

**MOTHER MARY AUGUSTINE AIKENHEAD
THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF CHARITY OF AUSTRALIA**

Sr Carmel Coyle RSC

Mary Augustine Aikenhead

The foundress of our order was born in Cork, Ireland on 19 January 1787, at a time when the country was recovering from the penal code. One aspect of these troubled times was the prohibition of Catholic Education and the deprivation of Catholics of civil life.

Her parents were married at the Holy Trinity Church, Cork in 1785 and Mary was baptised at St. Mary's Protestant Church, Sandon on 4 April 1787.

At a very early age Mary was aware of the distinction between the wealthy Protestants and the deprived Catholics. This was evident in her own home situation. Dr David Aikenhead, a Protestant, was a chemist, a landowner with some considerable degree of wealth and her mother, Mary Stackpole, whose family were strong in their faith, were some of the deprived.

As she grew, her parents were aware of her delicate health and it was decided she be cared for in a healthier atmosphere by foster parents, which was not unusual at that time. These folk, John and Mary Rorke, lived at Eason's Hill, which was a semi-rural area and her parents could visit her often. She stayed with them until she was six years old.

The Rorkes had always been faithful to their Catholic Faith and the years under the care of John and Mary made a lasting impression on little Mary. While she was there she was baptised 'properly' at the Bishop's Chapel, where the faithful gathered each Sunday for Mass. To all this, Dr Aikenhead held no opposition.

When it was time for Mary to return home, she was so distressed at leaving the Rorkes, her father found employment for them in his own home; Mary as a nurse maid and John working around the home. By this time, Mary had two sisters, Ann and Margaret, and a brother, St. John.

Mary was always aware of people and on one occasion she asked her father to buy his coal from another man as she thought he needed more money. On another occasion she asked her father for medicine for someone she thought was too poor to buy their own.

Although the Rorkes lived with the Aikenhead family, it was Mary's father who supervised her night prayers and forbade her to say any prayers to Our Lady or the other devotions Mary Rorke had taught her. He also wanted Mary to attend Protestant services with him each Sunday.

Mary also spent some time with her grandparents, the Stackpoles, where the prayers to Our Lady and other devotions were revived. She began to attend daily Mass, supposedly unbeknown to her father, and made excuses why she could not accompany him to services on Sunday.

Dr Aikenhead retired in 1796 ready to enjoy some years of peace and relaxation when he became very unwell. The Protestant clergyman visited him but he was unconsolated with his attention. Through the example of his wife, Mary and the Rorkes, he expressed a wish to be received into the Catholic Church and died peacefully a few days later.

After Dr Aikenhead's death, there was much property investment and finances to attend to and as Mrs Aikenhead could not, Mary became head of the house and the role of administrator came naturally to her.

Mary was a very attractive girl and had many friends some of whom had the same vision as herself - helping those in need. She was well liked in most circles as she made no distinction between rich and poor, Protestant and Catholic.

Mary was now 15 and her Father's conversion had made a deep impression on her. She had not received her First Holy Communion, which she prepared for and received on the Feast of St Peter and Paul in 1802. She was Confirmed by the Bishop of Cork on 2 July the same year. Most Catholics at this time were wary of professing their faith publicly. Rev. Dr Florence McCarthy, the Parish Priest, made a great impression on her with his sermon of Dives and Lazarus. Here she saw the same story as she was experiencing in her daily life. It was also where her focus had been for some time as she was already visiting the poor in their homes with her friend, Cecilia Lynch, who was about to go to Dublin to join the Poor Clares.

Mary travelled to Dublin with the family. There she met Father Daniel Murray SJ, who became her life long friend and who was also looking for a way to alleviate the needs of the poor. Their ideas were so well related it was decided to make a move and find a congregation who could help prepare Mary to found her own, for this purpose.

It was finally decided that Mary would go to York, where the congregation of the Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary were established. It had been founded some years before by Mary Ward. As with Father Murray's Society of Jesus, the Institute had the same Rule based on the Ignatian Spirituality. Father Murray arranged for Mary and another young girl, Alicia Walsh, to travel to York. This parting was very hard for Mary. She was now 25, her mother had died and, although her trust in Divine Providence was unshakeable, she was anxious for her two sisters and brother.

The trip to York took two weeks by sea and coach and they arrived on 6 June for Mary to commence her novitiate at the Bar Convent, York. This date is still an important one in our Congregation.

