbourne within the year.

The staffing of the schools by members of religious institutes was done, in most cases, without adequate recompense or even none. This had some unintended beneficial consequences, for example, music teaching provided a source of income. Many of the early religious were well educated middle class women so had much to offer in the cultural area, and again this contribution is largely overlooked.

These ventures were often led by intrepid and courageous leaders of early foundations who are relatively unknown. Some thirty Sisters of Mercy, mainly from Ireland, led foundations to Australia – to capital and provincial cities or country towns, eg, Bathurst, Bendigo, Cooktown, Perth and Goulburn to name but a few. However, scholarly biographies of these women are few, only three in fact - Mothers Ursula Frayne,<sup>12</sup> Vincent Whitty,<sup>13</sup> and Ignatius McQuoin.<sup>14</sup> Mother Xavier was a contemporary of and well known to the first two. She probably did not know Mother Ignatius but may have met her when the latter visited the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin,<sup>15</sup> in 1856. On the whole, details of the lives of other early founders lives are not available or subsumed in the histories of their congregations.<sup>16</sup>

A large part of the problem of undertaking research into the lives and contribution of these women is the paucity of information and reliable sources, a problem which is also relevant to

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in: Kathleen Dunlop Kane, *Adventure in Faith: The Presentation Sisters in Victoria*, (Melbourne: Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Victoria, 1974), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Ursula Frayne: A Biography*, (Fremantle: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Anne Hetherington & Pauline Smoothy (eds), *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty 1839-1892* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2011), and Mary Xaverius O’Donoghue, *Mother Vincent Whitty: Woman and Educator in a Masculine Society*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Maureen McQuirk, *Singing to the End of the Service: Elizabeth McQuoin, Founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Sydney, Australia 1865*, (Caringbah: Playwright Publishing, 2007), 256-266. Mother Ignatius (Elizabeth) McQuoin of the Immaculate Heart of Mary led the first foundation of Sisters of Mercy to North Sydney in 1865 from the Convent of Mercy in Liverpool. This convent had been founded from the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin, in 1843. Elizabeth McQuoin was born in Liverpool in 1819, entered the Sisters of Mercy in Liverpool in 1848, was received in 1849 and professed in 1851. During her time there, she was the superior of a Liverpool foundation in Lancaster and novice mistress in Liverpool.

<sup>15</sup> Hereafter referred to as Baggot Street.

<sup>16</sup> One exception to this is a brief study of the life of Mother Mary Paul Fielding, the founder of Yass. Anon. *Life Story of a Valiant Woman* (Westmead: The Boys Home, 1925).

this study. However, many religious congregations have commissioned histories although the earlier ones are more in-house studies and not widely available.<sup>17</sup>

This study of the life of Mother Xavier who led the foundation group of Sisters of Mercy to Geelong in 1859 is an attempt to add to this small collection. Before any analysis and interpretation is undertaken the facts of her life need to be established. Although some details of the period before she came to Geelong are known there is a great deal of conjecture and unverified information about her available in contemporary or near contemporary accounts, unreferenced documents and oral tradition. The situation is somewhat improved regarding her twenty years in Geelong with her letters,<sup>18</sup> material from the Geelong convent such as Chapter Acts, Account books and Profession Registers and later research, including studies of the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy which the Geelong convent joined in 1907.<sup>19</sup> These later sources generally provide accurate information for the period in question.

Unfortunately, some of the other sources used in this study do not conform to the norms of historical rigour. However it was thought useful to include information garnered from them. These sources are mainly undated and often anonymous statements included in various nonacademic accounts and reminiscences and contain information handed down through several decades of Mercy history. By collecting and including as many such sources as are currently available, the opportunity may arise in the future for researchers to either authenticate or discount them. They may be identified by various qualifying phrases such as: “A long standing tradition relates ...”, or: “It is thought ... ” or: “Contemporary accounts say ...”. Many of these sources are found in the Mercy International Archives, Baggot Street, Dublin.<sup>20</sup>

Mother Xavier’s life may be divided into three distinct phases – the years before she entered the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin (c1819-1843); the fifteen or so years there (1843-1858); and the twenty years she spent in Geelong (1859-1879).

Chapter one provides the context in which Mother Xavier grew up. The nineteenth century, especially its first fifty years, was a period of great political, economic and religious change in Ireland and some of these changes impacted on her life, particularly her family circumstances.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>18</sup> The originals of letters from Mother Xavier are held in the Mercy International Archives, Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from letters used in this study are taken from the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives, Alphington, copies of original letters and typscripts, Box 27, Vol. 42#141/51 and Box 28, Vol. 58#141/58.

<sup>19</sup> McMaster, *The Foundation, Growth and Development of the Convent of Mercy, Geelong, 1859-1980*, and Watts, Turnbull & Walsh, *Mercy Girls: The Story of Sacred Heart College, Geelong*. See also Appendix 2.

<sup>20</sup> See the *Baggot Street File*, referred to hereafter as the *BSF*.

This chapter relates what little is known about her family which belonged to the wealthy Catholic landed class. Chapter two focusses on her entrance into the Sisters of Mercy in the first convent established in Dublin, her career there as a community member, novice mistress and finally superior, and her contribution to the development of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and overseas during her time in leadership. Chapter three considers the circumstances leading to the foundation of the Convent of Mercy in Geelong, the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy and their early days as Mother Xavier began to bring her vision into reality. Chapter four examines the operation of the community, Mother Xavier's concerns regarding some members and problems associated with lack of personnel and finance. Chapter five describes the various works of mercy Mother Xavier initiated and directed in the convent complex she built and their impact on the society of her time in Geelong. The final chapter attempts to summarise and reflect on Mother Xavier's contribution to the growth of the Catholic Church in Australia.

This study seeks to present in a coherent narrative what may be discovered about her life and to situate her in the context of the development of the Catholic Church not only in Geelong but in a wider context. The various chapters are partly chronological and partly thematic.

## Chapter 1 Context and Family

Mother Xavier was born and grew up during an interesting and significant time in the history of Ireland. It is highly unlikely that anyone born in Ireland a hundred years before her would have been able to imagine the world she inhabited in the first fifty years or so of the nineteenth century. Changes beginning during that century altered forever the social, political, economic and religious landscape of the country. They were: the Potato Famine<sup>1</sup> of 1845-1852; the decline and eventual repeal of the Penal Laws leading to Catholic Emancipation in 1829; the development of an influential and increasingly powerful Catholic middle class of merchants and land owners; a rise in the influence of the Catholic Church and a corresponding rise in religious practice, especially during the episcopate of Archbishop, later Cardinal, Cullen;<sup>2</sup> and the foundation of several religious congregations, mainly of women, involved in education, health and the alleviation of poverty.

### The Potato Famine of 1845-1852

Ireland in the nineteenth century was a country with a high proportion of small tenant farmers and landless labourers who barely had enough to live on and depended on potatoes for sustenance.<sup>3</sup> In successive years beginning in 1845, the potato crop was infected by what was known as the potato blight and failed leaving millions of people without their staple crop and without the means to buy food or pay their rent. The effect was catastrophic: hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation and their attendant diseases of dysentery or typhoid; and evictions of those unable to pay their rent added to the dire situation. Absentee landlord in general did little to alleviate the situation and the British Government was on the whole unwilling or unable to deal with the situation. While records are not precise, it is estimated that some million people died of starvation or disease during this period.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Various titles as: the Great Hunger, the Irish Potato Famine or several other variants. In this study it will be referred to as the Potato Famine.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Cullen was appointed Archbishop of Armagh in 1850 and Archbishop of Dublin in 1852. He was made Ireland's first cardinal in 1866, and devoted much of his time and energy to reforming and reorganising the Irish Church after the destabilising and demoralising influence of the Penal Laws. See: Molony, John 'Cullen, Paul (1803-1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre for Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.au/biography/Cullen-paul-3298/text5015>, published first in hard copy 1969, accessed 23 October 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Woodham Smith, C. *The Great Hunger Ireland 1845-9* (London: New English Library: 1962/1979), 30-33.

<sup>4</sup> Woodham Smith, 409. See also: Donnelly, James S, *The Great Irish Potato Famine*. Thrupp-Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001, 169-178.

One drastic solution presented itself to desperate people – emigration, many to England, Scotland and Wales, large numbers to North America, and some to Australia and Argentina.<sup>5</sup> Conditions on many ships were dire and the death toll on the North Atlantic crossing was high. Conditions in their new countries, especially in Canada, were not much better.<sup>6</sup> Again, records are not precise, but it has been calculated that over two million people left the country during this period. The decline in population is illustrated by census figures. In 1841, the census recorded a figure of 8,175,124. Ten years later it was 6,552,385.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the Potato Famine, and the consequent migration, the social structure and demography of Ireland was permanently changed.

### **Repeal of the Penal Laws**

The Penal Laws gradually developed as a consequence of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, the opposing forces being those of the exiled Catholic King James II of England and Ireland and the Protestant King William III who had overthrown King James. This resulted in a decisive victory for the Protestants. The Treaty of Limerick was signed by both sides in 1691 and marked the ascendancy of the Protestant ruling classes. Its relatively tolerant articles were superseded a few years later by the first articles of the Penal Code. Especially during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714), this marked the beginnings of a relentless and vicious persecution of the Catholic majority.<sup>8</sup>

These laws were designed to render Irish Catholics landless, uneducated, politically impotent, and because of their Catholicism, discriminated against in all ways possible. Some of these laws, particularly those relating to ownership of land and inheritance, were designed to force people to change their religion; most professions were forbidden to the laity; they could not join the army or navy; and a good education was generally unavailable. Priests were persecuted or subjected to onerous restrictions on their ministry or even exiled and bishops could not exercise their ministry especially that of ordaining priests. These laws were implemented sporadically and with various degrees of severity at different times and in different places, often depending on the attitude of local law enforcement bodies. As well,

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<sup>5</sup> Woodham Smith, 200- 280. See also: McLay, A. *Women on the Move: Mercy's Triple Spiral; A History of the Adelaide Sisters of Mercy Ireland to Argentina 1856-1880 to South Australia 1880* (Adelaide: Sisters of Mercy, 1996), 2-7.

<sup>6</sup> Woodham Smith, 212-234.

<sup>7</sup> Woodham Smith, 409.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1985), 121-126.

subterfuges aimed at circumventing these laws were employed with varying degrees of success in various times and places.<sup>9</sup>

Catholic land owners had their land confiscated and measures put in place so that they could neither acquire nor own any more, although there were some ways in which on occasions this could be avoided with care and cunning. It has been estimated that in 1641, 59% of land was owned by Catholic land holders but during the eighteenth century, it had dropped to 5%.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of the eighteenth century, various relief bills grudgingly passed by the Irish Parliament gradually removed some restrictions, for example, Catholics could become lawyers or practice medicine, go to universities, operate schools, own or lease land on favourable terms, or become magistrates.<sup>11</sup> In the end, as the aim of crushing Catholicism seemed to be futile, and with a degree of political expediency, the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 was passed. While not giving full equality with the Established Church of Ireland ruling class, this act repealed most of the Penal Laws and allowed Catholic members of Parliament to take their seats.

### **Rise of a Catholic middle class**

One occupation was not subject to Penal Law restrictions, possibly because it was despised by the ruling classes. This was anything associated with trade or commerce. Consequently a Catholic merchant class developed which gradually began to exert power and influence.<sup>12</sup> As well, as regulations regarding restrictions on land owning were lifted by the end of the eighteenth century, wealthy Catholics gradually began to buy land even from indigent Protestant landowners.<sup>13</sup> These wealthy merchants and landowners gradually began to assume positions of power and influence particularly in larger towns and cities.<sup>14</sup>

### **Reorganisation and revitalisation of the Catholic Church**

Because of relentless persecution in some areas and gratuitous obstruction in others, the situation of the Irish Catholic Church had been reduced to a parlous state of decay and

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<sup>9</sup> See: John Brady & Patrick Corish, *The Church under the Penal Code*, in Patrick Corish (general editor), *A History of Irish Catholicism*, Volume IV, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 41-88, for details of this period.

<sup>10</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 123.

<sup>11</sup> Sean Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845*, New York: Gill & Macmillan, 1982, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Brady & Corish, *The Church under the Penal Code*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 152, 168.

<sup>14</sup> Mary P Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion, & Cultural Change in Ireland, 1760-1900*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33.

disorganisation by the end of the seventeenth century. As a result of persecution, exile and imprisonment, by 1703, there were only three bishops remaining in the country and priests were subject to continual harassment and constricting laws. However, by employing a variety of stratagems, the hierarchy was largely restored during the next twenty or so years and dioceses reorganised.<sup>15</sup>

The situation with the priests was in several ways more problematical and many of the penal laws were aimed directly at them.<sup>16</sup> The Banishment Act of 1697 had ordered all clergy belonging to religious orders, mainly Franciscans and Dominicans, to leave Ireland and most did.<sup>17</sup> Diocesan clergy who were hassled and circumscribed by many vexatious restrictions had to do most of their studies in various colleges established on the Continent for the education of Irish clergy, eg, in Lisbon, Paris, Louvain and Madrid to name a few, until the foundation of Maynooth College in 1795.<sup>18</sup> Gradually, parishes were staffed fairly adequately by diocesan clergy, about whom one student of the period concluded: "... on the whole they were worthy men. As a body, they could be described as 'middle class', in their origins and in their standard of living."<sup>19</sup>

During the eighteenth century, the herculean process of regeneration began to combat Protestant influence and proselytism. One historian called this "the devotional revolution". While some conclusions regarding this devotional revolution have been challenged, most historians agree that basically there was a transformation of Catholic life especially during the second half of the century and the Catholic Church and its institutions became strong and influential.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Brady & Corish, *The Church under the Penal Code*, 6-11, 26-49.

<sup>16</sup> Edith M Johnson, *The Gill History of Ireland: Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol 8, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan), 37-41.

<sup>17</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 161-163. See also: Corish, Patrick. *Maynooth College 1795-1995*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995), 1-19.

<sup>19</sup> Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, 160-162. See also: Connolly. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845*, 32-44.

<sup>20</sup> Emmet Larkin, *The Devotional Revolution in Ireland*, *American Historical Review*, 77, 1972, 625-652. See also: Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1750-1850*. WashingtonDC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006.

### **Foundation of women's religious congregations**

It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that several groups of women religious were founded in Ireland.<sup>21</sup> Religious life for women at that time was largely mandated by the provisions of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and defined by solemn vows and strict cloister or enclosure. Solemn vows at that time were generally considered more binding and difficult to be dispensed from if a member wished to leave religious life. Enclosure or cloister related to the strict separation of the community from the outside world. In practice it meant that the religious did not go outside the convent except for rare and unusual circumstances and the convent was off limits to all outsiders, again except for rare occasions, eg, visits from a doctor or the bishop. Even in Ireland there were still some enclosed religious orders such as the Dominicans, Augustinians, Poor Clares and Carmelites who managed to survive the penal times by making certain adaptations to their way of life. However, they were not able to assist in any significant way in the alleviation of poverty and ignorance which was endemic in nineteenth-century Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was characterised by wars and revolutions with consequent great social upheaval, poverty and other ills. Driven by the sight of such chronic need, enterprising women often assisted, encouraged and guided by pastorally minded bishops, founded congregations with simple vows which were able to venture outside their convents to undertake philanthropic work. Viewed initially by the people with some suspicion because of the apparent freedom of movement they had, they quickly proved their worth and grew in number and influence.

The first of these in Ireland was the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, later known as the Presentation Sisters founded in Cork by Nano Nagle in 1776. For a variety of reasons, including the conviction that by so doing they would achieve a more solid legitimacy in the Church and amongst the people, in 1805 they adopted solemn vows and

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<sup>21</sup> Men's congregations founded in Ireland during the century included the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers founded in Waterford by Blessed Edmund Rice in 1802, and the Patrician Brothers, founded by Bishop Daniel Delany in Tullow in 1808.

<sup>22</sup> See: James Kelly & Dermot Keogh, (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 272-277, for accounts of how the Carmelites, Dominicans and Poor Clares adapted to the changing circumstances.

strict enclosure, but nevertheless were still able to make several foundations both in Ireland and overseas.<sup>23</sup>

Neither of these traditional hallmarks of religious women characterised later foundations. Three of these new congregations, all founded under the auspices of the Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, were successful and spread quickly. They were: the Sisters of Charity founded in 1815 by Mary Aitkenhead; the Loreto Sisters, the Irish branch of Mary Ward's Institute of the Blessed Virgin, founded by Teresa Ball in 1821; and the Sisters of Mercy, founded in 1831 by Catherine McAuley. Other congregations founded in Ireland during the century, such as the Sisters of St Brigid, founded in 1807 by the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Dr Delany; the Sisters of Holy Faith, founded in Dublin in 1867 by Margaret Aylward; and the Sisters of St John of God, founded in Wexford by Bishop Furlong in 1871 tended to remain in their dioceses and not make foundations elsewhere until some years later.

The growth in numbers of religious women in these simple vow congregations not only in Ireland but also on the Continent was extremely rapid.<sup>24</sup> Even so, they did not achieve canonical identity in the Church until 1900 when Pope Leo XIII issued the Apostolic Constitution, *Conditae a Christo*.<sup>25</sup> In Ireland alone, in 1800, it was estimated that there were 120 women religious, all enclosed; by 1850, there were 1500, mainly from newer congregations; and by 1900 about 8,000.<sup>26</sup> The most numerous and widespread of these were the Sisters of Mercy.

### **The Sisters of Mercy**

The first Convent of Mercy was established in Baggot Street, Dublin. Their founder, Catherine McAuley, a wealthy middle class Dublin woman some fifty years old, had not intended to found a religious congregation, her reason probably based on the influence of her largely Protestant upbringing because as one early biographer wrote:

... she had imbibed certain Protestant prejudices, which she retained for a very long period. She did not like the idea of Religious vows, and disapproved of Conventual

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<sup>23</sup> For an account of events leading to this decision, see: Mary Raphael Consedine, *Listening Journey: A Study of the Spirit and Ideals of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters*, (Melbourne: Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary), 191-208.

<sup>24</sup> See: Caitriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987), 36-44, for statistical and geographical information of the spread of convents in Ireland in the nineteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Leo XIII, Apostolic Constitution, *Conditae a Christo*, 8 December 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Magray, *Transforming Power*, 9.

observances, etc., having constantly heard them ridiculed and misrepresented by Protestants.<sup>27</sup>

Instead, she envisaged a group of women, free to come or go, who devoted themselves to improving the lives of those who existed in a state of impoverished desperation in Dublin, at that time one of the most advanced and sophisticated cities in the British Empire but with areas of great need. She built a large centre on the corner of Baggot and Herbert Streets, then part of fashionable Dublin, as the site for her work. This involved visitation and alleviation as much as was possible of the indigent poor, especially specially during and after the Potato Famine, visitation of the sick and dying particularly in Dublin's less than adequate hospitals, nursing during cholera epidemics, providing shelter and training for women entering the workforce and education of poor children.

Eventually as time went on, the group began to resemble a fledgling religious congregation, and to clarify the situation and continue the works already successfully established, Catherine McAuley took what was for her a difficult decision to proceed with the establishment of a new congregation. With Archbishop Murray's support, she and two companions, after a novitiate with the nearby Presentation Sisters, were professed as the first Sisters of Mercy on 12 December 1831.

Over the next ten years the new group flourished. Their rule and constitutions were based on those of the Presentation Sisters although a prescient Archbishop Murray crossed out the chapter on enclosure in an early draft. Their work was sorely needed and they were very adaptable. In their early days, for example, they nursed the sick during the 1832 cholera epidemic and they looked after the many destitute dispossessed as a result of the Potato Famine.

With the added advantage of having a governance structure which suited both the time and the bishops they spread rapidly. New Convents of Mercy were established, some of them branch houses of the original Convent of Mercy, others quite independent, including two in England. As well, plans were being made for a foundation in Newfoundland when Catherine McAuley died on 11 November 1841. This foundation occurred in 1842 and in the following year, a foundation was made in Pittsburgh, the first of many in the United States. In 1846, another

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<sup>27</sup> From reminiscences by Mother Mary Clare (Georgiana) Moore, an early companion of Catherine McAuley, quoted in: Mary C Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 102.

foundation from Baggot Street was made in Perth, at that time a small and struggling town in the far away colony of Swan River in Australia.

Many of the later overseas foundations were made in response to requests from bishops on behalf of their Irish impoverished flocks, numbers of which had increased greatly because of immigration as a result of the Potato Famine.

### **The Maguire Family**

In many ways, the Maguire family was a good example of the changes in Irish political, social and religious life in the first part of the nineteenth century. It is not known how the family became land owners but they may have been able to take advantage of changes in the centuries old policy of discrimination against Catholics. However, there is little doubt that it occurred and that the family became not only substantial land owners but took their place in the Irish society of the time. Also, the Maguire children appeared to have been well educated and this would have involved considerable expense. Two of the boys became Jesuits and four girls became Sisters of Mercy.

Little is known of Mother Xavier's family life and she does not provide any information in her extant correspondence.<sup>28</sup> Her parents are listed in convent records as Richard and Margaret (née McCann) Maguire of Newgrange, Co Meath. Her father, who at one time was a Justice of the Peace, was described as being a wealthy grazier who spent much of his money educating his large and talented family. Mother Xavier's mother was the sister of Father Henry McCann who was involved in introducing the Vincentian Fathers to Ireland.<sup>29</sup> Richard Maguire owned a large property on the north banks of the Boyne River between Drogheda and Slane.<sup>30</sup>

The actual number in the Maguire family is somewhat unclear. In some accounts it was said that there were fifteen in the family, five girls and ten boys, while others indicated that there were four girls and five boys. The most accurate indication comes from one of the boys, Matthew Maguire, who in the information he provided to the Jesuits when he entered the novitiate at Milltown, wrote that he had "five brothers and four sisters (alive)". Infant

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<sup>28</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, much of the information in this section comes from an undated (c 1980), anonymous publication: *Misericordia in Ballygihan, Glathule*.

<sup>29</sup> See: <http://vincentians.ie/who-we-are/the-history-the-irish-vincentians>, accessed 23 February 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Geraldine Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend in the Boyne, Irish Rural Landscapes*, Vol 1, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 151.

mortality and life expectancy being what it was during those times, perhaps both figures were correct.<sup>31</sup>

All the boys except Matthew were educated at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit College in Lancashire. James was born in 1825 and was a pupil at Stonyhurst (1836-1842). He entered the English Jesuit province in 1843 and was ordained in 1855. He spent many years in mission work in Lancashire and Scotland and after some years there went to Barbados. He returned to England, eventually retiring to Stonyhurst where he died in 1904.<sup>32</sup> Matthew, the youngest boy, was born in 1835 and according to his information was educated at Mount St Mary's College, Derbyshire, also a Jesuit College. However there is no record of his attendance there.<sup>33</sup> He spent some years farming before entering the Jesuits in Ireland in 1868. He was ordained in England but spent all his religious life in Ireland and died unexpectedly at Clongowes College in 1894.<sup>34</sup>

Another brother, Lieutenant Colonel John Maguire, who was also educated at Stonyhurst (1829-1833), had a distinguished military career, serving in China in 1841-42, in the Punjab campaign in 1848-49 and in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 campaign and was mentioned in dispatches three times. He died on 11 January 1904 at the age of eighty five. His funeral took place with full military honours at Windsor Castle where he lived in the Lower Ward.<sup>35</sup> It appears that one brother, Richard, the second son, who was at Stonyhurst from 1829 to 1835 died in 1849.<sup>36</sup>

On several records, another son, Thomas, was listed as a gentleman farmer. He too was educated at Stonyhurst (1841-1844) and one of his twin sons became a Redemptorist.<sup>37</sup> Some

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<sup>31</sup> See: Appendix 3. Matthew's obituary also states that he had four sisters and five brothers. Information courtesy of Damien Burke, Assistant Archivist of the Irish Jesuit Province. In James' obituary it said he came from a family of five daughters and ten sons. Information courtesy of David Knight, Archivist at Stonyhurst College. In a commemorative brochure published on the occasion of the Convent of Mercy Longford centenary, it was noted that Mother Bernard Maguire came from a family of fifteen. See: *Convent of Mercy, Longford, 1861-2011: An Illustrated History*, (Longford: St Joseph's Convent of Mercy, 2011), 49.

<sup>32</sup> Information from: *Letters and Notices 1904*, 399-404, courtesy of Anna Edwards, British Jesuit Province Assistant Archivist.

<sup>33</sup> Information courtesy of Marcia Newton, Head of Library and Archives Services, Mount Saint Mary's College, Derbyshire.

<sup>34</sup> Information courtesy of Damien Burke, Assistant Archivist of the Irish Jesuit Province.

<sup>35</sup> Information from *The Stonyhurst Magazine*, Obituary, March 1904, 74, courtesy of Anna Edwards, British Jesuit Province Assistant Archivist.

<sup>36</sup> See: Anglo Celt Newspaper. Death notice: *August 3, at his father's residence, Richard, second son of Richard Maguire ESQ JP, Newgrange, County Meath*, [www.irelandoldnews.com/cavan/1849/AUG.html](http://www.irelandoldnews.com/cavan/1849/AUG.html), accessed 16 June 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Father Arthur Maguire CSsR (1869-1934). Information courtesy of Anthony McCrave CSsR, archivist for the Irish Redemptorists.

accounts state that another, possibly named Francis, was also at Stonyhurst at the same time as Thomas (1841-1844) and was a county inspector of police.<sup>38</sup> Matthew said he had five brothers alive in 1868 but there is no information about a possible fifth brother available at present. There was a Walter Maguire at Stonyhurst from 1835 to 1841 but although the dates could fit the lack of any other information makes this connection too vague and unable to be substantiated. To add to the mystery, the 29 August 1879 issue of *The Geelong Advertiser* announcing Mother Xavier's death, noted: "She had a brother, a resident of New Zealand but at present in Warrnambool".

One source states that the girls were well educated by the Ursuline Sisters either in Cork or Thurles but to date this has not been able to be independently verified.<sup>39</sup> The Ursuline Sisters had been founded in Brescia, Italy in 1534 by Saint Angela Merici. In 1612 they established a convent in Paris. By this time, St Angela's plan to have her followers living without cloister had been circumvented and her followers adopted solemn vows and became cloistered as was the requirement for religious women at that time. In 1771, under the leadership of Nano Nagle, who later founded the Presentation Sisters, they established a convent in Cork where they conducted a school for the daughters of the emerging Irish middle class as well as a school for the poor, all within the confines of the convent. In 1796 a community was established in Thurles and three years later a school began.<sup>40</sup>

The Maguire girls were reputed to have taken part in the social life of the time, were well educated and musical and were known to be good horsewomen who followed the hounds. Each of the four daughters was said to have come to the convent with a substantial dowry. In one of Mother Xavier's letters mentions an amount of £400, a very large amount for that time, as the dowry of her sister, Annie, so it could be presumed that the other three sisters were given similar amounts.<sup>41</sup>

The dowry was money brought to the community by a woman on her entrance to a religious community. If she remained in the community, it was not to be disposed of until her death but if she decided to leave the community it was to be returned to her minus the interest. It was mentioned obliquely in the *Rule and Constitutions of Religious called Sisters of Mercy*: "As many shall be admitted as the funds of the house will permit, and no more, unless the

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<sup>38</sup> Teresa Delaney, *The Maguire Sisters – A Remarkable Family*, (*ACAI Newsletter*, 44, April/May 2011), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Delaney, *The Maguire Sisters – A Remarkable Family*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> See: [www.ursulines.ie](http://www.ursulines.ie).

