

Thesis Title

**The History of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956-2006):
Within the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission**

Submitted by

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma*

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I have not received direct computer assistance or any editorial writing assistance in the presentation of this thesis.

.....*J. A. Flaherty*.....

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956–2006): Within the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission

Scriptural and theological perspectives reveal that women were called to discipleship and mission in the gospels and in the early church as portrayed in the New Testament. While emphasising the essential relationship between the ‘constants’ of church teaching and the immediate historical and cultural settings in their overview of the church in its call to universal mission, Bevens & Schroeder, in *Constants in Context*, identified the ‘liberating and transformative model’ as one of crucial significance. This early model was eventually re-emphasised through the renewed theology of Vatican II. Despite their authentic roles being subject to misrepresentation or obliteration in canonical and historical writings, women have continued as disciples and agents of mission.

The second phase of the thesis outlines the historical antecedents leading to the post-World War II missionary engagement of the Australian Sisters of Mercy in the late colonial stage in what was then the Territory of New Guinea under Australian administration. This soon became the independent nation of Papua New Guinea (1975). A selective portrayal of women as agents of mission shows new ministerial models of women religious originating in post-revolutionary France. The spread of this movement in the nineteenth century is noted in relation to a) the founding traditions of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and their expansion and consolidation in Australia and b) the founding of missionary institutes, in particular, the Divine Word missionaries, whose early field of evangelisation was New Guinea. Twentieth century papal initiatives called for religious men and women, whose institutes were not primarily devoted to foreign missions, to be co-workers in mission, particularly in the Pacific. This appeal found a willing response among the Australian Sisters of Mercy who had recently, in response to church directives, reorganised their various congregations into Union and Federation canonical structures.

The history of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956-2006) proceeds within the foundational context of the first two stages. The Sisters of Mercy, initially working in dioceses administered by the Divine Word Missionaries, eventually extended to other dioceses in the new nation. Research data are used from relevant archives, recorded in-depth interviews with Australian and Papua New Guinean Mercy Sisters and key consultants, as well as my own personal experience as a Sister of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1964-2003). To reflect the changing contexts of mission, the findings are presented in three time-frames, 1956-69, 1970-81 and 1982-2006. This exploration shows that, following their founding traditions in a liberating and transformative paradigm as modelled in the New Testament and re-defined in Vatican II, the expatriate and indigenous sisters were challenged to new forms of initiative, adaptability, flexibility, mobility and collaboration as they branched out into emerging ministries. As they reached out in mission they were reciprocally enriched within changing social and multi-cultural contexts. As disciples of Jesus, they experienced the cycle of joys and sorrows in their own lives and in the lives of those with whom they stood in solidarity.

In conclusion, the founding traditions expressed within a particular liberating and transformative model sustained the Sisters of Mercy as agents in mission in changing Melanesian (and global) contexts. These traditions are revisited in the light of contemporary theology, both of mission and of religious life.

Chapter One

The Church's Intrinsic Call to Universal Mission

Introduction

The history of the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea (1956-2006) is a tiny branch with its unique niche on the vine of the universal mission of God's love and mercy for creation and humanity through all ages.

Missionaries to foreign lands have had several biblical texts to guide and inspire them. There was Christ's awesome, post-death and resurrection mandate to the Church, through the apostles, to preach the gospel to all nations in Matthew 28:19-20: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'.¹

Similarly, a strong motivational source for engaging in universal mission was to be found in Acts 1:8: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'.

Another powerful text in Luke 4:16-21, in which Jesus, in a messianic self-revelation in his home synagogue of Nazareth, applied the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1f to himself and his ministry, has also been crucial in understanding Christ's own mission, and that of the Church in the light of this:² 'He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing...'

Mission, in the sense of appreciating and sharing 'one's religious experience and insights, first within one's own community and tradition, and then with people and communities of other cultural, social, and religious traditions'³ has, with varying, and sometimes ambivalent, layers of interpretation and practice, continued in the life of the Church throughout the ages. Senior and Stuhlmueller (1983) have drawn together threads of modern biblical scholarship to illustrate how the

¹ Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Harper Catholic Bibles © (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999, 1995, 1989).

² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 84.

³ Donald Senior, CP & Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP. *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 3.

theological understanding of Jesus' mission, as transmitted to his disciples and followers in the early Church in the New Testament, had its roots in the Old Testament.

Part 1. Roots of Universal Salvation in the Old Testament

Senior and Stuhlmueller have shown that over a process of several centuries the Israelites had come to know a loving and faithful God.⁴ Despite their ancestry as desert invaders, ex-slaves, refugees, peasant farmers, resident aliens, and rabble, time and time again, when facing danger and annihilation, they had been significantly rescued as a people.⁵ As they perceived it and recorded it, God, their deliverer, initiated an intimate relationship with them through a formal and lasting love Covenant and constantly showed overwhelming, gratuitous, forgiving and continuous love throughout their tumultuous history.

Israel's election by the God of Mercy

In their Hebrew traditions, recorded in the Scriptures, God was revealed to the Israelites as a God of mercy. Sobrino maintains that, while mercy is not God's only attribute, it is the fundamental one in relationship with Israel.⁶ He defines mercy as the motivation of God's action of liberation and salvation of Israel. In analysing this attribute he points out that when the God of love hears the cries of a suffering people, he re-acts, impelled by deep-seated agony, in mercy. For example, God is revealed as a God of mercy in Exodus 3:7-8.⁷ The depth of God's love for a poor and dispossessed people was unique to Israel and not found in the religions of their neighbours.⁸

The liberation experience of the Exodus event, establishing that God's primary relationship with humanity was one of loving mercy, formed a radical tenet of biblical faith.⁹ The Israelites grasped the meaning of their 'elect' status as the 'chosen people' in their relationship with God. They came to understand that care of the underprivileged and marginalised, such as the poor, widows, orphans and strangers within their tribes was integral to their keeping of the Covenant.¹⁰

Israel's God, the eternal and mysterious Creator spirit, was beyond imagination, concrete depiction, or use of words. This awesome God (YHWH "I AM WHO I AM") (Exodus 3:14), interpreted by

⁴ Senior & Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 1983:23, 57, 86.

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 56-57.

⁶ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 16.

⁷ Exodus 3:7-8: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them.'

⁸ Senior & Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 1983:87.

⁹ Dorothee Soelle & Shirley A. Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7-8.

¹⁰ Senior & Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 79.

scholars of Hebrew as ‘I will be there; as who I am will be there for you’, who created males and females in his likeness came to be known through imagery and symbolic action.¹¹

Male symbols were employed, such as father and husband and those taken from political life, such as warrior, king and judge, as well as female symbols, such as mother, a woman giving birth, nursing her young, and caring for little ones, and the female figure of cosmic power and might - Wisdom/Sophia. God being identified as shepherd, potter, artist, farmer and midwife, laundress, baker woman and homemaker showed close association with daily human activity. In addition, the world of nature was a powerful, beautiful and wondrous means of revelation, depicting Yahweh’s power, care and providence. Symbols from nature included that of a roaring lion, hovering mother bird and angry mother bear as well as light, cloud wind, fire, rock, water and life itself. That God’s relationship included care of the whole of creation was seen in the psalms¹² and prophets.¹³ Thus, the various symbolic expressions for YHWH signified that God was intimately and compassionately related to all humanity and the natural world.

Israel, experiencing the sacred within historical, cultural and secular contexts, grew in their intuitions of universal salvation

Israel developed its consciousness of election and the corresponding call to fidelity within particular historical and secular contexts.¹⁴ During historically tumultuous times the biblical faith of the Israelites was purged and purified.¹⁵ In response to the personal, compassionate and forgiving love of Yahweh, time and again, successive generations of Jews deepened their love and trust, communally and individually, in the realization that their hopes rested in God’s power alone.¹⁶ Charismatic leaders, such as Moses and David, recognised these secular events as divine interventions of deliverance, worthy to be commemorated in worship, narrative and song.¹⁷ The prophets, in particular, Isaiah, Micah and Hosea, showed that Yahweh’s love and fidelity through the Covenant had never failed; Emmanuel, God-with-us, was always there mysteriously in all areas of life, whether in the secular or religious settings.

Israel’s religious experience, in contrast with that of its neighbours, developed ‘exclusively within

¹¹ Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2008), 21.

¹² Psalms 108:4; 119:64; 136:4-9.

¹³ Jeremiah 9:24.

¹⁴ Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 16.

¹⁵ Ibid. e.g. the Patriarchal Age (1850–1550 B.C.E.), the Exodus and Mosaic Age (1240 -1200 B.C.E.), the initial stages of the Covenant Religion (1200–921 B.C.E.), the loss of empire and the disintegration through the exile of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Judah (921 B.C.E), and the destruction of the temple and deportation and exile in Babylon (587 B. C. E.).

¹⁶ Ibid. 144.

¹⁷ Ibid. 69, 84.

the realm of history'.¹⁸ Secular events that were historical, political, environmental or cultural in essence were always giving 'signals of the presence of its invisible Maker'.¹⁹ These were empirical circumstances that in themselves did not require 'any special religious insight or any divine revelation to recognise or explain'.²⁰

The Israelites subjected secular influences that they faced in their relationship with the neighbouring tribes and nations to ongoing reflection in the light of their biblical faith. Differences were thus variously negotiated, challenged or repudiated. At first the nomadic Israelites learnt and borrowed agricultural practices, idol worship and fertility rites from their Canaanite neighbours. In the course of time, reinforced by their growing monotheism and challenged by the prophets, they vigorously rejected many gentile rituals as idolatrous and therefore contrary to the Covenant, while they incorporated others that could be adapted and integrated within their own faith traditions.

Gradually Israel's understanding of election reached beyond consideration of their own communal entity to a recognition that the gentile tribes were included within Yahweh's loving dominion.²¹ This introduced a universal dimension - the horizon of the election of the people of Israel was 'the peoples of the world'. Yahweh is not only the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Gentiles, for there is only one God.²²

Thus, the biblical foundations for mission in the Old Testament have introduced the theme of universal salvation experienced through Israel's faith in the saving power of the God of Mercy. The development of the mystery of the God of Israel as the liberator of all peoples is gradually revealed through various prophecies pertaining to the future 'Messiah' - salvation will be mediated to all humanity, not through one elected people, but through Jesus, the Messiah.²³

Part 2. Growing Consciousness of Universal Mission in the New Testament

The theological messianic theme, central to Old Testament theology, continued in the New Testament where Jesus is revealed as God's Son, the Messiah and incarnate Mercy.

¹⁸ Gerard von Rad, *On Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 145.

¹⁹ Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 32.

²⁰ Ibid. 13.

²¹ Ibid. 94, 101, 107.

²² Romans 3:29:30.

²³ *The New Jerusalem Bible*, ed. Henry Wansbrough (New York: DoubleDay, 1985), 1162.

Jesus in the Gospels - the Messiah, Son of God, incarnate God of Mercy

The gospels, which derive from historical events of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus were compiled in faith from oral and written traditions of the various Christian communities of the Jesus movement in Palestine and the early Christian movement in Antioch. The early disciples compiled 'interpretative remembrances' of the historical Jesus, as expressions of the significance of Jesus in their own situations.²⁴ The gospels were written with the purpose of commending Jesus Christ to the Mediterranean world.

Jesus applied messianic scripture texts to himself and his mission. He identified himself as the suffering servant who would offer vicarious expiation through suffering.²⁵ He was identified as the perfect servant foretold by Second Isaiah.²⁶ He was the Good Shepherd and the founder of the worship 'in spirit' foretold by Ezekiel.²⁷ Old Testament references in Joel 3:1-5 about 'the outpouring of the spirit of prophecy on all God's people in the eschatological age' are seen by the early Christian community as being fulfilled by Jesus' sending of the Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21).

By referring the words of the prophet Isaiah to himself in Luke 4:18-19 Jesus made his first messianic declaration. He revealed that God's love was present in the world, addressing and embracing everything that made up humanity. Furthermore, seeing the Father present as love and mercy was 'in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of his mission as the Messiah'.²⁸ The Messiah, so long awaited in Israel, was God's Son. Evincing a remarkably affectionate and intimate relationship, Jesus referred to God in the familiar term of 'Abba'. His father was the one who responded immediately to the needs of his people in a gracious and compassionate way, as in the three mercy parables of Luke 15 – the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.²⁹ Jesus grew in consciousness that his will and purpose were identified with that of the Father.³⁰

Jesus' death and resurrection confirmed his followers in these beliefs. The authority of Christ in his words, actions and miracles 'was now explicitly revealed as the authority and mission of God's Son.' Not only is Jesus' mission in all its layers validated, but also his very person is revealed as exalted and transcendent and his awesome identity confirmed as the Christ, the Son of God, Son of man and Lord of the universe.³¹

²⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), 102 .

²⁵ 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Also Mark 10:45. Luke 22:19-20, 37.

²⁶ Matthew 12:17-21; John 1:1-29.

²⁷ *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1176.

²⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia, On the Mercy of God* (Sydney: St Paul Publications, 1980), 11-13.

²⁹ Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 148.

³⁰ John 14:8-14.

³¹ Ibid.148 and Acts 2:36 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'.

The God of mercy who had acted in the very beginning of the history of salvation (Exodus 3:7-8), continued this loving care, embodied in Jesus. Jesus lived the ideal of complete humanity in ways of love, hoping, celebrating, and, particularly, of mercy.³² Mercy shaped and molded Jesus' entire life and mission. When confronted with the suffering of the masses, the poor, the weak, those deprived of dignity, Jesus' entrails 'wrenched' and he was impelled to eradicate not only the suffering, but also its causes and unjust, exploitative structures.³³

Australian scripture scholar, Veronica Lawson, has drawn significant textual parallels between the richness of the mystery of God's mercy (in the Hebrew translation of the Old Testament) and that of Jesus' identification with the God of mercy (in the Greek translations of the New Testament).³⁴ A condensed form of Lawson's explanation of the various terms used highlight these parallels.

In the Old Testament Hebrew translations of the noun *hesed* and its derivatives refer to steadfast love or kindness, with connotations of loyalty, fidelity and constancy. The noun *rahamim* derives from the Hebrew for 'womb' and, while translated as mercy or compassion it contains elements of deeply experienced emotions expressed in action to alleviate suffering, such as 'compassion, womb love, gut love, parental love'. These expressions of mercy portray 'a relational concept in terms of God and God's covenant relationship with God's people, and of God's people in their relationships with one another'. Mercy is an active concept, which one shows, does or demonstrates.

Similarly in the New Testament Jesus, in his life and ministries, evinced the same compassionate expressions of God's mercy. Briefly, these fall into four groups: from the Greek noun *eleos* meaning mercy, pity, compassion; the plural noun *splagchna* denoting the depths of one's being or the locus of heartfelt compassion; the noun *oiktirmos* translated as compassion, mercy, sympathy; and the noun *charis*, translated as grace, favour, credit or joy. While gospel examples of these expressions are numerous, particularly in Jesus' healing ministry, the expression of the verb *splagchnizomai*, derived from *splagchna*, stands out with more intensity, as it denotes 'being moved to the depths of one's being'.³⁵

These contextual meanings reinforce the active, personal and relational meaning of the mercy of God in the Old Testament and capture the same depths of love expressed by Jesus. They demonstrate God's intimate relationship with humanity and the invitation extended to human beings for compassionate relationships with one another.³⁶

³² Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 17.

³³ Ibid. 19-20.

³⁴ Veronica Lawson: Email communication of document: 'A resource for the study of Mercy in the Bible'. 20 September, 2012.

³⁵ Ibid. Matthew 3:35, 14:14, 15:32; Mark 1:40; 6:34; 8:2, 9:20; Luke-Acts 7:11, 10:33 15:20; Philemon 1:8. 2:1.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia (On the Mercy of God)*, 1980:62. Cf. Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Peter 1:10.

This is further expanded by John Paul II. God becomes especially visible according to the New Testament understanding of the God of mercy 'in Christ and through Christ'. Jesus incarnates and personifies the God of mercy who becomes visible in a particular way as the Father 'who is rich in mercy' (Ephesians 2:4). In its comprehensive meaning, mercy 'restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man. The genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew'. Furthermore, Mercy 'constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission...'³⁷

God's all-inclusive gift of salvation - Jesus initiates the Reign of God

Jesus was the first to proclaim the imminence of the reign of God: He saw his life, message and ministry as inaugurating the 'coming of the Kingdom of God'.³⁸ He chose to eat in the company of ordinary people and those on the margins of society, like the tax-collectors (one of whom was among the twelve), prostitutes and sinners and social outcasts. He chose those 'excluded from participation in the religious and social community of Israel' for healing, for friendship and ministry.³⁹ He associated with women and included them in his community of disciples, showing by his miracles and exorcisms that, in his vision of the reign of God, women held the same status and worth as men. Those crushed by society - the voiceless, downtrodden and sorrowful suffering injustice - were given hope, freedom and assurance of God's overwhelming and continuous love for them; they would be rewarded with justice and peace and a sharing in the blessings in the Kingdom of God.⁴⁰ While Jesus saw his main mission towards the house of Israel, his scope of salvation was all-inclusive, embracing 'both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and oppressor, both the sinners and the devout'.⁴¹

Renowned biblical scholars see the reign or kingdom of God, expressed in the tensive symbol *basileia*⁴² as a central motif and context of Jesus' ministry.⁴³ Senior and Stulmueller claimed that this symbol embraced all, and that the world, the human person, society and the totality of reality would all be transformed by God and God's reign 'was already breaking into history through Jesus' liberating action on God's behalf'.⁴⁴

³⁷ Ibid. 7.

³⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 28, cf. Mark 1:14-15. 'The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.'

³⁹ Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 147.

⁴⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 32.

⁴¹ Ibid. 28-29.

⁴² Cf. Walter Kasper, Jon Sobrino and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Jesus and his movement shared the symbol, (*basileia*) and the whole range of expectations evoked by it, with the other groups in Palestine. Jews expected either the restoration of the Davidic national sovereignty of Israel and abolition of Roman imperialism or an apocalyptic universal kingdom of cosmological dimensions with the holy city and temple as its centre.

⁴³ Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 155.

⁴⁴ Kaspar, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oats and N.Y.:Paulist Press, 1976), 75.

The tension inherent in the interpretation of the advent of the kingdom has been seen by theologians as variously present, imminent ('at hand') as in Mark 1:14-15, or in the future as in Matthew 13:24-30. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom, but did not bring it to its consummation. The kingdom as present is an experience of God's rule and encompasses a quality of life orienting his people and his world toward their full destiny. The experience of the consummation of that rule will be felt fully on a cosmic and historical level in the future.⁴⁵

Jesus' all-inclusive mission in relation to the Reign of God: the inclusion of women as disciples and missionaries

Deeply imbued with the scriptural and religious traditions of Judaism that Yahweh was Lord of the universe and creator of all things, Jesus was conscious of the call to continue his Father's mission for the whole world.⁴⁶ With the realisation that Israel held a special, but not exclusive, place in God's action in the world and its history,⁴⁷ he began by forming an inclusive community through his establishment of the Twelve, symbolic of a fully restored Israel and indicative that the reign of God was breaking into human history.⁴⁸

In his vision of the reign of God, Jesus showed that women, contrary to the taboos of patriarchal society of Judaism, held the same status and worth as men as they were included in his community of disciples, accompanying him in his ministry and being sent out on missionary journeys, (cf. Mark 15:40-41 and Matthew 27:55-56). The first missionary to non-Jews was the woman of Samaria, (cf. John 4:1-42).⁴⁹ Susanna and Joanna in Luke 8.3 were recognized as 'followers and collaborators on the economic level'.⁵⁰ Jesus offered feminine images of the merciful compassion of God in the example of widow's mite in Mark 12:41-44.⁵¹ Women were portrayed significantly with prophetic roles of anointing Jesus in preparation for his passion in Mark 14:1-9 and John 12:1-11.