There they resided for three years; working, praying and recreating with these Sisters. Mary and Alicia spent many hours writing Rules and other relevant documents which would help them when they needed to return to their own work. Dr Murray kept in constant touch and encouraged Mary every step of the way.

Mary took the name Sister Augustine and Alicia took Catherine. In February 1815, Dr Murray came to collect them. He had suggested they open their own Foundation at Harold's Cross, Dublin, where there was an establishment for orphans. Father arranged for a section to be set aside as a convent and a chapel. Dr Murray had recently travelled to Rome and was appointed Archbishop of Dublin, much to the delight of the Sisters. Mary's own motto "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" was the keynote of her life. These words came to her after a talk by Fr. St. Leger SJ. Both he and Fr. Peter Kenny SJ often came to the Sisters to lead them in lectures, retreats and triduums.

In 1819 a convent was opened at Stanthorpe Street, Dublin. As a novitiate with four novices and three postulants, Mother stressed to all who entered that they did require more hands but they must have heads and, above all, hearts so single as to love God alone. She also stressed that not all who entered would persevere.

By 1821 the Presentation Sisters and the Christian Brothers had established schools in Ireland.

Mother Aikenhead was asked to begin a school in Gardiner Street, Dublin. Most of the children had been to Protestant schools or none at all and the Sisters were not very welcome, so it became complete chaos. Out of the blue came Brother Duggan who helped the Sisters to prepare their lessons and gave them a few clues about discipline. Life became much easier and the Sisters never forgot the kindness of Brother Duggan.

In 1826, Typhoid Fever raged in the country and many of the Sisters lost their lives, including Ann, Mother Aikenhead's sister, who had joined the Congregation. Some of the Sisters continued visiting the sick, with the health authorities.

At the time, Mother and Dr Murray could see the need for a hospital for the poor of Ireland. In 1833 word spread that this may happen and many generous donations were forthcoming. Then some people became wary. However not to be deterred, Mother bought a building in Stephen's Green. She had already sent three Sisters to the Hospitalliers of St. Thomas of Villanova, in France, to train as nurses and, on their return, the building was ready for patients. It was named St. Vincent's, the first of many such named hospitals to flourish under the care of our Sisters. As the number of beds increased, many doctors were approached and were delighted to be involved. Long before Florence Nightingale revolutionised general standards of hospital care, St Vincent's became the first hospital to introduce continental standards of nursing.

St Vincent's Hospital New York was one of the many hospitals involved in treating the injured survivors of the 2001 September 11 tragedy there.

One of the most outstanding projects undertaken by a Sister in Ireland was at Foxford where Mother Arsenius was asked to go, with four other Sisters, to open a national school. Like many other Sisters she had come from a wealthy family and, as with Mother Aikenhead, from an early age she was disturbed at both the distinction between rich and poor and the religious discrimination.

When she arrived Mother Arsenius saw that the River Moy flowed rapidly alongside the site for the convent. Although there had previously been a woollen mill nearby she envisaged a greater plan to establish a mill to give work to the unemployed and immediately began work on this. As could be expected, her plans were fraught with opposition. However with the support of friends they soon began training 40-100 unemployed young people in weaving, dairying, laundering, gardening, cooking and sewing. The school began in a disused corn store.

Mother Arsenius personally took samples of cloth from shop to shop and, very soon with the help of some distinguished folk of the area, the woollen mills were employing many hundreds of people. As in all walks of life, some seized the opportunity and were rewarded.

By the early 1900s, schooling, First Communion groups, Corpus Christi processions, an orchestra and handball tournaments were all part of life at Foxford, under the care of the Sisters of Charity.

The Place which was originally called Providence Mills Foxford still stands. The Mills still sell various items of Foxford woollen clothing. The original buildings of the chapel, school and music school can be visited with other tourist attractions including a museum on the site where, in various rooms, life size figures tell the story of the growth of the town of Foxford under the direction of Mother Arsenius.

In 1836 an approach was made by Bishop Polding to Mother Aikenhead to send some Sisters to the New Mission in “New Holland” as Australia was then called. Dr Ullathorne arrived in Ireland with pamphlets about the misery and hopelessness of convict life in the country and these were made known to all the Sisters’ communities and, on Holy Saturday 1838, Mother Aikenhead gave Dr Ullathorne the names of five Sisters willing to go to Australia.. Mother prepared the Sisters well by personally packing all that they would need including retreat notes, spiritual papers, chapel requisites, a crucifix with a black figure to help them in their contact with the aborigines, good clothing, and a government school book. In all the years until her death, Mother often sent parcels to the Sisters at this Mission and they never forgot her kindness.