<sup>41</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 September 1862.

subject bring with her a sufficient dowry for her maintenance and for all other necessities.”<sup>42</sup> Catherine McAuley was chided on more than one occasion by bishops who considered that she had a somewhat cavalier attitude towards admitting candidates without a dowry. For example, she had difficulties in this regard with Bishop Murphy of Cork who often called her a “Sister of Divine Providence” and did not mean it as a compliment.<sup>43</sup> The regulation of the dowry was later enshrined in church law in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, Canons 547-551. It remained a part of constitutions of various communities until comparatively recent times.<sup>44</sup>

Annie Maguire entered the Baggot Street, Dublin, Convent of Mercy, on 1 May 1843, and was received that same year. She was given the religious name of Sister Mary Philomene, sometimes known as Philomena, and was professed on 26 November 1845. For some years she was a member of the Baggot Street community. In 1853 she was appointed by the superior, Mother Vincent Whitty, to lead a foundation to Belfast. As her third term of office as superior of Belfast drew to an end in May 1862, she accepted an invitation to lead a foundation to Worcester. The foundation lasted about seven years but because of vicious anti-Catholic sentiment and prejudice against religious the parish priest advised the sisters to leave. The community stayed for a short time at Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan, but responding to an invitation from Bishop Goold of Victoria, who had met Mother Philomene at Baggot Street in 1870 and knew Mother Xavier in Geelong, volunteered to go to his diocese. In 1872 they arrived in Warrnambool, a flourishing provincial town, where they established a successful foundation. Mother Philomene died there in 1888.<sup>45</sup>

Maria Maguire entered Baggot Street on 15 August 1850 and was given the religious name of Sister Mary Bernard.<sup>46</sup> She was professed on 3 October 1853. Her oldest sister, Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier, would have been her novice mistress and another sister, Sister Mary Philomene, would have still been a member of the community. As a novice she was sent to

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<sup>42</sup> *The Rule and Constitutions of the Religious called Sisters of Mercy*, Dublin: James Duffy, 1863, 17. The original document was promulgated by the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith on 5 July 1841 and printed in Italian and English.

<sup>43</sup> Mary C Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 145, 204-295.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, *Constitutions of the Member Congregations of the Federation of the Religious Sisters of Mercy*, 1962, Chapter V, Clauses 23-26, 11-12. Interestingly, there was no reference to the dowry in the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Australian Union of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy*, 1960, which applied to the other group of Sisters of Mercy in Australia. Perhaps it was considered that this matter was covered adequately in the Code of Canon Law, or probably, was no longer needed.

<sup>45</sup> See: Maria Luddy, *The Call of the North: A History of the Sisters of Mercy, Down and Connor Diocese, Ireland*, (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2010), 303-304, for a brief account of the history of the Maguire sisters in Ireland.

<sup>46</sup> *BSR*, 101.

Loughrea, Co Galway, to be part of a foundation there. While still a novice she returned to Baggot Street and was then sent to Ballinasloe, also in Co Galway, a daughter house of Loughrea where she was professed by special permission as novices were usually professed in the convent in which they had entered. In April 1861 she became the first superior of Longford, Co Longford, and remained in office for twelve years. Eventually her health broke down and she was hospitalised in Belgium. In an 1877 letter to Mother Ligouri Keenan, the then superior of Baggot Street, Mother Xavier expressed the grave concern both she and Mother Philomene had about her health and asked for more information: “I beg of you to write to me the particulars and tell me all.”<sup>47</sup> Her distress was quite obvious and her concern clear. Mother Bernard died in 1882.

The youngest of the four sisters was Henrietta who entered at Baggot Street in 1858 and received the religious name of Sister Mary Joseph Aloysius.<sup>48</sup> While still a novice she was sent to Belfast, now the capital of Northern Ireland, where her sister, Mother Philomene, was the superior and she was professed there on 23 October 1861. In February 1864 she went on a foundation to Ashton-under-Lyne and three years later to Bolton, both towns near Manchester, England. This latter foundation did not prosper so in 1868 the community returned to Ireland and settled in Belturbet, Co Cavan, where she spent most of the rest of her life. She died there in 1931.

Mother Xavier was born and grew up in a time of great change in Ireland, particularly as a result of the Potato Famine which caused great social dislocation and demographic change. With the gradual relaxing and eventual abolition of the Penal Laws, some Catholics were slowly able to reclaim their position in the economic, political, social and religious life of the country. Her family was a beneficiary of and contributed to these developments. In particular, the six members who became either Jesuits or Sisters of Mercy made a significant contribution to the revitalisation of Catholicism in Ireland and its spread overseas. Mother Xavier’s time as a Sister of Mercy in Ireland was part of this contribution in a religious institute which was becoming very influential in the changing Irish society.

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<sup>47</sup> Maguire to Keenan, 9 June 1877.

<sup>48</sup> *BSR*, 140.

## Chapter 2 Sister of Mercy

It is not known how or when the Maguire sisters came into contact with the Sisters of Mercy, but on 1 May 1843, Elizabeth, or Eliza as she usually styled herself, aged twenty four and the oldest of the Maguire girls, together with her sister, Annie, entered the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin.<sup>1</sup>

Entrants to convents were known as postulants and the postulancy lasted some six months. The *Rule and Constitutions* provided that:

If their conduct during this time be humble and conformable to the spirit of the Congregation, they shall be allowed to solicit in Chapter the Religious Habit, and if the majority of votes (which must be secret) be in their favour they shall receive it, and commence their Novitiate.<sup>2</sup>

The Chapter was a centuries old feature of the governance of religious life. It was a gathering of the professed members of the community to discuss and organize the business of the community. Two of its important functions were the regular election of those in positions of authority, eg, the superior, any assistants, the novice mistress and the bursar,<sup>3</sup> and the approval or otherwise of requests for admission to the novitiate or to take vows.<sup>4</sup>

If the Chapter gave its approval, then, at a liturgical ceremony known as a reception, the novices were given the same religious dress as the professed sisters except that they wore a white veil. They also received the name or names of saints by which they were then known and whom they often adopted as patrons and began a period of training, known as a novitiate, which was also the term used to designate the place or building in which this took place. During the time of the novitiate, the novices were instructed in all aspects of the life they wished to embrace. At the same time they were assessed as to their suitability and no doubt discerned whether this was what they really wanted. The novitiate generally lasted two years and if the novices wished to continue, they sought the approval of the community to profess the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and the service of the poor, sick and ignorant. This

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<sup>1</sup> See: Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin, *Register of Professed Sisters* hereafter referred to as the *BSR*. This consists of single page illuminated entries for each person who entered from 1831 on and gives brief biographical data. Because of the fragility of these documents, a typed copy of each entry is made available to researchers. The number beside these entries refers to the order of entrance, eg, for Elizabeth Maguire, 70, Annie Maguire, 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> A term given to the person in charge of the finances and material needs of the house.

<sup>4</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 54-56.

request had to be approved by the community assembled in a Chapter before they were admitted to profession.<sup>5</sup>

### Novice

When Elizabeth Maguire was received into the Sisters of Mercy on 21 November 1843, she was given the religious name Sister Mary Cecilia (sometimes spelt as *Cecelia* in early records) Xavier.<sup>6</sup> Three other young women also entered the novitiate during 1843, Sister Mary Christina Doherty who eventually went to New York, Sisters Mary Cecilia Cassidy who lived and died at Baggot Street and is buried there, and Agatha Kilkelly who went to on a foundation to Dundalk (1847). Others in the novitiate at that time included Sisters Mary Evangelista Fitzpatrick, the future founder of Buenos Aires (1856) and Adelaide (1882) and Stanislaus Wyly who went to the New York foundation (1850).<sup>7</sup>

Her novice mistress was Mother Vincent Whitty who was a significant figure in the early history of the Sisters of Mercy both at Baggot Street and in Australia. Ellen Whitty entered Baggot Street in 1839 and was professed in 1841, having been prepared for this by Catherine McAuley herself. She was present at the latter's death. Just after Catherine McAuley's death in November 1841 she was elected to the position of novice mistress. In September 1849 at the age of thirty, Mother Vincent was then elected superior of the community and re-elected in 1852. In 1860 she led a foundation to Brisbane, Australia. The foundation was successful although Mother Vincent was not well treated by the bishop of the time, Bishop James Quinn. She died in Brisbane in 1892.<sup>8</sup>

The superior of the house when Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier entered was Mother Mary de Pazzi Delany who was one of Catherine McAuley's original companions and one of the first eight women received as future Sisters of Mercy in early 1832 and professed in 1833. Apparently she was of a retiring disposition, subject to epileptic seizures and did not handle pressure well.<sup>9</sup> However, she enjoyed Catherine's McAuley's confidence and after her death was elected superior. She chose not to be re-elected when her three year term was completed and died at Baggot Street in 1872.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> She usually was known as Sister Mary Xavier.

<sup>7</sup> *BSR*, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77.

<sup>8</sup> See: Hetherington & Smoothy, *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty*, 6-13.

<sup>9</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 371.

Mother de Pazzi was succeeded by Mother Mary Cecilia Marmion who entered the Sisters of Mercy at Baggot Street in 1834 and was professed in 1836. In 1839 Catherine McAuley had appointed her to the position of novice mistress, according to one account, initially not always an entirely happy arrangement for her and presumably the novices.<sup>11</sup> However, things improved and Catherine was able to write in 1841: “Sister M. Cecilia you know is a general favourite. Perhaps there never was a more beloved Mistress of Novices. They call the novaship [sic] - Paradise – tho’ the best discipline is kept up.”<sup>12</sup> She was elected superior in 1844 but in 1849 died of typhus, probably contracted while visiting the sick during one of the many fever epidemics which ravaged the city.<sup>13</sup>

On 26 November 1845 Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier, together with her sister, Sister Mary Philomene, professed perpetual vows of: “... Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience; and the service of the Poor, Sick, and Ignorant; and to persevere until death in this Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy ...”<sup>14</sup> She donned a black veil, received a silver ring and was from then on subject to the obligations and possessed all the rights of a professed member of the community.

### **Community member**

The substantial but plain multi-story building in Baggot Street was the centre of the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin. By the time of Catherine McAuley’s death in November 1841, apart from those who were part of the community and the novitiate, the house was a home for about twenty homeless servants or other young women looking for work who were given assistance to obtain employable skills, and also for a school for some two hundred poor girls. As well, members of the community visited Catholic patients in Dublin’s less than adequate hospitals and poor Catholics, many of whom were originally from the country but victims of evictions caused in a large part by the Potato Famine.<sup>15</sup>

No record exists on what work of the community the newly professed Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier undertook but the works begun by the founder were continuing and she would have been involved in some of them. An early Geelong publication stated that: “Whilst still a

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy unto Thousands: The Life of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*, (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1957), 256-258.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine McAuley to Sister M Frances Warde, 26-27 July, 1841, in Mary C Sullivan, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 419.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 371.

<sup>14</sup> See: *Rule and Constitutions*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 70-73.

Novice, she had volunteered for the Newfoundland Mission, but her Superior, who probably saw in the young religious fit material for greater work, refused her request to go to America.”<sup>16</sup> She was received in November 1843 the same month that Sisters Mary Ursula Frayne and Rose Lynch were returning from Newfoundland, so this may have had some truth in it.<sup>17</sup> However, there is no way of verifying this assertion.

By the time Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier was professed, a contemporary account stated that there were thirty six Sisters of Mercy in the community, three hundred children in the school and seventy two young women supported, presumably in the House of Mercy.<sup>18</sup> No doubt the extensive programme of visitation to the sick and poor of Dublin continued.

### Novice Mistress

Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier must have impressed the community with her maturity and sense of vocation for some four and a half years later aged approximately thirty, at a Chapter held on 27 September 1849, she was elected to the position of novice mistress, according to the process mandated by the *Rule and Constitutions* which directed that, once the mother superior had been elected, she was to

... select such Sisters as she believed best suited for the offices of the Mother Assistant, Bursar and Mistress of Novices, and shall propose them to the Chapter. The Election shall be made with black and white beans. If any or all of them shall be rejected, the Mother Superior shall propose others...<sup>19</sup>

As Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier, now known as Mother Xavier,<sup>20</sup> replaced Mother Vincent, the latter obviously considered her suitable for the position. On 27 May 1852 at the next Chapter where Mother Vincent was re-elected, she was re-elected for a further three year period.

The novice mistress played a very important role in the life of the community. According to the *Rule and Constitutions*:

As the order and preservation of a Religious Body depend greatly on the pious and religious training of the Novices, the Sister appointed to this important office

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<sup>16</sup> Convent of Mercy, Geelong, *Golden Jubilee Record, Convent of Mercy, 1859-1909*, (Geelong: Henwood & Dancy, 1910), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Kathrine Bellamy, *Weavers of Tapestry*, (St John's, NL: Flanker Press, 2006), 87.

<sup>18</sup> See: Walter Battersby, (ed), *The Complete Catholic Directory, Almanac and Registry for the Year of Our Lord 1845* (Dublin: Battersby), 228. This information was repeated virtually unchanged for most years at least until 1859 so needs to be treated with a degree of caution.

<sup>19</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 45-46.

<sup>20</sup> Sisters of Mercy of Mercy, Baggot Street, *The Customs and Minor Regulations of the Religious called Sisters of Mercy in the Parent House, Baggot-Street, and Its Branch Houses*, (Dublin: J M O'Toole & Son, 1869), 83.

shall be discreet, meek and pious, of great prudence, and experienced in all the duties of the Congregation, judicious in discerning the dispositions of those under her care, and endowed with talents to form their minds to the practice of every virtue.<sup>21</sup>

The *Rule and Constitutions* laid down how the novice mistress should instruct the novices in the practice of the vows, prayer and meditation and a love of the congregation and directed that they should apply to her for all their needs. Because of the importance of this office the *Rule and Constitutions* also enjoined that: “As far as circumstances permit, the Mistress of Novices should be free from all other offices, so that she may be able to dedicate herself entirely to this important task.”<sup>22</sup>

During Mother Xavier’s time as novice mistress, some fifty aspiring Sisters of Mercy including her sister, Maria, were in her charge. Twenty nine were professed during this time, sixteen of whom had begun their novitiate before she took charge. She had the total responsibility for the formation of a further eighteen while eleven had not completed their novitiate before her two terms as novice mistress ended in May 1855.<sup>23</sup>

Those she had responsibility for during this time included a future superior of Baggot Street, Sister Mary Magdalen Kirwan, who was superior from 1864 to 1870,<sup>24</sup> and sisters who went on overseas foundations to Clifford, Buenos Aires, Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and later some who were part of the future Geelong foundation. Others went on foundations in Ireland such as: Ballinsaloe, Belfast, Downpatrick, Dundalk, Goldenbridge, and Longford, and thirteen sisters lived and died at Baggot Street, some of them being buried there.<sup>25</sup>

### **Mother Superior**

On 24 May 1855 at a Chapter convoked for the purpose of electing a new superior in place of Vincent Whitty who had completed the two terms permitted by the *Rule and Constitutions*, Mother Xavier was elected the Mother Superior of the Baggot Street Convent.

The role and duties of the mother superior of a Convent of Mercy were delineated in Catherine McAuley’s *Rule and Constitutions*. It was an onerous position. As well as being a role model for the members of the community, she was expected to see the rule and constitutions were strictly observed; to provide the sisters with all necessities; to listen to,

<sup>21</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 50-53.

<sup>22</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> See: *BSR*, 98-138.

<sup>24</sup> *BSR*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> Biographical information from the *BSR*.

encourage, support and if necessary admonish them; to preside at all public exercises and meetings; and to ensure that novices were adequately prepared for their professions.<sup>26</sup>

At that same Chapter, Mother Vincent Whitty was elected Mother Assistant; Mother Evangelista Fitzpatrick was elected the Bursar; and Mother Joseph Starr the Novice Mistress.<sup>27</sup> Just over six months later, these arrangements had to be changed at another Chapter held on 2 December consequent upon appointments to overseas foundations. Evangelista Fitzpatrick been appointed to lead the foundation to Buenos Aires and Joseph Starr to lead the foundation to Clifford. Vincent Whitty took up the position of Novice Mistress again,<sup>28</sup> Mary of Mercy Norris who was to follow Mother Xavier as Superior became Mother Assistant and Gabriel Sherlock became Bursar.

While very little is known of the daily operation of the community with Mother Xavier as leader, records indicate that life proceeded apace. During her years as superior, young women continued to present themselves as candidates. Twenty two were given approval at Chapters to proceed to the formal novitiate and sixteen novices were professed. Among those professed were sisters who went to Buenos Aires, Adelaide, and Geelong, future superiors and novice mistresses of Baggot Street, and the first superior of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Dublin and some who spent their whole lives at Baggot Street.

Apparently she also made some changes to the lives of the community, two of which had been suggested by anonymous documents. One related to the religious habit worn at the time. An unverified source relates: “Up to the time Mother Cecilia Xavier Maguire became Mother Superior of Baggot Street, ie, 1855, the veil was worn resting on the frontal. She was the first to use the stiffener in the veil; it has been used ever since.”<sup>29</sup> Certainly by 1866, it was in use throughout the various communities and gradually became uniform throughout the world as photographs of early Sisters of Mercy attest.<sup>30</sup>

Another tradition says that she organised that the community say the Office in Latin. The original practice of the community was to recite the Office in English. Whether or not Mother

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<sup>26</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 46-48.

<sup>27</sup> *BSR*, 76, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Mother Vincent had held this position for two terms earlier (2 December 1841 to 26 May 1852) and then had two more terms (2 December 1855 to 24 May 1858).

<sup>29</sup> *BSF*. The frontal was a strip of white material worn across the forehead. The stiffener in the veil was designed to keep the veil from impeding sight and was known by different names in different places, eg, veil paper (Melbourne Congregation), veil board (Ballarat Congregation), or for many others, the stiffener.

<sup>30</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide for the Religious called Sisters of Mercy, Part III*, (London, Robson & Son, 1866), 90.

Xavier was responsible for changing this at Baggot Street cannot be independently verified but in 1866 a reliable source stated:

In conformity with the practice of the Church, we say the Office in Latin. In the beginning it was for some time said in English; but as members and houses increased, this change was agreed upon by the majority of the houses of the Order, after having consulted the Right Rev. Dr. Blake, who had been the faithful friend and adviser of our revered foundress. His lordship stated that it had always been intended that the Office should be said in Latin, when the Institute should have matured and the members sufficiently numerous to afford the time necessary to learn the Latin office.<sup>31</sup>

This convent at Baggot Street had initiated several foundations of Sisters of Mercy, both in Ireland and overseas, which once they had established themselves became independent and self-supporting. However, in the 1850s, it also had responsibility for three branch or filial houses.

Mother McAuley's system of governance had basically followed the monastic pattern, ie, foundations made from the motherhouse became independent and operated autonomously, in contrast to that favoured by two other contemporary religious congregations in Dublin, the Sisters of Charity and the Loreto Sisters, both of whom who had a centralised mode of governance led by a superior general. So foundations such as Limerick, founded by Mother McAuley in 1838, became independent of Baggot Street, received and professed their own members, made their own appointments and in turn made their own foundations, eg, Limerick sent sisters to Kinsale in 1844 and Ennis in 1854.

However some newly established communities remained under the authority and governance of the founding community. Reasons for this varied, for example, they were in the same town or were too small in number to establish the usual structures or they were not able to be self-supporting. Such communities were co-ordinated by a member of the community appointed by the mother superior and known as the local superior or in later times, the sister in charge. The authority of these appointees was not derived from the constitutions as such but delegated by the superior of the founding community.

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<sup>31</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide for Religious called Sisters of Mercy, Parts I & II*, 135-136. Dr Michael Blake, a Dublin parish priest and later Bishop of Dromore, was a close friend, supporter, adviser and trusted confidante of Catherine McAuley. He died in 1860.

While they were not new foundations, two of these places in particular occupied much of Mother Xavier's time and energy and she had a significant influence on their development.

### **Kingstown**

Kingstown, now known as Dun Laoghaire, was one of Catherine McAuley's early foundations and certainly one of her most problematic. Established in March 1835 it was intended to provide a sea side place for convalescing members of the community. Kingstown was mainly a resort town for the wealthy but had an underside of poverty so Catherine soon decided to open a school for poor girls.<sup>32</sup> Misunderstandings with the parish priest, Father Sheridan, over the responsibility for finances caused Catherine reluctantly to withdraw the community some three years later. At the urging of Archbishop Murray they eventually returned in 1840 to a somewhat uneasy peace with the parish priest and no great optimism – in a letter, Catherine McAuley noted that sisters were: “... preparing to return to ill-fated Kingstown ...”<sup>33</sup> Relations did not improve so the sisters withdrew in 1842 and the property was sold. Their matters rested until Mother Xavier purchased Ballygihan House in Glathule, which was at the other end of Kingstown, and six sisters took up residence in 1856.<sup>34</sup> They visited the poor and taught in the school. That same year, Archbishop Cullen invited the community to take charge of a rehabilitation service for women who had been in Mountjoy prison and were preparing for release. The first year some eighty six women were sent there from the prison, of whom some thirty eight either obtained employment or returned to their homes.<sup>35</sup>

### **Boosterstown 1838**

Catherine McAuley established St Anne's Convent as a branch house in Boosterstown in July 1838 partly to replace the convent in Kingstown. She sent Ursula Frayne to be in charge of a community of five and although some were not in the best of health and had been sent there to recuperate soon they began to visit the sick and poor and run a school for the poor. That Mother Xavier was involved to a degree in this community even before she became the superior is given some substance by a handwritten manuscript notebook entitled: *Rules for the Sodality. Directions for Instructions and Meditations. List of Members of the Library*

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<sup>32</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 174-175, 231-234, 289-290, 311-312.

<sup>33</sup> Sullivan, (ed), *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*, 260.

<sup>34</sup> See: Anon, *Misericordia in Ballygihan, Glathule*.

<sup>35</sup> See: John N Murphy, *'Terra incognita' or Convents of the United Kingdom*, (London: Longman's, 1873), 168-169. This work continued until 1883.

*of the Sodality of Mercy (2 February 1851 to 14 January 1855)*<sup>36</sup> which contained a list in Mother Xavier's writing of forty two addresses, sixteen of whom were from Booterstown.

### **Charitable Infirmary Jervis Street Hospital**

Not long before Mother Xavier began her term of office, the Baggot Street community accepted another responsibility. The Charitable Infirmary in Jervis Street, commonly known as the Jervis Street Hospital had been founded in 1718 and was Ireland's oldest hospital. A historian of this hospital noted that:

In 1852 the committee of management made the remarkable decision to invite the Sisters of Mercy to supervise nursing in the hospital. This decision was motivated by a desire to improve the standard of nursing in the hospital, and whereas it was recognised that the sisters were not trained nurses, it was appreciated that they had 'acquired an experience which renders them very efficient'.<sup>37</sup>

Concerns about possible proselytisation were allayed and in August 1854 a community arrived there to begin their duties. An early Geelong publication stated that: "... when the civil authorities asked the Sisters to take over the management of the Jervis Street Hospital, it was her (ie., Mother Xavier's) privilege to be placed in charge"<sup>38</sup>

Mother Xavier was still the novice mistress when this responsibility was accepted and given the requirement in the *Rule and Constitution* about the novice mistress not being involved in other duties, this might not have been all that feasible. However, once she became superior she would have been in charge although not really involved in the actual day to day management of the hospital.

In 1857, the *Dublin Catholic Directory* listed the numbers of Sisters of Mercy in Dublin as: Baggot Street, fifty (this would probably include postulants and novices who were largely the responsibility of the Mistress of Novices); Booterstown, ten; Golden Bridge, Kilmainham, ten; Glastrule, Kingstown, six. The number at the Jervis Street Hospital was not listed.

### **The Crimea**

Although she did not have direct responsibility for them, surely a cause of some concern to Mother Xavier was the situation of two members of her community nursing in the Crimea,

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<sup>36</sup> *BSF*.

<sup>37</sup> Eoin O'Brien, *The Charitable Infirmary in Jervis Street, 1718-1987*, (Dublin: Anniversary Press, 1987), 42. The Sisters of Mercy relinquished their role in the hospital in 1983, four years before it closed.

<sup>38</sup> Convent of Mercy, Geelong, *Golden Jubilee Record*, 14.

Sisters Mary Agnes Whitty and Elizabeth Hersey. They formed part of a contingent of eleven Sisters of Mercy from various Irish Convents of Mercy assembled by Mother Xavier's predecessor and led by Mother Francis Bridgeman. They left Ireland in December 1854 and returned in April 1856.<sup>39</sup>

New foundations both in Ireland and overseas continued to be made. In the first year of Mother Xavier's leadership of the Baggot Street Convent of Mercy three important foundations were initiated, one in Dublin itself, the others overseas.

### **Mater Misericordiae Hospital**

The desire of the Sisters of Mercy to build a hospital for the poor of Dublin took many years to be realised. According to an early annalist of the Sisters of Mercy:

The idea ... originated with Mother McAuley, who was anxious that the Sisters should have a hospital of their own, in which the spiritual and temporal wants of the poor could be perfectly ministered to, and from which patients should not be compelled to go until their health was completely re-established.<sup>40</sup>

The superior of the time, Cecilia Marmion wrote to Archbishop Daniel Murray requesting permission for "... the establishment of a hospital on the north side of the city",<sup>41</sup> and he agreed to this request. It was in Vincent Whitty's time as superior that land to do so was purchased in 1851. Murray died in 1852, and his successor, Archbishop Paul Cullen, was also in favour of the proposal. This property was in Eccles Street, and cost £1,610, an enormous sum for the time and eventually paid for by the Sisters of Mercy in 1854.<sup>42</sup> The hospital was officially founded in the following year, the architect, John Bourke, being then commissioned to design the building. He was described thus:

The architect selected to design, plan, and superintend the building of this noble edifice is our young and talented fellow citizen, John Bourke Esq., many evidences of whose genius and taste are to be found in ecclesiastical structures in various parts of Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

However, as the historian of the hospital notes:

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<sup>39</sup> See: Evelyn Bolster, *The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War*, (Cork: Mercier Press, 1964), for a study of this venture.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Austin Carroll, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, Vol I, (New York: P O'Shea, 1881), 56.

<sup>41</sup> Eugene Nolan, *Caring for the Nation: A History of the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2013), 5. No date was given on this letter

<sup>42</sup> Nolan, *Caring for the Nation*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in: Nolan, *Caring for the Nation*, 8.

It is widely held that the person who influenced the size and splendour of the Mater building was Sr Cecilia Maguire, her vision overcoming the fact that the Sisters themselves had only limited financial resources to build the hospital.<sup>44</sup>

Or, as another writer put it:

The guiding spirit behind this great undertaking was Mother M.C. Xavier Maguire who proceeded on the principle that the work of those who labor for God's glory should at least equal if not excel that of the many who toil only for the earthly reward.<sup>45</sup>

In preparation for staffing the new hospital, Vincent Whitty sent three sisters accompanied by Father James Quinn overseas to London and the Hotel Dieu hospitals in Paris and Amiens to study latest nurse training and methods and hospital management.<sup>46</sup> One source relates that Mother Xavier was one of the sisters sent to do this.<sup>47</sup> The foundation stone of the new hospital was laid on 24 September 1855 and building commenced soon after as and when funds became available. Mother Xavier would have been involved to a certain extent in the progress of this long desired building and in particular its rather grand design. In fact the Mercy annalist stated:

It pleased God to reserve the carrying out of this noble idea to her [ie, Mother Catherine McAuley's] successor and dearly beloved spiritual daughter, Mother Xavier Maguire, who died recently on the Australian mission.<sup>48</sup>

The first section of the hospital eventually opened on 24 September 1861. By this time the two early guiding lights were literally on the other side of the earth, Mother Xavier in Geelong and Mother Vincent in Brisbane.