Despite some ambivalence in regard to the recording of women's roles in the gospels, Jesus' treatment of women as equal in the kingdom is undeniable.⁵² Pope John Paul claimed that the gospel contained an ever relevant message originating from the attitude of Jesus Christ himself that women were to be set free 'from every kind of exploitation and domination'.⁵³

⁴⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 3.

⁴⁶ Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, (Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2004), 151.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 154.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 153.

⁴⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 138.

⁵⁰ Elsa Tamez – "Women's Leadership in the New Testament" in *Gender in Theology, Spirituality and Practice*, eds., Lisa Sowle Cahill, Diego Irarrazaval and Elaine M. Wainwright. *Concilium International Journal of Theology* 4 (2012), 78.

⁵¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 12.

⁵² Susan Smith, "The Story of Women in Christian Mission" *Women Church* 37 (2005), 27.

⁵³ Mary Coloe PBVM, "A matter of justice and necessity" in *Women's Participation in the Catholic Church*, *Compass*, 455,

Part 3. Essential unity of the Mission of Jesus and the Early Church

Jesus, by his preaching, his conduct and very person was the primal missionary.⁵⁴ The paschal mystery gave birth to the mission theology of the New Testament⁵⁵ and Luke, in his composition of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles was singularly intent on relating ‘the essential unity between the mission of Jesus and that of the early Church’.⁵⁶

Jesus bestowed a basic structure for his Church. Peter was established as leader and his disciples invited to celebrate the Eucharist in his memory. This foundation would guide the disciples in the way the Spirit would ‘lead the community in its mission and toward its identity.’⁵⁷

The early Church’s growing consciousness of universal mission: Paul’s revelation of ‘salvation for all’

Bevans and Schroeder describe the evolving nature of the Church as it ‘emerged in mission’.⁵⁸ The apostolic community grew in its understanding that it was to reach out in love to preach, witness and serve for the sake of the reign of God. The vision was inclusive of all and the mandate had as its horizon ‘the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

The initial steps recorded in Acts constitute a strong biblical basis for the dictum that the Church is ‘missionary by its very nature’.⁵⁹ Beginning with Pentecost, groups seeking baptism and admission in the Christian community included Jews from the diaspora around the Mediterranean and Gentile proselytes who had been converted to Judaism. Early converts also included the order of widows and orphans, who, after Paul, were joined by young unmarried women as consecrated virgins in the community or household assembly of followers, leading lives of prayer, good works and service.

The Apostles responded to the Spirit’s promptings originating from the Gentile world, such as Peter’s baptism of the Samaritans, the acceptance of the Roman Cornelius and his household into the faith (Acts 10:28-33) and Paul’s revelation on behalf of the Gentiles in Syrian Antioch. This raised a dilemma about whether these converts should also follow the customary observance of the Judaic Law, including dietary regulations and the practice of circumcision. The matter was decided at the

3, 2011, 13- 20. Comments re the ‘Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women,’ Libreria Editrice Vaticana, (1995:13). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documentis/hf_jp_ii_let_29061995_women_en.html

⁵⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 31.

⁵⁵ Senior & Stuhlmueeller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 158.

⁵⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 55.

⁵⁷ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 2-5, 30.

⁵⁹ *Ad Gentes 2 Vatican Council II: Constitutions Decrees Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (N.Y.: Costello Publishing and Dublin Dominican Publications, 2007), 444.

Council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D. as in Acts 15:28-29 establishing a principle in relation to incorporating the Gospel in non-Jewish contexts in the Greco-Roman world:⁶⁰ Gentiles could be baptised into the Christian communities without the prerequisite of Judaic knowledge and observance of the Law of Moses; God's salvation was for all, as clarified by Paul in Galatians 3:26-28:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for all of you are now in Christ Jesus.

As the Church expanded in the known world it grew in the realisation of the inherent nature to spread the Gospel 'to the ends of the earth'. The Church was also being transformed as the foundational household churches, initially household assemblies, multiplied.⁶¹ In his faith conviction that the gift of grace was freely given and required a free response, Paul has left the Church a 'Pauline charism' in addition to the "Petrine charism" which expressed the primacy exercised by the Pope as Bishop of Rome and which represented 'unity and continuity with the tradition, and the faithful preservation and transmission of the tradition'.⁶² The complementary *Pauline* charism represented the more outward-going missionary impulse and the prophetic challenge to traditional understanding and practice that the experience of mission constantly raises as the Gospel encounters new culture.⁶³

Women as agents of mission in New Testament times – cultural and gender influences

Just as they had been included as equals among Jesus' disciples, women featured as central and leading individuals in the early Christian movement.⁶⁴ The exceptional place and role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, not only evinced in the Gospel narrative, but soon to emerge prominently in the post-apostolic Church is of prime importance. Mary is the most clearly delineated woman in the New Testament and conveyed a revered presence, symbolic of maternal love, humble service, and queenly power.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Mayknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 85.

⁶¹ In dismissing distinctions between the elect, holy nation and the 'unclean' nations of the Gentile world, Jesus had shown that salvation was due entirely to God's grace, and not to any righteousness in following the Law.

⁶² Senior & Stulmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 172.

⁶³ The Petrine and Pauline charisms, are complementary to each other (as evidenced in the early confrontation of Peter and Paul, then their reconciliation), yet co-exist in a state of some tension, derived from particular visions of church. While this tension does not form a major theme in this thesis, it is a fundamental consideration in missionary development throughout history.

⁶⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 36.

⁶⁵ Mary offered a ubiquitous feminine presence which was soon indigenized. For example, Our Lady of Walshingham in England and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.

However, feminist scripture scholars have found that the agency of women in ecclesial ministry in the early Church has been selectively misrepresented or marginalized.⁶⁶ This misrepresentation of women was a gradual process, which occurred as encompassing socio-political, patriarchal customs were transmitted into the Jewish communities of the Jesus movement and incorporated into the canonical New Testament writings. In the first century the patriarchal culture of Judaism in Palestine was pervasive. Power, influence and property were the prerogative of men. Contemporary methods of biblical scholarship enable feminist theologians to penetrate the patriarchal and linguistic framework so as to expose hidden layers of liberation and of religious agency. Reinterpreting controversial biblical symbols gives witness to ‘the struggle, life, and leadership of Christian women who spoke and acted in the power of the Spirit’.⁶⁷

Elsa Tamez claimed that women’s New Testament roles were portrayed variously in three distinct historical periods, defined, not necessarily by the time of the original event itself, but by the time of canonical writing.⁶⁸ The presence and influence of the considerable number of women leaders during these stages can be detected by reading the scriptures in a meticulous and methodical way, using ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion’. Her critiques on these influences on women’s roles are explained in three time frames (a) to 30 AD, (b) from 30 AD to 70 AD, and (c) from 70 AD to 110 AD.

Women leaders in the Jesus of Nazareth movement period – 30 AD. There is no text from Jesus’ time, as the gospels, compiled from different sources, were written between the years 68 and 100 AD. However, there was a strong presence of women as part of the Jesus movement and, despite the use of male-centred language and their infrequent naming in the gospels, women are included in generic terms and some are mentioned specifically by name and agency.

Significant mention of Jesus’ many women disciples shows clearly that women were leaders of the Jesus movement. For example, the women followers (Luke 8.3), of Martha who proclaims her confession of Jesus as Messiah (Luke 10) and of Mary who studies at Jesus’ feet (Luke 10) and anoints Jesus’ feet in preparation for his death (John 11.27). Furthermore, the naming of particular women placed at the crucial conclusion of the synoptic gospels is most significant.⁶⁹ As eye-witnesses to the crucifixion, burial, resurrection and apparition of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons, were identified and acclaimed as true disciples. Many other women, who were known followers of Jesus, having served significant

⁶⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 1983:84.

⁶⁷ Johnson 2008:94-95 defines patriarchy, or rule of the father as a social structure in which power is consistently in the hands of dominant males. Androcentrism, or male-centredness, refers to ways of thinking and acting that favour men in such a way that men’s way of being human becomes normative for all human beings and women, as a consequence, are seen as ‘derivative, off-center, less than truly human’. These themes were incorporated into the Roman domestic codes.

⁶⁸ Elsa Tamez, “Women’s Leadership in the New Testament” in *Gender in Theology, Spirituality and Practice*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill, Diego Irarrazaval and Elaine M. Wainwright *Concilium International Journal of Theology*, 4 (2012).

⁶⁹ Mark 15:40-41; Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 16:1-8; 16:9-11; Matthew 27:55-56; 28:1-10; Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-11.

theological roles during Jesus' public ministry, notably of following (*ekolouthoun*), and serving (*diakonoun*) also accompanied Jesus to Calvary (Mark 15:41).

John's gospel, written towards the end of the first century when the institutionalization of the Church was being formed and women's leadership was being questioned (Timothy 2:11-12), similarly portrays prominent women as church leaders. For example, the woman of Samaria (John 4:1-42) and Mary Magdalene who has been acclaimed as Apostle to the Apostles because of the particular mission given by Jesus (John 20:11-18): But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father' 'You are my witnesses through all the earth'.

Women leaders in the Apostolic period (30 AD – 70 AD). This era included the expansion of the Apostolic period from 30 AD to the Roman War and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Acts of the Apostles were written c. 85 AD reflecting the era which saw the birth of Christian communities in family homes, where women appeared in the Assembly and as leaders of the 'household church' (*ekklesia*), which was the basic structural unit of the early Christian Church and was open to Christian believers from the surrounding areas.⁷⁰ Christians met together 'to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to hear the gospel proclaimed and explained, and to provide hospitality for travelling missionaries such as Paul and his companions'.⁷¹

The first Pauline communities which emanated from the large Greco-Roman city of Antioch retained Jesus' teaching of equality in person and ministry of men and women in the kingdom, and encouraged women and men to work together in the general missionary outreach.⁷² Drawing on sources that have been authenticated as written by Paul,⁷³ Smith offered, among her examples, that of Paul considering Chloe, leader of the 'household church' (1 Corinthians 1:11), as his social equal. In addition, Phoebe was entitled to be recognised for her great authority within the early Christian Church because her service and office were influential in the community.⁷⁴ Moreover, designations such as elect, saints, brothers, or sons used in an inclusive generic way clearly applied to both men and women in the Christian community as did leadership titles, such as apostles, prophets, or teachers, which were later presumed to apply only to males.⁷⁵

Thus, although the early Christian communities attempted to live by the ideal of equal discipleship - of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free (Galatians 3:28) - strands of cultural

⁷⁰ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, ed., Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina, 7 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 74.

⁷¹ Smith, "The Story of Women in Christian Mission," 27.

⁷² Ibid. 2005, 26.

⁷³ 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon and Romans were written between 51 and 63 AD.

⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 45-47.

⁷⁵ For example, Phoebe is clearly included among those addressed by the masculine title of *diaconos* in Romans 16:1 as are women in the masculine rendition of *kalodidaskalos* in Titus 2:3.

patriarchal consciousness and customs infiltrated the manner in which this was recorded.

Women leaders in the post-apostolic period (70 AD – 110 AD). During this era the disciples founded Christian communities beyond the Jewish world of the diaspora in Antioch, Asia Minor, North Africa, Egypt and Rome, the centre of the Roman Empire. Women's leadership roles were further threatened and diminished as the domestic codes of Roman society expressing the dominant rights of the Roman male (as the *pater-familias*) over wife, children, servants, slaves and property, began to appear.⁷⁶

Greek philosophical thought also influenced the consciousness of leaders of the early Christian communities. According to Aristotle's dualistic conception of reality (384-322 BCE), as divided into matter and spirit, men were identified with the higher faculties of rationality and spirit while women were relegated to the material world and seen as a deviation of the normative male: being physically deficient, women were therefore considered socially and physically inferior. Thus, Roman ideology and Greek philosophical influences negatively impacting women were reinforced as the early Christian communities moved towards institutionalization with the growing perception that the Church, as God's household, would conform to the domestic codes of Roman society (1 Timothy 2:14-3:4-5).⁷⁷

Growing tension in regard to women's leadership roles is reflected in the New Testament events recorded at this time. Although women are portrayed as leaders, teachers and evangelists in John's gospel written at this time, some epistles of this era, previously attributed to Paul - 1 Timothy, Titus, Colossians, Ephesians, Corinthians 1 and 2 - contain conflicting messages regarding the status of women; for example, emphasis upon the submissiveness of wives to their husbands (Colossians 3:18), silence in the church (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; 1 Timothy 2:11-14); and their identification with Eve as the transgressor.

This review of the ascendancy of patriarchy in society and Church explains the opposition the presence of women in active and public ministry provoked, even into the second and third centuries, and the comparative and selective invisibility of women in leadership roles in recorded history in the subsequent centuries.

The biblical themes of universal salvation and the Church's integral call to mission that have been traced thus far in regard to the Old and New Testaments, are now revisited in the light of theological and historical perspectives.

⁷⁶ Elsa Tamez, "Women's Leadership in the New Testament", 80-84. Domestic codes refer to household administration by males and command women, children and slaves to be subject to their husbands, fathers and masters respectively.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 83.

Part 4. The Church's theological and historical approaches to mission: Towards a conceptual framework for this study of women in mission

Bevans and Schroeder have depicted general trends in the Church's approach to universal mission throughout history, and their analysis offers a conceptual framework for identifying strands, which are of significance in portraying the history of the Sisters of Mercy in mission in Papua New Guinea (1956-2006).

Application of theological constants to particular historical and cultural contexts

In subjecting the Christian message to historical and theological analysis, Bevans and Schroeder emphasise six theological 'constants' of Jesus' life and message, as experienced, lived and interpreted by the early church communities, and show how these have been followed and variously interpreted in different contexts through the ages.⁷⁸ These constants, arranged below, form the basic principles upon which the Church, responding to its missionary call, has preached, served and witnessed to God's reign in different historical and cultural contexts.

- The centrality of Jesus the Christ, along with his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- The ecclesial nature of a missionary activity (expressed by fidelity to a common book (the Bible), a common heritage (faith tradition) and a common ritual (sacramental life).
- The Church's understanding of 'eschatology', embracing social/historical eschatology (the reign of God) and individual eschatology (death, judgment, heaven, purgatory and hell).
- The nature of salvation in Christ as 'wholeness and holistic healing and structural change and transformation', which may be expressed as 'The nature of salvation in relation to this world and the next'.
- The Church's understanding of anthropology, of human nature's capacity for sin and potential for goodness.
- The role of human culture as a vehicle for communicating the gospel.

In practice, the complexities of these constants, which have guided church teaching throughout the ages, may be captured in three general theological patterns or paradigms.⁷⁹ Such paradigms expose 'a certain drift, a certain tendency, a certain perspective which is distinct and which tends to determine or color all doctrinal expressions of faith and pastoral decisions that embody it'.⁸⁰ Each can be traced to the earliest centuries of the Church, and are orthodox expressions of Christianity. At

⁷⁸ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, 34, citing Andrew F. Walls "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture", in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 3–15.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 19, citing Justo L. Conzaes, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999) 31, and Dorothee Soelle; *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology* London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 7-22.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 19, 35.

the same time, *elements of all types or paradigms are contained in each and valid alternative views are often held in tension* (writer's emphasis).

These missionary models, derived from Bevans and Schroeder, Justo L. Gonzales, and Dorothee Soelle, are paraphrased in the following order: (1) Mission as 'commitment to liberation and transformation' (2) Mission as 'the discovery of the truth' and (3) Mission as 'saving souls and extending the church'.

Mission as 'commitment to liberation and transformation', the oldest of the three models proposed, with its roots in Antioch and near Eastern culture and closest in spirit to many of the original witnesses to Christianity in the New Testament, is motivated by serving the ministerial needs of the church community.⁸¹ This theology closely encapsulates the model of salvation as holistic liberation and transformation.

Its emphasis is on history in the sense that all takes place within time and is guided toward God's future. Jesus is known as redeemer and liberator, the Church is seen as herald or servant, salvation is recognised as holistic and human nature is viewed positively.⁸² John Paul claimed that this model, which emphasised mission as commitment to liberation and transformation, was based on Christ's messianic programme, the programme of mercy, which became 'the programme of his people, the programme of the Church'.⁸³ This model is recognized in the missionary approach of the French women religious of the nineteenth century and in relation to 'foreign' missions in the colonial era as well as in the emergence of the apostolic institutes in nineteenth century Ireland, including the Sisters of Mercy – themes, which are pursued in the next chapter.

Mission as 'the discovery of the truth'. This liberal approach grew out of Alexandria with Hellenistic cultural roots in a consistent search for the truth and emphasised that the hidden treasure of Christ was buried in the warp of cultural patterns and values.⁸⁴ In this tradition the Church was seen as mystical communion and sacrament and human nature was looked upon with potential for growth. Mission was carried out as a search for God's grace hidden 'within a people's cultural, religious and historical context'.⁸⁵ The beginnings of modern mission anthropology may be traced

⁸¹ Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology* (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 7-22. Soelle refers to Type C theology as radical theology.

⁸² Examples of this theology are early Luther, Teilhard de Chardin and the liberation theologian, Gutierrez. Figures in mission were East Syrian monks, Francis of Assisi and Liberation theologians.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia (On the Mercy of God)*, 44. Cited by Brendan Byrne, *Paul the Apostle, Personal story, Mission and Meaning for the Church today*, in *Compass* 42, 4, 2008, 14-21.

⁸⁴ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 49, 60-61.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 61. This approach with its respect for cultures was adopted in mission countries by Cyril and Methodius in regard to the Slavs, Matteo Ricci in regard to China and de Nobili in India.

to Wilhelm Schmidt of the Society of the Divine Word and this missionary approach in foreign countries was typified by the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in Papua New Guinea.⁸⁶

Mission as ‘saving souls and extending the church’.⁸⁷ This orthodox and conservative theology with its origins in the Roman Christian communities grew out of the early Roman culture with its philosophical basis in law and reason. God was seen as a law-giver and judge, and through the lens of a rather negative view of human nature and the world, Jesus, the Redeemer, offered satisfaction for individual and collective sin, which was seen as the breaking of divine law. Prominence was given to the Church as an institution, and emphasis was given to spiritual rather than temporal matters in regard to salvation, culture tended to be viewed ambivalently and creation was understood in a hierarchical way.

Mission was seen as saving souls and extending the church as an institution and this model was captured in the doctrinal statements of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the first Vatican Council (1870) – a time of defence in the face of the Protestant reformation and consolidation during the Counter-Reformation. While there were exceptions (as implied by the interpretation of models or paradigms) the Church generally maintained a cautious stance towards the modern world, virtually from the sixteenth to the middle of the twentieth century.⁸⁸

Towards a conceptual framework for the study of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956–2006)

The three models introduced previously provide a platform for exploring the fifty-year period of history in this thesis. The model of mission as ‘saving souls and extending the church’ provides a general perspective for interpreting the colonial, pre-Vatican II stage of the fifty-year period, while that of ‘commitment to liberation and transformation’ as outlined above and in the previous paragraph, speaks to a later post - Vatican II (1962-65) and post - Independence stage (1975).