Mother Aikenhead died on 22nd July 1858 at Harold’s Cross, Dublin.

Mission in a New Land

Mother Aikenhead’s wish was that this would be a separate Congregation. It is now known as The Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia. The five who set out from Dublin were Mother John Cahill, Sister Xavier Williams (a novice), Sister de Sales O’Brien, Sister Laurence Cator and Sister Mary Baptist de Lacy, a nursing sister from St Vincent’s Dublin. They travelled for four and a half months on the ship *Francis Speight* and arrived at Sydney on 31 December 1838, twenty-three years after the congregation had been founded.

A great welcome awaited them and on 1st January 1839 a High Mass, in honour of these five Sisters and other religious who had arrived with them, was held. Their religious attire, which has been modified over the years, must have appeared daunting to the residents, many of whom had not seen it before.

The Sisters first stayed at a residence at Woolloomooloo then the Bishop found a residence for them at Parramatta which, while suitable as a temporary residence, was totally inadequate for a permanent place.

One of our first benefactors was a Mr William Davis, who realised the plight of the Sisters and their need for the necessities of life. He arranged for the Sisters to move to more suitable premises and gave them £100 a year.

As soon as the Sisters arrived at Parramatta, they began visiting the factory and house of detention for women convicts. The number of inmates, comprising both women and children, ranged from 1200 to 1500. The first reports from the Sisters about the every day scenes of disorder and riotous behaviour may be better imagined than described.

On the day of the first visit by the Sisters, many thousands gathered on the flagstones and the joy on the faces of the women was indescribable as they seemed to know immediately that the Sisters were there to rescue them from their dreadful state.

The Governor, Sir George Gipps and Lady Gipps welcomed the Sisters who then spoke to the women reminding them of God's love for them and inspiring them to look for better things in life than they were now experiencing. The Sisters then spoke to the Governor about better working conditions for the women whose tasks included breaking stones and many other hard and degrading work. The Sisters asked for a laundry to be built, sewing rooms set up and some wages given in return for work by the women.

As these changes were implemented, the standard of life improved dramatically and the officers were astounded at the effect this all had on the lives of the women. It was soon discovered that some of the women had great singing voices and these formed a choir which also added to the morale of the group.

During the Sister's time at Parramatta, Sister Xavier Williams made her final vows in St Patrick's at Parramatta. Mr Justice Therry and his wife, along with Hon. H.J.J. Plunkett and Mrs Plunkett, supplied all the decoration in the church for the ceremony, and for the entertainment of the guests afterwards.

One Sister recorded that when a male convict obtained his Ticket of Leave and had a desire to settle down, he would come to the prison, show his papers and ask for a wife. This was communicated to those women who were under the sisters' instruction and wished to enter the matrimonial state. After taking a survey of the women available, the man would indicate his preference and, after some discussion - if they agreed to marry - a Priest was sent for, the happy couple were prepared for Confession and received the sacrament of Marriage.

Many of these marriages turned out satisfactorily but of course things do not always run smoothly. On one occasion the usual selection procedure had been undergone, the bridegroom went away to secure the silver ring and, after a long delay, returned bringing with him not only the silver ring but a bonnet for his bride. The lady donned the bonnet, the clergyman began "Richard, will you take this woman for thy wedded wife". He answered "I will". When the lady was asked "Eliza, will you take this man for your wedded husband" there was a long silence and the clergyman repeated the question whereupon Eliza emphatically replied "No". The prospective bridegroom looked at in amazement for some seconds then shouted "Well, give me back my bonnet" and not surprisingly left the scene - never to return.

Before the Sisters left Parramatta, an incident occurred that could well have hastened their departure. One night, the only domestic Sister was awakened by a strange noise and before she could get out of bed to investigate, her door was opened and a man wearing a mask and carrying a dimly lit lamp came over to her bed. She pretended to be asleep and assuring himself she was so, he left the room. Fearing for the safety of the other Sisters, she locked the door, opened the window and screamed for help. Her screams soon woke everyone including the neighbours. The scoundrel took off. However the next morning, the servant employed by the priest who used to deliver messages to the convent came into the kitchen where he met the Sister who had raised the alarm. He asked her what was the cause of the night's commotion. The Sister, thinking he looked about the size and shape of her unwelcome visitor, answered evasively. She told the Priest, Father Coffey, who discovered many valuable books and other articles were missing from his home. As a result the man was arrested and sent to Norfolk Island.