## Overseas

The two overseas foundations made during Mother Xavier's time as superior were in fact planned prior to her taking up office. As Mother Assistant to Mother Vincent, she no doubt

<sup>44</sup>Nolan, *Caring for the Nation*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Beata Bauman, *A Way of Mercy: Catherine McAuley's Contribution to Nursing*, (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), 114 - 115.

<sup>46</sup> James Quinn was later Bishop of Brisbane (1859-1881) and invited Mother Vincent to make a foundation there. See: Maria Luddy, (ed), *The Crimean Journals of the Sisters of Mercy, 1854-56*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 6-7.

<sup>47</sup>Mary Ignatius O'Sullivan, *The Wheel of Time*, (Melbourne: The Advocate Press, 1954), 78. The author of this book, Sister Mary Ignatius (Frances) O'Sullivan (1875-1969), was a boarder at Sacred Heart College, Geelong from 1889 to 1892. She entered the Convent of Mercy, Geelong, on 1 June 1894, was received on 18 June 1895 and professed on 3 January 1898. She taught mainly in various Geelong schools and retired from teaching in 1946, then devoted much of her time to research into the history of the Melbourne Congregation of Sisters of Mercy which culminated in the publication of this book. Unfortunately she did not provide references for her research but in general it has proved to be reasonably accurate with regard to the history of the Geelong Convent of Mercy.

<sup>48</sup> Austin, *Annals*, 56.

was cognisant of the details of the preparations and obviously in favour of their implementation.

### **Buenos Aires, Argentina 1856**

Dublin Archdiocesan Archives show that in the 1840's requests had been made for a Mercy foundation to Buenos Aires which at that time had a large Irish population. Eventually:

Reverend Mother Vincent Whitty and her Assistant, Mother Xavier Maguire, were willing to allow volunteers to go to Buenos Aires. ... Another member of the Baggot Street Convent governing council, Mother Evangelista Fitzpatrick, was chosen to lead the first foundation to Argentina ...<sup>49</sup>

This small group of four professed sisters, one novice and two postulants left Dublin on 8 January 1856 and arrived in Buenos Aires on 24 February 1856. Another group of four sisters and two postulants arrived in October of that same year.<sup>50</sup> Many of those who went to Buenos Aires had been in the novitiate when Mother Xavier was the novice mistress. They included: Sisters Mary Vincent Mostyn who died there within two years; Agnes Whitty, who had to return to Ireland because of ill health; Baptist O'Donnell, who went to Buenos Aires, then Adelaide but eventually returned to refound Buenos Aires; and Catherine Flanagan, Ligouri Griffin, and Gertrude O'Rourke who initially went there but later were in the group which founded Adelaide.<sup>51</sup>

### **Clifford, England 1855**

The small village of Clifford was in Yorkshire and had a growing Catholic community. Originally another religious congregation, the Sisters of Providence, were in residence but personnel shortages led to their departure. Knowledge of the foundation made by the Sisters of Mercy in Bermondsey apparently led to the parish priest issuing a request for a community. Although facing a shortage of sisters in Baggot Street, Vincent Whitty acquiesced to his request. "Four nuns and a lay-sister were selected for Clifford in August 1855. They were joined nine months later by another nun with two novices and a postulant."<sup>52</sup> Two years later

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<sup>49</sup> Mother Evangelista Fitzpatrick entered the Baggot Street convent in 1845 shortly before the two older Maguire sisters were professed and was elected the Bursar there before the Convent Chapter on 2 December 1855 appointed her as the Mother Superior of the Buenos Aires foundation. She later founded the Sisters of Mercy in Adelaide in 1880 and died there in 1886. See: McLay, *Women on the Move*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> McLay, *Women on the Move*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> *BSR*, 86, 89, 95, 108, 113.

<sup>52</sup> Sisters Mary Joseph Starr, Magdalen Kennedy, Agnes McOwen and Scholastica Saurin who went on the foundation to Clifford and later to Hull. See: Maria G McClelland, C, *The Sisters of Mercy, Popular Politics*

two sisters went to Hull. All of the members chosen had been Mother Xavier's novices, having entered Baggot Street between 1849 and 1852, and none of them was very experienced in religious life, a circumstance which may have contributed to the problems the community was to face in the following years.

Clifford was a foundation beset with difficulties, especially with the parish priests and often over money and property.<sup>53</sup> In a few years, it became clear that the future there was rather tenuous so personnel and resources were increasingly directed to Hull to the detriment of the Clifford foundation and in 1867 they withdrew to concentrate on the Hull foundation.

### **The Builder**

Mother Xavier began her career as a builder by instituting improvements to the convent at Baggot Street. It would be reasonable to suppose that some of these would have at least been in the pipeline when she took up office as they began in her first year of office. So, in 1855, some remodelling and extensions to the cloister area including the construction of an oratory at its end were undertaken and a new stairway was constructed. The next year an imposing ionic inspired portico was built at the front entrance and a balustrade constructed along the frontage of the building. Stained glass windows and tiled floors were installed in various parts of the convent. Changes were also made to some of the large rooms to form offices, a community room and a reception parlour.

Various renovations were made to the Chapel between 1855 and 1858. The wooden altar installed in Catherine McAuley's time was replaced,<sup>54</sup> and other changes in the chapel overseen by the architect, John Bourke,<sup>55</sup> included the installation of gothic style carved oak choir stalls,<sup>56</sup> hot water pipes, a new tiled floor, and a new sacristy and confessional. A stained glass Rosary window costing £150 was installed over the high altar, a gift from the

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*and the Growth of the Roman Catholic Community in Hull, 1855 – 1930*, (Roman Catholic Studies, Vol 13, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press: 2000), 21-27.

<sup>53</sup> McLelland, *The Sisters of Mercy ...Hull*, 31-39.

<sup>54</sup> This altar was itself replaced in 1864 by a marble altar costing £900.

<sup>55</sup> The original architect of the Baggot Street renovations was John Keane. It is thought that Bourke may have taken over his practice prior to Keane's death in 1859. One of Bourke's chief works was the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1855.

<sup>56</sup> **BSF**, Beakey to Maguire, 19 March 1857, enclosing estimates for oak (£183.10.0) or pine (£122.1.0) choir stalls and platforms in the Chapel and recommending the oak be chosen. It was.

father of Sisters Mary Evangelist and Agnes Vincent Forde on the occasion of their professions in June 1858.<sup>57</sup>

It is a source of some conjecture about what inspired Mother Xavier to make these changes to the fabric of the convent which tended to make the place more monastic in appearance, eg, stained glass windows, cloisters and choir stalls in the chapel. Both the Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of Mercy moved freely about the poor and deprived parts of Dublin, albeit usually in pairs and were known, somewhat disapprovingly, as the “walking nuns”.<sup>58</sup> Parents and others were sometimes suspicious of these new groups, wondering if in fact they were “real nuns”.

Unverified sources claim that Mother Xavier was educated by the Ursuline Sisters who had solemn vows and observed enclosure, in other words, they complied with the accepted perception of how women religious of the time worked and lived in traditional convents. Perhaps she thought that the changes she made at Baggot Street would help convince the Catholic population that the Sisters of Mercy were quite legitimate and approved of by Church authorities.

Mother Xavier’s three year term of office concluded in May 1858. Her two predecessors had been elected to second terms,<sup>59</sup> but at the Chapter meeting held on 24 May 1858 there were three inconclusive ballots for the position of Mother Superior. The Archbishop then appointed Sister Mary of Mercy Norris according to a stipulation of the Constitutions: “Should there be an equality of votes for two candidates or more, a new scrutiny shall be made, and if a majority be not obtained either in this or in a third scrutiny, the Election shall be made by the Bishop”.<sup>60</sup>

An anonymous and undated document in the Baggot Street file commented: “... it would be difficult to know what exactly the Convent looked like in the time of the Foundress by the time all the reconstruction was finished ...” and puts in writing a longstanding tradition:

Tradition has it however that the Baggot Street community had quite enough of Mother Xavier’s “improvements” and did not re-elect her in 1858. They felt that

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<sup>57</sup> This was replaced in 1931 by a window depicting the Assumption installed in honour of the centenary of the Sisters of Mercy. What happened to the original window is not recorded.

<sup>58</sup> The Loreto Sisters had a type of semi-enclosure.

<sup>59</sup> Mother Cecilia Marmion (1844-1849) and Mother Vincent Whitty (1852-1855). The pattern of superiors having two three year terms resumed with Mother Xavier’s successor and continued thereafter.

<sup>60</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 44-45.

she had spent too much Community money in building some useless additions to the fabric of the Parent house.<sup>61</sup>

Mother Xavier's term of office was for the times uncharacteristically short and interestingly, she was not appointed to any other position of responsibility in the community, in itself a little unusual as there had been a certain amount of changing of places in previous times, eg, Vincent Whitty had been at various times the novice mistress, the superior and then the assistant;<sup>62</sup> Mary of Mercy Norris had been the assistant; and Mother Xavier herself the novice mistress before being the superior. Whether the fact that she was not re-elected was a rejection made ever so politely by the community and what Mother Xavier thought of it is not known.

The new Mother Superior appointed her predecessor in charge of the house the latter had founded in 1856 in Ballygibran, Kingstown. It was here that various accounts indicated that she compiled *The Little Companion of the Sisters of Mercy*, a book of devotions used by Sisters of Mercy for many decades and reprinted several times.<sup>63</sup> This consisted of grace before and after dinner (in Latin), the morning oblation, prayers during Mass and for Communion, novenas, prayers for visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and some devotions for the First Sunday observance.<sup>64</sup> Some of these were specific to Sisters of Mercy while others could be used by religious of other orders. Later editions also included the Little Office of Our Lady (in Latin), which was prescribed for daily recitation by the *Rule and Constitutions*.<sup>65</sup> While there is no author or editor mentioned in the frontispiece, there is a notation in the body of the work which reads: "NB. Dear sister, in charity offer one Hail Mary for the grace of perseverance and a happy death for the compiler of this little treatise. Sr M C X."<sup>66</sup>

There is no evidence that Mother Xavier ever met Catherine McAuley who died some eighteen months before the former came to Baggot Street, although it could have been possible. However, there were still many in the community who knew Catherine McAuley well. Mother Xavier's first superior, de Pazzi Delany, was one of Catherine McAuley's earliest companions, a close confidante, on occasions her *de facto* deputy, and her successor as superior; her next two superiors, Cecilia Marmion and Vincent Whitty, who had also been

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<sup>61</sup> *BSF*, *The Antipodes 10*, undated anonymous note.

<sup>62</sup> The assistant as the name implies, presided in the absence of the superior, was the first of her advisors, known as *discreets*, and was to ensure that the sisters would want for nothing. See: *Rule and Constitutions*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Cecilia Xavier Maguire, *The Little Companion of the Sisters of Mercy*, (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1949). This book was reprinted several times although early editions are rare.

<sup>64</sup> It was a devotional practice that every First Sunday was to be a day of silent retreat.

<sup>65</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 18-19, and Maguire, *The Little Companion*, 145-188.

<sup>66</sup> Maguire, *The Little Companion*, 142.

her novice mistress, were likewise close companions of the founder, and the majority of the community members knew her well.

It is not unreasonable to speculate that Mother Xavier may have imbibed some of the understandings, attitudes, and ways of operating of a woman who occupied such a prominent place in the life and works of the Baggot Street convent. Whether or not this was the case, those who knew Catherine McAuley well appeared to have had no hesitation in electing Mother Xavier to important and influential positions of responsibility, first as novice mistress four years after her profession, and then as superior six years later. During her time as superior, she exercised responsibility for the flourishing life and ministry centred on Baggot Street as well as initiating and supervising several foundations made both in Ireland and overseas. No doubt the experience she gained assisted her in the next phase of her life and ministry.

### Chapter 3 Geelong - Establishment

Mother Xavier's time as superior may have been brief and its conclusion unexpected but soon afterwards, another opportunity presented itself for her to exercise her undoubted energy, talents and expertise.

On 6 June, 1859, Bishop James Alipius Goold OSA, the bishop of Melbourne in the colony of Victoria, Australia, visited the Baggot Street community. James Goold, an Irishman born in 1812, was a member of the Augustinian Order.<sup>1</sup> Ordained in 1835, he volunteered to serve in the colony of New South Wales and arrived there in 1838. He served for some time in Campbelltown. At the age of thirty five, he had been a reluctant appointee to lead the new diocese of Melbourne, which, on Archbishop Polding's recommendation, had been established in 1847 and at that time covered the whole of what in 1851 became the colony of Victoria.

When Goold arrived he found there were three priests and three churches in his diocese and he embarked on an extensive programme of recruiting priests, mainly from Ireland, building churches and inviting women and men religious to carry out the many needed works of mercy, especially of education.<sup>2</sup> Foundations of Sisters of Mercy were made in 1857, 1859 and 1872, Good Shepherd Sisters in 1863, Jesuits in 1865 and Christian Brothers in 1868. In 1874, his diocese was divided and the suffragan dioceses of Ballarat and Sandhurst were established with Goold being made the Metropolitan Archbishop of the ecclesiastical Province of Melbourne.<sup>3</sup> Goold died in 1886.<sup>4</sup>

Victoria was just over two and a half times the size of Ireland and had a population of about 511,000, of which some 88,000 were Catholics, mostly poor Irish who suffered quite a degree of discrimination from the mainly Protestant middle and upper classes. It was a prosperous and growing colony especially as a result of the gold rush period in the 1850s and the Land Act of 1862 which resulted in a great increase in population and

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<sup>1</sup> The Order of St Augustine (OSA), commonly known as the Augustinians, was formally established in 1256. The first Augustinians arrived in Australia in 1838 and served the pioneer church in many parts of the country.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1973), 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> A third diocese, Sale, was established in 1887. An ecclesiastical province is one that is presided over by a metropolitan who is an archbishop. He has certain but limited authority with regard to the bishops of the associated dioceses which are grouped within the province and are known as suffragan dioceses.

<sup>4</sup> See: J R J Grigsby, 'Goold, James Alipius (1812-1886)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre for Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goold-james-alipius-3633>, published first in hard copy 1972, accessed 17 November 2015.

prosperity. However, while Melbourne became a wealthy, sophisticated and stylish city, there was also a very poor and needy underclass, many of whom were Catholics.<sup>5</sup>

In 1857, Goold had obtained a community of three sisters led by Mother Ursula Frayne. The sisters settled in Fitzroy, now one of the inner suburbs of Melbourne, and within a short time began schools for the poor, a boarding and secondary school for middle class girls, a House of Mercy to care for young Irish girls seeking employment, and took over the administration of an orphanage in the nearby suburb of South Melbourne.<sup>6</sup>

Ursula (Clara) Frayne is a significant figure in the history of the Australian Sisters of Mercy. She entered Baggot Street on 2 July 1834, was received on 20 June 1835 and professed on 25 January 1837. She was involved in several Irish foundations, was very close to Catherine McAuley and cared for her in her final illness. In 1842 she went to Newfoundland but returned in 1843.<sup>7</sup> She led the first foundation of Sisters of Mercy to the fledgling colony of Swan River in 1846<sup>8</sup> and later in 1857 the first foundation of women religious to Melbourne, the main town in the better developed colony of Victoria. She died at Fitzroy on 9 June 1885.

Goold was desirous of obtaining more Sisters of Mercy for Geelong, the second biggest town in the area, which, though on a smaller scale, was developing along the same lines as Melbourne, hence his mission to Baggot Street. Geelong was first settled in 1836 and proclaimed a town two years later.<sup>9</sup> It was a prosperous and growing town and was gradually developing as a port for the export of wool and wheat from the western areas of the colony. The discovery of gold in Ballarat was a stimulus for the growth of the town and manufacturing, especially in the wool industry, flour milling and engineering, were thriving. The town also had several schools, a hospital, a daily newspaper, a rail connection to Melbourne opened in 1857 and several major banks and insurance companies. As well, many cultural institutions such as a free library and various social

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<sup>5</sup> Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 222-223. See also: Maree Allen, *The Labourers' Friends*, (Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1989), 33-34.

<sup>6</sup> Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 226-237.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of her life, see Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*.

<sup>8</sup> See: McLay, Anne, *Women out of Their Sphere: A History of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia from 1846*, Northbridge: Vanguard Press, 1992, for her role in this first foundation of Sisters of Mercy in Australia.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Brownhill, *The History of Geelong and Corio Bay*, (Geelong: The Geelong Advertiser, 1959), 8.

clubs and musical societies were developing.<sup>10</sup> The 1857 census gave the population of the town as 23,288, including 4517 Catholics.<sup>11</sup>

The Geelong mission which had been established in 1842 initially covered basically the western half of the colony.<sup>12</sup> The first church had been built in 1842 but soon became too small so a second and larger church was then constructed and completed in 1847 to cater for a Catholic population of about 1,000. Consequent upon the gold rushes the Catholic population increased to nearly 4,000 and this church too proved to be inadequate so it was decided to build a larger and much grander cathedral-like church. Work began in 1854 but ceased two years later. It was not resumed until 1871 and the church, St Mary of the Angels, was dedicated the following year.<sup>13</sup>

The Geelong mission was led by Dean Joseph Hayes. He was an Irish Augustinian who had volunteered to come to Victoria in 1853 and was appointed to Geelong in 1856. He later was appointed to Bendigo and died in 1868.<sup>14</sup> An extract from the *Catholic Directory* of 1858 noted that he was assisted by three priests who provided Masses daily at the main church and in several others in outlying districts, usually once a month, as well as administering the sacraments and visiting the sick and prisoners.<sup>15</sup>

The progress of Goold's negotiations with the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin is charted through his diary entries. An entry dated 9 June 1859 reports:

Called on the Archbishop to know if he would object to a Community going to Melbourne from the convent in Baggot Street, provided that such could be spared; he said not. I then visited the convent, but could do nothing, the Superior being out.

The next entry dated 12 June is a little more hopeful: "Said Mass in the chapel of the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street. It is likely I may get a Community from this place; the consent of the Archbishop is all that is needed to make it a positive fact."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See Brownhill, *History of Geelong and Corio Bay*.

<sup>11</sup> Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> However, by the early eighteenth sixties, several other parishes had been established in this area such as: Portland (1847), Port Fairy (1849), Warrnambool (1853), Ballarat (1853), and Hamilton (1862). See: National Council of Priests of Australia Inc, *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia July 2014-June 2015*, 82-86, 321.

<sup>13</sup> See: St Mary's Parish, Geelong, [www.stmarysgeelong.com.au/history.html](http://www.stmarysgeelong.com.au/history.html), accessed 30 July 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 179-180.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Condon, Brian, & Ian Waters, (eds), *James Alipius Goold Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Diary 1848-1886*, (Melbourne: Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, 1997).

However, despite his earlier assurance, Archbishop Cullen had evidently re-considered. Goold's entry for the next day records the Archbishop's change of mind: "The Archbishop refused his consent to a Community going out to Melbourne from Baggot Street on the plea that they could not be spared." It is not known who or what led to the about face but undaunted Goold tried again on 13 July and this time succeeded: "In Dublin, went to Howth to visit the Archbishop and get his leave for Mrs Macguire [sic] and two other Sisters of Mercy (Baggot Street) and informed Rev. Mother of this arrangement."<sup>17</sup>

How Mother Xavier heard of this venture and what went on behind the scenes is not known but the same day Archbishop Cullen gave his permission she wrote a rather fulsome letter to him from the Convent of Mercy in Glasthule which read:

My dear Archbishop

I cannot allow a day to pass without telling you how truly grateful I feel to you for granting my request. May God reward you for giving me this new and glorious opportunity of doing something for Him. I feel very, very happy. I am not going with an idea that I shall not have crosses and difficulties but I think I am going with courage, prepared to meet everything and with my entire confidence placed in God. I prayed very much that only His will might be done and I think I was prepared to accept even a refusal but your permission which I accept from God, has excited in my heart a joyful hope that He loves me and I take this call as a proof that He does. I hope I may be faithful. I shall never forget to pray for you, my dear Father in God. Won't I see you and get your blessing before I go?

My dear Lord from your grateful and obedient child in JC,

Sister M Frances Xavier Maguire<sup>18</sup>

Across the bottom of this missive he wrote: "Let Mrs Maguire and two Sisters go if they think they have a vocation" - hardly a ringing endorsement but at least he did not say no!

It is sometimes difficult for people who have been in interesting and demanding leadership roles to settle back into their previous lives. Whether or not Mother Xavier felt this is not known but she grasped with alacrity an opportunity to be involved in a new and challenging venture. That it was literally on the other side of the world in a place no one knew very much about probably added to the attraction.

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<sup>17</sup> During these times, religious women usually did not wear their religious dress in public and were referred to as *Mrs.*

<sup>18</sup> Maguire to Cullen, 13 July 1859.

No time was wasted. On 15 July Goold noted in his diary: “Called on the Sisters of Mercy; left cheque for £50 for Mrs Maguire towards outfits for the Sisters. At 2 o’clock p.m. started for Holyhead.” Some three weeks later on 5 September he recorded:

In Liverpool. Learned that the Sisters of Mercy had that morning gone on board the **Ocean Chief**, the vessel in which they sail for Melbourne. I went on board and took my leave of them; their cabins are large and conveniently situated.<sup>19</sup>

It is highly likely that Mother Xavier had a fair bit of say as to who would accompany her to Geelong. Archbishop Cullen may have thought she would be accompanied by two sisters but in the end the party numbered six – Mothers Xavier Maguire and Gabriel Sherlock, Sisters Mary Margaret Mulally, Mary Regis Manley, Mary Rose Lynch and Mary Aloysius Ryan (a novice).

Gabriel (Maria) Sherlock was appointed her assistant. Her parents were Sir Robert and Lady Catherine Sherlock of Rathfarnham who were friendly with Catherine McAuley and she was one of three of their daughters who became Sisters of Mercy. Educated by the Loreto Sisters, Maria entered Baggot Street with her sister, Catherine, on 7 September 1847, and was received on 10 May 1848. She was professed on 14 May 1850 and Mother Xavier who was the Novice Mistress at the time prepared both her and her sister for profession. When Mother Xavier became the Superior, Gabriel became the Bursar and they worked together in the administration of Baggot Street.<sup>20</sup>

Margaret (Mary) Mulally entered Baggot Street on 21 December 1846 and was received on 31 August 1847, being given the religious name Mary Margaret. She was professed on 20 March 1850 so Mother Xavier would have been her novice mistress for some six months after the latter assumed that office. It is not known what work she undertook in the nine years before she went to Geelong but one account says that she accompanied Mother Xavier to France to study hospital administration prior to the establishment of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital.<sup>21</sup>

The third of the sisters chosen who were to figure prominently in the Geelong foundation was Regis (Elizabeth) Manley. She entered Baggot Street on 13 April 1848 and was received on 13 December 1848 and professed on 16 August 1851, thus

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<sup>19</sup> Condon, *Goold Diary*.

<sup>20</sup> O’Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> O’Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 78.

receiving most of her novitiate training under Mother Xavier. She had been educated in France and Belgium and was an accomplished linguist and musician.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth sister, Rose (Catherine) Lynch had the distinction of knowing Mother Catherine McAuley well. She entered Baggot Street on 3 July 1838, was received on 21 January 1839 and professed on 15 December 1840. De Pazzi Delany and Cecilia Marmion would have been her novice mistresses. Soon after her profession she was appointed the Mother Assistant of the new and difficult foundation made in Birr in which Catherine McAuley took a keen personal interest.<sup>23</sup> In May 1842, she went on the foundation to St John's Newfoundland as did Ursula Frayne but they both returned to Baggot Street in November 1843 for reasons which to this day are subject to different interpretations.<sup>24</sup>

Little is known of the novice, Mary Aloysius Ryan. Presumably she had begun some of her novitiate training at Baggot Street but there are no records extant. Mother Xavier was the superior so she may have been known to her, but probably not very well. Vincent Whitty would have been Mary Aloysius' novice mistress but there is no biographical information about her until she arrived in Geelong and even that is sketchy and incomplete.

### **The Voyage**

This party of six joined about three hundred other passengers on the *Ocean Chief* which sailed from Liverpool on 5 September 1859. This ship was described thus: "Built in America in 1854, the ship was a fast and sleek 1026 ton wooden sailing clipper of the Black Ball Line, regularly carrying mail, passengers and a crew of 52 between Liverpool and Melbourne."<sup>25</sup>

They travelled first class and, as Gould noted, their accommodation was comfortable. Nevertheless it would have been a difficult time for them. The distance they had to travel was almost unimaginable and the voyage took nearly three months. Sea sickness,

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<sup>22</sup> O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 82.

<sup>23</sup> Mary C Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 315-321.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 56-77; or Kathrine Bellamy, *Weavers in Tapestry*, (St John's NL: Flanker Press, 2006), 56-81. Sister Mary Rose's subsequent career will be elaborated further in Chapter 4.

<sup>25</sup> John Watts, Glen Turnbull, Kathleen Walsh, *Mercy Girls: The Story of Sacred Heart College, Geelong 1860-2010*, (Geelong: Sacred Heart College, 2010), 9. In 1862, the *Ocean Chief* was destroyed by fire while anchored in the Auckland harbour.

and periods of boredom interspersed with times of dread when the seas became rough would have been their lot for all this time so when the ship docked at Melbourne on 28 November 1859 the community would have felt a sense of overwhelming relief.

Waiting to meet them was a figure familiar to most of them, Ursula Frayne, the superior of the Convent of Mercy, Fitzroy. The other professed members of the community at that time were: Anne Xavier Dillon and Joseph Sherlock. As well by this time, there were three novices: Xavier Butler, Cecilia Benbow and Austin Collins.

Their short stay at the convent was in many ways a reunion. The Sherlock sisters were re-united; three sisters who were together in the novitiate at Baggot Street met again; Mother Ursula met up with her Newfoundland companion, Rose Lynch; and all of them would have known either or both of the superiors. Then on 3 December, the feast of St Francis Xavier, the intrepid travellers set out on the last stage of their epic journey, a 75 kilometre two hour train journey to Geelong.<sup>26</sup>

When the probably travel weary group arrived, they were transported by carriage across the town to St Augustine's Orphanage in Newtown, now part of St Joseph's College. The orphanage was founded in 1855 by a Catholic lay association known as the Friendly Brothers and housed about sixty boys and girls. It was to be their temporary home for about three months.<sup>27</sup> Bishop Goold visited them in mid-December as Mother Xavier related in a letter to Baggot Street:

Our most kind Bishop came, yesterday, to see us, and, this morning, we made up a sort of an altar on which he celebrated the first Mass. He has cheered us all up and taken a great weight of my heart. He has actually given us a chaplain and we are to have Mass here every morning at 7 am.<sup>28</sup>

While there, they began their work of caring for the orphans, visitation of the sick and giving religious instruction.

Mother Xavier was not the first, and certainly not the last, leader of a Mercy foundation to find that what she had been promised did not quite match up with the reality. This happened to Catherine McAuley in Ireland when she led founding groups to Tullamore,

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<sup>26</sup>Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 9. A railway line from Melbourne to Geelong was completed in 1857 and a passenger train traversed it twice a day. Rail Geelong, [www.railgeelong.com/lineguide/geelong](http://www.railgeelong.com/lineguide/geelong), accessed 9 August 2014.

<sup>27</sup> See: MacKillop Family Services, [www.mackillop.org.au/staugustines](http://www.mackillop.org.au/staugustines), accessed 15 August 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 December 1859.