Biblical themes that have been addressed form a conceptual framework for this thesis. These are: the constant presence of a loving and merciful God in history, Jesus, the Christ, as the God of Mercy and his message of the gracious reign of God including women and the significance of the gospel being transmitted within diverse cultures. Chapter Two traces the tradition of women called to gospel discipleship and mission throughout history, including an exploration of the founding traditions of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and Australia, which evolved

⁸⁶ Ibid. 61-2. In addition I refer to an Email explanation (2 June 2013) by Stephen Bevans SVD. Type A theology is very prominent and was a major factor in mission before Vatican II.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 36.

⁸⁸ Exponents were St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and Francis Xavier.

within this tradition. An introduction of mission in New Guinea and the response of the Australian Sisters of Mercy to ecclesiastical requests for mission there conclude the chapter.

Chapters Three, Four and Five cover the history proper (1956–2006), divided into three time-frames. Chapter Three reports the beginnings and early developments of the Mercy foundations during post-world war colonialism (1956–69). During this period there were accelerated moves towards political Independence in the late sixties, and the winds of change of Vatican II (1962-65) began to deepen the theological understanding of Church, mission and religious life.

Chapter Four encapsulates a second time frame (1970–81) covering developments of the political acceleration of the last years of the colonial stage from 1970 leading to Self-Government (1973) and Independence (1975), the consolidation in the post-Independence era and the unification of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia in 1981.⁸⁹

The third time frame in Chapter Five encompasses the years 1982 to 2006. These years which saw the development of indigenous Sisters of Mercy were marked by a deteriorating social situation, and despite declining expatriate numbers and diversification in ministry, the acceptance and promotion of indigenous members. The period culminated in the election of the first Melanesian Sister of Mercy as leader and the establishment of the autonomous region of Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

In Chapter Six findings of the study of the Australian and Melanesian Sisters of Mercy in mission in PNG (1956–2006) within the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and mission are reviewed in light of the contemporary perspectives on the theology of mission.

⁸⁹ These two time divisions (1956-69) and (1970-1981) show some degree of overlap, as the winds of change of Vatican II and political Independence were finding their way officially as well as randomly in Church and government circles, and consequently influenced the initiatives of the sisters beyond the particular diocese to encompass inter-diocesan and national needs.

Chapter Two

In the Tradition of Women called to Gospel discipleship and mission: the Australian Sisters of Mercy requested for Missionary Service in New Guinea

Introduction

Continuing the theme of the Church's integral call to mission developed previously, this chapter outlines the involvement of women called to gospel discipleship and mission in the pattern of the liberating and transformative model of mission. In the first section (Part 1) this development in mission is selectively traced through various historical stages from early Christianity to the significant rise of new ministerial models of women religious addressing the social and religious needs in post-revolutionary France. From these institutes flowered ones especially dedicated to evangelisation in 'foreign' lands. The second section (Part 2) shows the development of similar apostolic institutes in Ireland. Among these were the Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley, whose founding traditions in mission in Ireland and during the Irish diaspora of the nineteenth century were negotiated and enriched through their expansion and consolidation in Australia.

A third section (Part 3) introduces New Guinea, the early missionary field of the Divine Word Missionaries, accompanied by the missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit, in the Pacific, showing their particular call to mission from their arrival in the late nineteenth century and their new beginnings after the devastation of two world wars.

The final section shows how twentieth century papal initiatives for members of religious institutes to be co-workers in mission paved the way for increased Australian missionary involvement in war-ravaged Pacific countries, including New Guinea. The Australian Sisters of Mercy, having reshaped their various congregations into Union and Federation canonical structures, were enabled to make a quick and enthusiastic response to mission requests from bishops in New Guinea, channelled through the Apostolic Delegate of Oceania.¹

¹ Cf. Chapter Three, Footnote 18

Part 1. Tracing the Tradition of Women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission to the nineteenth century

As the Church expanded through its missionary impulse the tradition of women as collaborators and supporters in the 'household churches', which included the care and protection of widows, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of St. Paul, continued. During this era the tenets of the faith of Christianity were being articulated by the great 'Fathers of the Church'.²

Early Christianity until the end of the fourth century

As women were full members of the Christian community, the connection between baptism, Church and mission implied that they were also involved in the spread of the Christian faith. Their influence was within the household, the house churches and the group of martyrs.³ As Christianity spread under the rule of the Roman imperial government during the first three centuries, Christians suffered persecution. Women, such as Perpetua and Felicitas, were among the many who came to be widely venerated for their Christian witness as martyrs. Young unmarried women, who could claim no status or independence of their own, joined the company of widows and were eventually granted official recognition as a corporate entity in the Church.⁴ The early movement of withdrawal from the world by individuals and groups of men to lead lives of prayer and solitude in the desert areas soon included women.⁵

The official church was identified with the Roman Empire and adopted the political and social structures of its administration. Roman society and the expanding warlike tribes of Europe at this time were essentially patriarchal and there was increasing opposition to women's active roles in the Church, articulated notably by influential males.⁶

In 313, pursuing a policy of religious tolerance of Christians, the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, centred in Byzantium. By 400 AD Christianity extended from the Mediterranean basin 'as far as Arabia, Abyssinia, and even to Central Asia and India'.⁷

² For example, Ignatius of Antioch Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, Augustine and noted for the early Church Councils, such as Nicea AD 325.

³ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 89.

⁴ M. R. MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia* (Sydney: Crossing Press 1996, 2002, 2nd edition), 3. MacGinley refers to traditions of a liturgical ritual of *velatio virginis*, or veiling of a virgin, which marked the commitment and service of virgins within the Christian community and was presided over by the bishop. This tradition dated from at least the second half of the 4th century and continued through incorporation into religious life into the mid-20th century.

⁵ Smith, *Women in Mission*, 79.

⁶ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 91. Bevans and Schroeder comment that by the end of the third century women's official roles basically disappeared as clericalism in the church increased.

⁷ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 88.

The evangelisation of Europe

Various Germanic and other tribes accepted Christianity as a result of evangelisation, but also in response to the influence of rulers, legislation or coercion. There was also social osmosis as Christian communities spread. Evangelisation was first initiated through the influence of Christian soldiers and traders and was primarily the field of male evangelists.⁸ Christianity was preached in the European borderlands to non-Christian tribes, as far north as Scandinavia. The Church, maintaining its fidelity to its missionary nature, became established in Europe during the subsequent centuries.⁹

The introduction of Christianity among ethnic peoples was marked by respect for indigenous cultures.¹⁰ When Pope Gregory the Great sent the Benedictine St Augustine to England in the sixth century he advocated giving a Christian interpretation to culturally acceptable matters. This missionary practice of 'accommodation' derived from the original decision of the Council of Jerusalem in relation to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.¹¹

Monasteries played a prominent part in the evangelisation of Eastern and Western Europe, particularly as centres of Christian witness, peace in turbulent times, and as centres of literacy, culture and active evangelising.¹² Luzbetak claimed that among the most effective of the mission models was that of the monastic model.¹³ As an institutionalised feature of the Christian empire, the monastic pattern of religious life was soon followed by women.¹⁴

The roles of women in the monastic movement

The first monastic rule written for a female community, that of Caesarius of Arles (470-540), stressed enclosure for the physical protection of the women and to enable them to be fully devoted

⁸ Until well into the Middle Ages, the method of missionaries was initially to approach local kings and chieftains who would then bring their people with them.

⁹ Pope Benedict XV, '*Maximum Illud – On the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World*', 1919, in *The Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters* (London: The Sword of the Spirit, c 1960), 2. In his Apostolic letter Benedict refers to acclaimed missionaries to Europe who had 'announced the tidings of eternal salvation brought to the human race by Jesus Christ': Gregory the Illuminator (Armenia); Victorinus (Syria) Frumentius (Ethiopia) Patrick (Ireland) Augustine (England) Clement Willebroed (the Netherlands) Boniface and Ansgar (Germany) and Cyril and Methodius (the Slavonic nations).

¹⁰ Features of Celtic spirituality were retained as local pagan feasts became vested with a Christian significance; e.g. Christmas was celebrated around the northern winter solstice on 25th December. The doctrine of Purgatory, which was rejected by Reformation preachers, strongly appealed to pagan peoples for whom beliefs and practices honouring their ancestors were central to their spirituality.

¹¹ Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Mayknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 86: cf. Acts 15:28; 17:22-31; Titus 1:5.

¹² MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 6. MacGinley further notes that the Council of Chalcedon of 451 AD brought the monasteries under Church legislation and control, by requiring the approbation of the local bishop for their establishment, as proposed by the Christian Emperor Marcian.

¹³ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 89.

¹⁴ MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 4. MacGinley reports that the sister of Pachmonius, considered the founder of the first monastic community beside the upper Nile around the year 320, appears to be the first of a series of sisters founding or directing female communities near the monasteries founded by their more famous brothers, such as Anthony of Egypt, Basil of Caesaria, Augustine of Hippo and Benedict of Nursia, whose sister was St Scholastica.

to their life of prayer.¹⁵ As the names of some influential Christian women, regarded as models of Christian living, had been honoured and recorded¹⁶ so too were women during the monastic age.¹⁷ Among these were the abbesses Hilda of Whitby in the seventh century and Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century. Smith has pointed out the evangelising role of monasteries as places of people's first introduction to Christianity as well as being renowned for holiness, prayer and learning. They also served a more distinctly evangelising role as Anglo-Saxon Benedictine women responded to calls as missionaries to accompany the English St Boniface in his eighth century evangelisation in the Germanic lands.¹⁸ For example, Boniface's niece, St Leoba (710 -782) was called from Wimborne abbey to help in missionary work. Entrusted with the management of the monastery of Bischofsheim, Leoba was very highly regarded by local leaders for care of children and families in need.

The rise of a wealthy class of traders becoming socially and politically influential amid the old military aristocracy brought about deep-seated social change during the Middle Ages. The eleventh century saw the rise of universities, which were founded by church leaders and became centres of legal and classical studies. Church council decrees were organized into a body of Canon Law. As new religious currents and movements increased it became necessary to define what the Church recognised as approved religious orders.¹⁹

In 1215 the most significant of the medieval General Councils, the Fourth Lateran Council, was convoked, and issuing from this, the second official statement of the Church at the level of a General Council regarding legislation of religious life was formulated.²⁰ It endorsed the Benedictine, Augustinian and Basilian (Eastern) early forms of monasticism, followed by the more recent Franciscan rule. New religious communities were required to base their life-style on one or other of these Rules.²¹ The requirement of enclosure for women religious, based on the centuries old monastic norm, was reinforced. Religious were formally categorised in both canon and civil law, by the taking of public solemn vows in the presence of witnesses.²² Every new monastic community was required to have specific papal approbation.²³

¹⁵ Ibid. 9. MacGinley further comments that where the observance of stability for monks was the responsibility of the community's abbot, the parallel and stricter observance of cloister for nuns became the responsibility of the bishop. A developing body of local legislation concerning enclosure was enacted by local church councils, especially in Gaul. The frequent repetition of insistence on enclosure, both in regional church councils and in civic decrees, raised the question of its degree of non-observance.

¹⁶ For example, the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine in the 4th century, and Empress Adelaide in the 8th century, Clothilde, wife of the first Frankish Christian King, Clovis.

¹⁷ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 89.

¹⁸ Susan Smith, *Women in Mission*, 83-84.

¹⁹ Some, like the Franciscan movement were orthodox and approved by the Papacy while others were seen as heretical.

²⁰ MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 122-23.

²¹ For example, St. Dominic chose the brief Augustinian Rule to which he added his own constitutions.

²² The legal Latin term *solemnis* signified an oath or vow to which one could be legally held.

²³ MacGinley, *Dynamic of Hope*, 25-27. Regulations were reaffirmed and endorsed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and it was under this legislation that the convents in Latin America, numerous by 1600, were established. These are

Social ministries of non-cloistered women

There is documentary evidence from the twelfth century of communities of men, and more numerous of women, who followed a religiously motivated celibate life-style and were usually engaged in local charitable services, such as care of the sick.²⁴ The best known of these were the Beguines in Flanders, Germany and northern France, but similar groups were also found in Spain (beatas) Italy (bizzochi), France (filles, dévotes).²⁵ Dating from the thirteenth century, the medieval Third Orders for lay people, especially the Franciscan and Dominican, became part of this movement. Some continued, living individually in their own homes; for example, the Dominican tertiaries, St Catherine of Siena and St Rose of Lima. Where these individuals or community members took vows, they were described as simple (from the Latin *simplex*) or private. They had no legal effect and could be annulled by the bishop or confessor before whom they were pronounced.

Within this context, simple-vow congregations of women in the modern sense multiplied. Approbation for their corporate operation was sought from local bishops and, usually, the local civic authority. In time, further official approbation was required as congregations spread beyond their diocese of origin, often causing disputes with local bishops who claimed that such sisterhoods were now legally under their episcopal authority.²⁶

The official distinction between those who were legally nuns in solemn-vow orders, bound by strict laws of enclosure, and pious laywomen, undertaking good works, continued. Communities of women, from then on called congregations, were to agree to adopt enclosure or to avoid the observance and conventions of convent life.²⁷ These requirements of Lateran IV were later reiterated at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), convened to address cataclysmic changes, particularly of those posed by the Protestant Reformation, publicly launched by Martin Luther in 1517.²⁸

In conclusion, through the pioneer missionaries, monastic roles of monks and nuns, the social ministries of non-cloistered women and lay members of the Catholic Church, the evangelisation of Europe was largely effected from approximately 500 AD through the medieval period and ending by the 1500s.²⁹

mentioned later in this chapter.

²⁴ Ibid. 23, 20, 41.

²⁵ Ibid. 19.

²⁶ These canonical issues were not resolved in Europe until the nineteenth century, as will be seen later in this chapter.

²⁷ Ibid. 42. As a result of this distinction, St. Vincent de Paul stressed to his Daughters of Charity, that they were not nuns, and as a sign of this, and their unwillingness to be, they dressed in the local peasants' costume, while other groups generally wore the local widow's dress.

²⁸ Ibid. 25-27. MacGinley further comments that because of widespread Protestant criticism of alleged immorality of nuns, as well as some instances of luxurious living, the clergy saw that much needed to be clarified and many abuses, accumulating over centuries, needed to be checked and abolished.

²⁹ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 85.

Women in Christian mission during the Early Modern Period (late 15th to late 18th century)

The end of the fifteenth century marked the beginning of the missionary expansion in the so-called 'Age of Discovery' (1492–1773).³⁰ This began with the trade expansion down the African coast and into Asia and the European discovery of the American continents, commencing with Columbus in 1492. The early explorers, the Spanish and Portuguese, were followed by the English, Dutch and French, as the prospect of wealth, power and empire triggered the race for colonisation.

From Europe zealous pioneer missionaries, following the traders, brought the faith to foreign lands in the east (India, China and the Pacific), the west (North and South America) and the south (Africa).³¹ Pioneer missionaries led the way in sustained efforts to spread the faith to the ends of the earth. Through the *patronatus* agreement the Church was initially allied politically and economically with the relevant colonial powers of Spain and Portugal in Asia, the Americas and Africa. In 1622 the papacy began to reclaim its authority in directing missionary activity and Gregory XV established the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (SCPF) to coordinate church missionary activities.³² This Sacred Congregation was strengthened by the founding by Pope Urban VIII of the Urban College of Propaganda in 1627 for the training of missionaries for the Far East.

The Franciscans and Dominicans, founded early in the thirteenth century as mobile, apostolic and centralized orders, accompanied the Spanish and Portuguese, while the Jesuits, founded in 1540, accompanied the French to New France (Canada). It was a male missionary frontier, the missionaries using the techniques of approaching local elites and preaching their Christian message more widely once they had gained a measure of acceptance. These missionaries devoted themselves to converting local peoples, learning their languages, translating Scripture and often encountering martyrdom.³³

This missionary expansion was commemorated by Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud*.³⁴ Among the 'crowd of apostolic men' who spread the faith were Bartholomew Las Casas who was 'devoted to the defence and the conversion of the poor natives'. St Francis Xavier worked zealously in India and Japan 'for the glory of God and the salvation of souls' and paved the way 'for a new evangelisation' in China, where members of missionary congregations 'were eager to propagate the faith ... amidst many vicissitudes'.

³⁰ Bevens & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 191.

³¹ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 50.

³² Bevens & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 191.

³³ Ibid. 173-74. Bevens & Schroeder comment that a significant interpretation of the word mission took place during this period. The term mission became commonly understood to refer to the church, then to the relevant mission society, particularly of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century as if the authority of God was transferred to them.

³⁴ Benedict XV, *The Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters* (London: The Sword of the Spirit, c. 1960), 2.

Luzbetak has identified the social and public roles of missionaries in regard to cultures.³⁵ Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in India were experts in cross-cultural communication. Bartolome de las Casas was a champion of human rights in the New World. Extant records of missionary ethnographers describe the traditional cultures and languages of the peoples of the Americas, Africa and Oceania.

Though less well known, the missionary contribution of women religious was considerable. This is illustrated in relation to different periods in the Catholic colonies of Spain and France.

Spanish women in mission in the colonial context of 16th century Latin America³⁶

When the crown and the Church of Spain and Portugal sought to establish stable Catholic settlements in the Americas, enclosed convents for dedicated female religious of the elite class, according to the European monastic pattern, formed part of their vision. From the beginning of the sixteenth century convent establishments appeared in the larger Spanish settlements - within twenty or thirty years of their founding and a little later in the Portuguese colony of Brazil.³⁷

Most of the convents throughout Latin America were established by the Spanish and Portuguese aristocracy.³⁸ In time, convents were founded by Latin American colonial women themselves, and by the eighteenth century a multiplicity of the traditional enclosed female orders of European women could be found.³⁹

Soon a second tier of women of more modest means and upbringing began to appear, as, within the sanctuary of the cloister, the nuns of the Spanish aristocracy sheltered women in need and received young girls, including orphans, for education. In the centuries before the Enlightenment when there was little appreciation of female intelligence, ability and competence, these convents developed as female educational institutions contributing to improving the standard of female education, including that of Indian women.

Besides these women in recognised solemn vow convents there were other religious women, whose dedication was directed towards social concerns, albeit in a more versatile and flexible way.⁴⁰ As in

³⁵ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 92-93.

³⁶ Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University, 2000).

³⁷ Ibid. 91. Socolow further comments that the first convent in Mexico City, Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion, was founded in 1540, within 19 years, and the first one in Lima within 26 years of the conquest. In Mexico alone 38 convents were founded in the 1600s.

³⁸ Ibid. 92. Under Portuguese rule, Brazil, with its initial scarcity of female settlers who were needed as wives, tolerated inter-racial marriages and alliances and convents were not sanctioned until the late 1600s. Women wishing to enter religious life returned to Portugal to do so.

³⁹ Ibid. 101. Nuns exercised leadership and responsibility in the convents which were self-governing institutions administered by an abbess. They managed real estate, banking matters and administration.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 106-107. Socolow comments that, as in Europe, these *beatas* were usually of more modest social standing than

Europe these non-cloistered lay women, who may or may not have taken simple vows and lived alone or in community, cared for orphans and provided schools for poor girls.

Providing for educational and social needs by nuns within traditional convents and by non-cloistered laywomen was not a unique phenomenon in colonial history. In comparison with the Spanish religious immigrants to Latin America who began with the known monastic structures of religious life in their home country, some French women, accompanying the male colonists in the seventeenth century in their founding of Canada (New France), conceived a different concept of religious life.