In Pitt Street, not far from Campbell Street, there was a large building known as "The Treadmill" which had been used as a place of punishment for more difficult convicts. When these convicts were moved to Parramatta, the military took it over and it was renamed "Carter's Barracks". After being vacant for some time, in 1845, the Archbishop spoke to the Superior of the Sisters and a formal application was made to the government for the front portion to be used as a refuge for single mothers. Permission was granted and the Sisters could care for thirty-three women. A laundry, an ironing room and sewing rooms were opened and soon the institution was self-supporting. On one occasion they held a bazaar and the sum of £400 was raised.

When Mother Scholastica Gibbons formed the Good Samaritan Congregation the new congregation took over this house.

Establishment of St Vincent's Schools and Hospitals in the New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

"Tarmons" was a property at Potts Point, owned by Sir Charles Nicholson, originally built and owned by the cousin of the great Daniel O'Connell. The property was for sale for £10 000 but the sum of £5 000 was still needed to purchase it for the Sisters. While all through the early days, money was always an important issue with the governing bodies - both religious and secular - it always seemed to come at the right time due, as our Foundress would say, to Divine Providence. On this occasion again it was so and the Sisters took possession of the property in 1857. While their previous accommodation was always adequate, this was a mansion and, for the first time, it seemed like they were living in a convent.

Sister Aloysia Mary Raymond, an Englishwoman, who was one of the newly professed Sisters, had been excellently trained by the Poor Clares in Darlington, England and she began St. Vincent's Day School while helping the other Sisters prepare their classes in some formal way.

In 1867 St. Vincent's school at Potts Point came under the jurisdiction of the new Council of Education. When Inspector Johnson paid his first official visit, like many Protestants, this gentleman felt a certain trepidation in approaching these black garbed ladies. However, we read he was soon at ease with them and congratulated the new Mistress Sister Aloysia and the Infant Mistress Sister Teresa Gannon on their excellent teaching and discipline.

One organisation, the Catholic Young Women's Association, was founded by the Rev. Dr Sheridan, principally for the young Irish girls in service in the new country. The group met each Sunday afternoon for some instruction by the Sisters. Simple education was also given enabling them to write a letter home; something they had been unable to do before.

Sister Aloysia was the first Sister to make her final vows in the Chapel of St Vincent's at Potts Point; being followed up to this day by many hundreds of young women.

In 1857, St Vincent's at Potts Point became the Mother House of our Congregation, with St. Vincent's Secondary Boarding School yet to be established. Although this College has expanded greatly over the years, unfortunately we no longer have sisters in residence there for, as is the case with many of our larger houses, the colleges have taken over as there are so few sisters to use them.

In 1888 the Sisters had been in the colony for 50 years and they numbered 120. There was a Mass of Thanksgiving in St. Mary's Cathedral celebrated by Bishop Moran. St. Vincent's Hospital, which had been the dream of Sister Baptist de Lacey (one of the first to arrive) had opened in 1870. By 1888 a suitable convent had also been built near the hospital for the Sisters.

In Hobart an orphanage and schools were well under way and the Sisters had opened several places in Melbourne and Sydney. St Mary's School had been a great place for the Sisters' mission work. It was through the children in the inner city (as we now know it) that their parents came be helped by the Sisters. When a group of children were presented for their First Holy Communion at St Mary's Cathedral, the fervour and piety of these young children had a great effect on all attending; and led to many renewing their commitment to their Faith.

At this time of celebration St.Vincent's Melbourne was almost completed and, while over the first fifty years there were many times fraught with anxiety, there was much for which to be grateful. One of the first five Sisters was still working in Hobart and the number of vocations was increasing. In the streets of Sydney there were many whose lives had been touched by the Sisters who were well known for their teaching of schoolwork and Sunday catechism, care in orphanages, and nursing.

In 1892 the Sisters began visiting the old mens home at Lidcombe. When I lived at Auburn in the 1960s, each second Saturday afternoon two of us would visit that same old men's home. Also in 1892 St Joseph's Hospital at Auburn was opened as a place for consumptive patients. Later this became a more general hospital.