Co Offaly, and Charleville, Co Cork, in 1836 and Carlow, Co Carlow, in 1837 where in each case the promised accommodation was grossly inadequate and unsuitable.<sup>29</sup>

It happened in Australia as well, for example: to Ursula Frayne in 1846 when she found that when she and her two companions arrived in Perth, not only were they unexpected but Bishop Brady had not organised any accommodation for them;<sup>30</sup> and later on when they arrived in Melbourne where although accommodation was ready it carried a substantial debt which the community was expected to pay;<sup>31</sup> to Vincent Whitty who led a community to Brisbane and found that: “No preparations had been made to receive the Sisters when they arrived on May 10, 1861”;<sup>32</sup> and in 1888 to Clare Dunphy and the sisters of the Parramatta foundation whose historian noted bluntly: “Dean Rigney [the parish priest] had made no provision for the sisters.”<sup>33</sup>

In a letter back to Baggot Street a month after they had arrived at their permanent home, Mother Xavier was nothing if not forthright about her reactions and expectations:

I felt more bitterly seeing myself and the Sisters living on the orphanage rations, understanding, as I did when we came out, that there was a house furnished and ready to receive us, in Geelong. I could not help but feel surprised that not so much as a bed had been got ready for us.<sup>34</sup>

Leading Mercy foundations was not for the fainthearted and neither Ursula Frayne nor Xavier Maguire fitted that category. They were both strong minded, capable and independent women. This did not always sit well with some ecclesiastical authorities.

Ursula Frayne had to endure what she regarded as unwarranted episcopal interference in Perth and readily accepted Bishop Goold’s invitation to establish a community in Melbourne, apparently working closely and harmoniously with him for the rest of her life.

Mother Xavier’s relationship with Bishop Goold was not so serene. Regarding her request for him to approve the admission of a postulant she wrote: “... he is not likely to oppose me much. He is not spoiled by getting too much of his own way.”<sup>35</sup> However

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<sup>29</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 185, 193, 199.

<sup>30</sup> Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 224.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Xaverius O’Donoghue, *Beyond Our Dreams*, (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1961), 17.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Sophie McGrath, *These Women: Women Religious in the History of Australia: The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta 1888-1988*, (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>34</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>35</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

in a later letter she advised the Baggot Street superior not to write to him regarding the situation in which the fledgling community found itself as "...he is so tenacious, like all Bishops, of his honour..."<sup>36</sup> In an earlier letter she had commented "... the Bishop has given me leave to act in any way I think best for the Sisters or for the working up of the mission."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps he did not mean her to take his words to heart. Certainly at one stage some years later Goold was not impressed with her and criticised her severely in an entry in his private diary:

This good Rev. Mother is very mindful of other people's failings and forgetful of her own - she has but poor notions of obedience and humility – she is wanting in the true spirit of a good religious. It is to be hoped she will improve – she has great talent for management.<sup>38</sup>

However they appeared eventually to have established a reasonable working relationship. Whenever he was in Geelong he usually visited the Convent and he was often there in an official capacity presiding at receptions, professions and the election of superiors. In fact, in his will he left the convent his chalice and other goods.<sup>39</sup>

### **Early Days**

Just after they arrived, on 12 December, at a meeting of townspeople called to make arrangements for the establishment of a convent, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved: That being fully aware of the blessings in education, both to the higher and lower classes, in charitable ministrations, irrespective of creed or country, to the poor, the sick, and the dying, conferred by the Sisters of the order of Mercy, wherever they have settled, we hail with pleasure the arrival in Geelong of an affiliation from the parent house in Dublin.

Resolved: That feeling sincerely grateful to those ladies for leaving home and friends and coming so many thousands of miles to diffuse amongst us these blessings, we form a committee for the purpose of procuring for them a suitable residence to enable them to carry out more efficiently the objects of their sacred institute.<sup>40</sup>

The committee wasted no time and a sum of £1000 was donated as a result. Although no other such collections took place, the lay people of Geelong were very generous to

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<sup>36</sup> Maguire to Norris, 18 November 1860.

<sup>37</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 December 1859.

<sup>38</sup> Entry for 25 July 1864, *Goold Diary*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Goold died in 1886.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in: O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 67.

the Sisters of Mercy and Mother Xavier often mentions in her letters various gifts and offers of practical assistance.

In 1855, the parish priest, Dean Hayes had purchased at auction a large property of about four and a half hectares (11 acres) located at what was then known as Mercer's Hill for £3000, a bargain in many ways as it originally had a reserve price of £15,000. On the property was a large dilapidated house known as *Sunville* which had been unoccupied since then and it was this property which was made available to the Sisters of Mercy.<sup>41</sup>

However, before the community moved in it had to be set up. In a letter back to Baggot Street, Mother Xavier described what she had to do:

The house was empty except we moved in to it our £76 worth of goods. I have had to build a tank, a kitchen and refectory, furnish the house, mend certain parts of it and support the Sisters. ... Labour is extremely high – a man won't come in to work at less than 14/- a day. Water we had none. This very evening, I had to pay a man £20.9.6 for drawing water at 15/- a day.<sup>42</sup>

The convent account books recorded further work which needed to be done in succeeding years to make the building more suitable and comfortable.<sup>43</sup>

The property was not a gift to the sisters. They had to repay the purchase price plus interest back to the parish priest, fortunately in instalments but still a heavy financial burden - quite a profitable deal for Dean Hayes! Nevertheless the community was probably very pleased to move into its permanent home in March 1860 and Mother Xavier was happy to write back to Baggot Street:

I must write to you from my new Convent. I know how rejoiced you will be to know we are in a place of our own and so quickly too, for, after all, we are, altogether, only something over four months in the colony.<sup>44</sup>

She was impressed with their new surroundings and enthusiastically wrote:

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<sup>41</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 12- 13.

<sup>42</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>43</sup> See Convent of Mercy, Geelong, *Account Book*, Geelong, 1861-1912.

<sup>44</sup> Maguire to Mary Aloysius, 15 April 1860. Identity not definitively known. Perhaps Sister Mary Aloysius Morrin who was one of Mother Xavier's novices. She went on the foundation to Belfast and died there in 1894. *BSR*, 96.

In my life, I never saw so beautiful a place. It is prettier than Kingstown. This is winter and everything looks most beautifully green; the new grass has sprung up, the trees have young leaves and the flowers are beautiful.<sup>45</sup>

Bishop Goold and Mother Xavier had a similar vision regarding the operation of the community: “He [Bishop Goold] says we could, by getting ground, have all our institutions together – a thing I always wished for.”<sup>46</sup> As described in Mother Xavier’s early letters, people were very generous to the community, and their chaplain, Father Patrick Madden, appointed soon after they arrived,

... is stocking our fowl-yard. He is also getting us all sorts of queer things – an emu and kangaroo as pets. I have a parrot and he gave me a sweet little canary and I have never heard such a singer. I call her Patti. With all these pets the place will be rather amusing, and, decidedly, it is very pretty and all most peaceful.<sup>47</sup>

Mother Xavier indicated how much the community and she herself relied on him: “Dear Mr Madden is everything to me. He looks after everything and indeed, father and mother to us.”<sup>48</sup> He was also more than a generous provider as the following demonstrates:

Father Madden sent me seven dozen of the most beautiful red sherry, six dozen champagne, four dozen of French brandy ... he sent in such a stock because I think he feared he was going to be moved but, please God, he won’t.<sup>49</sup>

Father Patrick Madden was born in Cork and did some of his studies in All Hallows College, Dublin, a seminary founded in 1842 which educated many priests for the overseas mission in places such as Australia. He was ordained in Melbourne by Bishop Goold in 1854 and sent to Ballarat. He left Ballarat in 1859 for Geelong where he stayed for fifteen months before being sent to Keilor. He returned to Ireland in 1862 and died there in 1884.<sup>50</sup>

No wonder they were distressed when he was moved back to Melbourne a year or so later apparently under somewhat of a cloud as Goold’s diary indicated: “Saturday April 6<sup>th</sup> Saw Fr Madden, [told] him that he should not return to Geelong. Took back his faculties – gave him leave to say Mass. Forbad under pain of suspension to visit the

<sup>45</sup> Maguire to Mary Aloysius, 15 April 1860.

<sup>46</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 December 1859.

<sup>47</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>48</sup> Maguire to Norris, 13 September 1860.

<sup>49</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1961.

<sup>50</sup> Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 232, 242.

Geelong Convent”.<sup>51</sup> Father Madden ignored this direction from the bishop who in his diary later recorded:

Wrote to Mrs Maguire informing her that I strictly forbid Frs. Madden and Barry being allowed to visit the Convent and reminded that I was informed that [the] former visited the Convent though forbidden to do so under pain of censure.”<sup>52</sup>

She was not so impressed with Dean Hayes and considered him “... a queer stingy man and, certainly, does not improve on acquaintance.” In dealing with him, she related that: “I pretend not to mind half the things the Dean says and I find out it is the best in many cases, whereas, if I allowed him to get into a serious discussion, I might only have a row.”<sup>53</sup>

Mother Xavier’s early letters show how appreciative she was of the support of numerous benefactors. Shortly after they arrived in Geelong, she wrote back to Baggot Street:

A gentleman who saw us walking to the town called back, bringing food, and asked me if it would be contrary to the rules to accept a gig. You know the kind. It is a nice little one with two lamps, and a full set of harness. I was very glad. The people bring all sorts of things such as fowls, butter, fruit, and lovely flowers.<sup>54</sup>

When they had settled in their Newtown property, she was able to relate how: “Mr Bundle [sic] of the Botanical Gardens, here, has promised not only to lay out, but to stock flowers.”<sup>55</sup> The priests of the area were also very supportive as she informed Baggot Street: “The Priests generally are most kind and help me every way they can, especially Fr. O’Mara,<sup>56</sup> Fr. Shinnick,<sup>57</sup> Fr Farrelly<sup>58</sup> and a few others ...”<sup>59</sup> In fact, she was able to report:

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<sup>51</sup> Condon, *Goold Diary*, entry for 6 April 1862.

<sup>52</sup> Condon, *Goold Diary*, entry for 14 May 1862.

<sup>53</sup> Maguire to Norris, 13 September 1960

<sup>54</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 December 1859.

<sup>55</sup> More likely to be Daniel Bunce, the first curator of the Geelong Botanical Gardens which were established in 1851. See: Roy H Holden, ‘Bunce, Daniel (1813-1872)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre for Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.au.biography/bunce-daniel-1847/text2139>, published first in hard copy 1966, accessed 23 June 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Father Lorenzo O’Mara had come to the colony in 1859 and was briefly stationed in Geelong. Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Father William Shinnick was stationed in Geelong when the Sisters of Mercy arrived. He had arrived in the colony in 1853 and was ordained in Melbourne by Bishop Goold. He had spent time in missions in the Western District and Gippsland and later on in Queensland. He eventually returned to Ireland. Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 43, 126, 351-353.

The priests, headed, of course, by dear Father Madden, have given us a fine strong carriage. In some respects we are very well off, indeed. The Dean has given us a small phaeton – ours was in a sad condition, not safe, so the priests could not bear us to have it and gave us the carriage – besides the horse.<sup>60</sup>

While she was wary of Dean Hayes it is not known how she interacted with the other leading Geelong priests. Dean Hayes left Geelong in 1864 and was replaced by Archdeacon Matthew Dowling,<sup>61</sup> also an Augustinian, who had been ordained in Ireland in 1821. He volunteered for the Australian mission in 1849 and from then until 1852 worked with convicts in Tasmania. He was the first resident priest in Ballarat and in 1854 went to Keilor before coming to Geelong. One of his major achievements was to restart the work on St Mary of the Angels' Church. He died in 1870 before it was completed.<sup>62</sup>

Archdeacon Dowling was followed in 1871 by Archdeacon Patrick Slattery who was ordained for the Irish diocese of Cashel in 1855. However he spent some time as a military chaplain before coming to Australia. His first appointment was to Daylesford before coming to Geelong. Archdeacon Slattery was a great supporter and advocate of Catholic education then seeking to establish and organise Catholic schools after the government ceased to support them. He also saw to the completion of St Mary's Church in 1872. In 1881 he was appointed vicar general of the diocese. He resigned from his parish in 1900 and died in 1903.<sup>63</sup>

The support offered by the priests was often very practical but also financial. Although Mother Xavier considered that: "The Dean is very kind – but he is not generous."<sup>64</sup> she also noted that same year: "The Dean and Fr Madden are, now, in Melbourne, begging for us."<sup>65</sup> As well various priests preached charity sermons in towns such as Bendigo, Ballarat and Kyneton with the proceeds being duly recorded in the cash book.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Father Michael Farrelly was born in Ireland and came to Australia in 1841. After some years as a teacher, he was ordained by Bishop Goold in 1857 and appointed to the Mount Moriac-Colac mission. He spent some time in the Western District and was for many years the parish priest of Kilmore. Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 111-116, 282-284.

<sup>59</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 December 1860.

<sup>60</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1861.

<sup>61</sup> An archdeacon was the most senior priest in the diocese after the bishop, and often had diocesan administrative responsibilities.

<sup>62</sup> Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria* 48-50.

<sup>63</sup> Ebsworth *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, 50-59.

<sup>64</sup> Maguire to Norris, no date, probably written in July 1860.

<sup>65</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>66</sup> McMaster, *Foundation ...*, 10, 12. .

Gradually as the sisters and their work became better known, they enjoyed the esteem and support from many people in Geelong and beyond, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

The Geelong foundation was part of the remarkable missionary expansion of four religious congregations of women founded in Ireland, the Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Charity, the Loreto Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy. Even a cursory survey of their destinations reveals how far they ventured. In 1833, the Presentation Sisters went to St John's, Newfoundland, Manchester in 1836, Madras in 1842, San Francisco in 1854, Richmond, Tasmania, in 1866, several other towns in Australia and the United States between 1873 and 1891, and Rawalpindi in 1895.<sup>67</sup> The Loreto Sisters went to Kolkata, India in 1841, the islands of Mauritius and Gibraltar in 1845, Toronto in 1847, and Natal and Ballarat in 1878. The Sisters of Charity went to Sydney in 1838 and Hobart in 1847. The Sisters of Mercy after their first overseas foundation in Bermondsey, England in 1839, spread rapidly and by 1900 were present in most English speaking countries as well as in Argentina, Jamaica and Belize.

In general many foundations were established to serve the Irish *diaspora*. Often, they were made at the request of bishops of Irish origin who wanted their countrywomen to minister to poor Irish immigrants who had to leave the country as a result of the Potato Famine, or the families of Irish soldiers who were or had been in the British army. But not always – Mauritius was a French speaking dependency administered by Great Britain; Kolkata had many uneducated poor Catholic native born children; Argentina was largely Spanish speaking.

The difficulties these usually cultured and well educated middle and upper class Irish women faced were formidable. They had to adapt to an unfamiliar culture, often lacking any of the refinements and institutions with which they were familiar; they had to cope with separation from family, colleagues and friends and rely on undependable mail communication; they had to come to terms with at times unrealistic or difficult expectations from ecclesiastical authorities; and often their finances were inadequate, unreliable or severely limited.

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<sup>67</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 259.

All of these difficulties may be seen in letters Mother Xavier wrote back to her original home. Many of the leaders of these foundations would have been able to identify with what she wrote back to Ireland in 1860:

If those at home knew the struggles and anxieties and labours of poor missionaries how they would try to help. But, oh, how much the struggles would dwindle compared with foreign ones. There is something very desperate in a few facing the troubles of a mission in a strange lonely country.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, they and she persevered and in the vast majority of cases laid down foundations for enterprises which embodied and continued the vision of these resolute women.

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<sup>68</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 November 1860.

## Chapter 4 Geelong- Consolidation

Over the twenty years or so under Mother Xavier's leadership, the Geelong Convent of Mercy which had begun somewhat inauspiciously developed into a thriving enterprise which took its place among other valued institutions in the town such as the Geelong Infirmary and Benevolent Asylum, two other orphanages, Geelong College and Geelong Grammar School both for boys, and cultural bodies such as free libraries.<sup>1</sup> The community began to attract more women desirous of becoming members and painfully at times reached eventual financial stability.

### The Community

Much of the formal history of the community is charted in the Chapter Acts which recorded matters discussed and decided upon when the community assembled in the chapter meetings held every few months. Observations, allusions and interpretations made in letters back to Ireland add to this but little now remains of information regarding personal interactions and relationships amongst the women who made up this pioneering group.

Chapter meetings dealt with specified matters, the most usual being the approvals for candidates to be accepted into the novitiate or to be professed and the election of superiors and those who assisted them. The *Rule and Constitutions* stipulated that:

The Sisters who have a vote shall meet in Chapter, as often as the Mother Superior may think it expedient to have their opinions heard on any matter of importance to the Community. They shall assemble every six months to consider the qualities and dispositions of the Postulants and Novices, and also one month before the Reception of a Postulant, and two months before the Profession of a Novice, in order to decide, by their votes, whether they should be admitted.<sup>2</sup>

Community members taking part in a Chapter were enjoined: "... to listen attentively to whatever shall be proposed for consideration, weighing well, in God's presence, all the circumstances". They were expected to "...give their opinions with modesty, candour, and humility", and: "... take great care to be free from human respect, and to have nothing but God's greater glory in view."<sup>3</sup> As befitting such a solemn obligation, "The most inviolable secrecy shall be observed on all matters discussed in Chapter".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Anon, *Geelong, Past and Present*, (no pages), for accounts of these and other institutions.

<sup>2</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 54-55.

<sup>3</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 55-56.

The first chapter gathering was held on an unspecified date in March 1860 to vote on Aloysius Ryan's request to be professed. The votes were in her favour and the ceremony was scheduled for 2 July that same year. Little is known about her. There are a couple of references to her in Mother Xavier's letters, neither particularly complimentary, and the Profession Register only records that she ... "was professed here; but after several years her health having failed she was sent to Europe and died there."<sup>5</sup> The reference to Europe was a euphemism. It usually meant that the sister was sent to a mental institution under the care of women religious somewhere on the Continent and if she died during that time in most cases was buried there.

### **Formation in religious life**

In a letter to Archbishop Cullen in December 1860 giving a report on their activities at the end of the community's first full year, Mother Xavier had written: "As yet, this is no country for postulants."<sup>6</sup> She gave no reason for this statement but it was part of her argument in the letter for more sisters to be sent from Baggot Street. However, in August of the following year the two postulants entered. The first receptions took place in 1861 but there is no information to indicate who was in charge of their formation – possibly Mother Xavier herself. Three more were received in 1862, and the first local profession took place on 24 September 1864. Two more professions took place in 1866. Thereafter one or two professions took place most years.<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Sherlock became the novice mistress in 1866 and occupied that position during Mother Xavier's lifetime.

As indicated earlier, Chapter meetings were held several times each year "... to consult on the qualities and dispositions of the postulants and Novices."<sup>8</sup> Occasionally at these gatherings other decisions were taken, eg, at a meeting held in February 1865, it was decided "... that Sr Eliza Harty should be dismissed on account of her health."<sup>9</sup> This presumably having improved, she re-entered in 1869, was received and given the religious name of Sister Mary Teresa, and after her profession in 1872 remained a member of the Geelong community until her death in 1906.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Geelong Profession Register*.

<sup>6</sup> Maguire to Cullen, 15 December 1860.

<sup>7</sup> See: Appendix 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Geelong Chapter Acts*, entry for January 1867.

<sup>9</sup> *Geelong Chapter Acts*, entry for February 1865.

<sup>10</sup> Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, *Necrology*. This document contains an alphabetical list and short biography of some eight hundred Sisters of Mercy who died as either professed members of the Melbourne

Over the years of Mother Xavier's time in office, the Chapter gave approval for forty four women to be received into the novitiate. The majority of these were Australian born. Fifteen did not stay long and were not received into the novitiate and twenty nine were accepted.<sup>11</sup>

In 1862, Mother Xavier was happy to accept a prospective postulant from Ireland, Kate McGovern. She wrote back to Baggot Street: "Kate is with us. She is a dear little girl. She will be in the school for quite six months. I put uniform on her and she will give a tone to these wild and unmannerly Australians ..." <sup>12</sup> Alas, Kate did not turn out to be the leaven to improve the Australians! On 25 March 1862, the Chapter admitted Kate to the novitiate and she was given the religious name of Sister Mary Francis Xavier. However, on 25 January 1864, Mother Xavier wrote to Mary of Mercy: "Kate McGovern is leaving this week. She has no vocation ..." Apparently, there was some question of her going to Brisbane to enter there as she continues: "... M Vincent would be satisfied to give her a trial. I suppose she does not mind my poor opinion, still if she induces Kate to enter, she will regret it. However, let her do as she likes." <sup>13</sup> There is no record of this happening.

In the same letter she stated her philosophy regarding prospective members: "I feel that I would rather work myself altogether, into my grave, than profess Sisters who would be the least doubtful." No doubt her six year experience as the Mistress of Novices at Baggot Street stood her in good stead and gave her confidence in her judgement.

Most of those who left the community disappeared from the records and what happened to them is not known. Presumably they went home to their families and in due course married. One, however, Eugenie de Pazanan, who entered in 1874 but then left the novitiate, entered the Convent of Mercy in Warrnambool in 1881, and, as Sister Mary de Sales, was professed in 1883. She went on the Warrnambool foundation in Ballarat and died there in 1936.

Of those received into the novitiate, fourteen went on to be professed in Mother Xavier's time in office.<sup>14</sup> It appears that one of those left after profession but there is no information on the circumstances of her departure and her name could not be found in the *Necrology* or Geelong cemetery records. The majority of these sisters spent their whole life in the Geelong

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Congregation or its predecessor communities such as communities at Fitzroy, Geelong or Warrnambool. Over the years of Mother Xavier's time, unless otherwise indicated all biographical material for sisters mentioned in this study come from this source.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>12</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>13</sup> Maguire to Norris, 25 January 1864.

<sup>14</sup> See: Appendix 4.

community but amongst them numbered a future superior of the community and the leader of the first foundation to Coburg in 1903, Bernard Lyons; another, Patrick Tarrant, was part of the 1886 foundation made at North Melbourne; and three sisters went to the 1889 foundation to Kyneton, Ignatius O'Connor, Genevieve Buckley and Philomene Conway.

## Governance

The Chapter met at regular intervals to elect the superior and confirm by election those put forward by the incoming superior to occupy the other offices – assistants, bursar and novice mistress. According to the *Rule and Constitutions*: “In Monasteries newly founded the first Mother Superior shall govern for six years, unless there be canonical reasons for her being removed from office during that time.”<sup>15</sup> Mother Xavier had an initial term of office of six years. So an election was not necessary until that time was up.

The Geelong Chapter Acts record that on 16 May 1866,

The Chapter was assembled in presence of the Bishop for the resignation of the Office of Mother Superior. Mother M Xavier Maguire resigned her office into his hands and he having exhorted the Sisters to think of a new election the Chapter concluded with the usual prayers.

The following day, the Chapter Acts recorded:

This day being the Octave of the Ascension of Our Lord the Bishop as prescribed by the Rule assembled the Chapter for the election of a Mother Superior, having taken the votes of the Sisters and there being a majority in favour of Mother Mary Xavier Maguire her election was confirmed.

Also that same day the Chapter Acts noted that:

The Mother Superior assembled the Chapter to fill the Offices. Sister M. Margaret Mullally was named for that of Assistant, Sr. M. Regis Manley for that of Bursar and Sr. M. Gabriel Sherlock Mistress of Novices the votes were in their favour.

Chapter gatherings for a similar purpose and with similar results were held in 1869, 1872, 1875 and 1879. According to the *Rule and Constitutions*, superiors were in office for a set time – usually two three year terms but in new foundations, the founding superior usually had longer periods as it was in Mother Xavier’s case.

The Chapter did consider other matters. One wonders what was behind the following entry made on 19 December 1872:

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<sup>15</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 42.

The Chapter was this day assembled to consult on the propriety of withdrawing from Sr Mary Juliana Donaldson her vote for the space of three years on account of a serious fault, which was accordingly done with the approbation of the Bishop.

Another series of entries related to Sister Mary Clare McCann. Sarah McCann entered the Sisters of Mercy in Fitzroy on 2 October 1860, was received the following year and professed on 14 April 1863. A note in the *Fitzroy Profession Register* states that she "removed to Geelong" but did not give a date for this. There must have been trouble in the Fitzroy community in which she was involved. On 18 March 1873, the *Fitzroy Acts of Chapter* recorded that:

The Mother Superior called a Chapter of Discreets and Vocals for the purpose of consulting on the necessity of depriving of their votes in Chapter Sister Mary Xavier Butler, Sister Mary Cecilia Benbow, Sister Mary Clare McCann and Sister Mary Angela Mornane, as a very mild punishment for the many grave violations of Rule and Vows of which they were guilty during the past years and since May 10 1872, notwithstanding the many times they promised amendment and received pardon, the forbearance of Superiors only rendering the above named Sisters more deficient. A summary of the breaches of Rule and Vows was read aloud for the guidance of vocals. The votes were taken and were in favour of the measure.<sup>16</sup>

This was signed by the eight professed members of the community who were entitled to vote.

When an appeal was made in March 1873 for sisters to go to the Mercy foundation in Wellington, New Zealand, probably to the relief of all concerned, Xavier Butler and Cecilia Benbow volunteered to go.<sup>17</sup> They arrived on 1 July 1873 and spent the rest of their lives there. Angela Mornane died at the age of twenty nine in 1874 and that same year Clare McCann applied to transfer to the Geelong community.<sup>18</sup> This was not just a simple matter of going to live in the community. Sisters were professed in a certain house and the expectation was that they would stay there unless requested to go on a new foundation. There was no obligation for any house to receive a sister who wanted or needed to move from her house of profession. The origin of this practice was found in a book of minor regulations and customs

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<sup>16</sup> *Vocals* was the term given to those entitled to vote.

<sup>17</sup> Sister Mary Xavier Butler must have had a bit of a chequered career at Fitzroy. She had already in 1865 been removed by a vote of the Chapter from the position of Bursar "for reasons known to the Mother Superior, and by her explained so far as necessary for the guidance of the Chapter." See *Fitzroy Chapter Acts*, 16 March 1865.

<sup>18</sup> Clare (Sarah) McCann was one of the early Australian born entrants to the Convent of Mercy, Fitzroy. She was received in 1861 and professed in 1863. She died in Geelong in 1922.

drawn up for the Baggot Street convent, published in 1869,<sup>19</sup> but it was the usual practice well before this date.

The *Geelong Chapter Acts* record that on 28 December 1874:

The Chapter was this day assembled to consult on the advisability of receiving Sister Mary Clare McCann from the Convent of Mercy Nicholson Street into this Community. The Sisters were exhorted to pray and reflect seriously on the matter and notice was given that the Chapter would be again assembled on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January in order to decide by votes.

At this later Chapter, the votes were in favour of her admittance and she began what could be construed as a period of probation of three years during which time she had no vote in Chapter meetings as stipulated:

The Sister so admitted shall be subject to the Superior and customs of this house, joining in all the duties and common exercises, including the Chapter of Faults, as the other members of the Community, amongst whom she takes the rank of her Profession, with the exception of all Capitulary Assemblies, at which she shall not be present, nor have either active or passive vote for her three years of probation.<sup>20</sup>

It was not until January 1876 that she was admitted to full voting rights and thus full membership in her new community where she remained until her death in 1922. Ties were cut with her former community in what appears now to be a rather brutal manner. The *Fitzroy Chapter Acts* for 16 August 1877 recorded that:

On this day the Mother Superior called a Chapter of Discreets and Vocals for the purpose of consulting on, and determining by Vote the advisability of ever re-admitting as members of this Community, any or all of the three Sisters who were removed to other Convents, namely, Sisters M Xavier Butler, M Cecilia Benbow, and M Clare McCann, if any communication with them by visits, by letters or verbal messages should be permitted, if their relatives should ever be encouraged to come about the Convent and if communication by visits, letters, messages or in any other way with dismissed postulants or novices should be allowed. The majority of Votes decided that never again should the above named Sisters be admitted amongst us or communication any way be held with them, or their relatives, and that visits or communications with dismissed postulants or novices should be discouraged.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Customs and Minor Regulations of the Religious called Sisters of Mercy*, 136.