An example of French colonial women in mission in 17th century Canada⁴¹

Inspired by the earlier arrival of the Jesuits in New France in 1611, the religious renewal in France in the seventeenth century found expression in the evangelisation of the indigenous peoples of North America. The first French enterprise in Montreal was officially attributed to religious motives and, although the foundation included important participants from among the clergy, it was predominantly a lay missionary undertaking, making it unique in the history of the Catholic Church.⁴²

A young French woman, Marguerite de Bourjeois (1620–1700), was recruited to set up the first school for the children and to accompany and guide the young immigrant women, who, as the colony's prospective wives and mothers, were seen as forming Canada's future. Marguerite was guided in her belief that Christ's command to go out and make disciples of all nations was addressed to the whole Church. As a pioneer and leader she attempted to build a better Church and society in a colonial world where those two were closely aligned, collaborating with lay men and women as well as clerics.⁴³

the nuns in the recognised religious orders and were uncloistered. Beatas were the first religiously committed women to go to Latin America from Spain, arriving in Mexico in 1530 to teach daughters of noble Indian families, but in the face of difficulties eventually returning to Spain. The communities (*beaterios*) also spread in Latin American cities. These women were generally unmarried women or older widows searching for religious expression outside of formal religious life. This category of non-cloistered women also included tertiaries of the recognised monastic orders, the most famous being Rosa de Santa Maria of Lima (1586-1617), canonised in 1670.

⁴¹ Patricia Simpson, *Marguerite de Bourjeois and Montreal, 1640-1665* (Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), 66-67. While the imperialistic motives of colonial administration have been recorded in history, the dimension of religious motivation in relation to the Catholic French colonies has not received the same attention. The English and the Dutch, as well as the French and the Spanish, were engaged in empire building at this time, but not in the same kind of missionary activity. The endeavours in China and Japan were not related to European expansion.

⁴² Ibid. French Catholics in the world of the Counter Reformation saw it as their responsibility to share the precious possession of the Christian faith.

⁴³ Ibid. 68-69, 139, 144, 158.

The missionary model she adopted was that of the early Church as it spread among Jews, Greeks and Romans. Marguerite and her early companions lived communally in society, without cloister or specific religious dress. Committed to self-support and simplicity of life, they offered free education to the children of the colonists and to Indian children, in return for simple food and shelter. They opened workshops where poor women could learn the crafts that would enable them to earn their living. Their endurance was tested in the many precarious forms of pioneer existence - dangers, hostilities, armed resistance, scarcity of food and supplies and religious and commercial conflicts.

Marguerite was at the centre of an important development in mission in the Catholic Church in a colonial context and her new institute, the Congregation of Notre Dame, received canonical approval during her life-time in 1659.⁴⁴ Besides the colonial French, the members of the community soon included North American women of French, Amerindian, and even English ancestry. Their educational efforts extended beyond Montreal to Quebec and to the little settlements coming into being along the St Lawrence River.⁴⁵ Marguerite de Bourjeoys' Congregation of Notre-Dame offered a new vision of the family of nations through its multi-cultural membership and mission involvement in the seventeenth century.

Women in Christian mission during the later Modern Period (19th to mid-twentieth century)

By the end of the eighteenth century the global power of the various colonizing nations had receded and Catholic missions seemed in decline.⁴⁶ However, there was regeneration as growing mission consciousness, initiatives and global action increased dramatically throughout the Christian world among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox denominations during the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The Catholic revival dates from the reign of Pope Gregory XVI (1831-46).

Gregory encouraged the established missionary orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and the Jesuits (reinstated in 1814 after their previous suppression). In addition, about forty new male Catholic institutes were founded from this time with the specific purpose of missionary involvement.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 10. This deviated from the time-honoured norm of solemn vowed, cloistered religious life, recognised legally in church and state and with strict rules of enclosure, as previously described. Such establishments depended for their material security on endowments and dowries and conducted social and educational outreach within the convent walls.

⁴⁵ Although later years of the seventeenth century would see Montreal change and develop to become the economic centre of Canada, Marguerite de Bourjeoys' multi-cultural congregation was one of the surviving influences of the original missionary vision of the French Société of Notre Dame and of the evangelising roots in the faith and sacrifice of the early founders.

⁴⁶ Cyril Hally, *Australia's Missionary Effort* (Sydney: ACTS Publications, 1973), 14. Hally notes that the Jesuits with their long history of missionary involvement had been suppressed by the Pope in 1773; the church was suffering persecution in China and Japan; and the missionary church was no longer as effectively supported by the previously effective Paris Foreign Mission Society and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

⁴⁷ Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 97.

Among these were the Picpus Society, the Marists and the Divine Word missionaries – all soon to be involved in the Pacific.

However, ‘unparalleled in history’ was the missionary enthusiasm and involvement of women, as France became a vibrant centre for foreign missions. Thirty-nine women’s institutes were founded expressly for missionary work. Pauline Jaricot with her founding of the French Association of the Propagation of the Faith (1822) promoted widespread interest in, and active support of, overseas missions among non-Christian peoples.⁴⁸

Pope Gregory XVI encouraged and supported the spiritual missionary momentum in various ways.⁴⁹ He reformed the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, (founded in 1622 in the wake of Trent to deal with church affairs in overseas mission territories, many in countries by then under non-Catholic rule). Through him, some seventy dioceses and vicariates apostolic were established and almost 200 missionary vicars apostolic (bishops in their own right) were appointed.⁵⁰ In 1845 he approved an instruction of Propaganda encouraging native hierarchy in mission territories. Moreover, in his encyclical, *Probe Nostris* issued in 1840, he called women as well as men to urgent missionary work. Support of overseas missionary activity was continued by Pius IX (1846–78) and Leo XIII (1878-1903).⁵¹

Gregory XVI’s encouragement of women in mission was based on the fact that women were already at work in mission lands! How this came to be so brings the reader back to a significant period in French history.

New movement of women religious founded for apostolic service and ‘foreign missions’ in nineteenth century France

The social involvement of women religious, first in active public ministry, and later in evangelisation to non-Christians (expressed at the time as mission in foreign lands), began in the years following the dissolution of the monasteries and attempted destruction of the Church during and after the French Revolution of 1789.

The following century saw a great expansion of simple-vow congregations as a new, more flexible model of women religious evolved. Sisters were dedicated to addressing the secular needs in

⁴⁸ Ibid. 99.

⁴⁹ Various sources acknowledge Gregory XVI’s influential mission involvement. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 99; JWD Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). 307 – 309; Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 209.

⁵⁰ These vicariates often had undefined boundaries as in New Guinea and in other areas where, as in England, the Catholic episcopacy had been prohibited until 1850.

⁵¹ By the beginning of the twentieth century Christianity had become a worldwide religion.

society through nursing, teaching and serving the poor, while managing their own recruitment, membership, finances and establishments. In France alone – the most prolific heartland of this movement – almost four hundred new active institutes for women were founded, in addition to those dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵²

Despite some anxiety and uncertainty among priests and bishops, the Church could not afford to lose the ‘tremendous religious energy and opportunity for spiritual renewal’ that these institutes offered.⁵³ In this vein, Rome began to grant them official approbation and to allocate to them a Cardinal Protector, whose authority exceeded that of a local bishop in their regard.⁵⁴ This new direction marked a radical change from the accepted monastic, cloistered model under diocesan jurisdiction to that of the more centrally governed, active, non-cloistered, apostolic institute that could, in the case of local or diocesan disputes, appeal directly to Rome.

These apostolic institutes evolved into institutes especially dedicated to ‘foreign missions’ in the far-flung French empire. This movement paved the way for papal approval of religious life for woman as uncloistered, centralised, and dedicated to addressing human need in different societal and cultural contexts as founders responded to requests from bishops and were actively supported by French civil authorities.⁵⁵ Thousands of religious women ministered to settlers and indigenes alike, replacing the traditional male missionary as educators, nurses, and evangelists. By the middle of the century French women religious had shown that the Catholic faith was ‘universally applicable to peoples of all races and backgrounds’.

Descriptive summaries of two pioneers offer an illustration of this expansion.⁵⁶

Ann-Marie Javouhey was a founder of a new non-cloistered institute, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, soon engaged in overseas missionary work. Their primary aim was education, but also included care of the sick and other forms of practical work for adults and care of young women in need. Anne-Marie had a universal vision and stipulated that those of the institute would be prepared ‘to go to any part of the world’.⁵⁷

⁵² Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7

⁵³ Ibid. 8. By 1880 their number exceeded 130,000 sisters and outnumbered priests and brothers three to two.

⁵⁴ MacGinley, “Women Religious and their Convent High schools in Nineteenth Century Australia”, *Australian Catholic Record* 87 (2010): 3-19. MacGinley states that the first documented case was in relation to the Sisters of Charity, simple-vow non-enclosed apostolic religious, in Ghent in 1816, when Rome granted them canonical approbation rather than the simple commendation for good works usually accorded to a non-enclosed institute of women.

⁵⁵ Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 3, 9, 104-45.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 104–145.

⁵⁷ MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 270.

As requested by French colonial administrators and Vicars–Apostolic, Javouey’s sisters were particularly engaged in the evangelisation and social care of indigenous women. Her independent, centralised control of the institute was opposed by some influential French bishops, while others supported her.⁵⁸ Her sisters made foundations in Réunion, Senegal, Goree, the British colonies of Senegambia and Sierra Leone in Africa, and later in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the West Indies and Guiana in South America. Strongly opposed to the slave trade, she was asked by the French government to take over management of a run-down Guianian settlement of Mana, and to implement a program for receiving and preparing Negroes for full emancipation by 1838.⁵⁹

Emilie de Vialar, founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition (1832), established her institute for missionary service through education, health care and charitable services. The sisters were primarily simple vowed members of a religious congregation whose particular spirit was the exercise of ‘works of charity in infidel countries’.⁶⁰ While the sisters lived out their spiritual life in community through daily routines of prayer and contemplation, they saw their primary call to salvation through active service to others. As they were not bound by rules of strict enclosure, Emily’s sisters had increased mobility and flexibility of apostolate.⁶¹

With vocations coming from France, and later from her foreign missionary foundations, the institute soon became a multinational religious foundation: her sisters serving as ‘cultural intermediaries between Europe and Africa, as well as between European elites and poor European migrants’.⁶² De Vialar’s vision was directed towards the French colonies of the Mediterranean Basin and included some in the former and existing countries of the Ottoman Empire - Algiers (1835) Tunis (1840), Sousse (1842), Cyprus (1844), Malta (1845), Beyrouth, Syra in Greece (1846), Moulmein in Burma (1847).⁶³

De Vialar’s administration, across different diocesan boundaries, was centralised and under papal auspices, instead of being controlled by a diocesan bishop as ecclesiastical superior.⁶⁴ Her practices of recruitment, training and placement were unpopular with some bishops and susceptible to criticism. On the other hand, de Vialar’s advisors and supporters came from among the clergy in the religious field and French government administrators who appreciated her promotion of French society and culture. She and her sisters were visible as Christian women in the streets, clinics,

⁵⁸ Ibid. 270. MacGinley notes that Javouhey successfully resisted the efforts of the Prefects Apostolic of Martinique and Guiana to detach the sisters from their French mother house.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 270-271.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 104-145.

⁶¹ Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 152. Curtis explains that the innovative adaptations to religious life must be seen within the context of support of the French colonial administrators during a French migratory wave around the Mediterranean and, from 1840 onwards, to the Middle Eastern territories of a declining Ottoman Empire.

⁶² Ibid. 145.

⁶³ Rosa MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 110.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 110.

schools, including free schools for the poor, and asylums. Furthermore, as they had access for ministry into the homes of Muslim and Jewish families, they had a spiritual influence that exceeded that of male clerics who performed more traditional roles in evangelisation.⁶⁵

These, and similar models of simple-vowed religious life, based on education, nursing, and charity, for sustaining mission activity in non-Christian foreign lands, spread from Europe - a movement that was significant for the Australian and Pacific Church.

Influence of French women religious in Ireland, Australia and the Pacific

Until the mid-twentieth century there was a clear historical distinction, between ‘home’ missions and ‘foreign’ missions. Some French religious missionary congregations wished to establish bases in Australia for missionary work in the Asia-Pacific region and succeeded in getting the permission from respective bishops to establish communities in Australia.⁶⁶ Emily Vialar sent such a community of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition to Western Australia in 1855.⁶⁷ Anne-Marie Javouhey’s Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny briefly came to Victoria (1903-1912). The Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Sisters (OLSH) who followed the first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) to Papua made a foundation in Sydney in 1885.⁶⁸

The lay and religious pioneers of the Third Order of Mary for the Missions (later to evolve as the Marist Missionary Sisters (SMSM), who were serving on mission on the islands of Wallis and Fortuna, established an Australian base in Sydney in 1861. The Institute of Our Lady of the Missions made a foundation from New Zealand in Perth in 1897. Sisters of the various missionary bases opened small hospitals and schools, which gave them access to potential vocations.

Meanwhile women’s apostolic institutes dedicated to ‘home’ mission through religious and social service to the poor took hold in nineteenth century Ireland.

Part 2. Mission in the Tradition of Catherine McAuley, Founder of the Sisters of Mercy

The history of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956–2006) has its roots in a distant place and time. The mission spirituality of the Australian Sisters of Mercy who were commissioned as missionaries to New Guinea, and who, in turn, passed on this spirit of mercy mission to young

⁶⁵ Sarah Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 127.

⁶⁶ MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 111.

⁶⁸ Cf. Part 3 in this Chapter.

indigenous women there, can be traced back to their founder, Catherine McAuley in nineteenth century Ireland.

Catholic Ireland emerges from persecution

For two centuries British rule in Ireland was characterised by systemic government oppression, persecution for their Catholic faith and deprivation of civil rights.⁶⁹ During the occupation, the faith of Irish Catholics was secretly and courageously nurtured by Irish clergy who had carried out their seminary training on the Continent, particularly in France. With the dissolution of the monasteries (1536–37), four established orders of religious women survived as small groups dressed as lay women - Dominicans, Poor Clares, Carmelites and Augustinians.⁷⁰

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Britain's penal law restrictions were gradually lifted.⁷¹ A climate of increasing religious tolerance and the repeal of laws against religious freedom in Ireland and Britain through the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, commonly referred to as Catholic Emancipation, was accompanied by a strengthening and resurgence in doctrinal, sacramental and ecclesiastical aspects of Catholic life, zealously promoted by the bishops.⁷² The energies of the Church were largely absorbed in 'renewal and reform of Catholic education, political and social questions and the problems of the diaspora' and with its new role of leadership in national life.⁷³ The elite influential Catholics of the privileged wealthy families, who were now able to compete financially and culturally with the upper class Protestants, were in a position to reassert their place as Catholics in society and practise their faith publicly. Many, especially women, were appalled at the dire circumstances of the Catholic masses who were ignorant of religious beliefs and who comprised the 'poor' throughout the land - the destitute, hungry, illiterate, uneducated, unemployed and imprisoned. The most impoverished of all were women and children.

It was during the early part of this struggle that new institutes of apostolic women religious, following the pattern set on the Continent, emerged to address this widespread spiritual and material poverty. Peckham Magray refers to these new-style 'modern sisterhoods' as 'a new departure in the

⁶⁹ Mary C. Sullivan, *In the Tradition of Catherine McAuley* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame and Dublin: Four Courts, 1995).

⁷⁰ Most Catholic lay women of the elite stratum of society had received their secular and religious education in convents in France.

⁷¹ Deirdre Raftery & Catherine Nowlan-Roebuck, "Convent Schools and National Education in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Negotiating a Place within a Non-Denominational System," *History of Education*, 36, 3 (2007): 356.

⁷² Smith, *Women in Mission*, 125.

⁷³ Edmund M. Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey 1830 – 1980* (Gill & MacMillan: Dublin & Washington, D.C.: 1990), 10, 14, 119. Hogan commented that almost a million of the population had emigrated to North America, and half as many to England and Scotland. He further commented that during the nineteenth century Sisters of Mercy worked in 'pagan apostolates among Aborigines, Maoris and American Indians, as well as in South Africa, Belize and Jamaica'.

history of the religious life of Irish women' and the growth of a powerful new movement within the Irish Catholic Church.⁷⁴

The founders of the pioneering religious institutes forming the new movement were, in particular, Nano Nagle - the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1775, Mary Aikenhead - the Sisters of Charity in 1815, Frances (Teresa) Ball who introduced a branch of Mary Ward's Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1821, Catherine McAuley - the Sisters of Mercy in 1831, and Margaret Aylward - the Sisters of the Holy Faith in 1867.⁷⁵ These founders had been involved in active ministry for the poor prior to founding their particular institute.

Having situated Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy within the tradition of women called to gospel discipleship and mission, it is now appropriate to explore what may be seen as the founding traditions of the Sisters of Mercy. From the historical examples of religious life for women in mission given thus far, I have selected for emphasis elements such as Catherine McAuley's social consciousness and agency, Mercy spirituality and the cross, mission for the poor and governance. These themes are intertwined in the following summary narrative and are pursued later in this chapter in regard to the Sisters of Mercy in Australia.

Catherine McAuley and the early Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and England

As an heiress, Catherine, in 1827 built a large multi-purpose complex, the House of Mercy, situated strategically within the more favoured part of Dublin to alert the rich to the plight of the poor. Under her guidance a core group of 'pious ladies' provided accommodation, schooling in basic education, employment training skills and religious instruction for poor servant and uneducated girls. They sought not only to provide immediate help, but also to instruct them in the faith and to teach them skills to support themselves. Catherine and her co-workers were seen in public walking with their pupils and residents to the church for Mass, bringing help to the sick poor in their homes and visiting them in prison.

Some of Dublin's Catholic elite looked with suspicion on Catherine and distrusted her because, unlike the established elite with their inherited affluence, her wealth came from Protestant sources and they deemed her to be an outsider of a lower social class, (as a *parvenu* or upstart). Others suspected that donations from the annual charity sermons would reduce those given to the Charity Sisters for their highly valued public hospital work.

⁷⁴ Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women Religion, and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 9.

Responding to opposition from both lay and clerical quarters, Archbishop Murray summoned Catherine to account for her way of life and bluntly informed her, that in order to receive church support and continue her works of mercy, she would have to conform to Catholic tradition either by joining a religious congregation or foregoing the image and practice of monastic observance.

Catherine's vision of Gospel discipleship and mission for the poor

Catherine soon came to the firm realisation that she was being called to a new and radical way of apostolic religious life, based on the principle of mercy for the poor. She chose that of the Presentation rule, based on that of the Paris Ursulines, as the nearest expression of the vision she and her companions were being called to follow. After completing her novitiate with the Presentation Sisters at George's Hill and making profession of perpetual vows there on 12 December 1831, Catherine McAuley was appointed as Superior of the newly formed congregation, the Sisters of Mercy, by Archbishop Murray, who accorded his episcopal approbation of the institute the same year.

Catherine's rule for the Sisters of Mercy – following Jesus' principal path of Mercy

In consultation with her sisters Catherine devised her rule by refining that of the Presentation Sisters. Setting its direction to centre around Mercy, she placed her concept of apostolic service as a loving response in following the person of Jesus, particularly in his compassionate approach to the poor of society.

In Chapter Three of the original rule she emphasised the role of Mercy in the spiritual and ministerial lives of the sisters: 'Mercy – the principal path marked out by Jesus for those who desire to follow him.' It is significant that the first two chapters to be submitted to Rome in 1833 were on the Visitation of the Sick and the Protection of Distressed Women.