In 1918 Sister Therese Cotter who worked at St. Vincent's Hospital also did some visitation and was aware of the many children in State schools who needed religious instruction. She inspired a group of young girls to form a club they named *Theresians*. The members began visiting homes, bringing children to Mass on Sundays, instructing them for the sacraments, helping with parish work and also helping to fulfil the spiritual and material needs of so many after World War I. By 1936 this work was well under way with 20 centres, a holiday home at Padstow. A home for smaller children at Edgecliffe (still operating in the 70s) was established. *Prague House* was opened for homeless men in Melbourne under the direction of one of our Sisters.

Soup Kitchens were set up in Darlinghurst by Sister Clare Richardson. A shelter in Tusculum Street behind Potts Point Convent provided meals for unemployed men and this was run by Sister Maurus who also worked at the Sydney Goal. Her work at the Goal was followed by the well known Sister Germanus McQuillan from Toowoomba.

By the 1920s the States of New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania had each established primary and secondary schools as well as a St. Vincent's Hospital. "Charities" was a household name in these States and the Sisters had also established Mt. St. Evin's Private Hospital in Melbourne, St. Vincent's at Lismore and had plans under way for a St. Vincent's Hospital at Bathurst.

The Congregation established in Queensland and Beyond

As a mural in St Stephen's Cathedral showed for many years, the Sisters of Mercy were the first religious sisters to come to Brisbane. When Archbishop Duhig succeeded Archbishop Dunne, he was determined to broaden and diversify religious orders in the diocese; so, in 1920 when Mother Berchmanns Daly, an Irish-born Sister, became Superior-General and wrote to the Archbishop mentioning that she was looking for "a resting place" - preferably in Toowoomba - for invalid Sisters he seized the opportunity. Although the Range would not have been his first choice, after considerable communication, Toowoomba was settled on. Monsignor Fouhy from Toowoomba already had the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Brothers and the Good Samaritan Sisters there and was anxious to establish a hospital with another Congregation. In 1920 three Sisters came with Mother Berchmanns and Sister Raphael to the hospitality of the other two Congregations of Sisters until their own convent was set up.. Many generous donations were forthcoming and building commenced at Mackenzie Street (still the site of the present convent) with the foundation stone being blessed in 1921 and the convent finally opened by Dr. Mannix on 19 November 1922.

By this time a foundation stone for a church/school had been laid at Ashgrove. The first Mass had been celebrated by Archbishop Duhig in *Betheden*, a stately home on Waterworks Road. The Archbishop then promised he would soon have a church for them and a small wooden one was opened in 1923 under the newly appointed parish priest, Father Lalor.

Some years later, when Archbishop Duhig was travelling to Wagga Wagga for the consecration of the Cathedral, he called on Mother Canice Bruton, then the Superior-General, asking if she would undertake to open a school at Ashgrove. Mother Bruton said she would travel to look at the site, again being offered hospitality with the Sisters of Mercy at All Hallows.

Grantuly was a home built by the Stewart family and Reverend Mother was impressed by it. Incidentally, another home of the Stewart family named *Glenlyon* was owned by the Marist Fathers until last year.

Like her foundress, Mother Canice notified the Communities and, on May 21st, five Sisters set out from Sydney. They stopped en route at Toowoomba where they were greeted warmly by both the Sisters and nurses there. Then on 25 May the five arrived at Brisbane Railway Station again to another warm reception by Father Lalor P.P., Mrs. Devoy, a sister of one of the arriving Sisters and Mr Moore, the previous owner of *Grantuly*. They enjoyed a welcome lunch prepared by Messrs Purcell, Craig and Fincks. Kitty, one of Mrs Purcell's daughters, became a Sister of Charity in 1927 has been a Sister for 70 years and recently celebrated her 102nd Birthday at the Lillian Cooper Nursing Home at Kangaroo Point where she is a resident.

The next day Father Lalor took Mother Edmund, Sister Agnes Fitzgerald, Sister Albertus, Sister Damien and Sister Germaine to *Dara*, the home of the Archbishop, to be welcomed and the following Sunday they were welcomed by the Parish and their convent blessed.

Among the luggage brought from Sydney was a chalice which Mother Aikenhead gave to the first five Sisters when they left Ireland and like her Foundress, Mother Canice had packed many articles which would be of use for the Sisters in this new venture. Thus the sisters began life in their lovely new surroundings.