<sup>20</sup> *The Customs and Minor Regulation of the Religious called Sisters of Mercy*, 137. The Chapter of Faults was a regular occurrence in religious life in which a member admitted in public to some external but not sinful violation of the rule and received a penance from the superior. Capitulary Assemblies were another name for the community Chapters; active vote meant she could vote on matters requiring this, eg, election of the superior; passive vote meant that she could be voted for, eg, as the superior.

## Community concerns

Mother Xavier's early letters reveal her concern about the members of her community. Comments in her early letters range between impatient exasperation and genuine appreciation and love. In a letter to Baggot Street in April 1860 she wrote: "None of us are strong except Sr. M. Gabriel. ... Sr. M. Margaret is better. ... Sr. M. Regis is delicate. Sr. M. Rose and I get constant faintings and Sr. M. Aloysius fainted on Sunday." In the same letter she commented with a certain amount of frustration:

Sr. M. Aloysius is greatly improved but I find her very dreamy and dawdling. I gave her plenty to do and timed her at everything. She has, also, an affected way of speaking of which she is nearly cured. She did not know one section of the rules. Nothing will ever make her clever in the school, but she is improved greatly and is a good little thing.<sup>21</sup>

Her next letter returns to her concern: "... the sisters seem so delicate. I don't think they can keep up" ...<sup>22</sup> Threaded through her early letters are worried comments about the health of the sisters, especially Sister Mary Gabriel Sherlock who ironically outlived her by eighteen years and replaced her as superior.

Arriving in December, they had to endure the heat of an Australian summer immediately and were plagued by mosquitoes. She wrote: "Sr. M. Regis feels the hot winds terribly. They give her terrible headaches and you know I have no one to take her place no matter how done up she is".<sup>23</sup> Later Sister Mary Margaret was causing her concern: "I am uneasy about Sr. M. Margaret. She looks very badly, and has a bad opinion of herself, she is losing strength fast".<sup>24</sup> At various times during the first few years Mother Xavier feared that one or other of the sisters might die. In early 1861, she wrote that: "I may be wrong but I do not think Margaret will live."<sup>25</sup> A few months later it was Mother Gabriel: "... she is now under Doctor's care, and he does not seem to have much hope for her; her lungs are engaged, and whenever decline sets in it takes people off very, very quickly."<sup>26</sup>

During Mother Xavier's time in office, two young women died – Sister Mary Gertrude Farrell, a novice aged nineteen and Sister Mary Claver Flanagan aged thirty who was

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<sup>21</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>22</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>23</sup> Maguire to Norris 9 May 1860.

<sup>24</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 January 1861.

<sup>25</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1861.

<sup>26</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1861.

professed on her deathbed. According to *The Geelong Advertiser* which reported both deaths, they died of consumption.

The community actually lived in straitened circumstances and Mother Xavier once wrote back to Baggot Street admitting that: “I am sadly off for clothing, that is, Church Cloaks, black veils, and of all things, printing material. ... Poor Sr. M. Juliana has a set of poor beads”.<sup>27</sup> On occasions Mother Xavier had to ask for help from Baggot Street for certain items. These ranged from material for their habits: “I hope you have sent us the material for the cloak and bonnet, veils, etc, etc. We still make a shabby appearance and everywhere, the cloaks look better than the going out ordinary dress”,<sup>28</sup> to catechisms and rosary beads.<sup>29</sup>

Not that she said much about it but her own health was not always good as she suffered from rheumatism quite badly.<sup>30</sup> In one 1863 letter she noted that: “I have just seen Doctor today, and I think his prescription will do me good. ... You will have to excuse my writing though, for I am all stiff.”<sup>31</sup> The following year she related:

I have just got up after another fit of sickness, Dysentery, it is rather fatal here just now but my doctor is so careful of me, he checked it in a few days. He had hardly given up looking after me, when I got it, and he thought it dangerous, so soon after the fever, but I think it really did me good. It forced me to keep quiet for a week, and when one is laid up really one must be satisfied.<sup>32</sup>

Apparently she occasionally would go to the Fitzroy community over the week end, a time she relished:

It is quite delightful to be friends with the Srs in Melbourne. Such a rest to me to go there sometimes, but I can only go on Saturday and return by the early train on Monday and come in that way, it is inconvenient, but still I go from time to time ...<sup>33</sup>,

or spend some time recuperating in Queenscliff which she described as “... a most lovely spot and the bush, at this season, is enchanting. The wattle is in full bloom and it makes the spot a nature grove”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Maguire to Norris, 25 January 1884. The church cloak was a cream semicircular serge cloak worn in at Mass on important feast days such as Easter or Christmas or for significant events such as receptions or professions. See: Sisters of Mercy, *Guide*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>29</sup> Maguire to Norris, May 1862

<sup>30</sup> See Maguire to M Magdalen Kirwan, 24 May 1864.

<sup>31</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 April 1863.

<sup>32</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1864.

<sup>33</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1861.

<sup>34</sup> Maguire to Norris, 18 November 1860.

Obviously it was not always peace and light in the community. In December 1860 she wrote:

Poor M. Gabriel is so anxious to go home that she could not give me an unprejudiced opinion – but this is one of my present crosses. I might have a fighting quarrelling Community, but thank God they are very united, but very childish.<sup>35</sup>

This reference to returning to Ireland may in fact have had some substance for in a diary entry made on 29 January 1861, Bishop Goold wrote:

Celebrated Mass at the Convent. Held a Visitation immediately. Said I would not object to any returning to Europe when they had provided substitutes approved by me and Rev Mother. This is not to be done at the expense of the Diocese.<sup>36</sup>

There is no record of this happening as described. Early the next year she complained: “I have to think for everyone.”<sup>37</sup> A few years later she wrote:

You have no idea of how little use the Sisters are. M Rose absolutely none. Sr Aloysius so foolish and giddy, she is no use either, and M.G. was never useful since she came here, and now of course less so, so the whole labour falls on Sr. M. Margaret, Regis and myself.<sup>38</sup>

This may have been written in a moment of exasperation or despondency for she was able to say at one time earlier:

Storms seem, thank God, to be at an end, at least pro tem. We are enjoying a great peace, the Sisters are all happy, well, and good. A sort of new life seems to have dawned for us – all so contented and so devoted to their duties.<sup>39</sup>

She was able to reiterate this in a letter of the following year: “We are all well and very happy, thank God.”<sup>40</sup>

1861 had brought an unexpected but happy event to the community. On 8 December 1860, a contingent of five Sisters of Mercy, led by Mother Vincent Whitty, and under the patronage of Bishop James Quinn of Brisbane, left Liverpool for Brisbane. Before landing first in Melbourne, they had to spend some time at the Quarantine Station but had arranged to stay a few days in Geelong. Mother Xavier was happy to host these visitors, many of whom she knew well, in particular Mother Vincent. “I have had to take a cottage adjoining in our

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<sup>35</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 December 1860.

<sup>36</sup> *Goold Diary*, 29 January 1861.

<sup>37</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

<sup>38</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1864.

<sup>39</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 April 1863.

<sup>40</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1864.

grounds for dormitory for the Sisters, as space is very limited and, indeed, I am having all sorts of comforts and pleasures for them.” she wrote to Mother Mary of Mercy.<sup>41</sup> The visitors stayed for about a fortnight before returning to Melbourne and then setting sail for Brisbane. Later Mother Vincent was able to inform Mother Mary of Mercy: “If you saw these two Communities [Melbourne and Geelong] and their beginnings I think you would *fill up* with joy to see the poor Sisters of Mercy working on just the same in every clime.”<sup>42</sup>

There was a certain irony in this meeting of these three Mercy founders. When she was the superior of Baggot Street, Mother Xavier received letters requesting additional sisters from Ursula Frayne in Perth but they were not forthcoming and this apparently caused a certain amount of friction between these two formidable founders. Another source of friction may have been over Rose Lynch who had gone to Newfoundland with Ursula Frayne.<sup>43</sup> Vincent Whitty who stayed at both the Fitzroy and Geelong convents on her way to Brisbane in 1861 was apparently the mediator and reported back to Baggot Street: “You will be delighted to hear the quarrel between Melbourne and Geelong is made up, entirely so, thank God. They will be a mutual help to each other.”<sup>44</sup> and Mother Xavier was able to write:

I am rejoicing to tell you and you will be rejoicing to hear that I am friends in Melbourne again. I am so happy about it for besides the disedification given by our coldness it is to me a great comfort to be able to speak to dear M Ursula. She will be a great help ...<sup>45</sup>

Apart from her concerns about members of the community, two other themes ran through Mother Xavier’s early letters: her frequent requests for more sisters and her financial worries.

### **Additional sisters**

Early in 1860 she requested someone who spoke French and could teach music.<sup>46</sup> The following month she makes reference to her own sister, Sister Mary Joseph, about whom some discussion must have taken place regarding her coming to Geelong, and requested: “... a sensible, education Sister from Baggot Street ”...<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless she was realistic about their needs and wrote that: “I want to feel ourselves better established first and have a better means

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<sup>41</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1861.

<sup>42</sup> Whitty to Norris, 23 April 1861, in Hetherington, & Smoothy, *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty, 1839-1892*, 131.

<sup>43</sup> Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 239-290.

<sup>44</sup> Whitty to Norris, 23 April, 1861, in: Hetherington & Smoothy, *Whitty*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> Maguire to Norris, undated fragment, probably in 1861. See: Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 239-240.

<sup>46</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>47</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

of support but I know we shall want them. Do then, name them, and let them know a bit of French and music between them.”<sup>48</sup>

Later letters made frequent reference to her sister, Mary Philomene, whose term of office as the superior of the Belfast foundation was drawing to a close in 1862, a fact of which Mother Xavier was no doubt aware. Part of the reason for the request was her dowry which, as Mother Xavier wrote, “... her means would just set us up ... it would enable me to get the Sisters and do much good besides.” In the same letter she wrote:

Now take me out of my present difficulties, like a darling child, pay the expenses of Sr. Philomena, Joseph and Gonzago [sic] of Belfast and the novice if she should come and pay your own account in Baggot Street and send me a little money and the remainder of Sr. M. Philomena’s dowry ...<sup>49</sup>

However, neither Philomene nor her dowry was destined for Geelong although in 1872 Mother Xavier had the opportunity to be reunited with her when she was on her way to found a convent in Warrnambool.

Under the patronage of Bishop Goold who had called in to Baggot Street on his way home from the first Vatican Council, Mother Philomene led a party of five professed sisters and three novices to this developing coastal town with a high proportion of Irish migrants. It appears that Mother Xavier had done some preliminary work connected to this foundation. *The Advocate* of 6 April 1872, after giving an account of the reception of Ellen Harty, goes on to report that on the next day: “...the rev. mother and one of the nuns left for Warrnambool and Belfast, with the object of ascertaining which will be the most eligible place for the establishment of a new convent, nine sisters [sic] being expected out from the parent house in Dublin.”<sup>50</sup> Mother Philomene and her assistant, Mother Agnes Graham, landed in May 1872 in Queenscliff and spent some days with the community in Geelong before sailing to Warrnambool in a coastal steamer with the rest of the party following some days later.<sup>51</sup> Warrnambool is about 190 kilometres from Geelong, and at that time, there was no rail link. Travel overland would have been difficult and even dangerous so the best method of travelling between the two towns would have been via coastal steamer. Mother Xavier

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<sup>48</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>49</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 November 1860.

<sup>50</sup> Belfast was the original name of the coastal town of Port Fairy.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, *The Labourers’ Friends*, 100.

however mentioned in an 1877 letter that Mother Philomene was visiting on at least one occasion.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps she also thought that the chances of her sister coming to Geelong were receding but earlier she seems to have enlisted her help. In the Belfast Chapter Book, there is an entry dated 6 February 1860 which read: “Sr. Ellen Savage was by a majority of votes admitted to receive the holy habit of religion for the mission of Geelong, Australia.”<sup>53</sup> There is no record of this sister coming to Geelong so presumably this arrangement fell through.<sup>54</sup> The following year, Mother Xavier wrote: “Dear Sister M. Philomena has offered to give me M. Ignatia together with Sr. A. Joseph and she has a novice for me that is if Sr. A. Joseph ought to come.”<sup>55</sup>

Mother Xavier was nothing if not persistent even importunate – letter after letter contained pleas for more sisters. In May 1860 she wrote: “If one or two good Sisters would come determined to be happy, I think they could have every means of doing so.”<sup>56</sup> By the following November it appears that she was counting on having her sisters with her: “I hope in God that before this reaches you, you will have arranged that the dear Sisters, Philomena and Joseph, are to come to us.”<sup>57</sup> In a letter written early the following year she mentions another of whom she had hopes: “... Sister Mary Vincent is constantly telling me how much she wished to come – that she was applying herself even to the study of French in order to prepare herself for the schools here.”<sup>58</sup> Evidently she later decided that it was probably for the best that Sister Mary Joseph was not coming as she wrote: “You seem to think that all relations ought to be the most anxious about coming or, at least, to be willing to be together. I entirely differ from you. I do not think it good nor do I think that one who has experience could wish it.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Maguire to Keenan, 9 June 1877.

<sup>53</sup> Mercy International Archives Belfast File.

<sup>54</sup> Ellen Savage was given the religious name of Sister Mary Philomena and there is a further entry in the Belfast Chapter Book dated 30 June 1860 which reads: “The Chapter assembled this day when Sr Bodelia Cawfield was by a majority of votes admitted to receive the holy habit as there was some disappointment about Sr Philomena Savage going to the mission in Australia.” Sister Mary Philomena Savage transferred to St Joseph’s Convent, Dundee, as a novice, was professed on 7 March 1863 and died there on 14 February 1865. Information courtesy of Marianne Cosgrove, Mercy Congregational Archives, Dublin.

<sup>55</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1861. The novice was presumably Ellen Savage. Sister A Joseph was probably her sister Mary Joseph Aloysius who while still a novice was a member of the Belfast Community at that time.

<sup>56</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860

<sup>57</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 November 1860.

<sup>58</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 January 1861. Possibly Sister Mary Vincent Mostyn who was professed at Baggot Street in 1850, went to Buenos Aires in 1863 and died there two years later.

<sup>59</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1861.

As well as practical assistance in the ever increasing workload with which the community was coping, Mother Xavier apparently had another motive for wanting more sisters from Ireland. She explained to Mother Mary of Mercy regarding her request for additional sisters:

You will have a great reward for doing justice to this mission. It will be a fine one if there is a solid and good foundation laid. If these Australians be allowed to think themselves of too much importance, it would be a sad obstacle to work. Nothing would do them so much good, as an example. It would, besides, in teaching them how to act, show them their own deficiencies. What can the poor children know, as yet, of religious life.<sup>60</sup>

At one stage, Mother Xavier had contemplated returning to Ireland to look for volunteers. There was a precedent for this. In 1850, Ursula Frayne had returned to Ireland seeking volunteers, an occurrence of which Mother Xavier was aware.<sup>61</sup> However she was also aware of an insurmountable problem: “I would really beg for leave to go home for subjects, but I could not afford it – and that’s the real truth. I should take a sister with me and it would cost nearly all I have besides leaving so few to do the work here.”<sup>62</sup> Then, in 1864, with a certain resignation, Mother Xavier wrote: “I am sadly disappointed at not getting some help from Baggot Street.”<sup>63</sup> Eventually, Mother Xavier’s pleas for reinforcements were heard. On 21 July, 1866, Sisters Mary Francis Xavier (Harriet) Fallon and Stanislaus Joseph (Teresa) McCann left Baggot Street to come to Geelong and rendered sterling service to the community for decades.

Harriet Fallon came from a well-connected but impecunious family and was educated in France and by the Loreto Sisters in Rathfarnham. Her mother was friendly with Catherine McAuley. Two of her sisters entered the convent there, one becoming an early superior general, the other apparently not staying.<sup>64</sup> Her older sister, Letitia, had entered Baggot Street on 4 November 1853.<sup>65</sup> Harriet entered Baggot Street on 31 May 1855, just after Mother Xavier had been elected the superior so she would have been known to her, and she was

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<sup>60</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 April 1863.

<sup>61</sup> See: Kovesty Killerby, *Frayne*, 152- 189.

<sup>62</sup> Maguire to Norris, May 1862.

<sup>63</sup> Maguire to Magdalen Kirwan, one of her former novices and the newly elected superior of Baggot Street, 24 May 1864.

<sup>64</sup> In 1878, Mother Mary Xaveria (Jane) Fallon became the third superior general of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary usually known as the Loreto Sisters. See: Tynan, K, *A Nun, Her Friends and Her Order*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), for an early account of her life.

<sup>65</sup> Sister Mary de Sales (Letitia) Fallon was professed at Baggot Street in 1856 and in 1861 went on the foundation to Longford founded by Mother Bernard Maguire. She later became to first superior of Newtownforbes in 1871 and died there in 1895. *BSR*, 115.

professed on 15 February 1858.<sup>66</sup> She was involved in Sacred Heart College and in 1886 led a foundation to North Melbourne, returning to Geelong when she was elected superior. She died there in 1899.

Teresa McCann entered the Sisters of Mercy at Baggot Street on 23 September 1850 and was received on 27 May 1851, being given the name of Sister Mary Stanislaus Joseph, generally known as Sister Mary Stanislaus.<sup>67</sup> In the 28 August 1879 issue of *The Geelong Advertiser* which reported on Mother Xavier's precarious health, it was stated that Sister Mary Stanislaus was Mother Xavier's cousin. Given that Mother Xavier's mother was a McCann, this may be true but cannot be independently verified as yet. She would have been one of Mother Xavier's novices. After her profession on 3 October 1853 she was a member of the Baggot Street community and after she arrived in Geelong remained there until she died in 1910.

In an 1863 letter to Mother Mary of Mercy Norris, Mother Xavier expressed an additional wish: "Indeed you would confer a benefit on us all, by placing us in a position as would enable us to take these Australians their entire time of Novitiate, and besides, giving them a nice Baggot St. example".<sup>68</sup> This could be seen as the genesis of an unsolved mystery. In 1876 the convent financial ledger noted:

Draft to London. Expenses of Sisters' return - £150.0.0  
 Expenses of Sisters per Northumberland, Dec. 6 - £190.0.0  
 Sent to Mrs Keenan, Baggot St., Expenses of Sisters' return Dec.21 - £200.0.0

Further information was recorded in the Geelong Historical Record's Society papers: "On Dec.6<sup>th</sup>, ten sisters left the Port of Melbourne on the Northumberland, a sailing ship bound for London. They were all young – between twenty-five and thirty -five years of age."<sup>69</sup> Surprisingly, to date, no names or any other information exists about this venture. To add to this mystery, *The Advocate* of 2 June 1877 noted that: "By the Northumberland from London, there arrived on 29 May ult. Misses Fallon, Moloney, O'Sullivan, Buckley, Davis, Lee and Farrell. Five of these young women, all Irish, entered the novitiate in Geelong."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *BSR*, 122.

<sup>67</sup> *BSR*, 102.

<sup>68</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 April 1863.

<sup>69</sup> Recorded in: Mc Master, L, *The Foundation, Growth and Development of the Convent of Mercy, Geelong, 1859-1980*, 23. Mrs Keenan was Mother Mary Ligouri Keenan who at one stage was the Novice Mistress (1862-1870) and at that time was the superior of Baggot Street (1876-1882). She was a novice during Mother Xavier's time as superior.

<sup>70</sup> Sisters Mary Gertrude (Lizzie) Farrell who died while still a novice, Mary de Sales (Catherine) Davis, Mary Ligouri (Ellen) O'Sullivan, Mary Genevieve (Mary Anne) Buckley, and Mary Cecilia (Hannah) Lee.

Presumably Sister Mary Francis Xavier Fallon accompanied them as Mother Xavier mentions her as bringing mail from Ireland.<sup>71</sup>

### **Lay Sisters**

By 1864, there were eight choir sisters in the community and Mother Xavier had begun to make arrangements to admit lay sisters who were found in most religious congregations in Australia at this time. The origin of this two tiered class of members lay in the way religious life for women had been organised for centuries and reinforced by church law, especially as mandated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

Choir sisters had to provide a dowry, were usually well educated and obligated to recite the Divine Office in Latin,<sup>72</sup> often devoted themselves to study or artistic pursuits and maintained a strict enclosure, ie, they did not venture outside the confines of the convent. The role of the lay sisters was basically to look after the needs of the choir sisters, see to the smooth operation of the convent and interact with seculars. Normally they did not have to provide a dowry nor have the same level of education, and were not obliged to the Divine Office. Their formal habit was slightly different – it had a white apron and did not have a train. As well, and depending on circumstances they dined together either before or after the choir sisters. They were able to leave the convent to get necessary supplies and conduct any business of the community which could not be handled within the convent.

Active communities also adopted this practice. Choir sisters undertook the main works of mercy, especially education, teaching not only the basics but also subjects such as foreign languages, music or art. They usually came from the middle or upper classes where they themselves had received such an education. Lay sisters usually had little or no education and came from poorer families who often could not afford dowries.

In her original draft of the *Constitutions* Catherine McAuley made no reference to them although by 1834 of the twenty four women who had entered Baggot Street, five had done so with the intention of becoming lay sisters. However, in the copy of the *Constitutions* which

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<sup>71</sup> Maguire to Keenan, 9 June 1877.

<sup>72</sup> The Divine Office is the official liturgical prayer of the Church. It is composed of hymns, psalms and readings and parts of it are recited at seven different times of the day, eg, Matins in the early morning, Vespers in the evening and Compline at night.

eventually went to Rome for approval there is a section on lay sisters, said to have been written by the founder herself.<sup>73</sup> It began:

The Lay Sisters admitted to this Religious Congregation, besides the essential requisites (ie, vocation, good constitution, and ordinary education), should have also a manner and appearance suited to Religious who must be seen in public; because, although they shall be employed generally in domestic works, yet as circumstances may happen which would render their assistance in other situations necessary, they ought to be persons who could occasionally accompany the Choir Sisters, without there being any remarkable outward difference.<sup>74</sup>

The section concluded:

The state of Lay Sisters is very like that which our humble Redeemer chose for Himself in this world, who devoted Himself to the service of others, without ever seeking to be served Himself. It will encourage them greatly to reflect in all their labours that they are working for a Divine Master, who will make great account of every toil and pain, sweeten every difficulty, and generously reward every effort that they make for His Love.<sup>75</sup>

Apparently Catherine McAuley did not differentiate in her relationships with the Baggot Street lay sisters but unfortunately this attitude was not universal in Mercy convents. By 1866, the distinctions between choir and lay sisters had become more apparent, and regulations concerning them more detailed and designed to emphasise the distinctions between the two groups, eg, lay sisters could not vote in elections or chapters, had separate times to recreate and different places in the chapel and always were considered after professed choir sisters no matter how junior the former were and despite their own years as professed Sisters of Mercy.<sup>76</sup> They were often basically treated as servants in religious habits. One experienced historian of Mercy life considered that:

In the history of women's religious orders and congregations, few aspects of religious life evolved so painfully, were so often poorly managed, or provoked so much resentment as the phenomenon of lay sisters. ... The history of the Sisters of Mercy, especially in some countries or in parts of those countries, was not exempt from this pain.<sup>77</sup>

In 1864 Mother Xavier wrote to Baggot Street:

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<sup>73</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 56-57.

<sup>74</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 56.

<sup>75</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> See: *Guide*, for a detailed description of their position, duties and modes of operation.

<sup>77</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 144-146.

I am going to try a lay Sister. If they could get in and we would have three of them it would be a great saving, as servants' wages are so high, and it is difficult to get a good servant. ... The girl who is coming here is to have a year as postulant, so I shall have time to get to know her.<sup>78</sup>

Three months later she wrote in reference to the lay sisters then postulants: "We have two little things. One is such a nice cook."<sup>79</sup> The *Geelong Chapter Acts* record that on 1 November 1864, the Chapter approved for reception two prospective lay sisters, Mary McKenna, who was given the religious name Sister Mary Patrick, and Mary Tobin whose religious name was Sister Mary Magdalen.<sup>80</sup> It appears that the first left the community while still a novice and the latter was approved for profession on 18 December 1868 and professed the following year. Her name does not appear again in official records, so it is presumed that she left the community some time after her profession.<sup>81</sup> Three others entered and were received during Mother Xavier's time but only one was professed.<sup>82</sup> As time went on, the community increased as new members were professed and by the time of Mother Xavier's death numbered twenty five.<sup>83</sup>

Almost from the beginning, the community relied on paid lay staff to assist in the works being carried out on the site. Entries in the *Geelong Convent Account Book* for 1863 note payments for two women for domestic help and the caretaker who lived in a cottage on the grounds, as well as for teachers for music and dancing. Similar entries occurred during later years.

## Finances

The other matter which greatly concerned Mother Xavier and no doubt contributed to many a sleepless night particularly in the early years of the foundation was the precarious and uncertain nature of the community's finances. It is not known what financial resources the community arrived in Geelong with but judging from Mother Xavier's early letters if any they appeared to be minimal. In an 1862 letter, she noted: "You did not give me anyone with any means [ie, presumably dowry money and], although you may think Australia rich, I assure

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<sup>78</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1864.

<sup>79</sup> Maguire to Kirwan, 24 May 1864.

<sup>80</sup> Lay sisters in many convents did not have the name *Mary* in their religious name.

<sup>81</sup> Geelong cemetery records and the *Necrology*.

<sup>82</sup> See Appendix 4. Sister Mary Francis (Mary) Hoban was professed in 1869 and spent all her life in Geelong and died on 25 March 1909.

<sup>83</sup> See: Appendix 5.

you it is very hard to get over our money difficulties.”<sup>84</sup> In an undated fragment of an earlier letter to Baggot Street, she had written:

Did I think it would be of any use to appeal to the Bishop, for more support, I would myself, do so, but I think it is better not, as we did come without any fixed arrangement or, I believe, without comment at all being made. So, I believe it is better to struggle against it now.<sup>85</sup>

The community was expected to and wished to be self-supporting as Mother Xavier wrote in 1862: “We never get a penny but what we earn and you know, yourself, that cannot be much having to support so many ...”,<sup>86</sup> so they soon had substantial debts, including the purchase price for their Newtown home, costs associated with its development and other improvements as well as the purchase of additional land let alone debts incurred when she began her extensive building programme. This was a heavy burden for her and she admitted: “Anxiety about the bills has made me sick but still, God is helping me through all.”<sup>87</sup> In another undated fragment of a letter, probably written in July 1860 she listed expenses and noted that: “Our resources are seven children paying £2.10 a quarter for schooling and Fr. Madden, whose goodness and watchfulness we have to thank for our dinner often.”<sup>88</sup>

On occasions Mother Xavier requested loans from Baggot Street which usually seemed to be forthcoming and which she was careful to pay back: On one occasion she was unable to pay for some timber needed for improvements and the creditor was pressing her for payment. She appealed to Baggot Street for assistance:

... I owe £70 to this man. I heard he is a bad man and talks odiously of religious. Would Baggot Street lend it to me? I know a little time, please God, will take us out of our present troubles. £100 now will be more valuable than £200 in a few years and what I think is this. I owe you something on account of the garden. Would you make it up to £100 and lend me the balance to pay off this odious man.<sup>89</sup>

A month or so later she was able to write: “Many, many thanks for the £50. It will be a great help and, please God, I shall soon be able to refund dear Baggot Street.”<sup>90</sup> Matters seemed to improve and by the end of the year she was able to write: “Thanks a thousand times for the loan of the £100. The £50 next month will be a great help to me. ... There is now £370 of our

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<sup>84</sup> Maguire to Norris, May 1862.