Examples of the scriptural foundation of Catherine's spirituality abound, particularly in her personal spirituality, ministry to the poor and her teaching and letters to the sisters. Catherine's approach strongly suggests her sense of discipleship as portrayed by Jesus in his invitation to his followers to share in his mission in inaugurating the reign of God (Luke 4:16-21). She expressed that it was 'a consolation to serve Jesus Christ Himself, in the person of the poor, and to walk the very same path He trod'.⁷⁶ She was deeply motivated by a desire to relieve the poor of their suffering of body and of spirit. She ardently wished to impart her love of God and to teach the truths and practices of the Catholic faith, of which so many poor Catholics were ignorant. Keenly aware of the proselytising attempts of the Protestant establishment, she sought to counteract this influence with sound religious

⁷⁶ Bonaventure Brennan, *According to Catherine: Words of Wisdom from Catherine McAuley, A Thematic Approach*, (Dublin: Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, 2003), 96.

education in the schools. In Catherine's theology, temporal relief was never separated from the spiritual. Her alleviation of poverty and suffering included enhancing a person's self-esteem and self-reliance through resources and skills for survival. Her vision of the reign of God was holistic in nature.

Catherine's construction of the Mercy rule, presented for canonical approbation, resembled that of the newly established apostolic institutes – 'the modern sisterhoods' - in Ireland. This comprised the sisters taking simple vows, and dedication to societies' poor. The practice of a decentralised form of government, allowing local responsibility and autonomy, was rather unique in the circumstances, as the emerging legislation for simple-vow foundations was increasingly pressing for full centralisation of internal administration. Catherine's vision of de-centralisation, though often fraught with tension, was to prove inspired, enabling the flexible and widespread expansion of the Institute. With firm determination, Catherine followed the prolonged process required in seeking and gaining approbation from Rome.

Living the charism of the Sisters of Mercy: religious community and ministry with the poor

The early years of the fledgling congregation were marked by personal tragedies in religious community and ministry. Catherine faced these heavy trials of suffering and death of family and sisters, as she did the weight of clerical opposition, misunderstanding and difficulties of the new foundation, with humility, faith and profound common sense. She saw these 'crosses' as evidence that the Institute was founded on Calvary and the Sisters were to serve a crucified Redeemer.⁷⁷ Furthermore, she saw sufferings as indications that the foundation and its spread were God's work.

Meanwhile, many young women, attracted to the new religious life institutes in Ireland, colloquially referred to as the 'walking nuns', were drawn to the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine's interpretation in the light of faith and humility is seen in her account of these early times.⁷⁸

We have now gone beyond 100 in number, and the desire to join seems rather to increase, though it was thought the foundations would retard it, it seems to be quite otherwise. There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance, or judgement has not impeded, and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God. I could mark circumstances calculated to defeat it at once, but nothing however injurious in itself has done any injury. This is all I could say.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 44.

⁷⁸ Mary C. Sullivan, *In the Tradition of Catherine McAuley*, 179. Catherine's account of the growth of the Congregation is contained in a letter to Mother Elizabeth Moore, dated 13 January 1830.

After the initial scepticism on the part of the clergy and lay people, public trust grew as the sisters were at the forefront as various social needs arose. Many requests, even entreaties, came from bishops for foundations.⁷⁹ While Catherine's intention was that the Sisters work within the jurisdiction and direction of the bishop of the Diocese she was cautious and practical about the provision of financial arrangements beforehand: by no means was a bishop's wish for a foundation a command to be followed.⁸⁰ This responsibility also extended in Catherine's case to the withdrawal of the sisters, as in Kingstown, where, despite persistent efforts on the part of the sisters, the clerical situation in the parish had become impossible for the carrying out of their ministry.⁸¹

Early traditions of social consciousness and agency: women and poverty

Catherine saw her ministry in the social context: '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'.⁸² In addition to the dire conditions outlined in the introduction to this chapter the majority of the population in pre-famine Ireland, lived at subsistence level, dependent on small agricultural holdings and seasonal employment in order to survive.⁸³ Women with their dependent children were much more likely to enter state institutions of relief, such as the workhouse, than men.

When the Great Famine years (1845–50) reduced the population by almost two million, women's capacity to remain economically independent was severely restricted. Lack of employment opportunities and skills, poor pay, various life crises, such as desertion or incapacity of a spouse, pregnancy, dependent children and age, all influenced their ability to support themselves and their families.⁸⁴

Before schooling was customary on a nation-wide scale the Sisters of Mercy set up free schools, particularly for the poor, and then 'pay' schools for children whose parents were able to contribute financially. The passage of the 1831 Education Act funding national education schools enabled the Sisters of Mercy to become part of the national system.⁸⁵ It was against Mercy policy for the sisters

⁷⁹ Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, 10-12, 26. Even as late as the 1860s, some members of the clergy still resisted the incursion of women religious into their parishes.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 30. As women religious decided whether or not to make a foundation they controlled the spread of their institutes.

⁸¹ Sullivan, *In the Tradition of Catherine McAuley*, 16-17.

⁸² M. Angela Bolster, *Catherine McAuley in Her Own Words* (Dublin: Dublin Diocesan Office for Causes, 1978), 17.

⁸³ Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10. Luddy notes that industrialisation and the production of cheap fabric materials in England by the 1830s caused the virtual destruction of the linen, cotton and woollen cottage industries in Ireland, resulting in extreme hardship to women who were responsible for family survival.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 11.

⁸⁵ Each religious denomination was empowered to manage its own schools, but to receive state aid it was obliged to use non-sectarian textbooks provided by the government. Religion could be taught only at a designated period of the day. By the late 1850's 75 per cent of all convent elementary schools (or approximately 110 schools) were attached to the National Board.

to conduct boarding schools, which were considered to be for the elite.⁸⁶ In general the Sisters of Mercy collaborated with government initiatives in education, health and social welfare from the 1840s.⁸⁷

Catherine promotes a spirit of unity and decentralised governance as the Institute expands

During her lifetime Catherine's mercy way of life attracted well over 150 women, inspired by her unique spirituality, fusing two intertwining threads of loving contemplation in union with God and social mission in a spirit of mercy. Upon founding the Sisters of Mercy in 1831, Catherine made twelve foundations in Ireland and two in England (Bermondsey, 1839 and Birmingham 1841) and was preparing for two more foundations in Liverpool and Nova Scotia before her death in 1841.⁸⁸

It was not only the general adaptability that made the Sisters of Mercy popular with the bishops, and contributed to the spreading of the congregation. Steadfastly relying on Divine Providence, Catherine trusted in the sisters she sent forth as she fostered foundations, often financed, organised and carried out by women.⁸⁹ In setting up autonomous convents Catherine ensured that authority for the convent and ministries rested in the hands of the new founder. She was most insistent not to be seen as an authority figure like a mother general, or as she expressed it, a 'mistress general'.⁹⁰

Catherine held the threads of the Mercy identity together as she transmitted her spirit in various transparent ways. This was through her role as superior and mistress of novices, her vast personal correspondence to the sisters, through travelling extensively in setting up self-reliant, autonomous foundations and staying several weeks at each place to ensure stability. Not least of these influences was Catherine's own gracious living out of service to the poor and her natural and 'cordial' approach to all, regardless of age, class or creed. Catherine encouraged the sisters to keep in close contact with one another. According to one of the founding members: 'Our dear Foundress always wished to strengthen this, and often expressed her ardent desire that the first houses formed under her should keep up a mutual correspondence by letter, not only with the Parent House, but with each other'.⁹¹

After her death the founding mothers sought to absorb, preserve and spread 'the spirit of the foundress' in their lives and ministry. They did this through teaching new members the substance and spiritual richness of Catherine's writings and correspondence, and by their frequent visits to Baggot

⁸⁶ Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, 81. These were usually provided as secondary 'superior' schools, operated by the Loreto Dominican or Ursuline Sisters, according to the French system.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 77.

⁸⁸ M. Ignatia Neumann, ed. *Letters of Catherine McAuley 1827-1841* (Baltimore, USA: Helicon Press, 1969).

⁸⁹ Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, 27.

⁹⁰ M. Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1958). 426.

⁹¹ Sullivan, *In the Tradition of Catherine McAuley*, 69.

Street and to Mercy convents in their own or other dioceses.⁹² They faithfully and lovingly preserved her writings and letters and circulated precious biographical sketches. Thus, the spirituality of Catherine McAuley and the early Sisters of Mercy, firmly incarnated within the social context of the times and the founding traditions deriving from this, have been recorded.

The Sisters of Mercy as ‘agents of missionary activity’

Peckham Magray found that the early founders and pioneers of the new apostolic religious congregations were highly motivated by a strong sense of faith in their divine call.⁹³ Emphasising the ‘agency’ they exercised she paints a profile of the majority as being well-educated women of high birth, of wealth and means, devoted to the faith and the Church (often with close family relations and friendships among the bishops and clergy) and with deep commitment to the poor. They were confident and competent women who ‘largely determined the direction of their orders’.⁹⁴

Questioning the assumed invisibility of the sisters’ lives and women’s generally unrecognised place in Church and society, Peckham Magray argued cogently that the roles of independence, innovation and agency of these heroines of the Irish Church had not been sufficiently recognised in history. She elaborated on the part the modern women’s institutes, including the Sisters of Mercy, played in the transformation of Catholic culture, interpreting their social intervention in terms of missionary activity.⁹⁵ Reporting that by the end of the century there were 35 different congregations managing 368 convents, she concluded that ‘their social and religious ministries had a significant impact on the transformation of the Irish Church and Irish society’.⁹⁶

In their educative role the Sisters of Mercy were significant in this transformation. Many of the sisters were from the well-educated elite families and deeply committed to passing on the tenets of their faith and counteracting the constant proselytising practised by the Protestants.⁹⁷ Similarly, the Irish historian, Edmund Hogan endorsed the missionary identity ascribed to Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy. They, with the other modern institutes, responded in times calling for internal missionary activity when the Irish society and Church were recovering and rebuilding after the devastation of British domination and persecution.⁹⁸

⁹² Ibid. 68.

⁹³ Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, 10.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 11-12. Peckham Magray discovered that Irish nuns exercised ‘considerable personal, religious and cultural power’ in shaping their religious communities and their work in a church that ‘embraced their work ever more eagerly as the nineteenth century progressed’.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 11.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 13.

⁹⁷ This may be deduced from the requirement of ‘dowry payment’, although Catherine’s lenience on this matter is to be noted.

⁹⁸ Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement*, 7.

The Sisters of Mercy also responded to the spiritual needs of their time in a further capacity – that of evangelisation through ‘pastoral’ missionary work to their compatriots who had emigrated throughout the western world in large numbers.

Sisters of Mercy of the Irish diaspora – responding to the needs of the Australian missionary Church

Introduction

Evangelisation among emigrants of the Irish diaspora in England and Scotland, as well as former and continuing colonies of the British Empire, became a major concern of the Irish Church from the 1830s. The movement for the Propagation of the Faith, which promoted evangelisation in foreign lands and which had grown since the early 1820s, was staunchly supported by Archbishop Daniel Murray and some of the leading clergy in Dublin.⁹⁹ The Irish missionaries’ primary apostolic objectives, as they became exiles ‘for the sake of the kingdom,’ were to preach the gospel and provide the sacraments, Christian education and nursing care to their compatriots whose faith was at risk through lack of pastoral care.¹⁰⁰

The first Irish Sisters of Mercy to engage in this pastoral missionary venture, as requested by bishops of the colonies of the British Empire, went to Newfoundland in 1842.¹⁰¹ Shortly after, foundations were made in Pittsburgh (1843), Perth (1846), Auckland (1850), Buenos Aires (1856), Brisbane (1860), Adelaide (1880 from Buenos Aires), Belize (1883), Jamaica (1890) and South Africa (1896).¹⁰² The Sisters of Mercy from England and Ireland also carried out nursing service in the Crimean War (1854).¹⁰³

Founding traditions of the Sisters of Mercy in the Australian missionary Church

In 1846 Ursula Frayne made the long and difficult journey on mission with two professed sisters, three novices and a postulant to establish the first foundation of the Sisters of Mercy on Australian soil in Perth.¹⁰⁴ Once in Perth, Ursula and her founding sisters set about their missionary work – ministering to those in prison, including convicts (1850–68), educating children of the Irish settlers,

⁹⁹ The role of Pauline Jaricho and the Propagation of the Faith has been mentioned earlier in this chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Loreto Sisters went to India in 1841 and Presentation Sisters went to India in 1841 and to Newfoundland in 1833. Primary proclamation’ to the unevangelised did not initially come within their apostolic objectives.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Ursula Frayne: A Biography* (Fremantle: University of Notre Dame, 1996), 47-77. Sr Ursula (Ellen) Frayne, who had joined the Sisters of Mercy at Baggot Street in 1836 and trained as a novice by Catherine McAuley was one of the original band of Sisters of Mercy to Newfoundland in 1843.

¹⁰² Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey 1830–1980*. 48.

¹⁰³ Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 798-80.

¹⁰⁴ Killerby, *Ursula Frayne: A Biography*, 92-113.

visiting those in need and reaching out to educate the Aboriginal children, which was difficult because of their tribal mode of living. In time, and not without difficulties and sufferings, the number of sisters, including those who were Australian born, grew and ministries spread.

Ursula was followed by some of the original Irish and English founders who, responding to the requests of the Australian bishops, passed on the traditions of Mercy of Catherine and the early Sisters of Mercy. They were strong and responsible leaders who willingly cooperated with bishops and clergy in their various ministries of mercy. However, they also opposed any capricious clerical domination threatening to disrupt that ministry and they encouraged the sisters in the same adaptability and enterprise exercised by their Irish founding mothers.¹⁰⁵

While showing pastoral concern for the newly arrived Irish immigrants, they responded to the expanding needs of Australia's growing Catholic population in cities and large country town centres. They practised Catherine's legacy of setting up independent houses to exercise local authority and devote themselves to relieving social inequalities and injustices. They engaged in their traditional and versatile ministries in urban areas and country town centres and undertook to staff parish schools. They set up pay or pension day schools for those with the means to pay for a better education for their daughters. At first, conducting secondary boarding schools, which were considered for the well-off, was against Mercy policy. Yet, in face of the vast distances involved, and convinced by Bishop Goold, Ursula Frayne, who was at first unwilling go against Catherine's original policy, agreed to set up a boarding school system to provide a superior education for young ladies whose parents were prepared to pay for this.

During this early phase further Australian foundations sprang from those from Ireland, England and Buenos Aires, increasing the number of self-supporting independent congregations.¹⁰⁶ The Irish bishops, whose dioceses served the Irish settlers, found the Sisters of Mercy were well suited to the Australian conditions. Reasons for this were their decentralised form of government and flexibility and availability to local needs within the diocese, expressed in the sisters' collaboration in education, particularly at the parochial school level and their involvement in social welfare and health care, as well as their less confining practice of enclosure which tended to constrain the ministries of some of the other congregations.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 193. One overseas congregation, established in Argentina in 1856, faced an uprising of religious persecution and civil unrest and the Irish and Argentinian sisters fled to Ireland, only to respond almost immediately to the request to come to Adelaide in 1880.

¹⁰⁶ Helen Mary Delaney, "The Evolution of Governance Structures of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia 1846 -1990" (PhD diss., St Paul University, 1991), 39-67. By 1905 there were approximately fifty independent motherhouses in the country, ranging greatly in size, and nearly all having dependent branch houses, 59, 61.

The phenomenal growth of the Sisters of Mercy in the vast missionary setting of Australia was largely due to their constitutions, which allowed flexibility and adaptability in their decentralised governance. Imbued with a common spirit, derived from their identification with their call to gospel discipleship and mission in the tradition of Catherine McAuley, the pioneer sisters followed the Rule and Constitutions approved for Baggot Street in 1841.

In her doctoral thesis Helen Delaney outlined adaptations in religious life, mission and governance due to the need for consolidation after the initial rapid expansion. From 1900–1950 the foundations faced increasing financial, material and personnel constraints, particularly in isolated rural areas, as they tried to maintain standards of religious formation in the separate novitiates.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, in an ever increasing secular environment, they were challenged to meet government requirements for professional training in teaching and nursing.

When initiatives towards regional or diocesan centralisation were proposed by some diocesan bishops, in general, independent foundations complied with these requests and united in various forms of amalgamations.¹⁰⁸ Others rejected any attempts at persuasion or pressure towards structures of unification.¹⁰⁹ These responses exposed the tensions faced by the sisters in relation to their efforts to adhere to Catherine's decentralised form of governance which ensured commitment to local needs, and the challenge of meeting emerging needs, requiring more combined approaches to community, formation and mission. Kerr claimed:

[The Sisters of Mercy in Australia] ...made a constant effort to achieve a balance between the two elements of fidelity to the traditions of governance inherited from Catherine and the imperative of meeting, in the most effective manner, the apostolic needs of the people to whom they had been called.

Meanwhile, other uniting and defining factors were at work.¹¹⁰ Despite the variations of local conditions and the adjustments of new organisational structures, the strong common Mercy spirit transmitted through the pioneer Irish and English founders prevailed and the sisters went ahead with many amalgamations.¹¹¹ On the other hand, different local interpretations of Catherine's charism and practices, as they were handed down from the original foundations in the various Australian settings, caused some tension. In some cases and, in a time of general conservatism in Church and society, the joining together of foundations triggered a painful process as sisters felt they were discarding some

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 66.

¹⁰⁸ Thirteen foundations in Victoria, plus two from Tasmania united to form the Melbourne Congregation in 1908.

¹⁰⁹ The Mt Gambier foundation first rejected a proposal to re-unite with Adelaide in 1907 but did so in 1941. In 1925 North Sydney and Parramatta refused the strong suggestion of the Apostolic Delegate to amalgamate.

¹¹⁰ Delaney, "The Evolution of Governance Structures of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia 1846-1990", 66.

¹¹¹ Berenice Kerr, *The Land that I will show You, History of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia, 1981-2011* (Sydney: The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, 2011), 23, 24.

of their most sacred traditions.¹¹² However, the strong common bond of the Mercy spirit prevailed and by 1950 the number of independent congregations had been reduced with seventeen independent congregations being formed. The constant of the common Mercy spirit would be seen as a powerful dimension in the moves in the mid-1950s taken towards further unification, related later in this chapter.

Part 3. The Church's renewed commitment to universal mission and the call for Australian women missionaries to New Guinea and the Pacific Islands

Introduction

The island of New Guinea and West Papua (previously claimed by the Dutch) together with the Pacific islands of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Fiji comprise the geographical zone culturally referred to as Melanesia. The first explorers from the outside world to impact on the island of New Guinea in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese and Spanish, were later followed by the Dutch, English and French. During the nineteenth century German and British governments took commercial interest in the region.¹¹³ Newcomers responsible for this 'foreign intrusion' comprised government personnel, adventurers, traders, scientists and missionaries.¹¹⁴ In 1884 the north-east region, New Guinea, was claimed as a German protectorate and the south-east region, Papua, was proclaimed a British protectorate.¹¹⁵ In 1901 Papua was transferred to the Commonwealth of Australia, which, after World War I, also received the mandate to govern the New Guinea region, referred to as the 'Mandated Territory'.¹¹⁶

Catholic missionary involvement in New Guinea

Catholic missionary involvement in the north-eastern (Madang) and western regions (Wewak) of the German administration of New Guinea was, from the 1880s, largely the responsibility of the Society

¹¹² Ibid. In reflecting on the various moves throughout Australia, Sister Dorothy Campion, first President of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (1981-1987), commented: 'It was not without difficulty that each congregation gave up its independence and learned to merge the distinct and separate cultures which had grown out of their differing backgrounds and founding stories.'