On June 1st they began classes at the convent with 28 pupils. They did much visiting and soon the numbers increased. The parish also had a Mission which, through the Sisters and Father Lalor, reached many parishioners who wanted to become involved with the parish and the work of the Sisters.

The tremendous and self-sacrificing generosity of benefactors that began with the Sister's arrival in 1925, has continued for 76 years.

One Sunday afternoon, some months after the Sisters arrived, Father Lalor was killed in a motor car accident on Waterworks Road. Father had been extremely kind to the Sisters and this was a big loss for them. Soon Father Hogan was appointed as Parish Priest and he soon had a larger church and a school building established. In August 1927, 175 pupils walked to their new school where the classes under the care of the Sisters of Charity continued for 54 years. In 1981 the Sisters withdrew. The church accommodated hundreds of worshippers for almost 30 years until a new church was opened in 1957.

After the primary school was established, the Sisters began a kindergarten at the convent. Very soon they applied for and gained educational status for a secondary college. This began with students in 1932, while the kindergarten was operating. The first brick building of the college was opened and named Mt. St. Michaels in 1942. This too continued to expand and now has 700 students. The Sisters withdrew from administration of the college although some continued in various roles on staff until 1996.

The Sisters were invited to go to Fiji in 1957 - their first time outside Australia - to train their Sisters and their students in education. Some years later a number of those Fijian Sisters came to Australia to further their spiritual and educational growth and later one of their Congregation was granted permission to join our Congregation. She is now on the staff of St. Vincent's Hospital at Robina, Queensland which was opened on 25 August 2000.

Sisters also went to Papua New Guinea for a period of fifteen years; again to educate the Sisters. They held positions on the Board of Education, developed training colleges for their own Sisters who wished to take up this particular work and formed Catechetical Programmes. The Sisters worked in Megiar and Bundi and their work continued as long as it was needed and there were Sisters to go.

In 1984 some of our Sisters began working with *Care Australia* and *Caritas Australia*. They spent time in refugee camps in Rawanda, Macedonia and Cambodia. Also at this time we received an invitation to join our Irish counterparts in Zambia to teach and nurse. Many of our Sisters have accepted this challenge and at present we have three Sisters in Zambia, one in Dili, one in Lagos; all involved in both education and nursing.

Mt Olivet Hospital at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane was opened in 1957. The land had been given to the Sisters for a hospital dedicated to the care of the terminally ill, irrespective of religion, and this has remained the purpose of the hospital. The benefactor was a Miss Bedford whose gift was in memory of her great friend, Dr Lillian Cooper; one of the first female doctors in Brisbane. The administration and nursing was initially carried out by many Sisters. Several more levels have since been added and it now has eight storeys, all of which have recently been refurbished with each floor allocated to a different level of health care.

Marycrest Retirement Centre, with the adjoining chapel and convent, was built in 1977 and caters for 160 residents on five floors with the sixth floor being the Lillian Cooper Nursing Home with 30 patients. The author works at *Marycrest* three days a week.

The Mt Olivet Board of Directors offered to administer Archdiocesan Aged Care. This has brought together the administration of Mt Olivet; Rainworth; Oxford Park-Mitchelton and Gympie.

In 1984 the Ministry to HIV/AIDS patients began out of the Sacred Heart Hospice at Darlinghurst in New South Wales and in 1994 the *Tree of Hope Centre* for carers of these patients was established in Albion, Sydney, by one of our Sisters.

Quite recently we have opened, in combination with the Holy Spirit Sisters, a new hospital at Chermside located in the grounds of Prince Charles Hospital. This has been called "Holy Spirit Northside" and we hope it will prove to be a worthwhile venture.

One of the main thrusts of my ministries is to remember our benefactors. While only a few benefactors are actually named here, I am well aware how often we have been looked after - as our Foundress would remind us - by Divine Providence working through the generosity of so many people since our first Sisters arrived in Australia in 1838. Our work would have been much harder and our achievements less but for this wonderful support.

In 1988 we celebrated our 150 years with a Mass at St Mary's Cathedral. Although our numbers are less, we continue knowing much good work can still be done by those we have. There are many reasons to be grateful for those five sisters who came here so long ago and also to the wisdom and deep spirituality of our Foundress, Mother Mary Augustine Aikenhead.