<sup>85</sup> Maguire to Norris, probably written in July 1860.

<sup>86</sup> Maguire to Norris, undated fragment, 1862.

<sup>87</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>88</sup> Maguire to Norris, July 1860.

<sup>89</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860

<sup>90</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 September 1860.

third instalment in the bank and, when the debt on this place is paid, everything we can get will be our own.”<sup>91</sup>

By 1861, the account book showed that income was £1,438.0.2 and expenditure was £1,433.17.8. However serious financial trouble soon made its presence felt. Mother Xavier had appointed Sister Mary Rose Lynch as the Bursar, telling Mother Mary of Mercy that she: “... is an extraordinary little manager, she contrives to get everything.”<sup>92</sup> It soon became evident that she was anything but! To her consternation, Mother Xavier discovered that Sister Mary Rose was over ordering supplies, paying too much for them and generally running up bills everywhere while giving the impression that she was competently managing household expenditure.<sup>93</sup> She concluded that: “I cannot give the house-keeping to Sr. Rose again. I believe it is want of head and not foolishness. She seems to have no head for accounts or management or ordering of any kind.”<sup>94</sup> Mother Xavier was very worried about the situation. In an uncharacteristically almost desperate way, she wrote:

I hardly know what to do. To the Dean I could not say a word and to Fr. Madden, I really felt ashamed and have been thinking so much myself and am so anxious myself about everything, I was for one day not able to get up. I was so downcast and frightened and the following day, when Father Madden came, he noticed at once that I looked ill and thought I was going to cry. He is very sharp.<sup>95</sup>

As well as this problem, Sister Mary Rose was causing problems in the community. Mother Xavier wrote back to Baggot Street: “Sister M. Rose is very imprudent, nothing can keep her tongue quiet, and when she is in a temper I am always expecting some bitter declaration from her before no matter who.”<sup>96</sup> Two entries in the Geelong Chapter Book describe what happened next. The first, possibly written by Mother Xavier herself, and headed *July* stated:

The Chapter assembled to decide on sending Sister M Rose back to Ireland in consequence of her insubordination, and spirit of discontent. She was removed from the office of Bursar which she had held for two months, and left the community with the approbation of the Bishop and full consent of the Sisters on 28 of August.

The second entry, headed *July 1861* and signed by Mother Xavier, was substantially the same but less harsh:

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<sup>91</sup> Maguire to Norris, 18 November 1860.

<sup>92</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>93</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

<sup>94</sup> Undated letter fragment written in 1861.

<sup>95</sup> Undated letter fragment written in 1861 to Mother Mary of Mercy Norris.

<sup>96</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

The Chapter assembled to receive Sr. M. Rose Lynch's resignation of her office of Bursar, it having been previously decided to accede to her desire to leave the Colony – she left the Community the 28<sup>th</sup> of August following with the approbation of the Bishop and the full consent of the Sisters.<sup>97</sup>

Mother Xavier then took charge of the finances until early in the following year when Sister Mary Regis was elected Bursar.

Sister Mary Rose Lynch is one of the tragic figures in the history of the Sisters of Mercy. After her departure from Australia, she arrived at St Edward's Convent in London where she stayed for some years but not as a full member of the community as apparently neither the communities of Dundalk where she had been before she went to Geelong nor Baggot Street would readmit her. The same thing happened when there was a possibility that she might join the community at Bermondsey. It appears that she may have been suffering from a mental illness which worsened over the years for in September 1874, Mother Clare Moore of Bermondsey wrote: "Sister Mary Rose is now in Toulouse", ie, in a mental hospital in that city. She died there on 6 August 1890 although her actual burial place in Toulouse is unknown.<sup>98</sup>

In May 1861, beset with financial worries and shortage of personnel, Mother Xavier wrote: "I feel sometimes as if I really cannot get on."<sup>99</sup> Gradually however, the finances of the community stabilised and increased as income became more regular, the main sources being day school tuition and boarding school fees, subsidies paid for orphans and government grants for buildings. On occasions, dowry money from new members was used as collateral, for example, an entry in the account book for 1870 records the lending of Sister Mary Josephine Mitchell's dowry of £900 for expenses associated with the orphanage but money from this source had to be repaid. Now and then, fetes were held and the community occasionally received donations, bequests and money collected at charity sermons.

Amongst common methods of acquiring funds were charity sermons and collections in places such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Kilmore and Kyneton. She mentions in one letter the possibility of going to Ballarat where a: "... High Mass and charity sermon would do wonders ..." <sup>100</sup> A year or so later she noted: "We shall, please God, have a bazaar for the orphans about the end

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<sup>97</sup> *Geelong Chapter Acts*, no date. The 1861 Cash Book records that the cost of Sister Rose's return to England was £70.5.6.

<sup>98</sup> See: Bellamy, *Weavers of Tapestry*, 43-44, 76-81, for an account of Sister M Rose's post-Geelong life.

<sup>99</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1861

<sup>100</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

of November and we are entitled to sermons through the Western District.”<sup>101</sup> the latter presumably with the approval of Bishop Goold. These methods of acquiring funds were most helpful. In the convent cash book for 1861, credits included a £50 donation from the bishop, £88.11.8 in other donations, £91.17.0 from sermons and collections made in Bendigo, Kilmore and Kyneton, and £456.17.6 from a bazaar, totalling almost half their income for the year.<sup>102</sup>

It must be noted that not all applicants brought dowries but permission to accept those without them had to come from the bishop as the following entry in his diary for 11 April 1862 noted: “Gave permission to receive Miss Harty as a postulant without means, Revd. Mother having pressed for leave.” Interestingly, while Mother Xavier in letters back to Baggot Street often refers to how beneficial it would be to have sisters, especially her own sister, Sister Mary Philomene, to come to Geelong with their dowries, there is no hint of what happened to her own or if she brought it with her when she came. Or perhaps it was gone, subsumed into the finances of the Baggot Street community when she was the superior or used to help pay for the extensive and expensive renovations she undertook there.

Mother Xavier’s letters for the first few years chart a very uncertain course fraught with worries regarding the members of the community endeavouring to settle into and acclimatise to a very different environment from their Irish home. In addition, they had to deal with inadequate and precarious financial arrangements. The numbers in the community gradually increased and, as the existing Geelong account books demonstrate, careful expenditure and juggling of available finance gradually bore fruit. Despite the problems the community encountered in its early days, the sisters forged ahead in their desire to bring the works of mercy to their new home.

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<sup>101</sup> Maguire to Norris, 18 September 1862.

<sup>102</sup> McMaster, *The Foundation* ..., 10.

## Chapter 5 Works of Mercy

Catherine McAuley was inspired to found the Sisters of Mercy to assist in the alleviation of poverty, destitution and discrimination of, in her case, the Catholic underclasses of Dublin. What she intended for the congregation is clearly expressed in the opening paragraph of the constitutions she wrote:

The Sisters admitted to this Religious Congregation, besides the principal and general end of all Religious orders, such as attending particularly to their own perfection, must also have in view what is particularly characteristic to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, that is the most serious application to the Instruction of poor Girls, Visitation of the Sick and the protection of distressed women of good character.<sup>1</sup>

Some twenty years after Catherine McAuley's death, concern was expressed in some quarters that Mercy foundations which were independent and self-governing were inadvertently diverging from her vision. In 1864, Mother Francis Bridgeman, from all accounts, a formidable and forthright character and the superior at Kinsale,<sup>2</sup> convened a meeting of Mercy superiors which was held in Limerick with some seventeen superiors attending. The superiors of several foundations did not attend, some, eg, Baggot Street, because they did not consider it necessary, others because they did not get permission from their bishops to go.

Following this meeting, Mother Francis Bridgeman compiled *A Guide for the Religious called Sisters of Mercy*, the first edition of which was published in 1866.<sup>3</sup> This publication dealt at length with what was considered the proper works of the institute. It never had any official or binding status but was widely disseminated, quite influential in some quarters, and more or less adopted by many convents.

The section on the objects of the institute opened with a rather breathtaking assertion: "The objects of the Institute are of vast extent: they embrace the endless miseries which poverty, sickness, ignorance, and sin entail on the poor of Christ."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Original Handwritten Rule*, slightly edited in: *Rule and Constitutions*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Mother Francis (Johanna) Bridgeman was born in 1813 and entered the newly founded Convent of Mercy, Limerick, on 1 November 1838, being received by Catherine McAuley herself. She was professed on 9 December 1839 and in 1844 was appointed the first superior of the new foundation in Kinsale. In 1854 she led a mainly Irish contingent of eleven Sisters of Mercy to the Crimea where they remained for about sixteen months nursing wounded and sick soldiers. She returned to Kinsale where she was superior until her death on 11 February 1888. See: Bolster, *The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War*, 40-48, 292-294.

<sup>3</sup> Sisters of Mercy (Bridgeman, F): *Guide for the Religious called Sisters of Mercy*, (London: Robson & Son, 1866). See also: Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 146, 306.

<sup>4</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide*, 5.

It went on to note three objects of the Institute:

... the education of poor girls, visitation of the sick, and the protection of distressed women of good character”, as being “*particularly characteristic*” of our Institute. But, according to the explanation given by our venerated Foundress herself, these three objects were not intended to exclude other services to the poor, but only to have preference and precedence of all others.

This guide then listed other works of Mercy considered to be:

... in conformity with the spirit and practice of the Institute, though not specified in the rule, the following are conspicuous - care or visitation of hospitals, Magdalen asylums, reformatories, visitation of prisons and workhouses, instruction of adults, distribution of food and clothing to the poor, Sunday-school, night-school, &c.<sup>5</sup>

Two practical pieces of advice followed, the first cautioning:

Even of the works conforming with the spirit of the Institute, it is better a community should not undertake more than it is capable of discharging well and the second recommending that: The three characteristic objects should be established, as soon as it is possible, by each new Community, and first care bestowed upon them. “*The good you ought to do, do it well.*”<sup>6</sup>

The care of orphans was not mentioned explicitly but was considered to come under the general heading of “The Education of Girls”.<sup>7</sup>

While this guide was compiled after Mother Xavier went to Geelong, she would have been thoroughly familiar with its spirit and intention and involved in its practical expression. As soon as possible after they arrived, the sisters began the traditional works of mercy according to their situation and circumstances.

In an early letter to Archbishop Cullen she related how she hoped to establish a House of Mercy, a boarding school, a middle class day school and a poor school as well as looking after the female orphans which then numbered forty. As well, she noted:

We visit the hospital, a very fine Institute, where we have been most amiably received and where we can visit as often and at any time we please. We also visit the Jail, besides which we must have Sunday School; then Catechism in the Church on Sundays, visitation (for there are sick and dying people here), and the instruction of adults.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Sisters of Mercy, *Guide*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Maguire to Cullen, 16 February 1860. At that time, the hospital was known as the Infirmary and Benevolent Asylum and was established in 1849. See: Anon, *Geelong Past and Present*, (No page numbers given).

Her letter concluded with a heartfelt plea asking him for his support for two more sisters to be sent to assist in these much needed works of mercy.

### **Orphanage**

Even before the community moved to their permanent home they had taken charge of the sixty or so orphans at St Augustine's, Newtown, and Sisters Mary Margaret and Gabriel continued to reside there until the girls could be accommodated on the Newtown site. Mother Xavier had earlier indicated that she had every intention of establishing an orphanage as she wrote back to Baggot Street in 1860:

If I can manage to get up the orphanage as I intend, I should have accommodation for about thirty altogether and an institution for about fifty children and very tidy. But how shall I manage them? The orphanage and school children are to be kept quite apart from each other.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the outbuildings, originally stables, were converted to a rather makeshift orphanage and on 21 December 1862, twenty one orphan girls from St Augustine's were moved to the Newtown site.<sup>10</sup> This accommodation left much to be desired. However, Mother Xavier reported that she had received money from the Dean to begin the construction of an orphanage:

The Dean has handed me £390 with directions to begin now and do what I can about the Orphanage. The Bishop wrote to me this morning, a most kind note and, in the name of God, I'm going to begin. I have no more than £300 for building and furnishing but I shall trust God who will surely help so good a work.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of November 1862, she had already begun to plan the building of the orphanage and gave regular reports on the progress of the building and that she had written to the Treasurer "... asking to have the Orphanage put on a regular estimate for next year in which I asked for a building grant and a maintenance for forty to fifty children and young women."<sup>12</sup> She also indicated in the same letter that the orphanage was to be called *Our Lady's Consolation*. Letters charted its progress, thus, for example, in early 1861 she could report: "The building goes on merrily and the shell will be finished by the tenth of March."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 September 1860.

<sup>10</sup> Barnard, Jill, & Twigg, Karen,  *Holding on to Hope: A History of the Founding Agencies of MacKillop Family Services. 1854-1997*. Kew: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Postscript to a letter from Gabriel Sherlock to Mary of Mercy Norris, 12 November 1862.

<sup>12</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 November 1862.

<sup>13</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 January 1861.

However, in May 1862 she had to write: "... I do believe that institutions beginning in poverty and the cross succeed best in the end". In the same letter, she reported that: "One of my dear little orphans died" and went on to comment that:

As for the Cross, the dear little orphans seem to have brought a large share in the way of sickness and inconvenience. Poor little things are shivering in the stable. It is well during the summer but now that the severe winter has set in I tremble for them. Still, God will take care of his own. They have added too, to our labour considerably. They are mostly young they must get constant care. One sweet little thing of three years old is to be baptised on Saturday – one two and a half has fever and nearly went to heaven.<sup>14</sup>

The orphans came from poor and needy backgrounds. A report in the 23 May 1879 issue of *The Geelong Advertiser* gives one such example: "Agnes Kelly, a three year old waif, fostered by Mrs Margaret Dowling, McKillop Street, Geelong (grandmother) placed by the court in the hands of the Newtown Convent for seven years."

By February 1864, Mother Xavier, ever the shrewd business woman, was able to report that:

The building of the new Orphanage goes on fast. I have written to M. Bernard to order 3 dozen beds for me in Dublin. We could not get 3 dozen of any one shape here, I expect to get them cheaper, otherwise the cost of coming out will not be much.<sup>15</sup>

Later that year, the permanent substantial blue stone building was ready for the orphans to move into. By 1869, there were eighty seven orphans in residence.

### **Industrial School**

Social conditions in the colony from the 1850s on resulted in an unacceptable number of disadvantaged or abandoned children needing care. According to one study of social welfare institutions, not only those who had lost both parents were regarded as orphans.

The children of widowed or deserted mothers were also regarded as orphans, although those of widowed fathers were not. Some children arrived in the Port Phillip District as orphans because one or both of their parents had perished on the long sea journey to Australia. Still more children would have been placed in jeopardy through deaths, accidents, desertion or destitution in the district.<sup>16</sup>

The government was concerned that these children would develop into a criminal underclass and after much debate passed the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act, 1864*. This act

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<sup>14</sup> Maguire to Norris, May 1862.

<sup>15</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1864.

<sup>16</sup> Barnard & Twigg, *Holding on to Hope*, 6.

defined neglected children as those who either had no place to live or lived in unsuitable places such as brothels or whose parents were either unable or unwilling to provide adequately for them, and the police had the power to send such children to newly established industrial schools. Here they were supposed to be provided with an education and training to be able to become useful members of society. Many children in these schools had Catholic parents, usually of Irish origin, mainly because they tended to belong to poorer and uneducated groups. Church authorities were very uneasy about the effect these industrial schools might have on these children either by neglecting their proper religious education or, and much worse, by active proselytism. As a result, two industrial schools for girls were established, one at the Good Shepherd Convent in Abbotsford, and the other at the Convent of Mercy, Geelong.<sup>17</sup>

Although there is no direct evidence to support this, there would be no doubt that this venture would have had Mother Xavier's full support and in fact would not have got off the ground without her approval. She had in earlier letters to Baggot Street expressed her opinion regarding the dangers facing unprotected immigrant girls so industrial schools would have been in her mind most acceptable. In early November 1860 she had written:

This is a dangerous country for such [ie, girls from the Baggot Street House of Mercy], at least, until we have a House of Mercy to receive them into. Then, they will get on. ... I think you ought not to venture any more of the refuge girls.<sup>18</sup>

A week later she wrote a long letter in which she detailed as much information as she could about girls from Baggot Street who may have been originally inmates of the refuge established at the Convent of Mercy, Fitzroy and with whom the community there endeavoured to keep in contact:

I have been slow about finding out all Sr. M. de Sales' protégés – poor refuge girls, but now, tell her I traced them all except Eliza O'Connor and Mary Gaffney. All are good but will not keep steadily in any place. ... How I wish for a House of Mercy. They say the Refuge is not a place to prepare them for servitude. ... A laborious, well-trained servant seldom loses her character. It is ignorant, untrained girls who do not know how to work.<sup>19</sup>

In 1865, St Joseph's Industrial School opened in the grounds of the convent. While not quite the same as the House of Mercy opened by Ursula Frayne soon after she arrived in Fitzroy in

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<sup>17</sup> See: Barnard & Twigg, *Holding on Hope*, 25-29.

<sup>18</sup> Maguire to Norris, 18 November 1860.

<sup>19</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 November 1860. The Sister Mary de Sales referred to was probably Sister Mary de Sales (Margaret) Hogan who had entered Baggot Street in 1856 and was professed in 1859 not long before Mother Xavier left for Geelong. *BSR*, 131.

1858, it nevertheless performed much the same function. A modern account of this venture reads as follows:

In 1865, fourteen young girls entered St Joseph's Industrial School, in the grounds of the Geelong Convent of Mercy. Early in 1866 they were joined by twelve more girls, aged from eight to ten years, transferred from the Melbourne Industrial School. The Sisters set out to give them 'a finish to their education and training as servants and then procure for them a suitable situation.' Sister Xavier accommodated the girls in a specially constructed building. An average of twenty to thirty girls annually occupied the school between 1866 and 1880.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the girls in the industrial school, who were considered to have come from poor and generally far from respectable parents and thus were considered a lower class than the orphans, whose parents were deemed poor but respectable, were educated with them. Educating two such different classes together was seen in some quarters as a rather radical innovation but was commented on most favourably by the Royal Commissioners in 1872:

Your Commissioners cannot refrain from commenting upon the pleasant contrast presented by the Industrial School Children, all females, in the Geelong Convent to those in the other local establishments. Here, for the first time, the children of this class appeared not only bright and healthy but natural and homelike, with nothing whatever of the cowed, restrained, listless aspect so painfully perceptible elsewhere. Among the admirable means adopted by the reverend ladies in order to win the confidence and affections of the destitute little ones, they have associated them with the children of poor but respectable parents, and, slight as this favour may appear, the Commissioners are convinced that it has had a most beneficial influence, the two classes being thus blended into a species of family relationship.<sup>21</sup>

One might wonder if in fact this was an innovative move or rather a considered response to a shortage of staff to run two separate schools given that Mother Xavier was ever practical, realistic and adaptable. By the time of her death, there were forty two girls in the industrial school.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, in common with other industrial schools in the state, it was phased out in the 1880s.

### **Select School or Pension School**

On 18 April 1860, readers of *The Geelong Advertiser* saw the following notice: "April 18. Education. The Sisters of Mercy beg to announce that they have opened a school for day

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<sup>20</sup> Barnard & Twigg, *Holding on to Hope*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Royal Commission on Industrial Schools and the Sanatory Station*, quoted in: *The Labourers' Friends*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> *The Advocate*, 6 September 1877.

pupils at their convent, Mercer's Hill, Geelong – they are also prepared to receive a limited number of children as boarders.<sup>23</sup>

This in fact followed an earlier notice of 8 March which informed readers that the school would open on 19 March which it did with an enrolment of nine girls. By the end of the year, the enrolment was twenty five, five of whom were boarders. Unfortunately very little is known about these first students.<sup>24</sup> Schools such as the one envisaged were known in Mercy circles as select or pension schools, charged fees, educated middle and upper class girls and often catered for boarders.

Catherine McAuley herself opened the first Mercy pension school. It was a decided failure as an early biographer of the founder described: “This spring [of 1830] a school for young ladies was opened in the refectory; but it proved a signal failure and the very first pupils it ever contained dropped off within the year.”<sup>25</sup> She went on to see to the foundation of several more at places such as Kingstown (which did not last), Tullamore, Carlow, Charleville and Cork.<sup>26</sup>

It appears that Catherine McAuley had three main reasons for establishing this type of school. This first related to the importance she attached to the education of girls as she wrote in the *Rule and Constitutions*:

The Sisters shall be convinced, that no work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the Poor, than the careful instruction of women; because, whatever be the station they are destined to fill, their example and their advice will always have great influence; and wherever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, she considered that such schools might possibly be a source of vocations to the Sisters of Mercy as she wrote in 1839 to Sister Josephine Warde in Cork about the Carlow pension school: “Some sweet young persons among them [the pupils] ... bid fair to become

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<sup>23</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> Doyle, M, *The Derry Large Manuscript*, also known as: *Notes on the Life of Mother Catherine McAuley by One of The First Sisters of Mercy*, in: Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> See: Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 152, 231, 311.

<sup>27</sup> *Original Rule*, 3.

Sisters.”<sup>28</sup> An observation over forty years later again about the Carlow pension school reinforced these expectations:

This institution became very flourishing. It was useful to the poor indirectly by the sentiments of considerate kindness and compassion for them which the Sisters took care to instil into the minds of their pupils; and directly by the large number of vocations to the Order which it produced.<sup>29</sup>

A third and eminently practical reason was that fees generated from the pension schools were of great financial assistance especially in subsidising the other works of mercy which had minimal or no income, and the sisters themselves.

Despite the fact that Catherine McAuley established pension schools, more in fact than Houses of Mercy, in the 1860s, some Sisters of Mercy had qualms about running such schools, and for some decades afterwards they were the source of controversy.<sup>30</sup> One group of founding sisters held that only those works of Mercy specified in the rule were authentic and that authenticity was directly related to the materially poor. The leading proponent of this interpretation of the rule was Mother Francis Bridgeman and this strict and literal attitude was shared by some later foundations in the USA made from Kinsale where she was the superior for many years.

A contrasting view was held by people such as Mother Vincent Whitty who in 1864 wrote: “... as Mother McAuley herself established Pension Schools in Carlow, Charleville and Cork, it appears unwise to make laws against them ...”.<sup>31</sup> It was also held by Mother Frances Warde who founded the convent in Carlow and made many foundations in the USA. They considered that, provided that they were consistent with the spirit of the Institute, works not actually specified in the rule could be undertaken by Sisters of Mercy who could also minister to social classes other than the materially poor. Just to make sure, in the USA, some groups of Sisters of Mercy routinely sought dispensations from Rome to run fee paying schools which, just as routinely, Rome gave. This practice apparently continued until the 1930s.

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<sup>28</sup> Catherine McAuley to Josephine Warde, 18 October 1838, in: Sullivan, (ed), *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*, 2004, 209.

<sup>29</sup> Carroll, *Annals*, Vol 1, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Emily George, *The Sisters of Mercy and the Pension Schools Controversy*, Unpublished paper based on the Keynote Address at the Mercy Secondary Schools Education Conference, Farmington Hills, October 1982.

<sup>31</sup> M Vincent Whitty to M Magdalen Kirwan, Hetherington, & Smoothery, (eds), *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty*, 172. Magdalen Kirwan, one of Mother Xavier’s novices, was the superior of Baggot Street from 1864 to 1867. *BSR*, 107.

This was never an issue in Australia probably because of the attitude of early founders who had no problem with such schools.<sup>32</sup> Mother Ursula Frayne had founded such schools in Perth and Melbourne and Mother Vincent Whitty was reputed to have stipulated that she did not want volunteers to go to Brisbane who were not in favour of establishing pension schools. For at least one pressing reason, Mother Xavier really did not have much option – she needed the hoped for income from the fees paid by boarders and day pupils.

Conditions were fairly primitive. Space at *Sunville* was at a premium but it appears that the boarders were housed there and one room was used as a school room. The sisters had to provide school requisites and this was neither easy nor cheap. As the school began, Mother Xavier wrote back to Baggot Street charting early progress:

I hope I am getting a little stock of books out and a Catechism. Very few books can be had here at all and all are double as dear as at home. I could not afford copy books or nice school books at all and had to be satisfied to get the N.B. books through some of the schools, and even then, we had to raise the price of each book. I do not think it is likely we shall get in any way connected with the National Board, at present. At least we might have a quiet little poor school and steal on by degrees.<sup>33</sup>

Mother Xavier also pleaded for staff, especially in the areas of French, music and English but none was forthcoming until 1866. Fortunately some of the sisters were well educated women so were able to pass their knowledge on. As one later writer put it with a certain amount of hyperbole:

As every member of the Geelong community was an Irish lady of birth, culture, and refinement, it followed that these first boarders immediately entered upon a school life that was to be the entrance door into all that was best and most cultured in Australian society.<sup>34</sup>

In some ways, the select school opened at the right time. Geelong was a prosperous city and there were many wealthy families who desired an education for their daughters which would fit them to take their place in society. Boys were well catered for – Geelong College, connected to the Presbyterian Church was founded in 1861 and Geelong Grammar School, a Church of England endeavour, opened in 1856. Some education was provided for Catholic boys in St Augustine's Orphanage and this was developed further following the arrival of the Christian Brothers who took over the management of the orphanage in 1878.<sup>35</sup> Education for

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<sup>32</sup> Helen Delaney, *According to the Circumstances – Pension Schools*, privately published article, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>34</sup> O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Anon, *Geelong, Past and Present*, Geelong: Henry Franks & Co, 1891, (no page numbers).

girls was not seen as so pressing and information in this area is minimal. Often women conducted private schools in their own homes and these were generally short lived. However there were two such schools in Newtown conducted by the Misses Dawson, one beginning in 1854, the other two years later.<sup>36</sup>

Mother Xavier's original plan was to establish two schools, one which she called in the parlance of the time: "... a second rate school and one like the special class."<sup>37</sup>, ie, a general educational establishment and the other a pension or finishing school for young ladies, but it was not until 1869 when extra boarding quarters became available that she was able to announce that: "... the Sisters of Mercy intend to re-organise their school, and will be prepared to receive after the Christmas vacation, Boarders at a pension of £30 per annum."<sup>38</sup>

Catherine McAuley's conviction that vocations would come from pension schools was quickly realised in Geelong. In 1862, the first boarder, Mary Mitchell, entered, to be followed by two others, Mary Lyons later that year and Eliza Donaldson in 1863.<sup>39</sup> This practice long continued. Over the next 150 years or so, 220 past pupils entered religious life, most becoming Sisters of Mercy.<sup>40</sup>

### **Other Schools**

The second school Mother Xavier established on the Newtown site was known as St Catherine's School. It was a day school and according to the practice of the time, students were educated separately from the orphans and industrial school girls and those in the pension school. In 1864 she was able to report: "St Catherine's school goes on most beautifully but I almost dread to see the numbers increasing as we must teach all ourselves – no monitresses."<sup>41</sup> Initially a house in nearby Gheringhap Street was rented but soon a separate building for this school was built and completed in 1865 at a cost of £437.3.3. The school continued to function until 1909 when the policy of educating boarders and day students separately was abolished and the building was demolished in 1910.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>38</sup> O'Sullivan, *The Wheel of Time*, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Sisters Mary Joseph, Bernard and Juliana respectively. Each was expected to bring a dowry of £500.