¹¹³ John Dademo Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23. By the end of the century trading companies based in Australia, Britain, France and Germany were operating in the island. In 1899 the original sovereignty rights granted to the New Guinea Company were rescinded and placed in the hands of the first Governor appointed from Germany.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 21.

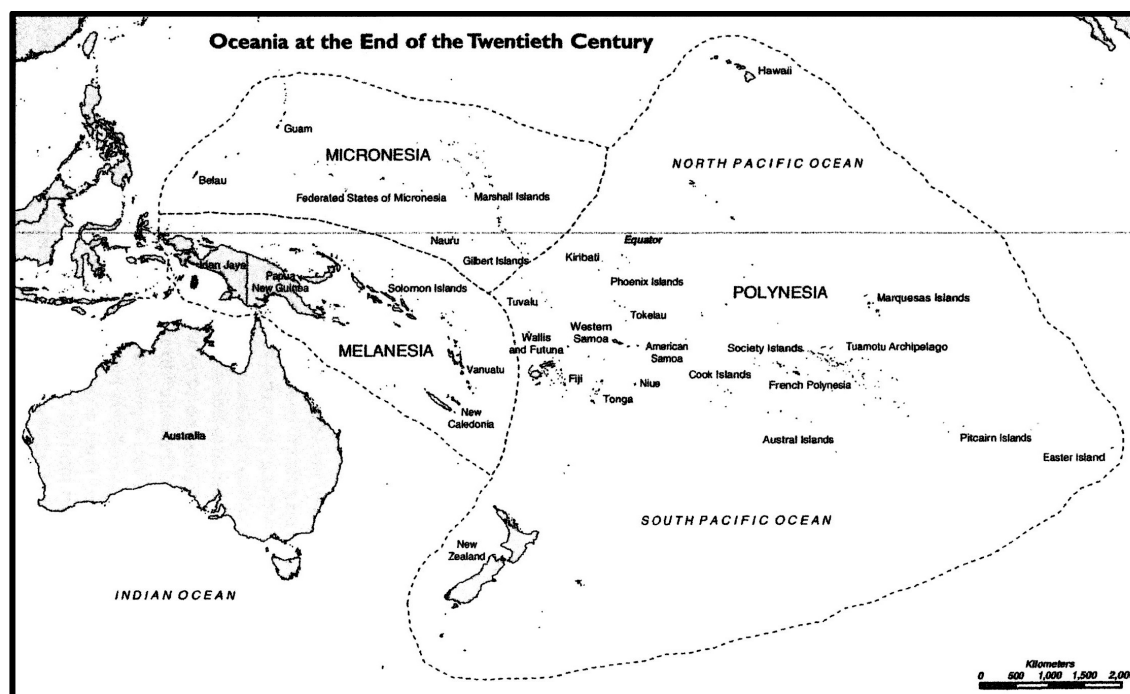
¹¹⁵ Ibid. 25, 26. The German government took control of German New Guinea from the New Guinea Trading Company in 1899.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 57, 26, 84. This transfer was not effected till 1905 and the following year, under the Papua act Australia assumed official responsibility for Papua. Following the signing of peace by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the former German New Guinea Protectorate was handed over by the League of Nations as a Mandated Territory to Australia in 1920.

of the Divine Word (SVD), accompanied by the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS).¹¹⁷ In 1896, New Guinea, known as the Prefecture Apostolic of Wilhelmsland, was officially entrusted to the Divine Word Missionaries by Pope Leo XIII.¹¹⁸

The following map shows the geographical region, which anthropologists generally refer to as Melanesia, as distinct from Micronesia and Polynesia. As stated above, the region of New Guinea and Papua, which is the main focus of this study, forms a prominent part of Melanesia.

Map 1



The Catholic missionary presence began in 1836 when Gregory XVI entrusted the French Marist Fathers with administration of the Western Pacific.¹¹⁹ The Marists were among the new Catholic male and female religious institutes which formed the basis for the revitalisation of the Catholic missionary movement and their influence was highly significant in the spread of Christianity in Oceania and the Pacific.¹²⁰

In 1881, the jurisdiction for the Vicariates of Melanesia and Micronesia was entrusted to the French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart who established mission posts on Yule Island (1885) and the

¹¹⁷ Fritz Bornemann and others, *A History of our Society* (Roma: Apud Collegium Verbi Divini. 1982).

¹¹⁸ Ibid. The beginnings and traditions of this new institute were very significant as the Sisters of Mercy were later called to mission areas under their administration.

¹¹⁹ Hally, *Australia's Missionary Effort*, 15. The French Picpus Fathers arrived in some of the islands of the eastern Pacific, including Hawaii.

¹²⁰ These have previously been mentioned in this chapter. In 1880 the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary entered the Pacific.

surrounding Mekeo region.¹²¹ The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, accompanied by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) established Catholic communities in New Britain (1882).¹²²

The society of the Divine Word missionaries (SVD) had recently been founded by a German priest, Arnold Janssen, who established his institute in Holland in 1875, with the vision to spread the Gospel of the Word throughout the world. He also founded the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS) as missionary helpers.¹²³ The spiritual qualities for the missionary the founder considered fundamental were ‘love of prayer, humility before God and man as proof of the genuineness of prayer, and finally, assiduous love for one’s fellowmen’.¹²⁴ In the missionary context, deep appreciation and respect for local cultures soon became a defining aspect of SVD missionary work, particularly as the new disciplines of linguistics and anthropology developed.

By 1914 there were Christian missions in most areas under government control in New Guinea and Papua, as well as in some unofficially explored areas.¹²⁵ Christianity was most readily accepted by the people when the missionary activities were seen to be of some benefit to the community, particularly in services of health, education and vocational training. In Papua the British Administrator of the Papuan region, Sir William MacGregor, recognised the positive civilising influence of the missions in promoting peaceful behaviour, deepening relationships and spreading European values.¹²⁶ An agreement on ‘spheres of influence’ was made so that the different denominations did not compete in the same geographical areas.¹²⁷ During its administration of Papua and New Guinea Australia left the responsibility for education and health to the various Christian missions to concentrate on economic development through tropical crops (coconuts, rubber, sisal hemp and tobacco) and the export of gold.¹²⁸

Early missionary traditions of the Divine Word Missionaries in the North Coast and Madang regions¹²⁹

Once they had acquired enough land for their religious purposes and for agriculture, including coconut and rubber plantations, the Divine Word Missionaries established their first mission stations,

¹²¹ Bernard de Vaulx, *History of the Missions: From the Beginning to Benedict XV (1914)* (London: Burns & Oats), 182. Fathers Navarre and Verjus, assisted by a religious brother, set out from Issoudun in France for Papua in 1885 and with new recruits persevered in their mission despite harsh tropical climate, diseases and death.

¹²² Ibid. Missionaries of the Sacred Heart also established their missions on New Britain and New Ireland. The branches of the women’s institutes (FDNSC in 1884 and SSpS in 1899) followed within a short time.

¹²³ The cloistered Sisters of Perpetual Adoration were founded to support the missions by their lives of prayer and sacrifice.

¹²⁴ Fritz Bornemann svd and others, *A History of Our Society* (Romae Apud Collegium Verbi Divini, 1981), 19.

¹²⁵ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 53.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 33.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 61.

¹²⁹ The following accounts largely derive from original sources recorded in Fritz Bornemann svd and others, *A History of Our Society*. (Roma Apud Collegium Verbi Divini, 1981).

setting out to improve the welfare of the population and also to be as self-reliant as possible.¹³⁰ The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, who arrived in 1888 opened schools for girls. According to Fr Eberhard Limbrock in 1890: ‘The main work of the Sisters is teaching; and that is not an easy task since they have not a single teaching aid except a blackboard and hand-made bulletin board.’ Soon reports showed the sisters’ work as being more broadly based: “The three Sisters work especially in the school, with the local women, in caring for the sick. By running a boarding school for girls, the Sisters greatly influence the young women.” In addition, the sisters managed the cooking, laundry and housekeeping for the clergy.¹³¹

For pragmatic reasons the mission headquarters were moved in 1905 to Alexishafen, a magnificent harbour, fifteen kilometres north of Madang. Letters from Fr Limbrock show the tradition being set in the pioneering years – of self-reliance and social development in various fields of agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, navigation, respect for language and culture, and spiritual concern in spreading the Gospel without coercion. The 1925 inventory of the mission livestock indicated the importance placed on self-sufficiency.¹³²

At Father Limbrock’s death in 1931 there were 20,000 baptised Catholics and 5,000 catechumens in the mission, which he had founded.¹³³

In 1913 the missionary territory was renamed the Prefecture Apostolic of East Wilhelmsland and divided into the Wewak and Madang regions which continued under the administration of the Divine Word Missionaries.¹³⁴ In 1914 the Apostolic Delegation to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific was established.¹³⁵ Although missionary activity was completely disrupted by the first World War (1914-18), papal statements at this time, and soon after, demonstrated the Church’s unceasing commitment to universal mission.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ The first five mission stations were founded in five different linguistic areas in the coastal and islands region of the headquarters on Tumleo Island. After considering using a single native language, English, Pidgin English or the Malayan language introduced by the Dutch in the Dutch East Indies, German was decided upon as the language of instruction.

¹³¹ Sr Dominique Coles, *Sent by the Spirit, Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit Papua New Guinea 1899-1999* (Wewak: Wirui Press, 1999), 3. Similar accounts were also communicated to me by the early SSsP sisters, by then veteran missionaries, Sr Arsenia Wild & Siglinda Poboss.

¹³² 1,374 head of cattle, 170 water buffalo, 80 pigs, 116 horses, 19 donkeys or mules, 817 sheep, 365 goats and 1,117 chickens.

¹³³ Ibid. 390.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 390. The Prefecture Apostolic of West Wilhelmsland was then entrusted to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, called also the Picpus Fathers)

¹³⁵ Hally, *Australia’s Missionary Effort*, 6.

¹³⁶ These were: *Maximum Illud* (1919) and *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) in the first half of the century, followed post-World War II by *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957).

The Church's integral call to universal mission reiterated through papal encyclicals in the first half of the twentieth century

Pope Benedict XV set the biblical context for his exhortations in *Maximum Illud* by referring to the sublime mission which Jesus entrusted to his disciples in Mark 16:15.¹³⁷ He appealed to the Catholic faithful to promote and develop the missions in order to bring the 'benefits of divine redemption' and human wholeness.¹³⁸

He appealed to missionary bishops to mould, train and build up an indigenous clergy, who possessed 'exceptional opportunities for introducing the faith' to their own people.¹³⁹ He encouraged women religious to serve in 'schools, orphanages, hospitals, hostels and other charitable institutions'. These ministries were 'with God's help, endowed with an extraordinary power to extend our faith'.¹⁴⁰ Institutions for health care and for elementary education and higher education of youth through instruction in the arts and trades in a spirit of cooperation were recommended.

The work of building up an indigenous clergy in this context was seen as essential to the Church being founded and once this was accomplished 'a missionary's work must be considered to have been brought to a happy close'.¹⁴¹

The total tenor of the encyclical advocated a liberating, transformative model of mission. Missionaries were exhorted to follow the same methods as Jesus, the 'Divine Teacher', who before teaching, compassionately healed their sick and showed himself as kind and loving to infants and little children.¹⁴²

Similar exhortations were made in Pius XI's encyclical, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, which reiterated the need 'to impart the light of the gospel and the benefits of Christian culture and civilisation' and 'to enlarge the Kingdom of Christ throughout the world' so that all might participate 'in salutary redemption'.¹⁴³ The pope appealed to the faithful to pray for missionary vocations.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Benedict XV, *On the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World*. This Apostolic Letter of Nov 30th, 1919, clearly expressed principles and directions for mission. These were, however, not acted upon till the entreaties of Pius XII in the 1950s.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 3. Conscious of the 'thousand million' who have been denied the 'benefits of divine redemption', he urged and encouraged the Catholic world in their call, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 5-6, 13. This observation was inspired by the evidence of the international outreach of women's missionary congregations, especially the French, from the nineteenth century as indicated above.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 6. This appeal was made in the light of the failure to establish indigenous clergy in mission lands, despite constant papal insistence.

¹⁴² Ibid. 39.

¹⁴³ Pius XI, *On Promoting the Sacred Missions*, Encyclical Letter of Pius XI, 28 February, 1926.

¹⁴⁴ He warned that if the mission church failed to accomplish this, the apostolate would be 'crippled', and such neglect would be 'an obstacle and an impediment for the establishment and organization of the Church'.

Again reiterated as integral to the process of establishing the Church was the plea for the indigenisation of the clergy, religious and catechists, who ‘by birth and temperament, by sentiment and by interest’ were in touch with their own people and best able to extend more widely the Kingdom of Christ’.¹⁴⁵ Seminary training was therefore essential for indigenous priests destined to govern the parishes and diocese and male and female indigenous religious congregations, ‘more in keeping with the needs and spirit of the country’, were to be established for these new followers of Christ.¹⁴⁶ Indigenous catechists were indispensable for instructing catechumens and preparing them for baptism.¹⁴⁷

Although these guidelines and exhortations were not universally followed at the time, they gave added impetus and continuing direction to the Divine Word Missionaries. This becomes evident in the mission developments, which were to follow.

Mission in New Guinea (and Papua) disrupted by World War II (1942-45)

In the 1930s the territory of the Divine Word Missionaries was divided into separate administrations of Madang and Wewak.¹⁴⁸ In 1934 three new Highlands areas were explored by the Divine Word Missionaries resulting in the establishment of central mission stations in Simbu and Goroka in the Eastern Highlands, Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands and the Tsak Valley in Enga – all places to which the Sisters of Mercy were later called to make foundations, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

Following the outbreak of war in the Pacific, the German missionaries in the Wewak and Madang Vicariates refused to leave and some of these were immediately put under house arrest. The tragedies

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 24.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 38. Also Frank Mihalik, SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSps Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996* (Madang: DWU Press, 1999) 22. The catechist taught religion, and, if he were able, the three R’s; he would pray with the community on Sundays in the absence of the priest and was to be the monitor of morals in the area. He would be sent if requested by the people in return for food and accommodation and a small salary from the parish. The impact of the papal guidelines became pronounced in the work of the SVD missionaries in New Guinea, as they shaped policies regarding ‘the benefits of divine redemption’ and human wholeness, respect for cultures, and training of indigenous clergy and catechists, encouragement of women religious in education and health ministries – goals and works to which the Sisters of Mercy would later commit themselves.

¹⁴⁸ Bornemann, 390, 394. A Prefecture Apostolic was headed by a Prefect Apostolic, a priest. A Vicariate Apostolic by a Vicar Apostolic, a bishop. These categories were organised under the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide. The Prefecture Apostolic of East Wilhelmsland was upgraded to become the Vicariate Apostolic of East New Guinea, with the German SVD, Francis Wolf appointed as Bishop of Madang. The status of the church in the Wewak area was raised with the appointment of Joseph Loerks, first as Prefect Apostolic of Central New Guinea in the Wewak area and then as the first Vicar Apostolic of Central New Guinea in 1933. In 1930 the two territories had a ‘total of 18,600 Catholics, 4,809 catechumens, 29 priests, 29 brothers and 53 sisters. 40 missionaries had died and 24 missionaries had been forced to leave for reasons of health.’

of the war form a precious part of the oral traditions of the missionaries - stories of heroism that the writer was years later privileged to hear first hand from some of the survivors.

Tragedies of War: Revered Oral Traditions. Tragically more than half of the missionaries (122 of the 230 priests, brothers and sisters) lost their lives in the war. The sisters lost more than half of their number. Also ninety per cent of churches, schools and other buildings were destroyed.

Two separate incidents saw, firstly, Bishop Loerks, six priests, fourteen brothers and eighteen Holy Spirit sisters executed and secondly seven priests, twelve brothers and twenty-seven Holy Spirit sisters killed and later buried in a huge common grave at Wewak.¹⁴⁹ A remarkable 'escape to freedom' from the Coast to the Highlands was also experienced towards the end of the war.¹⁵⁰ Among these were five SSps sisters, who were the first sisters to set foot in any of the Highlands missions.¹⁵¹

After the war, at the request of the Apostolic Delegate in Australia, Archbishop Panico, General MacArthur authorised the speedy return of the SVDs to the mission fields in the Coastal and Sepik River areas of Wewak, Madang and Highlands regions of Goroka, Simbu, Enga and Mount Hagen.¹⁵² Memories of the heroism were passed on by the survivors to the new and returning missionaries and formed the precious oral history of the Divine Word Missionaries and Holy Spirit Sisters.¹⁵³

With an enthusiasm generated from personal experience as a young American SVD, Frank Mihalik described the movement thus:¹⁵⁴

Within weeks of the 2 September 1945 Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay, 81 restless Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and 38 Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSps) – all war veterans now stranded in Australia – began to scurry back to their New Guinea missions. With them came 20 young American

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 396. In 1943 Bishop Loerks, 6 SVD priests, 14 brothers and 18 Holy Spirit Sisters who had been taken prisoners from Kairiru on the Japanese destroyer Akikaze were executed between Kavieng and Rabaul. When the Japanese decided to move Bishop Wolf and the missionaries from Manam Island, north east of Alexishafen, to Hollandia (Jayapura) on the Dorish Maru, it was strafed by the American forces, and the missionaries were ordered by their captors to lie down, exposed on the deck. Seven priests, twelve brothers and twenty-seven Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters were killed and many wounded. The dead were buried in a huge common grave at Wewak and then the ship moved on with the survivors to Jayapura.

¹⁵⁰ Sr Dominique Coles, SSps, *Sent by the Spirit, 100 Years of SSps Mission History in Papua New Guinea* (Madang: Holy Spirit Sisters 1999), 15-16. Towards the end of the war, missionaries from the Wewak and Aitape areas were assisted to escape through radio contacts of the Wewak Patrol Officer, Mr. Searson and Danny Leahy of Mount Hagen. They were accompanied by Mr Jim Taylor on their eight-week trek from Wewak, climbing to 3,000 metres along the edges of Enga and into Mount Hagen and down the Waghi Valley to Goroka and Benabena, where Army aircraft flew them to the safety of Port Moresby.

¹⁵¹ Going on to Brisbane they stayed with the Mercy Sisters for a week, before meeting with the SVDs at (Sydney).

¹⁵² Under the leadership of Father William van Baar, twenty-two priests and five brothers returned to Madang. Seven Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters returned to Alexishaven in 1946.

¹⁵³ Recounted in mission circles, and in private communications.

¹⁵⁴ Frank Mihalik SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A chronicle of SVD and SSps mission involvement on mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*. (Madang: DWU Press 1999).

priests who had hurried across the Pacific with MacArthur's troops heading for the Philippine invasion, only to be shunted out of the fighting zone to the safety of Australia.