<sup>40</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 111-113.

<sup>41</sup> Maguire to Kerwin, 8 November 1864. This letter does not appear to have survived but is quoted in McMaster, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 32.

Early on, Mother Xavier had high hope of being given St Mary's School which was near the main Church and conducted by a layman. She reported:

We are praying very hard, now, to get St. Mary's School which would give us great influence. It is near the Church and would be a nice one under our care. Besides it would be a far better locality to have the Sunday School than here being much more central.<sup>43</sup>

This was not to be. The layman did not want to leave and the Dean's friends did not want to give up their roles nor apparently their control government of school grants.<sup>44</sup> During Mother Xavier's time in Geelong numerous changes took place in the administration and funding of denominational schools, culminating in the 1872 Education Act which effectively decreed that schools funded by the government were to be free, compulsory and secular and which ceased funding to Catholic and other faith based schools.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1879, the community had responsibility for four schools – Sacred Heart Boarding School, as the pension school came to be known as, St Catherine's day school, Our Lady's Orphanage School where girls from St Joseph's Industrial School were also taught, and one off site primary school, St Patrick's School, Kildare, in West Geelong, which had been established in 1855, and whose administration had been transferred to the sisters in 1872.<sup>46</sup>

The Sunday School Mother Xavier mentioned in her letter appeared very early on her agenda. Less than a month after they arrived in their permanent home she was writing: "I mean to open Sunday school when the Dean returns from Sydney. The children's refectory will then be finished and I mean to use it, for the present, as a Sunday School and a small poor school during the week."<sup>47</sup> She took classes there regularly while other members of the community undertook visitation outside the convent.

### **Other Works of Mercy**

The convent quickly became a hive of industry with other traditional works of mercy being undertaken as well as activities resulting from the exigencies of the time.

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<sup>43</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>44</sup> Allen *The Labourers' Friends*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> D F Bourke, *A History of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, (Melbourne: Catholic Education Office), 1988, 76-103.

<sup>46</sup> McMaster, *The Foundation, Growth and Development of the Convent of Mercy, Geelong 1859-1980*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Maguire to Norris 9 May 1860.

Right from the very beginning of the Sisters of Mercy, visitation was an integral part of their ministry. The *Rule and Constitutions* in an early chapter on the practice stated that:

Mercy – the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who desire to follow Him – has, in all ages of the Church, excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying Poor ...<sup>48</sup>

The chapter then gives detailed instructions about what to do and how to act including:

They should act with great tenderness, and when there is no immediate danger of death, it will be well, *first*, to relieve distress and to endeavour in every practical way to promote the cleanliness, ease, and comfort of the sick person; since we are always better disposed to receive advice and instruction from those who show compassion for us.<sup>49</sup>

Those undertaking visitation were reminded that: “The good of souls is what the Sisters shall have principally in view.” Practical suggestions were given on what to do if recovery is hopeless or the conversation turns to matters regarding the person’s will, or how his or her family will be looked after.<sup>50</sup>

In an early letter Mother Xavier makes a passing reference to the visitation done by the community: “I think a great deal of good is done in the hospital though I can, but very seldom, visit the gaol on account of the Sunday school.”<sup>51</sup> On another occasion early in the next year she described a situation where Sister Mary Gabriel had been in contact with a poor dying woman:

We were in Retreat – she was completely neglected and her poor mother came to say she was in her agony and said bitterly that the Sisters had stayed away from her. Retreat and all, I sent them down to her to say some prayers for the dying.<sup>52</sup>

One wonders how in fact the community had time for any visitation with the demands on their time resulting from the schools in their care.

They also assisted local priests whenever they could. Mother Xavier mentioned in several of her early letters how she and the other sisters accompanied the priests to outlying Mass centres such as Queenscliff, Point Henry, Sutherland Creek, Bellarine and Mount Moriac, for example:

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<sup>48</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>52</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

I am going to Queenscliff on Wednesday. Don't you imagine the people there not seeing the priest for eight months before the last time we were there. They are now to have Mass once a month. They say our going there brought a blessing on the place but the truth is – Father Madden, in his zeal, has secured that for them.<sup>53</sup>

In a letter written a few days later she related that: “Father Farrell [sic] is to have his Church at Mt. Moriac opened on Sunday and I am going to help him. He is a very nice priest.”<sup>54</sup> While she does not say what she and the other sisters who would have accompanied her did on these visits it is not so hard to imagine that they probably assisted either by teaching catechism to children or helping instruct adults.

The latter was one of the activities carried out at the convent although it is not known if Mother Xavier participated in this. The *Necrology* relates however that Sister Mary Joseph (Mary) Mitchell, the first novice professed in Geelong in 1864, was of delicate health and did not teach but spent much of her time instructing converts. This would have been with Mother Xavier's cognisance and approval.

Another activity was the establishment and fostering of the sodality known as the Children of Mary. The Children of Mary was a pious sodality for teenage girls and young women founded in France in the nineteenth century. Those who wished to join went through a six month preliminary programme and once approved were entitled to wear a blue cape, a thin white veil and a large medal of Mary. They took part in regular prayer sessions and discussions and reached their zenith in the mid twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Again, it is not known if Mother Xavier was actively involved in this venture but it appeared to be quite flourishing. For example, issues of *The Advocate* in 1873 record that on 25 June, Father Dalton SJ gave a retreat to the members and on 29 October nineteen young women became members.

An enterprise which became highly valued was the establishment of a lending library for public use. The 6 September 1873 issue of *The Advocate* noted the opening of this library which it informed readers contained one thousand volumes, was open every Sunday from 2 pm to 4 pm and from which books could be borrowed for 2d apiece. The library, set up at the rear of St Catherine's school in 1870, was managed by Gabriel Sherlock and became very popular and well used. Books were expensive and often difficult to acquire but many were

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<sup>53</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 October 1860.

<sup>54</sup> Maguire to , , 282-284.

<sup>55</sup> See: Francis Gildart Ruffin, 'Children of Mary', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol 3, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org.cathen/03659d.htm>, accessed 21 December 2015.

gifts from Baggot Street. This library also generated much needed funds – the year after it opened £110 was listed in the accounts book as “Proceeds from the Library”.<sup>56</sup>

Fees from the teaching of music provided another source of income to the community. Indeed, many convents, not only of Sisters of Mercy, in early days had to rely on music fees to supplement their usually meagre and insufficient income. Many early Sisters of Mercy were accomplished in this area and Mother Xavier, Mother Margaret Mulally and Sister Mary Regis were no exceptions.<sup>57</sup>

Some of the activities undertaken or managed by the community were not really works of mercy as such but were driven by the necessity to generate income. One such venture, probably done in what little spare time the sisters had, was the arduous task of hand sewing gentlemen’s shirts for a firm in Melbourne which supplied the material. This too added to their income as an 1871 Account Book item stated: “Proceeds from needlework £14.6.”<sup>58</sup> Another activity begun in 1876 was the making of altar breads to supply not only their own needs but also those of various parishes. This was probably not a source of much income.

From the earliest days, the community employed lay staff and these would have needed to be supervised or directed and paid. As was customary for those holding this position, the community bursar would have been involved in this duty, especially in regard to domestic staff, but it would be understandable that Mother Xavier, especially early on, would have given much guidance in this area.

### **The Builder**

Most of these activities took place on the Newtown property which had to be developed to cater for them. Fortunately, Mother Xavier was a builder. She cut her teeth so to speak at Baggot Street when she was involved in planning for the Mater Misericordiae Hospital and undertook extensive renovations to the convent. However it was in Geelong that her vision of a convent complex was realised and it continues to stand as a monument to her forward thinking, fearlessness and breadth of vision.

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<sup>56</sup> McMaster, *Foundation ...*, 17. Although the first Geelong public library opened in 1875, the Convent Lending Library continued to function until 1899.

<sup>57</sup> O’Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 84.

<sup>58</sup> McMaster, *Foundation...*, 17.

The Newtown property was quite extensive but early in 1861 she bought more land to complete the full block which according to one estimate covered some twelve hectares (thirty acres).<sup>59</sup> Very early on she voiced her concern regarding the ownership of this property:

It is all very well while Dr. Goold lives, I am sure he won't interfere, but unless this property were our own we might be put to trouble hereafter. Dr. Goold likes to get all property in his own name to tell you the truth; and I hear that he has never made a will, so if he died now his friends could claim the most of it. You must pray for me and advise me on the matter. We are very far from home and foreign lands are strange places. The only way a poor helpless set of Nuns can hope to get on is by trying to be as independent as possible. People and Priests are cap in hand to independent persons, but alas, for the poor and dependent.<sup>60</sup>

The matter was settled on 5 December 1862 when a deed of sale was drawn up between Joseph William Belcher, the original owner who had been still owed some money from the sale, and:

The Right Reverend James Alipius Goold, Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, Eliza Maguire Superioress of the Convent of Mercy at Geelong, Mary Mullally and Maria Sherlock of Geelong in the said colony, spinsters, both Sisters of Mercy ...”, the four being described: “... as Trustees only.”<sup>61</sup>

The house the community initially occupied in Newtown was never intended to be a permanent residence. It had been vacant for some time, was not very suitable, and required some fairly basic improvements to make it remotely liveable. Mother Xavier was able to put her earlier experience in building to good use to make it more habitable and suitable for the various works carried out on the site in the succeeding years.

Already, a week or so after they arrived in Geelong she mentioned that she was “... told that Mr Wardel [sic] is coming here next week to finish plans for the Orphanage.” Whether or not she actually consulted him is not known but in fact, he was not to be involved in her building projects.<sup>62</sup>

Over the years several relatively temporary wooden buildings were constructed to house the orphans and to be used as school rooms. However, Mother Xavier had in her mind a clear vision of what she wanted which was a much more grandiose and permanent plan for the

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<sup>59</sup> McMaster, *Foundation* ..., 6.

<sup>60</sup> Excerpt of a letter dated 14 December 1860 to an unknown recipient, probably Mother Mary of Mercy Norris.

<sup>61</sup> Deed of Sale dated 5 December 1862, original held in the Melbourne Archives, Alphington.

<sup>62</sup> William Wardell was a prominent architect responsible for many civic and ecclesiastical buildings in the colony including St Patrick's Cathedral and St Peter and Paul's Church in Ashby, Geelong, which was completed in 1864. See: Evans, A G, *William Wardell: Building with Conviction*, Ballan: Connor Court Publishing, 2010.

convent complex. In fact, she resolved to build permanently within the first three years which she did.

Originally, she consulted the Dublin architect, John Bourke. His work would have been known to her because in 1855 he had been commissioned to design, plan and generally supervise the building of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital which was going on while Mother Xavier was the superior of Baggot Street.<sup>63</sup> He provided a master plan<sup>64</sup> but to continue with him as the architect was impracticable because of distance and the long delay in communication so Mother Xavier commissioned a well-known Geelong architect, Joseph Lowe Shaw,<sup>65</sup> who also produced a master plan which was in the main realised over the next twenty years, to begin to design a permanent set of bluestone buildings around a central quadrangle.<sup>66</sup> In 1861 prior to accepting tenders for the first building, she wrote:

The plan, as I sent it to you will be carried out and, as we came out here to build a Convent, what I am thinking of is to raise the story on that wing and finish it with a gothic window and a Goth [sic] Front – and build a little church at the end – that is, at the end of the front, but it will be a long time yet before I begin to think of more than I shall have when the Orphanage is settled. I shall rest then and after the debt is paid perhaps I shall save something towards building, but I have had enough of debts for my life.<sup>67</sup>

This building, now known as the east wing, was constructed in 1861, added on to in 1869 and finally completed in 1871, this time under the supervision of a Melbourne architect, Thomas Kelly. Originally a temporary and inadequate orphanage, it eventually became part of facilities designed for boarders and members of the community.

In 1862, construction began on the south wing which was to be a new and much better equipped permanent orphanage. With a sense of optimism, Mother Xavier had written back to Baggot Street:

The plans for the new building are very nice. I am getting a specification. By next month I hope to be able to say a tender has been accepted. The Bishop is, I think, very anxious that we should proceed with the work and indeed, so am I. ... Mr Shaw gives me hope of having a dormitory sixty –four by twenty-five feet

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<sup>63</sup> Nolan, *Caring for the Nation*, 8-13.

<sup>64</sup> McMaster, *Foundation ...*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Lowe Shaw, an Irishman, migrated to Australia in 1830 and settled in Geelong. He designed many buildings in Geelong and surrounding districts, including several churches. He migrated to Dunedin in 1876 and died in 1906. See: Huddle, Lorraine, 'Joseph Shaw', <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/AUS-VIC-GEELONG-DISTRICT/200>, accessed 30 November 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Watts et al, *Mercy Girls*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Maguire to Norris, 8 January 1861.

which would be very nice. Upstairs here, the view of the bay will be lovely from the second story.<sup>68</sup>

Fortunately a grant of £500 was received from the government and loans, collections and donations made up the total required for this building which was opened in 1864.<sup>69</sup>

Building of the north wing, designed by Thomas Kelly, began in 1871. The foundation stone of this building was laid with great ceremony. In a cavity beneath it a sealed container was placed. It contained the following citation written on vellum:

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, A.D. 1871, during the Pontificate of Pope Pius IX and during the reign of Queen Victoria, as Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Viscount Canterbury being Governor of the Colony of Victoria, J. A. Goold, Archbishop of Melbourne, in the presence of Archdeacon Slattery and a number of the laity with Rev. William Kelly S. J. as present, laid the Foundation Stone of the Convent of Our Blessed Lady of Mercy, under the special patronage of St. Francis Xavier, the Apostle of Australia, T. A. Kelly being Architect, and the Rev. Mother Xavier Maguire, the Superioress.<sup>70</sup>

She may have been mentioned last in the list of important people, but there is no doubt Mother Xavier was the inspiration and creator of the vision which was realised on that day.

A report of the day published in *The Geelong Advertiser* on the following day considered that:

It is indeed a lovely spot, and has been so improved by the Lady Superioress and her companion Sisters of Mercy as to make it a most delightful retreat for those who have withdrawn themselves from the world, or for the religious instruction of the rising generation.

Finally, the west wing, which was commissioned by Mother Xavier a few months before her death in 1879, provided further facilities for the expanding community.

While we have no direct evidence from her, it could be argued that Mother Xavier derived the greatest sense of achievement when the convent chapel was completed in 1874. Designed by Thomas Kelly, a well known church architect, the L-shaped gothic style building was built of bluestone and Ceres sandstone and while not quite complete was formally opened on 24 May 1874. It cost £6843.4s.2d, with the main body reserved for the community and the large side chapel for the boarders. One of the distinguishing features of this beautiful building is a large

<sup>68</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 September 1862.

<sup>69</sup> Watts et al, *Mercy Girls*, 26-27.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in McMaster, *Foundation ...*, 17.

stained glass window set over the sanctuary which was a gift from the families of early boarders.<sup>71</sup>

A long standing tradition relates that Mother Xavier said on its completion – *Nunc dimittus*, ie, “My work is finished”. Actually it was not until 1877 that it was finally complete when it was painted, the floor tiled and prayer stalls for the community were put in.<sup>72</sup>

Mother Xavier’s wish to have all the works of the Sisters of Mercy basically on the one site at Newtown quickly became a reality. Within a few years, it contained a convent, boarding school, orphanage, industrial school, day school and select school as well as a farm. It was a tangible expression of her vision, drive and business acumen, and she was a formidable and astute leader of the whole enterprise. The epitaph on the tombstone of the great architect of St Paul’s Cathedral in London, Sir Christopher Wren, may be translated as: “Reader, if you seek his monument – look around you.”<sup>73</sup> Much the same comment could be made about Mother Xavier when viewing the complex she built over some twenty years. But these buildings are only part of her legacy and part of an expression of her contribution to the Sisters of Mercy, the city of Geelong and the Catholic Church of Victoria and beyond.

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<sup>71</sup>Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 44.

<sup>72</sup>Watts *et al*, *Mercy Girls*, 22, McMaster, *Foundation ...*, 20.

<sup>73</sup>*Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*

## Chapter 6 Mother Xavier's Contribution and Influence

Mother Xavier died aged 60 on 30 August 1879 after several years of ill health, said to be caused by acute rheumatism, which saw her confined to a wheel chair for many years.<sup>1</sup> Her Requiem Mass was presided over by Archbishop Goold. The *Geelong Advertiser* of 2 September 1879 noted that:

The convent chapel was crowded with worshippers, many persons being unable to obtain even standing room. The ceremony was very impressive and effective, nearly all present being moved to tears. At noon, the convent bell commenced tolling, the doleful notes being continued for about half an hour. After Mass, a procession was formed and the mournful cortège wended its way from the chapel along the spacious corridor in the convent building, through the main entrance, and along the narrow pathway in the convent gardens to the little cemetery on the western side of the convent.

Apart from the clergy and their attendants, the procession consisted of:

Sisters of Mercy, 25 in number; children of the Society of Mary, numbering about 60, dressed all in mourning, with black falls;<sup>2</sup> the Convent girls (boarders), dressed in black; the girls from the Catholic Orphanage, wearing white falls; and the Catholic girls from the Industrial Schools similarly dressed.

*The Advocate* in its 6 September 1879 issue also contained details of Mother Xavier's funeral and a lengthy account of her life. It noted that:

Not alone amongst the Catholic portion of the community, but also among members of the various Protestant sects, were to be heard expressions of sorrow and sympathy. The record of the deceased lady's career is a splendid illustration of what can be accomplished by zeal, perseverance and a sublime devotion to duty.

The article concluded that:

Her character may be summed up in one sentence – an inherent capacity for government, possessing an almost masculine strength of mind, ever giving a bright example of virtue and piety, while carefully attentive to the smallest details incidental to the management of the community under her charge.

At a chapter meeting held on 15 September 1879 and presided over as usual by Archbishop Goold, Mother Xavier's long-time collaborator and close friend, Mother Gabriel Sherlock, was elected her successor.

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<sup>1</sup> O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Veils.

## The person

There is a description of Mother Xavier in Sister Mary Ignatius O'Sullivan's book, *The Wheel of Time*. Sister Mary Ignatius entered the Convent of Mercy on 1 June 1894 and was one of three novices<sup>3</sup> being prepared for profession by Mother Gabriel Sherlock when the latter died on 3 December 1897, two days before they were due to be professed (the ceremony was rescheduled for a month later). It is quite feasible to postulate that Mother Gabriel spoke about Mother Xavier to the novices so this description might have some veracity. Sister Mary Ignatius wrote:

In person, Mother Maguire was tall and correspondingly well-built. Those who remember her say she was of very dignified bearing, but aloof in manner with strangers. Her face was pleasant, but she could not be called beautiful. The early nuns' affection for their Mother in God was well known. "They fairly worshipped her" is the common comment made. ... She was always a dignified and firm, but most affectionate and generous mother in regard to her spiritual daughters. Her early social condition, wealth and culture of mind and body were forgotten in their regard, and she was as their "servant of servants".<sup>4</sup>

In approximately 1872, the community commissioned a portrait of Mother Xavier. Tradition relates that she was not too keen on the idea. However, "... in connivance with a lady artist in Geelong, some of the sisters managed a series of visits to the convent. In these the visitor closely scrutinised Mother Maguire and then went home and painted."<sup>5</sup> Mother Xavier could hardly have been ignorant of the artist's intentions but at least she would not have had to waste time sitting for her portrait. The portrait depicts a strong featured middle aged woman with a pensive expression on her face and dressed in the traditional Mercy habit. The artist in question was Kate Streeter, née Sheppard (1842 – 1930). Born in Ireland, she came with her parents to Geelong in 1858. By 1867 she was a licenced drawing teacher. In 1869, her portrait of Dean Hayes received great praise and the commission to paint Mother Xavier was one of several commissions which followed.<sup>6</sup>

Not everyone was so positive about Mother Xavier. Willie McAuley, Catherine McAuley's nephew, had been cared for by his aunt after the death of his parents but went to sea aged

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<sup>3</sup> Sisters Mary Louis Lynch (1874-1966), Ignatius O' Sullivan (1875-1969), and Zita Cuddihy (no further information available – presumed left the community at some stage). See: O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 81.

<sup>4</sup>O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 75-76.

<sup>5</sup>O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 75. This portrait is displayed in Sacred Heart College, Geelong.

<sup>6</sup> See: Design & Art Australia Online, 'Kate Streeter (1842-1930)', <https://www.daao.org.au/bio/kate-streeter/biography/>, accessed 21 October 2015.

eighteen, was not heard of again and was presumed to be dead.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, however, he arrived in Australia and settled in Colac, a town in the western district of Victoria. Some years later, he wished to discover some information regarding his family and to correct the erroneous impression that he had died at sea. It did not at first go well as he described in a letter to his cousin, Sister Mary Camillus (Teresa) Byrne:<sup>8</sup>

... in 1862 I wrote to Mrs Maguire in Geelong Convent, asking for some particulars. She said she was going to write to Baggot Street and would let me know if she heard anything, but she never wrote. Some years after, I went to Geelong and called to see her. I thought she treated me rather cool, so I never troubled her again.<sup>9</sup>

Fortunately he fared better with Mother Ursula Frayne:

More than twelve months since, I went by invitation to see our old friend Mrs Frayne in Melbourne. I verily believed she thought she was about to see an imposter, but she was soon convinced after scanning my features closely. She said how very like dear Aunt I was and, God bless her, gave me a hearty welcome.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, William sent his daughters to board at Sacred Heart College, Geelong. Several cordial letters from the next superior to him exist, and Frances, one of his daughters, entered the Kyneton Convent on 24 September 1891, was received on 24 March 1892 and was given the religious name, Mary Catherine. She was professed on 17 April 1894 and spent most of her religious life in Kyneton, dying there on 11 October 1952.

There are tantalising and unverifiable comments on what might have been considered some of Mother Xavier's less admirable qualities. One writer in an oblique comment noted that: "If she were, as some have said, domineering and impulsive in Ireland, she showed neither of these qualities in Australia."<sup>11</sup> An anonymous and undated document stated that when Mother Ursula Frayne met her years afterwards, presumably in Australia, she found that her impetuosity and eccentricity had died down.<sup>12</sup> Mother Austin Carroll,<sup>13</sup> the author of the four

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<sup>7</sup> Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 237-246.

<sup>8</sup> Teresa Byrne was the child of Catherine McAuley's cousin and her godchild. When her mother died in 1822, Catherine adopted her. She lived with Catherine in Baggot Street, entered there in 1837, was received in February 1838, being given the religious name of Sister Mary Camillus, and was professed in May 1841. She went on the first foundation to New York in 1846 and died in Baltimore in 1885. Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 53, 361

<sup>9</sup> McAuley to Byrne, 9 July 1884, in Imelda Keene,(ed), *The Letters of William Montgomery McAuley*. (Bermondsey: Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, (nd)), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Keene, *Letters of William Montgomery McAuley*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> O'Sullivan, *The Wheel of Time*, 76.

<sup>12</sup> *BSF*

volume, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, in noting her death, made this slightly ambiguous observation: “Her noble but somewhat impetuous spirit was well purified by suffering and humiliation before she was called from her exile to her home.”<sup>14</sup> This is a somewhat curious statement and there is no indication of what “the humiliation” was that Mother Xavier endured. Was it perhaps that she was not re-elected superior at Baggot Street in 1858 and felt this keenly? In his trenchant criticism, Goold singled out what he considered to be her: “... poor notions of obedience and humility” and considered that she was: “... wanting in the true spirit of a good religious.”<sup>15</sup> It is not known what prompted this comment in 1865 and there is no indication in entries in his diary that her attitudes and behavior caused him any further concern..

Domineering, impulsive and eccentric or perhaps clearheaded and convinced of the rightness of her actions, not given to wasting time wondering what to do and not constrained necessarily by what people thought – perhaps another way of interpreting these assessments. Another factor which may or may not be relevant is just what was meant by some of these comments, cloaked as they may have been by ladylike Victorian era rectitude. What is known however is that before she arrived in Australia Mother Xavier had demonstrated leadership skills, organisational ability and willingness to be adventurous. She had obviously gained the confidence of the community at a relatively young age as a religious as she was elected novice mistress, a position requiring prudence, discernment and understanding, and not long afterwards, elected superior. However, whether or not she fulfilled this last position to general satisfaction is a matter for conjecture unable to be resolved at this point in time.

### **Her letters**

The extant letters written by Mother Xavier, mainly to the superior of the time at Baggot Street, come mainly from the early days of the Geelong foundation. As such they give her personal insights and interpretations but for later times other sources must be utilised. The letters are for the most part factual and pragmatic.

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret Carroll entered the Sisters of Mercy in Cork in 1853, was received in May 1854, being given the religious name of Sister Mary Teresa Austin, and was professed in 1856. She went to the United States in 1856 and spent most of her life there, founding several convents, particularly in the southern states. She was a prolific author, writing a four volume chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, a life of Catherine McAuley, several other books and translations of books and many articles in Catholic periodicals of the time. She died in 1909. See: Mary Hermenia Muldrey, *Abounding in Mercy: Mother Austin Carroll* ( New Orleans: Habersham, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Mary Austin Carroll, *Annals*, Vol 2, 527.

<sup>15</sup> Condon, *Goold Diary*, Entry for 25 July 1864.

Little is learnt about her inner or spiritual life and, while apart from one letter expressing her concern about her sister, Mother Bernard, there are only occasional references to her sisters mainly about the possibility of one or the other of them coming to join her and a brief reference to her mother. There is also little mention of anyone else in her family even though during this time both her parents presumably died and her brother Matthew was ordained a priest. However, throughout this correspondence her confidence and trust in God shines through as does her determination to do her best for the glory of God and the spread of his kingdom. While at times she found the obstacles and difficulties which arose to be burdensome and difficult, she accepted them and always tried to find a way through them.

They are also revealing of some of her less admirable character traits. At times she was quite harsh in her comments, not only about Dean Hayes and Bishop Goold, but also about one or other or indeed all of the members of her community

In many ways, these early letters are quite revealing. She showed herself at times inclined to be forthright and critical. Dean Hayes was: "... kind but not generous."<sup>16</sup> Sister Mary Aloysius "... is greatly improved but I find her very dreamy and dawdling."<sup>17</sup> On one occasion she complained: "You have no idea of how little use the Sisters are."<sup>18</sup> Then, one other time, possibly feeling she had been misinterpreted, she wrote to Mary of Mercy Norris:

One or two words in your last letter pained me. You said, "If you are as badly off as you said". You may believe what I say. It is my sincerest wish to keep united with dear Baggot Street. I therefore write freely, and if ever I have anything to say that is not sincere, I shall not write at all. What I write of in confidence I should be sorry if sisters of other Convents should hear of our difficulties or our troubles. I would never voluntarily confide mine unless where I had confidence.<sup>19</sup>

At other times she was warm and affectionate. Writing to her in 1863, commenting on a sister having difficulties, she wrote: "For what a courageous mother you have been, and I have no doubt a true mother to Sr. Teresa. Really, I think you have done a great thing, a greater than building the front of the Mater Misericordiae ..."<sup>20</sup> When things in the community seemed to

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<sup>16</sup> Maguire to Norris, July 1860.

<sup>17</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860

<sup>18</sup> Maguire to Norris, 24 May 1861.

<sup>19</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

<sup>20</sup> Maguire to Norris, March 1863. See also: Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 144, 344, 373. Mary Carton (Sister Teresa) had entered Baggot Street in 1834 as a lay sister and was professed in July 1837. She assisted Catherine McAuley as she was dying and in 1844 became a choir sister by vote of the Chapter. However, she left the community in 1865 and was partially supported by the Baggot Street community until she died in 1890.

have improved, she wrote: “The Sisters are good and affectionate and I am very happy with them but I have the thinking and, indeed, the anxieties in general, to myself.”<sup>21</sup>

In her correspondence are three letters with no definite year dates, one simply headed “Easter Monday” and the others “1 April” and “7 April”. They are addressed to someone called May who was obviously preparing to enter the convent and are friendly and practical, eg, “Do not mind the veil. The material you speak of would be too narrow – I think we have enough for one veil.” “Do not forget to bring your violin.” There is a reference to a Sister Ellen who was in the novitiate at the time so they were probably written in 1873.<sup>22</sup> “Sr Ellen tells me she got her shawl at Foy and Gibson’s for 25/-. She could not procure one any place else.”<sup>23</sup> May was probably a diminutive and it is not possible to identify her from available sources. Each letter ends with: “... best wishes to yourself, Mamma and Lucy and kind regards to your father.”<sup>24</sup>

Mostly though, Mother Xavier usually projected an image of competence and calm optimism despite difficulties. On one occasion she wrote: “We must keep up and keep on the bright side and it is all for the best, as I know, in a little time, this struggle will be past.”<sup>25</sup> She was resolute but realistic in her attitude and on another occasion wrote: “My best I shall do, and do most sincerely. I am anxious to persevere. But more than my best I cannot do.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps her strength might stem from her conviction expressed in the following statement: “I am not fretting as I have committed all to God with confidence.”<sup>27</sup> On occasions however, she did express her inner turmoil and worries. In early 1861 she confided to Mother Mary of Mercy Norris: “Someway, I feel so sad and lonely yet. Then the Sisters seem so delicate.”<sup>28</sup> Later on that year writing after the debacle of Sister Rose Lynch’s serious mismanagement of the community finances, she wrote:

... I feel sure God called me from dear Baggot Street and helped me away from the many, many ties that bound me to old Ireland. For a short time, at a time, my heart nearly breaks, but again I get better, but I always feel, oh, so lonely, so shut up in

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<sup>21</sup> Maguire to Norris, undated, possibly late 1861.

<sup>22</sup> Probably Ellen Monahan who entered in February 1873, was received in August that same year and given the religious name of Sister Mary Columba, professed in 1875 and who remained in Geelong all her life. “May” was possibly a diminutive and it is not possible to identify her from the available sources.

<sup>23</sup> Maguire to May, 7 April.

<sup>24</sup> Maguire to May, dates unknown.

<sup>25</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>26</sup> Maguire to Norris, 4 July 1860.

<sup>27</sup> Maguire to Norris, 22 February 1861.

<sup>28</sup> Maguire to Norris, 9 May 1860.

myself. Fr. Madden is the only friend I have. Even to him I would not open my entire mind.<sup>29</sup>

We have no way of knowing what she thought and felt in later years but it might be reasonable to suppose that she did not change very much. Certainly those later years would have been less burdened with some of the problems she encountered in the early years particularly in relation to the staffing and finance of a newly established foundation but no doubt they brought their own worries.

### **Leadership qualities**

Bishop Goold once stated that Mother Xavier had "... great talent for management." This she amply demonstrated especially in her twenty years in Geelong. But more than that – she had a great talent for leadership. In the system of governance established by Catherine McAuley, new foundations such as the one made in Geelong were autonomous. In addition they were expected to be self-perpetuating and self-supporting. In the early difficult years of the Geelong foundation, shortage of personnel and precarious finances caused much concern to Mother Xavier although eventually these burdens were somewhat alleviated. To Mother Xavier devolved the responsibility to lead the community and to make all the important decisions. Up to a point she was beholden to nobody and her letters back to Baggot Street give evidence of this.

However there was one important proviso. The second part of the Mercy constitutions in operation in Mother Xavier's time and concerned principally with governance begin with a straight forward and unequivocal clause:

This Religious Congregation shall be always subject to the authority and jurisdiction of the Bishop of the Diocese, and the Sisters shall respect and obey him as their principal Superior after the Holy See. If, on account of his many occupations, he should not himself be able to attend to the direction of the Community, he shall appoint a Priest, on whose prudence, piety, and experience he can depend, to govern and direct under him, and to whom he will give the necessary faculties.<sup>30</sup>

The bishop or his delegate (and there is no evidence that Bishop Goold did delegate anyone to this office), had considerable authority and power. He "...was to attend to the regulation and good order of the community, both in spiritual and temporal matters," and to: "...watch over the exact observance of the Constitutions, for the purpose of maintaining good order, peace

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<sup>29</sup> Maguire to Norris, 14 December 1860.

<sup>30</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 38.

and charity". The superior was; "... not to undertake any matter of importance relating to the Monastery or Community, without the Bishop's consent."<sup>31</sup>

The Bishop or his delegate was to preside over all reception and profession ceremonies, and was to be informed of any persons admitted as postulants or sent away from the novitiate. As well he was to sign the acts of profession and the annual income and expenditure statements, and visit the convent each year: "... in order to examine if the Rule and Constitutions be exactly observed, the obligations of the Congregation duly fulfilled, and if the Sisters live in perfect harmony, union and charity." All members of the community were obliged to present themselves to him and answer: "... such questions as he may wish to ask concerning the said matters."<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, there is no mention of this formal requirement in Bishop Goold's diary or in Mother Xavier's correspondence but his diary entries show he often visited the community when he was in Geelong so perhaps many of these requirements were met in informal ways.

He was however conscious of his authority and responsibility. As the unfortunate Sister Mary Rose Lynch was preparing to leave Australia, he wrote to the superior at Baggot Street:

Mother Mary Rose will return this month to Ireland. This change in her vocation is the subject of much talk here and to me it has been an unpleasant lesson. I had nothing to say to the selection of the sisters who came out with Mrs Maguire so far I am relieved as to personal responsibility but I cannot I regret to say, view the matter in the same light with reference to my episcopal responsibility. I have therefore informed the superiors of our two religious communities that in future none from Home should join them without my written invitation.<sup>33</sup>

The relationship between bishops and strong minded and independent mother superiors on more than one occasion in Mercy history was a recipe for conflict but apparently not in this situation. It may have been a sensitive balancing act requiring a certain delicate manoeuvring and the exercise of subtle tactics by both Bishop Goold and Mother Xavier but they appeared to have overcome any problems and achieved a fruitful working relationship.

Her first impressions of the young Australians in her care were not very complimentary. There was, for example, her reference in an 1860 letter to them being wild and unmannerly but just whom she meant is not clear as at that time there was no one in the novitiate except

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<sup>31</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 40- 42.

<sup>33</sup> Goold to Norris, 25 August 1861, quoted in Kovesi Killerby, *Frayne*, 241. The two communities referred to in his letter were those at Fitzroy and Geelong.

Sister Mary Aloysius Ryan, an Irish woman, and the schools had just begun.<sup>34</sup> Later, in 1862, in one of her many letters imploring help from Baggot Street, she describes one of her difficulties: “I am sadly off for someone understanding needle-work. The native sisters have absolutely no idea of the work and the parents are very anxious about it.”<sup>35</sup> On another occasion, in 1863, while somewhat tentatively suggesting the possibility of some applicants making a novitiate in Baggot Street, she wrote:

If these Australians be allowed to think themselves of too much importance, it would be a sad obstacle to work. Nothing would do them so much good, as an example. It would, besides, in teaching them how to act, show them their own deficiencies. What can the poor children know, as yet, of religious life.<sup>36</sup>

### **Her legacy**

On 4 October 1879, *The Advocate* carried an account of: “The Month’s Memory for the late Rev. Mother”<sup>37</sup> which was held on Tuesday 30 September at the Geelong Convent chapel in the presence of nineteen clergy, many lay people and the community. The panegyric was preached by Father C Nulty who took as his text: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours for their works will follow them. Apocal. Xiv, 13”. In many ways, this text is almost prophetic as Mother Xavier’s legacy is considered.

This legacy is significant and enduring albeit much changed and may be found in the social welfare and educational institutions which trace their foundation to her initiatives. From the beginning of the foundation, she appeared to have a fairly clear idea of how she wished the works of mercy she hoped to establish be organised on the one site as she noted in an early letter to Baggot Street: “He [Bishop Goold] says we could, by getting ground, have all our institutions together – a thing I always wished for. ... in fact the bishop has given me leave to act in any way I think best for the Sisters or for the working up of the mission.”<sup>38</sup> As well, Mother Xavier knew what kind of buildings she wanted and worked assiduously for nearly twenty years to realise her plans.

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<sup>34</sup> Maguire to Norris, 19 April 1860.

<sup>35</sup> Maguire to Norris, May 1862.

<sup>36</sup> Maguire to Norris, 23 March 1863.

<sup>37</sup> The Month’s Memory, or Month’s Mind as it is often known as, is a Mass celebrated one month after a person’s death.

<sup>38</sup> Maguire to Norris, 16 December 1859.

## Social welfare

The first work of mercy the community engaged in when they arrived was the care of the orphans in St Augustine's Orphanage. The first institution Mother Xavier established on the Newtown site was an orphanage and the first permanent building she was responsible for was for them. In early letters she often spoke of these children under the care of the sisters in tender and concerned ways. She referred to them as: "... the dear little orphans", and worried about the conditions in which they lived before the orphanage was built. By the time of her death, there were ninety eight orphans in residence.<sup>39</sup> In 1912, the orphanage's name was changed to St Catherine's Orphanage and in 1928 was transferred to a large purpose built institution in the suburb of Highton.

In 1960, in recognition of the changing clientele and more appropriate methods of child care, the name of the orphanage was changed to St Catherine's Children's Home and smaller units in the large home were established. Further changes to social welfare policy eventually led to the closing and demolition of St Catherine's Children's Home and the founding of Mercy Family Care in North Geelong. This complex contained a central administration centre, several family group homes staffed by married couples and small residential units for children with special needs. The final move for this historical descendent of Mother Xavier's orphanage was Mercy Family Care's amalgamation with three other agencies belonging to the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of St Joseph and the Christian Brothers in 1997 to form MacKillop Family Services.<sup>40</sup>

## Education

Education is a vital component of Mercy ministry. In her *Rule and Constitutions*, Catherine McAuley placed the chapter on the schools directly after the first which dealt with the object of the Congregation and described the peculiar end of the congregation as including: "... the most assiduous application to the education of poor girls ..."<sup>41</sup>

The Geelong foundation was made before successive colonial governments legislated for free, compulsory and secular education. Even though schools were always part of Mother Xavier's plan and she quickly established them, it was not for the want of trying that she did not have

<sup>39</sup> *The Advocate*, 6 September 1877.

<sup>40</sup> For an account of the history of this orphanage, see: Barnard & Twigg.  *Holding on to Hope*, 116-119, 247-248, 268-270, 297-313.

<sup>41</sup> *Rule and Constitutions*, 3.

any schools outside the convent complex. The first of these was St Patrick's School in Kildare and from then on there was a steady increase in schools staffed and administered by the Geelong Sisters of Mercy. By the nineteen fifties, as well as the schools on the convent grounds actually founded by Mother Xavier, Geelong Sisters of Mercy staffed and administered nearly all the parish primary schools, some of them long established and conducted under lay leadership, others newly established, in the Geelong area. As well as St Patrick's School,<sup>42</sup> these schools included St Mary's Girls' School, Geelong (1892), St John's, North Geelong (1923), St Bernard's, Belmont (1941), St Robert's, Chilwell (1942), St Margaret's, East Geelong (1950), St Thomas', Norlane (1954), and Holy Family, Bell Park (1955).<sup>43</sup>

Sacred Heart College continued to develop although in its early years it catered for boarders only. In line with the practice of the time primary classes were phased out in 1972 and the boarding school closed in 1975.<sup>44</sup> It is now a large and flourishing secondary school for girls. In 1903, the sisters had opened St Agnes' Ladies College in the centre of Geelong in order to cater for day students. In the following decades this school, especially when Sacred Heart College began to enrol day students, underwent several changes, not only of function but also of name,<sup>45</sup> and eventually became a precursor of the present St Ignatius College in Drysdale, a town on the Bellarine Peninsula.<sup>46</sup>

The expansion of Catholic Primary schools in the late nineteenth century was such that there were not enough religious to staff them. Two years after Mother Xavier died, under the leadership of her successor, Mother Gabriel Sherlock, the Sisters of Mercy opened St Aloysius Teachers' Training College on the convent site. This was residential and catered for young women and novices and operated until the opening of a central training college at Ascot Vale in 1909.<sup>47</sup> In 1991, this teachers' college, known for many years as Mercy Teachers' College, became part of the newly established Australian Catholic University.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> St Patrick's, Kildare (1857) was administered by the Sisters of Mercy from 1875 and combined with St Peter and Paul's, Ashby (1854) in 1911 to form St Patrick's, West Geelong.

<sup>43</sup> O'Sullivan, *Wheel of Time*, 98-100.

<sup>44</sup> Watts *et al.*, *Mercy Girls*, 84.

<sup>45</sup> Eg, Goold College, Catholic Regional College.

<sup>46</sup> Watt *et al.*, *Mercy Girls*, 48, *Wheel of Time*, 95-97.

<sup>47</sup> *The Emergence of Australian Catholic University*, [www.acu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf), accessed 14 December 2015, and O'Sullivan, *The Wheel of Time*, 73.

<sup>48</sup> See: I C E Ascot Vale Campus, *Mercy Teachers' College, 1907-1985*, Elsternwick: Port Phillip Press, 1984.

### **Mother Xavier's influence**

It is hard to measure the influence of Mother Xavier. Influence is an elusive concept, hard to define and even harder to measure. Is it able to be found in ideas, attitudes, or ways of thinking and doing things or might it be expressed in the ethos and culture of an organisation? However it is seen, there is no doubt that Mother Xavier was an influential figure in the Sisters of Mercy, both in Dublin and Geelong, and particularly in the latter convent her influence would have contributed greatly to its culture, ethos and ways of living religious life. It might also be argued that her influence in Australia extended beyond the convent she founded and the women who became Sisters of Mercy while she was alive.

In her nine years of leadership as novice mistress and superior in Dublin, she either prepared or was the superior of Sisters of Mercy who later were part of foundations in the United Kingdom, the Americas or the Antipodes. It was in this latter far away area that her influence was most pervasive and enduring. For some fifty years, the convent she established in Geelong made a vital and needed contribution to the Geelong area and beyond as foundations were made from there to the country town of Kyneton (1889),<sup>49</sup> and the Melbourne suburbs of North Melbourne (1886) and Coburg (1903). As an autonomous foundation, the community managed its own affairs and many women became professed members of the community.

Then in 1907, many of the hitherto independent Mercy foundations in Victoria,<sup>50</sup> strongly encouraged by the Archbishop of the time, Thomas Carr, decided to amalgamate and form one congregation under the leadership of a superior general. Several factors contributed to this step. One of the most important was the government requirement that all teachers had to undergo teacher training and be registered. The Victorian bishops were of the opinion that this would be best served by central teacher training college and centralised novitiates and worked hard to encourage the communities in their dioceses to consider what was for many of them a radical step.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kyneton in turn made foundations which were branch houses in Woodend (1901) and Trentham (1903), and established a separate community in Castlemaine (1905). See: Allen, *The Labourers' Friends*, 70-90-97.

<sup>50</sup> Fitzroy, Geelong, Kyneton, Mansfield, Lilydale initially and then Bendigo, Yarrawonga, Wodonga, Shepparton, Tatura, Warrnambool and Terang. Other convents joined later – the Tasmanian convents of Deloraine, Burnie and Latrobe (1908), Casterton (1914), Mildura (1919), Colac (1936). The Ballarat house, founded from Warrnambool in 1881 chose to remain independent and formed the nucleus of the Ballarat Congregation

<sup>51</sup> See: Allen, *The Labourers' Friends*, 203-212. This also affected teaching congregations such as the Presentation Sisters and the Sisters of St Brigid who also found their independent houses amalgamated.

It could be argued that Mother Xavier's ideas and influence contributed greatly to the ethos and culture of the new congregation given that several of its early leaders came from the Geelong convent.

At the first chapter of the initial amalgamating houses, at that time all in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Archbishop Carr, as was his prerogative according to the decree from Rome approving the amalgamation, appointed the superior general until the first chapter of the new group was held. His choice was Mother Evangelist Doogan, then the superior of Geelong. Agnes Doogan was Australian born and went to school at Sacred Heart College, Geelong. As a boarder, she knew Mother Xavier. She entered the Geelong convent in 1888 at the age of twenty seven and was received in 1889. After her profession in 1891, she taught in Geelong schools, including Sacred Heart College until she was elected superior of the convent in 1903. She was elected at the first chapter of the newly amalgamated Sisters of Victoria and Tasmanian and re-elected and apart from one short break remained in office until 1938.<sup>52</sup>

The Geelong influence on the ethos and culture of the new congregation was further strengthened by the appointment of the Geelong novice mistress, Mother Angela Murphy, as the novice mistress for the central novitiate. Jessie Murphy was a boarder at Sacred Heart College and entered the Geelong convent in 1881, was received in 1882 and professed in 1884. She was eighteen when Mother Xavier died so she would have known her. In 1881, Mother Angela was one of the founding party which established a community in North Melbourne and after her return to Geelong in 1901 was appointed the community's novice mistress. In 1907 she was appointed to the central novitiate at that time in Coburg, then at Ascot Vale until a purpose built novitiate was constructed in the outer Melbourne suburb of Rosanna in 1930. She remained novice mistress until 1951 and died in 1959. It has been estimated that she trained over six hundred prospective Sisters of Mercy of whom over one quarter came from Geelong.<sup>53</sup>

Both these significant figures had received all their religious training and much of their lived experience of religious life at the Geelong convent at a period redolent with the influence of Mother Xavier. Hence their attitudes and modes of thinking and operating in the wider sphere of the newly established Melbourne congregation were possibly influenced by her legacy.

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<sup>52</sup> Allen, *The Labourers' Friends*, 204-207.

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *The Labourers' Friends*, 207-210.

## Conclusion

In her letter to Archbishop Cullen after he had given his permission for the Geelong foundation, Mother Xavier wrote: “I am not going with an idea that I shall not have crosses and difficulties but I think I am going with courage, prepared to meet everything and with my entire confidence placed in God. ... I hope I may be faithful.”<sup>54</sup>

She certainly had predicted the course of her new life. Crosses and difficulties she had in abundance, especially in those early years where at times she thought the very existence of the fledgling group was threatened and the difficulties almost insurmountable. However she faced all these obstacles with courage and stamina, meeting challenges as they came head on and bravely.

The life and legacy of Mother Xavier is kept alive mostly at Sacred Heart College, the school she established in 1860, but in many ways, as far as the wider public is concerned, it is largely unacknowledged. For twenty years she was a noteworthy figure in the emerging church in the Geelong area and the institutions she founded gave much to the social, educational and cultural life of the town.

Through those who followed her, Mother Xavier played a significant role in the growth of the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (1907-2011) which is now part of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. She is an important figure in the wider Australian church scene and belongs in the largely unsung host of women religious who have contributed so much not only the Church but also to the life of the country.

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<sup>54</sup> Maguire to Cullen, 13 July, 1859.

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## APPENDIX 1

### SOME RECENT STUDIES OF WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

This bibliography is not exhaustive. It does not, for example, include studies written prior to 1990, journal articles, studies of institutions belonging to religious women, eg, schools or hospitals, and many of the studies relating to St Mary MacKillop.

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**See Also:**

Burley, Stephanie. 'A, Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious in Australia'. *Journal of the Australasian Catholic Historical Society* 26 (2006,) 46.

## APPENDIX 2

### HISTORIES OF MERCY CONGREGATIONS

These histories vary in quality and usefulness to the researcher. Many of the early ones often are short on or lacking verifiable references and tend towards a hagiographical approach. The later ones are academically rigorous.

#### Adelaide

McLay, Anne. *Women on the Move: Mercy's Triple Spiral: A History of the Adelaide Sisters of Mercy: Ireland to Argentina 1856-1880 to South Australia 1880*. Adelaide: Sisters of Mercy, 1996.

#### Ballarat

O'Connor, Heather. *The Challenge of Change: Mercy and Loreto Sisters in Ballarat 1950-1980*. Ballan: Connor Court Publishing, 2013.

#### Brisbane

Hetherington, Anne, And Pauline, Smoothy (eds). *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty, 1839 to 1892*. St Lucia: University for Queensland Press, 2011.

O'Donoghue, Mary Xaverius. *Beyond Our Dreams: A Century of the Works of Mercy in Queensland*. Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1961.

#### Grafton

Raphael, Mary, and Celestine, Mary. *As Gentle Rain*. Sydney: Halstead Press, 1960.

#### Melbourne

Allen, Maree. *The Labourers' Friends: Sisters of Mercy in Victoria and Tasmania*. Melbourne: Hargreen Publishing Company, 1989.

O'Sullivan, Mary Ignatius. *The Wheel of Time*. Melbourne: The Advocate Press, 1954.

#### Paramatta

McGrath, Madeleine Sophie McGrath. *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia – The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta 1888-1988*. Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1988.

### **Perth and West Perth**

Byrne, Geraldine (ed). *Valiant Women: Letters from the Foundation Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia, 1845-1849*. Melbourne: The Polding Press, 1981.

McLay, Anne. *Women out of Their Sphere: A History of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia from 1846*. Northbridge: Vanguard Press, 1992.

### **Rockhampton**

Christina, Mary. *The Quality of Mercy: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy in Central Queensland*. Brisbane: The Catholic Leader Press, 1964.

### **Singleton**

Kelly, Colleen. *Through Light and Shade: Sisters of Mercy Singleton 1875-1995*. Newcastle: Cambridge Press, 1997.

### **Wilcannia-Forbes**

Ryan, Mary. *A History of the Sisters of Mercy Wilcannia-Forbes Congregation 1884-1959*. Allawah: Sisters of Mercy Wilcannia-Forbes Congregation, 2004.

See also:

### **Papua New Guinea**

Flaherty, Teresa A. *Crossings in Mercy: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea, 1956-2006*. St Mary's, S A: Openbook Howden, 2008.

## APPENDIX 3

### MAGUIRE FAMILY

Parents: Richard and Margaret (née McCann)

Name	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Occupation	Education	Comments
Eliza	1819?	30 August 1879 aged 60	Sister of Mercy – Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier	Ursuline School, Cork or Thurles?	Oldest girl
John	1819?	11 January 1904 aged 85	Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army	Stonyhurst 1829-1833	Oldest son
Richard	?	3 August 1849	N/A	Stonyhurst 1829-1835	Second oldest son
James	5 May 1825	10 March 1904 aged 79	Jesuit	Stonyhurst 1836-1842	Third oldest son
Annie	1827?	16 July 1888 aged 61	Sister of Mercy – Sister Mary Philomene	Ursuline School, Cork or Thurles?	Second oldest girl
Thomas	?	N/A	Landowner & magistrate	Stonyhurst 1841-1844	Fourth oldest son
Francis?	?	N/A	County Inspector of Police?	Stonyhurst 1841-1844	Twin?
Maria	1831?	3 September 1882 aged 51	Sister of Mercy – Sister Mary Bernard	Ursuline School, Cork or Thurles?	Third oldest girl
Matthew	6 October 1835	20 April 1894 aged 60	Jesuit	St Mary's Jesuit College, Derbyshire (no record there)	Fifth oldest son.

Henrietta	11 February 1837	4 April 1931 aged 94	Sister of Mercy - Sister Mary Joseph Aloysius	Ursuline School, Cork or Thurles?	Youngest girl
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**Notes:**

This list is in some cases a little more than guesswork. While dates of and ages at death are generally available dates of birth are not, with three exceptions (James, Matthew and Henrietta). The order of birth is similarly problematic, eg,

- who was the older of Eliza and John?
- were Thomas and Francis twins (same time at Stonyhurst and Thomas had twin sons)?
- Richard was listed in his death notice as the second oldest son, but his age was not given, and he was at Stonyhurst almost at the same time as John (1829-1833) but stayed there another two years 1829-1835
- did John leave Stonyhurst early to join the British Army?
- who was the fifth brother?

## APPENDIX 4

### ENTRANCES AND PROFESSIONS 1860-1879

<b>Year</b>	<b>Entered</b>	<b>Received</b>	<b>Professed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1860</b>			1	Came from Ireland in the original party while still a novice
<b>1861</b>	2	0	0	
<b>1862</b>	3	2	0	
<b>1863</b>	2	1	0	
<b>1864</b>	5	4	1	One novice left but returned in 1869 and was professed in 1872
<b>1865</b>	0	0	0	
<b>1866</b>	4	2	2	
<b>1867</b>	0	1	0	
<b>1868</b>	0	0	0	
<b>1869</b>	1	1	1	
<b>1870</b>	1	0	0	
<b>1871</b>	2	0	1	
<b>1872</b>	0	2	1	
<b>1873</b>	5	2	0	
<b>1874</b>	3	3	1	
<b>1875</b>	3	2	2	
<b>1876</b>	1	2	0	

<b>1877</b>	8	6	2	One novice died before profession
<b>1878</b>	1	1	2	
<b>1879</b>	3	0	0	One novice left but returned in 1882
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	4 professions in April 1880

**Notes:**

1. Sources: Novices' Register, Geelong Profession Register, Geelong Graves information, Melbourne Congregation Necrology
2. Sometimes there are discrepancies regarding dates, eg, between the Novices' Register, the Profession Register, the Chapter Acts or the Necrology so I have chosen the most likely one with however no guarantee of accuracy.
3. Those for whom there is no further information apart from the date of their entrance into the community or their profession are presumed to have left the community before their reception or profession.
4. Most of the professed sisters remained in Geelong all their lives or else went to one or other of the communities founded from Geelong, especially North Melbourne (1886) or Kyneton (1889).
5. One professed sister is presumed to have left the community as there is no record of her after profession.

## APPENDIX 5

### CONVENT OF MERCY, GEELONG, COMMUNITY MEMBERS 1879

At the time of Mother Xavier's death on 30 August 1879 the community consisted of twenty five members distributed as follows:

**Professed in:**

***Dublin***

Fallon, Mary Francis Xavier

Manley, Mary Regis

McCann, Mary Stanislaus Joseph

Mullaly, Margaret Mary

Sherlock, Mary Gabriel

***Fitzroy***

McCann, Mary Clare

***Geelong***

Donaldson, Mary Juliana

Gibson, Mary Magdalen

Harty, Mary Teresa

Hoban, Mary Francis

Joyce, Mary Agnes

Lyons, Mary Bernard

Maloney, Margaret Mary

Mitchell, Mary Joseph

Monahan, Mary Columba

O'Connor, Mary Ignatius

Tarrant, Mary Patrick

**Novitiate**

***Novices***

Buckley, Mary Genevieve

Davis, Mary de Sales

Hall, Mary Austin

Keogh, Mary Borgia

Lee, Mary Cecilia

O'Sullivan, Mary Ligouri

***Postulants***

Byrne, Ellen (later Mary Brigid)

Conway, (later Mary Philomene)

**Also:**

***Returned to Ireland***

Lynch, Mary Rose (1861)

Ryan, Mary Aloysius (date unknown – possibly 1876)

***Presumed left the Convent***

Tobin, Mary Magdalen (date unknown)

***Deceased***

Farrell, Mary Gertrude (died while still a novice 16.09.1877)

Flanagan, Mary Claver (professed on death bed 30.11.1878)