Receiving the government clearance to return on 20 July 1946, six Holy Spirit sisters sailed to New Guinea to return to their missionary work in Wewak, Alexishafen and Lae, where their pastor was the American, Fr Leo Arkfeld, the future Bishop of Central New Guinea.¹⁵⁵ Soon they opened their convents for missionary work in the Highlands – Mingende (1948) and Kondiu in the Simbu, Minj (1957) and Mount Hagen (1962) in the Western Highlands, Par (1957) and Yampu (1958) in Enga, and later in Goroka in 1966.¹⁵⁶ These were all locations that would soon become familiar to the Australian Mercy Sisters whose work was seen by the missionary bishops as crucial to augment the evangelising work of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Holy Spirit Sisters.¹⁵⁷

By the end of the war Australians had become far more conscious of the existence of their nearest northern neighbours. The fighting zones in the jungles of Rabaul, Bougainville, Milne Bay, Kokoda, Wewak and Port Moresby had been continuously reported in the media. Widespread gratitude was felt for the 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels' who, by their fierce fighting skills, as well as by their loyalty, courage and kindness, had saved the lives of many Australian soldiers and helped deliver Australia from invasion.¹⁵⁸ Australian soldiers discovered that many of the Papuans and New Guineans collaborating with them for Australian freedom were Christians.¹⁵⁹

Pope Pius XII's 1950s 'imperatives' for mission in the Pacific: an Australian response

By the 1950s a changing world order was evident. Colonial empires were collapsing as independence movements rose, the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) revealed a new global consciousness and, with the advance of science and technology, secularism was increasing. In this climate of change, Pope Pius XII called, in 1951, for a renewal of the Church and religious life, and,

¹⁵⁵ The Divine Word Missionaries of non-German descent had preceded them in October 1945.

¹⁵⁶ It is of note that the Rosary Sisters, a local congregation were founded by Bishop Arkfeld in Wewak in 1952 and directed by Sr Eurista Lohmans, SSpS, and the St Therese Sisters were founded by Bishop Adolph Noser in Madang in 1955. The co-foundress and first novice mistress was Sister Arsenia Wild.

¹⁵⁷ Personal accounts by these pioneers formed a rich part of the oral history circulated in mission circles, serving as a source of understanding, appreciation and inspiration to new missionaries. It was a privilege to talk personally with some of the sisters, especially the wartime survivors and post-war sisters, Sisters Arsenia Wild, Eurista Lohmanns, Siglinde Poboss, Nomitia Ebbing, and Nazaria Albers. The wartime destruction resulted not only in loss of lives, but also of limbs and irreplaceable professional documents such as teaching and nursing certificates, that were to have a detrimental effect for the particular sister's future work.

¹⁵⁸ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 122.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 117, 119. The first Papua Infantry Battalion, and the two New Guinea Infantry Battalions were later combined as the Pacific Islands Regiment. These small units achieved much and produced some distinguished war heroes.

in particular, a re-emphasis on mission, particularly in nations emerging from a colonial past and in need of reconstruction after the devastation of war.¹⁶⁰

In '*Evangelii Praecones*', *On promoting Catholic Missions 1951*, Pius XII re-emphasized that the Church's aim was to plant the Church firmly among the people of other lands and locally trained clergy were to form its hierarchy. Furthermore, he urged that 'all that was naturally good, just or beautiful' in local traditions and cultural practices be respected.¹⁶¹

Most importantly, he called for co-worker missionaries from the non-missionary institutes of men and women and strongly urged vicars apostolic to call on them for missionary service. He stated that these recruits should be professionally trained in education and health care and prepared with a good knowledge of their future area of missionary work.

These pleas for the renewal of religious life and commitment to mission deeply inspired Romolo Carboni, the Apostolic Delegate of Oceania - Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific islands from 1953 to 59.

The Australian Sisters of Mercy form two canonical groups as Union (1954) and Federation (1955)

With great enthusiasm, Archbishop Carboni encouraged various independent congregations, originating from the same religious foundation, to form closer associations. Many female institutes responded, including the seventeen independent congregations of the Sisters of Mercy throughout Australia. The canonical structures proposed to them were that of a canonical Union, which offered unity through a centralised form of governance, and the amalgamation of a Federation, allowing congregations of the one religious institute, to retain their independent status.¹⁶²

Subsequently, eight congregations agreed to unite in a Union structure (approved and adopted in 1954) - Adelaide, Bathurst, Goulburn, Gunnedah, Melbourne, Perth (Victoria Square), Singleton and Wilcannia-Forbes; nine congregations agreed to join the Federation structure (approved in 1955 and adopted in 1957) - Ballarat, Brisbane, Cairns, Grafton, Parramatta, North Sydney, Rockhampton, Townsville, West Perth. These two forms of governance structure prepared the

¹⁶⁰ This appeal, building on the previous encyclicals, *Maximum Illud* and *Rerum Ecclesiae*, was of direct significance to the Leaders of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia at the time.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 3. Conscious of the 'thousand million' who have been denied the 'benefits of divine redemption', he urged and encouraged the Catholic world in their call, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶² MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 320. In a Union the former autonomous congregations became subsidiary units governed by provincials, with the one Superior General elected as the central authority over the united institute. A Federation was a looser organisational structure in which member congregations retained their autonomy and were bonded through a central body, with the Major Superiors meeting regularly to share ideas and promote common interests.

Australian Sisters of Mercy for an organised and consolidated response to Pius XII's insistent call for mission.¹⁶³

Also in the early 1950s Carboni went personally to Goroka and Wewak to see the work of reconstruction as the Missionaries of the Divine Word (SVD) and Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS) returned to resume their work of evangelisation. Facing acute shortages of mission personnel, the SVD bishops of these areas looked to Australia for professional co-workers to meet the challenging needs of the people in education and health.¹⁶⁴

The Australian Sisters of Mercy respond to the call to mission in New Guinea¹⁶⁵

Archbishop Carboni boldly put the requests of the New Guinea bishops to the Australian Leaders and found a willing response from the Leaders of the Australian Sisters of Mercy. The two major advocates were the Union Leader, Patricia O'Neill, in Canberra, and the Federation Leader, Damian Duncombe, in Brisbane, both outstanding and innovative women of the Church.¹⁶⁶ Under the leadership of these two women, the first two communities were selected from an overwhelming number of volunteers and within a remarkably short time both groups were ready to send their first volunteer sisters on overseas mission to New Guinea.

Within the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission

The Australian Sisters of Mercy preparing for missionary work in New Guinea could claim a gospel missionary tradition traceable to the New Testament (cf. Chapter One). The general missionary pattern of the Church throughout the ages has been identified as being one of mercy.¹⁶⁷ Embedded within this general pattern and within the stream of apostolic women religious that has been described, the Sisters of Mercy had a special niche.

¹⁶³ An issue related to missionary conditions was that of the updating of religious life-style for women and of many of their customs, and despite Pius XII's call for this (1950, 1951, 1952), little was achieved at the time until after Vatican II and Paul VI's *Ecclesiae Sanctae* document of 1966.

¹⁶⁴ Australia itself had recently been elevated from missionary status to full ecclesiastical status in the church and the Vatican clearly expected that Australia then had responsibility for mission within and beyond its own shores.

¹⁶⁵ MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 320, explained that the 1950s and 1960s saw an enthusiastic response from different Australian institutes to mission countries. These included Good Samaritans, Missionary Franciscan Sisters, Josephites, Sisters of Charity, Dominicans, Presentations and Brigidines, as well as the men's institutes, the Marist, De La Salle and Christian Brothers.

¹⁶⁶ In the years that followed they proved to be not only capable and well-informed, but also enthusiastic, energetic and compassionate towards the needs of New Guinea, and able to convey this missionary spirit to their sisters.

¹⁶⁷ As previously discussed in relation to Pope John Paul II.

Through the multi-faceted legacy of their founder Catherine McAuley, the sisters inherited a mercy spirituality, based on a profound relationship with God and neighbour, expressed in a deep social consciousness and desire to alleviate the distress of the poor - an approach that was holistic in the gospel sense, leading to wholeness.

Throughout their history in Australia the sisters had courageously faced the lived expression of these ideals according to the Mercy Rule and Constitutions, which being decentralised, allowed for initial phenomenal growth. In time, the tensions of weighing the value of answering local needs (particularly in education, health and visitation) and combining beyond local boundaries in more centralised forms of governance and ministries marked the missionary road of the Sisters of Mercy. These tensions of governance and the Irish traditions of adaptability, flexibility and collaboration had been tested and strengthened in the Australian missionary context. The Mercy orientation was missionary in outreach – identified as home mission in Ireland and pastoral mission in the diaspora.

The challenges that awaited the Sisters of Mercy in the missionary context of New Guinea are now explored, as indicated in Chapter One, in the following three chapters.

Chapter Three

Initial Foundations of the Australian Sisters of Mercy in New Guinea (1956–69): Adapting to ecclesial, political and cultural contexts for primary education and health care: Goroka (1956), Kunjingini (1957) and Pumakos (1965)

Introduction

The manner in which the sisters responded to the invitation by the various New Guinea bishops is explored in this chapter. Goroka was part of the Madang Vicariate and was not made a separate Diocese till 1959, three years after the sisters' arrival.¹ Wewak had been created a Diocese in 1948 and Leo Arkfeld SVD appointed its Bishop with the title of Vicar Apostolic of the East Sepik Vicariate of New Guinea.² Pumakos was in the Mount Hagen Diocese when the sisters went there in 1965 and became part of the Diocese of Enga when it was created later in 1982. Within a few short years, and strengthened by new recruits, the sisters of the Union and the Federation expanded through new foundations within the contexts of the local mission stations and diocesan institutions.

Parts 1, 2 and 3 introduce the foundations and explore how the sisters adapted in a changing cultural environment in their traditional Mercy ministries of education, health and social concerns in the three extensive dioceses, administered by the Divine Word Missionaries, during this time-frame 1956-69.

Part 1. The Australian Union Sisters of Mercy in the Madang Diocese - Goroka and Simbu 1956.

Part 2. The Queensland (and Grafton) Sisters of Mercy of the Australian Federation in the Wewak Diocese - Kunjingini 1957 and Torembo 1958; and significant establishments for secondary education at Torembo 1964 and Yarpas 1966 and for teacher education Kunjingini 1957 and Kaindi 1969; as well as new foundations established for primary education and health care on the rural mission stations at Ulupu 1963 from within the Wewak Diocese, at Yangoru in 1963 from Rockhampton and at Negrie in 1970 from Townsville in Australia.

Part 3. The North Sydney Sisters of Mercy of the Australian Federation in the Mount Hagen Diocese - Pumakos in Enga in 1965 and Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen in 1968.

¹ Reference has been made in Chapter Two to the establishment of Vicariates under Gregory XVI (1831–46) and their administration by Vicars Apostolic, who were bishops in their own right. These vicariates were in developing mission territories with often undefined boundaries as in New Guinea and in other areas where, as in England, the Catholic episcopacy had been prohibited until 1850.

² Frank Mihalik SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSPs Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996*. (Madang DWU Press, 1998). Also Personal communication from Geoff Brumm SVD (SVD Historian, Wewak).

Each part concludes with a review in each diocese comprising 'Reflective observations' and the chapter concludes with 'The Sisters of Mercy as agents of mission in the Goroka, Wewak and Mount Hagen Dioceses'.

The political context of colonialism - education, health and social concerns

Post-war official policy in Papua New Guinea from 1946 to the early sixties was one of gradual, uniform development, which had the goal of protecting 'native culture' as it was confronted by western modernisation.³ This policy was to prevent harsh inequities caused by privilege granted to an educated elite.

Under GT Roscoe, as Director of Education in the late 1950s, there was a major expansion of primary education 'to train indigenous people to become clerks, medical orderlies, nurses, teachers, drivers, carpenters, mechanics, machine operators and storemen'.⁴ Primary education would furthermore improve basic health and facilitate entry of village people to the commercial world by encouraging cash cropping and providing the foundation for social cohesion and national unity.⁵

Most education and health services continued to be provided by the missions, as they had been before the war.⁶ Churches managed the training of staff, providing basic salaries, school administration and maintenance of the temporary bush school buildings.⁷ Catholic missions continued their concentration on religious education through schooling in most parish centres. In lower primary schools and basic vocational and technical institutions *Tok Pisin*, which gradually replaced the vernacular in ordinary clan communication, was the medium of instruction. English was taught in the upper primary grades. There were very few secondary schools.

The bulk of the services in hospitals, nurse training and aid-post centres continued to be carried out, particularly in the remote, rural areas, by the various mission agencies.⁸ These mission education and health agencies managed the training of staff, providing basic salaries, school administration and maintenance of the temporary bush school buildings. The government turned most of its attention to the established centres and to the recently opened up Highlands areas where half of the country's population lived.⁹

³ The Administrator, J.K. Murray, appointed W. C. Groves Director of Education in 1946 to pursue this policy in education.

⁴ Peter Smith, "Colonial policy, education and social stratification, 1945-75", *Education and Social Stratification in Papua New Guinea*, ed. M. Bray and P. Smith (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1985), 53.

⁵ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 53.

⁶ Smith and Bray, *Education and Social Stratification in Papua New Guinea*, 49-66.

⁷ These were supplemented by staple subsistence food and firewood from the village communities.

⁸ Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Uniting Church and Seventh Day Adventist.

⁹ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 132.

In the sixties the government poured funding into primary education for the establishment of administration schools, reduced financial assistance to church schools and took greater control over the missions' activities.¹⁰ In the interests of promoting national unity in a country where approximately 850 languages were spoken, English was declared the medium of instruction and an official policy in 1962 prohibited the speaking of *Tok Pisin* in primary schools.¹¹

As a result of a United Nations visiting mission in 1962 the official policy of uniform development was changed to the deliberate creation of an educated elite. The United National Trusteeship Council recommended policies to promote 'standards of professional, administrative and political leadership vital to any territory in preparation for self-government'.¹² This escalation, however, was soon perceived to bring about social division through neglect of the rural population, ninety per cent of whom were engaged in subsistence agriculture and fishing. The 1968 Economic Plan recommended a basic orientation of the primary school curriculum towards cultural and rural activities, agriculture and economic and social learning experiences.¹³

In general, by the late sixties, Australia had increased her responsibilities in education, the economy, social integration and political progress in preparation for Self-Government and Independence. The government poured money into the previously neglected Highlands and increased the budget for primary schools in the established areas. The churches, with minimal government subsidies, continued their commitment to primary education and health in the remote rural areas.

The context of church, mission and culture¹⁴

The Sisters of Mercy approached their ministries in the light of rapid political changes and the growing practice and expectation of women's missionary roles as reflected in twentieth century papal encyclicals (as previously outlined in Chapter Two).¹⁵ The original pioneers, and many sisters after them, participated in mission cross departure ceremonies conducted by the Australian bishops. When the sisters first arrived the cultural, religious and linguistic layers of the diverse clans studied by missionaries and secular anthropologists were not widely publicised. The new-comers, however, were sensitive to the need to show deference and respect towards local customs and sensibilities.¹⁶

¹⁰ Ibid. 128-131. Between 1959 and 1963, enrolment in 'recognised' primary schools more than doubled to almost 150,000.

¹¹ Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*, 76. This policy was to have a considerable impact on Catholic education, particularly in the Wewak, Goroka and Mount Hagen Dioceses where the SVD and SSsP missionaries (with a very few American and Australian exceptions) were of European birth and whose first language was other than English.

¹² M. Bray and P. Smith, *Education and Social Stratification in Papua New Guinea*, 49-66.

¹³ Ibid. 62.

¹⁴ The general identity of the western pre-Vatican II Catholic Church as orthodox and conservative did not apply in the same sense in the mission of New Guinea.

¹⁵ Pope Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones, The Popes and the Missions* (London: Sword of the Spirit, 1951).

¹⁶ The renewed theology of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) signalled the Church's embrace of the modern world and her call to 'read the signs of the times'. By the mid-sixties the first documents were being read and discussed in Papua New Guinea. As the effects of the revised theology took some time to be actioned within the Church in Papua

The Divine Word Missionaries had embraced the cultural goals of promotion of local clergy and valuing of study to increase knowledge, consciousness and respect of indigenous culture and languages.¹⁷ As indefatigable managers of their mission stations, they sought self-reliance and economic progress in agriculture, management of trade stores and improvement of roads, in addition to their numerous education and health care centres.

As the sisters' missionary endeavours were to be defined within recognised cultural contexts, it is relevant to explore these briefly in relation to Melanesian society.¹⁸

The context of Melanesian society, including the status of women

A brief summary of what became more widely known through publication in time, particularly in the post-independence era by anthropologists, missionaries and indigenous writers, revealed an emphasis on the place of Melanesian women within the patrilineal structure of traditional society.¹⁹

In patrilineal cultural systems, males traced their ancestry and inheritance of land through successive generations of males to a male ancestor. Male responsibility for social, political and religious life of the community was considered essential for the maintenance, preservation and survival of the clan.²⁰ The adult male members of the clan were therefore responsible for land and produce, prestige, religious practices, beliefs and rites, their wives and children.²¹

Religion in the sense of faithful adherence to custom, law and traditional values and practices of the ancestors was integral to daily life.²² Fullness of life was seen as flowing into the future. In the

and New Guinea, the relevance of these, together with the Self-Study (1970-74), will be considered within the next time frame (1970-81).

¹⁷ As previously outlined in the earlier twentieth century mission encyclicals, *Maximum Illud* 1919 and *Rerum Ecclesiae* 1926 and referred to in Chapter Two.

¹⁸ Darrell L. Whiteman (Ed.). *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, A Handbook for Church Workers, Book One of a Trilogy*. Point Series No 5, Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984. Melanesia includes Papua New Guinea, West Irian (former Dutch administration, now West Papua in Indonesia), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji. The Sisters of Mercy began in the three main areas of the patrilineal cultural systems. The non-Austronesian language group with patrilineal kinship forms of organisation virtually covers the mainland of Papua New Guinea and the Austronesian language group with a matrilineal kinship organisation includes most of the islands (including East New Britain, New Ireland and Milne Bay and a few coastal areas). Those with a matrilineal kinship organisation (the Austronesian language group) trace their descent and inheritance of land through successive generations of women to a common ancestress. These groupings include most of the islands and a few coastal areas and consist of much smaller clan groups. In practice, traditional societies had their own clearly defined social roles, based on gender, and united and strengthened their community bonds by a network of economic exchanges.

¹⁹ While strict gender specific roles are implied in these accounts, there were notable exceptions e.g. in the case of all-daughter offspring and, in oral history (as reported by RoseMary Baker) of the Sina Sina village woman who succeeded in stopping an imminent tribal fight by standing defiantly in the direct line of fire between two warring clans and imploring them to peace.

²⁰ For 50,000 years generations of people were socialised, educated and nourished through strong and enduring cultures. People met their basic needs through the same farming, fishing and hunting skills and practices used by their ancestors.

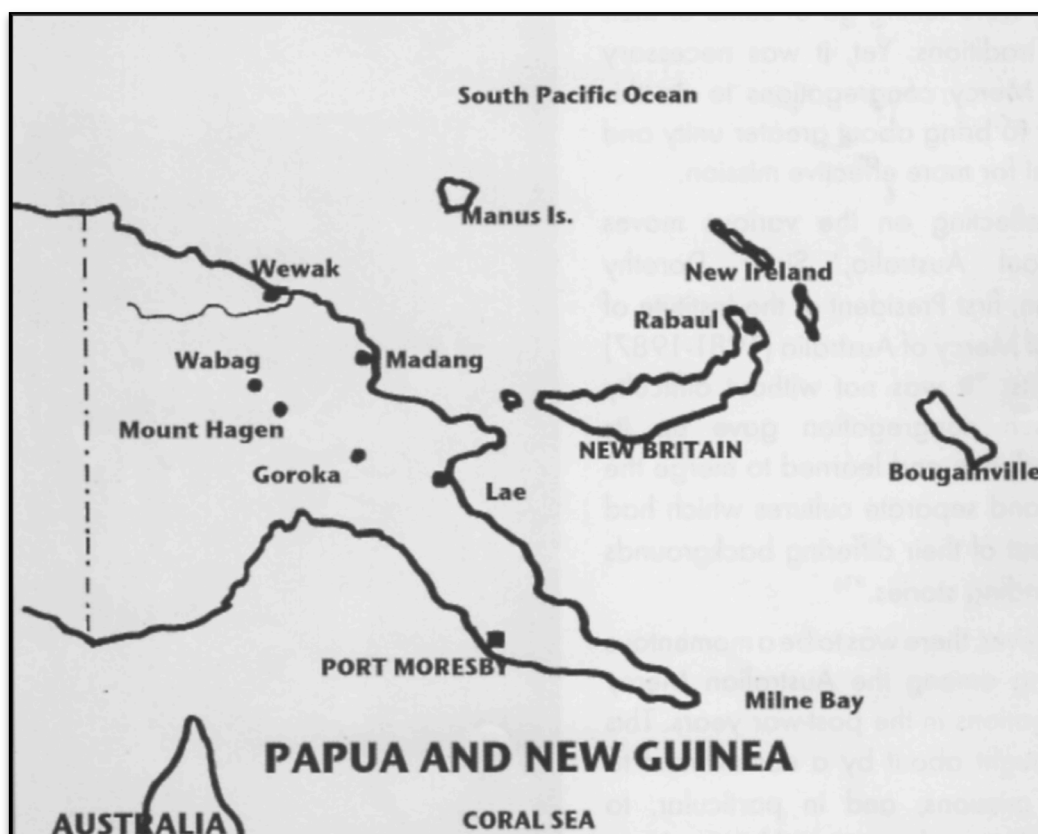
²¹ The societies were polygamous.

²² Ennio Mantovani SVD, *Divine Revelation and the Religions of PNG: A Missiological Manual*, (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 2000) and Bernard Narokobi, *Law and Custom in Melanesia*, Point Series No. 12, Institute of Pacific Studies of University of South Pacific & Melanesian Institute, 1989.

afterlife, the cycle of earthly duties to family and clan having been carried out, mistakes reconciled and clan strength celebrated, all looked forward to being united in harmony and complete life with the ancestors. While the consciousness of the spirit-world, with the many spirits to be appeased, brought respect and fear, the people esteemed and honoured one Spirit above all others.

The following general map outlines the major centres of Catholic mission in Papua and New Guinea in the 1950s.

Map 2



Through an arranged marriage the woman left her own clan to join that of her husband. She was in the company of the other wives, perhaps, even those from enemy territories. Women were thus, officially powerless to challenge the strong, united, corporate, patriarchal system that gave them a position, status and livelihood. They were forbidden entry to the men's house, where decisions were

made by the men of the clan, and a woman had no political voice and was expected to keep her opinions to herself, relying upon her husband's decisions.²³ Women were traditionally excluded from religious rituals and exchange ceremonies.²⁴ Men were 'in complete control of political decisions, including those affecting women'.²⁵

In these societies the woman was respected for her role as producer (of children, pigs and food gardens) and enjoyed a degree of domestic power, though her identity, status and authority were tied to that of the husband, for there was 'no full status in social life without marriage'.²⁶ In some cases wives gained high prestige because of their domestic and economic role, even to the extent of being rewarded with land. Man found his role in arranging exchange relationships cementing community bonds and woman found hers in providing the pigs and food needed for this. The female role of producer and the male role of politician were fixed. 'Man is the talker who belongs in the community's square, while the woman is the producer who belongs in the garden'.²⁷

In practice, traditional societies with their own clearly defined social roles, based on gender, were united and strengthened by a network of economic exchanges. Although excluded from the public forum, women were not politically passive, and wielded considerable influence behind the scenes. Because of their place within the 'economic core of society' due to their production for consumption and exchange, women often played a central, though private role.²⁸ In contrast to men who were to be aggressive and crafty in public, women were to be silent, modest, humble and unassuming in public situations.²⁹

In the late colonial stage, the vast majority of the people supported themselves by subsistence farming in rural areas. However, while men's workloads had decreased by the replacement of stone tools with steel axes and machinery, the domestic, gardening and child-minding roles of the women had increased.³⁰ With the introduction of the cash economy men had the opportunity for paid

²³ Y. Nagari, "Women, education and development," in the *Fifteenth Waigani Seminar: From Rhetoric to Reality, Papua New Guinea's Eight Point Plan and National Goals after a Decade*, ed. P. King, W. Lee and V. Warakai (Waigani: UPNG Press, 1985), 115-120.

²⁴ M. Strathern, *Women in between: Female Roles in a Male World - Mt. Hagen, New Guinea* (London and N. Y: Seminar Press, 1972), 69.

²⁵ M. G. Gelber, *Gender and Society in the New Guinea Highlands: An Anthropological Perspective on Antagonism toward Women* (London: Westview Press, 1986), 48.

²⁶ W. Bebin, "An anthropological view of sexuality," in *Human Sexuality in Melanesian Cultures*, ed. J. Ingebritson, Point Series, No 14 (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1990), 52.

²⁷ Ennio Mantovani, "Male-female relationships in Melanesia," *Catalyst, Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia*, 18, 1, (1988): 42.

²⁸ K. J. P. Chao, "Leadership," *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, ed. D. L. Whiteman, Point Series 1984, 5, 127-148.

²⁹ M. G. Gelber, *Gender and Society in the New Guinea Highlands*, 48.

³⁰ Researchers: Mandie, A., "Institutional and ideological control of gender in a transitional society", in the *Fifteenth Waigani Seminar: From Rhetoric to Reality, Papua New Guinea's Eight Point Plan and National Goals after a Decade*, ed. P. King, W. Lee and V. Warakai (Waigani: UPNG Press, 1985), 115-120. 166-171 and Nagari, Y., "Women, education and development." Ibid. 115-120.

employment. Women, already working hard with domestic chores, food gardening and child rearing, were further burdened by the need to turn to cash crops to find extra money for the new essentials of clothing and school fees for their children.

Some post-independence female writers claimed that male Australian colonial administration had neglected the education of females. The women's roles in socio-economic development, e.g. their substantial role in agriculture and the social and public roles they played in organizing their commercial exchanges, were not recognised.

This background suggests the challenging and changing social and cultural situation in which the Sisters of Mercy were to find themselves when they first set foot in New Guinea. Females were overburdened by the increase in their traditional work roles and the colonial education of girls had been overlooked.

The Sisters of Mercy as apostolic women religious called to mission in New Guinea

The Sisters of Mercy were able to operate within a pre-Vatican II framework focusing upon immediate and pragmatic human outcomes according to a liberating and transforming model (as introduced in Chapter Two). As vowed religious in the Church, and disciples of Jesus, Redeemer and incarnate God of Mercy, they were committed to serve and empower the poor and needy in society and were prepared to adjust to meet new challenges according to the vision of the diocese. They called upon their Mercy tradition of witnessing to a compassionate and encouraging view of women when, upon their arrival, they encountered the disadvantaged situations of many women in rural New Guinea, caught between the traditional and colonial contexts.

This chapter explores how the pioneer missionary sisters in New Guinea lived out their call in the spirit and traditions of their Founder in very different contexts: the Eastern Highlands, including Simbu in the Goroka Diocese; the coastal and islands areas, including the swamp lands of the Sepik in the Wewak Diocese; and the Western Highlands, including Enga in the Mount Hagen Diocese. Despite differences in missionary contexts and in the newly formed structures of Union and Federation, essential threads of the Mercy spirit and tradition in religious education, health care and pastoral concern through visitation in the three geographical and ecclesial administrations are seen to emerge.

Part 1. Foundations of the Australian Union of the Sisters of Mercy in the Madang Vicariate: Goroka (1956) and Simbu (1963)³¹

Archbishop Carboni had personally responded to the pleas of the Australian Catholics of Goroka for sisters for the education of their children. He saw a need for the Church to educate leaders who would be guided by Christian principles in their relationships with the indigenous people, as well as the potential for mission with the indigenous population. Bishop Noser in Madang had originally asked for three sisters but, as so many Union sisters were in favour of the mission and had volunteered, Mother Patricia O'Neill strategically decided to send four to ensure there would be someone to do missionary work with the indigenous children.³²

The Madang vicariate stretched from the mission headquarters on the coast at Alexishafen near Madang south to Lae and westwards across to the Eastern Highlands and Simbu. According to government policy, Madang was divided into separate spheres of influence with Goroka, including Kainantu, falling in a Lutheran area. The pioneer Divine Word priests had entered the Highlands from the northeast near Mount Wilhelm and most mission stations were in the heavily populated Catholic area of Simbu. There were, however pockets of Simbu Catholics working on the coffee plantations in the Goroka valley, where Catholic mission stations had been established at Namta, Yamiufa and Tafeto.

Goroka itself had recently become the established administration headquarters and recognised gateway to the vast Highlands area which, with the Western Highlands region, extended across to the West Papuan (formerly West Irian) border. With the sisters' arrival pending, Bishop Noser had plans to build up the Catholic faith among the civic population and townspeople of Goroka and establish a Catholic school for their children.

The four missionary sisters chosen from the many volunteers from the Union provinces were:³³ Nance (Elizabeth) Miller from Adelaide, Irene (Irenaeus) Carroll from Bathurst, Algra (Julian)

³¹ The historical details of this, and the following chapters are from various sources. They are the result of research from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and the former Australian Congregations of the Union and the Federation and the Sisters of Mercy PNG Region and from the Diocese of Goroka, Archdiocese of Mount Hagen and the Diocese of Wewak. Included are material, such as letters, documents and reports. I have also drawn on valuable information from the recorded interviews of more than eighty expatriate sisters and eighteen Papua New Guinea sisters as well as several relevant clergy and lay people.

³² Information on Mother Patricia is from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Sisters of Mercy PNG Region.

³³ The Union provinces were: Adelaide, Bathurst, Canberra-Goulburn, Gunnedah, Melbourne, Perth, Singleton and Wilcannia Forbes.

Clarke from Perth and Marie (Paul) Dagg from Singleton.³⁴ Mother Patricia arranged for the missionaries to meet at Malabar at the Sydney Convent of Mercy of the Gunnedah sisters, so they would get to know one another, and also so that she could decide on the community and mission leader. Taken by surprise, Elizabeth Miller was informed the day before their departure that she was appointed to this task. The sisters had a simple, but moving missioning ceremony in the convent and the Apostolic Delegate, Romolo Carboni, presented them with a special crucifix blessed by Pope Pius XII. All were in high spirits and were looking forward to their missionary work.

Leaving from Mascot Airport, they made brief stops at Moresby airport where, after the long hours of night flying, they were paid a reassuring and welcome visit by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH), who came with refreshing tea and sandwiches. Arriving at Alexishafen, the vicariate headquarters, they met Bishop Noser, the Holy Spirit Sisters and the recently formed indigenous institute of the Sisters of St Therese. After a short stay, the Bishop accompanied the pioneer band to Goroka on 30 January 1956.³⁵



Bishop Noser with founding Sisters on arrival at Goroka Airstrip

From Left: Marie Dagg, Algra Clarke, Elizabeth Miller, Bishop Noser and Irene Carroll

³⁴ In general baptismal names are given first followed by the religious names. Many sisters reverted to their baptismal names after Vatican II. Occasionally I have retained the religious names where this seems in keeping with the descriptive, narrative style. Some sisters retained their religious names.

³⁵ Information on Elizabeth Miller and the pioneer sisters has been taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, the Sisters of Mercy PNG Region and the Goroka Diocese.

Goroka Beginnings: the first two schools – for European and Indigenous children

Father Fontana, a zealous and hard-working priest, was there to welcome them. He offered them his permanent house, which he had just completed; he was prepared to live in a bush hut at the back of the church property until the building of the church and the sisters' convent were completed.

The first six months proved a hard and uncertain time. Fr Fontana completed the building of St Mary's Church, levelled the nearby hill, which Bishop Noser called Mount Mercy, and constructed buildings for the convent and school. In the light of the original request put to the Apostolic Delegate by the European population, Fr Fontana's zeal was directed towards their needs, and the sisters were disappointed to find that he had made no plans for a school for the indigenous children. Furthermore, he had devised an imposing plan for a boarding school for students from the whole of the country.³⁶

Making the most of the situation, the sisters began teaching the Queensland syllabus of the Primary 'A' International School.³⁷ The Australian children were at first in desks at the back of the church, and later at St Mary's School on the convent property. Sadly, Fr Fontana was forced to return to the United States, suffering with cancer. His successor, Fr Bodnar, continued with the original plans and the boarding school was eventually built. Although the sisters were not in favour of it, their protests went unheeded. As it happened, Fr Bodnar was not able to attract the numbers anticipated to make the project viable.

Meanwhile, St. Mary's Primary 'A' School prospered in terms of the education standard offered, if not in enrolment numbers. The sisters' teaching qualifications were officially recognised, enabling them to receive government subsidies. When the government eventually offered a new boarding school subsidy to parents for the secondary education of their children in Australia, St. Mary's students qualified for entry into Catholic and other denominational boarding schools there and the parents preferred this option.

Within a few months Mother Patricia visited the mission and, in her communication with Bishop Noser, insisted that, as she had exceeded his original request by sending four sisters, he allow a school to begin as soon as possible for missionary work with indigenous children. In August Marie Dagg was authorised with that task and began teaching at the back of the North Goroka Church. Although the class was a very small group of twenty students because only ten double desks were allowed, the sisters saw the demand for education within the indigenous clans around Goroka and decided to look for land for their own school and the freedom to expand. Eventually, land was

³⁶ Archival records show that there was effective communication between the Union leader and the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra about the acquisition of land titles. Patricia was also the liaison between Bishop Arkfeld and Canberra.

³⁷ The schools in which the Australian syllabus from Queensland was taught were referred to in this way.

offered by the people of Faniufa Village on the outskirts of Goroka and this was communicated to the sisters by a small boy, Joseph Aswo. Once the land agreement was completed work began on a bush classroom. Sacred Heart School Faniufa, the first Catholic Primary 'T' school for indigenous pupils in the Goroka area, was blessed and opened on 28 January 1957.

The school developed rapidly as the number of male national teachers and female lay missionaries increased. The majority of students were boys, but, unlike in the government schools where most of the teachers were male, more female students enrolled because of the sisters' influence and intervention.³⁸ A permanent office and two classrooms were built by a national builder-carpenter, supervised by Bill O'Brien, a coffee plantation owner. Marie Dagg drove the jeep to the river to get gravel and sand and with the senior boys made the 109 cement blocks for the foundation of the school, entrusting a miraculous medal of Our Lady of Lourdes to each one. By 1960 when two more sisters arrived, Margaret (Patrice) Clarke and Ursula (Marie Loreto) Gilbert, the school was approved by the Education Department as a demonstration school. Ursula's father and uncle from Australia soon arrived and built two new permanent classrooms.³⁹

New visions for Goroka: a new Diocese in 1959

Within a few years the sisters found themselves at the centre of missionary activity with the appointment of Bernard Schilling as Bishop of Goroka and the arrival from the United States of Fr Harry McGee SVD, who eagerly adapted to the needs of the situation as a pastor on the ground and a pilot in the air.

Goroka was no longer a mission outpost, but the church headquarters of the vast areas of the Eastern Highlands and Simbu. George Greathead, a prominent public figure and former District Commissioner, arranged for the transfer of the lease of some of his property for the diocesan centre at Kefamo on the outskirts of Goroka town. Bishop Schilling encouraged a friendly, co-operative spirit among the missionaries.

By this time, initial construction of the ever-shifting Highlands Highway, linking Coast and Highlands, was underway. By later standards the 'highway' seemed merely the joining and widening of narrow bumpy tracks ever prone to bogging and landslides in the wet season - the monsoonal climatic conditions from November to May - but its construction enabled the sisters, with Fr McGee's initiative and encouragement as parish priest, to venture forth to start new schools

³⁸ The parents told the sisters that they did not want to send their daughters to the government schools because the teachers there were all male, but they knew the sisters would look after their daughters at Faniufa.

³⁹ From a recorded interview with Marie Dagg, c. 2005.

in the village areas beyond the Goroka town boundary. Fr McGee saw an urgent need for all in the Church and the Mercy religious community at Goroka to be a missionary presence. There were pockets of Catholic Simbu workers on the coffee plantations amid the Lutheran villages and, when the villagers gave land, they expected that the school should be open to all children, not just the Catholics. The sisters' role was not one of trying to make converts, but to be a Christian presence. Fr McGee's appeal to the willing sisters was: 'Let us be a presence among the people – north, south, east and west of Goroka'.⁴⁰

This encouragement enabled the sisters to be more widely involved in rural areas beyond Goroka from 1960. New schools of Tafeto, Katagu and Yamiufa, begun in 1960, were distances of twelve to fifteen kilometres radiating from Goroka, and the sisters were able to drive along the highway with relative ease before embarking on the more problematic minor roads to the schools. Opening a new school meant winning the people's approval, gaining access to suitable land and negotiating its lease, arranging for the voluntary construction of permanent and bush school buildings, finding teachers and selecting pupils from the throngs of youngsters yearning to go to school. The lion's share of setting up, running and maintaining the schools was done by the sisters. The sisters' missionary involvement is recorded as follows:⁴¹

Sr Irenaeus Carroll began and completed St Therese's School and Church at Tafeto west of Goroka.⁴²

Sr Mary Julian Clarke opened Katagu School in the Bena District southeast of Goroka.

Sr Mary Patrick Mahoney managed supervision of Religious Education at Yamiufa School at the foot of the Daulo Pass. Lay missionaries, Cecily Everding from Germany and Margaret Dahl from Adelaide, had previously opened this mission complex.

In 1961 a Catholic school was started across the Kamaliki River at Yabiufa village, with an indigenous teacher, John Olkande as Head Teacher. The sisters helped to supervise the teachers at this school.

Sisters and lay missionary pioneers and volunteers in the mission context

The newfound missionary activity brought tremendous joy and new challenges. The number of sisters increased with the arrival of Mary (Antonita) Gleeson, Dorothy Anne (Emily) Harrick, Agnes (Mary Patrick) Mahoney, Margaret (Patrice) Clarke and Ursula (Marie Loreto) Gilbert. Lay missionaries came, many of whom were former students or teachers from Mercy schools in Australia. Audrey Stainsby, a qualified nurse, came originally on holiday to see her cousin, Mary

⁴⁰ Compiled from archival material such as letters and reports and anecdotal references by the sisters who held his memory in high esteem.

⁴¹ Information supplemented by information from archival records of the Goroka Diocese.

⁴² The name of Sr Irenaeus was held in fond memory by the people of Tafeto, for her involvement, and in organizing the building of the church.

Gleeson, and stayed to take charge of health care at Tafeto for many years and was co-worker and companion of Irene Carroll. Early lay missionaries in the Goroka Diocese from Australia were Mollie Bird (St Mary's) from Singleton, Lisa Pighetti (St Mary's) from Melbourne, Margaret Dahl (Yamiufa) from Adelaide and Carmel Tormey (Yamiufa) from Perth. Later Australian arrivals were Mary Jaier (Faniufa), Anne Lowndes (Faniufa) and Mary O'Loughlin (Kamaliki), while Jose Koch (Tafeto) and Cecily Everding (Yamiufa) were from Europe. Mother Elizabeth's sister Kathleen came to help out with the teaching at St Mary's.⁴³

The Goroka Convent of Mercy – a place of welcome and hospitality

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Miller and the sisters had settled in and the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy was well known as a place of welcome for mission personnel for hospitality and retreats. The large boarding school provided accommodation for retreats for priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay missionaries within and beyond the diocese. Cathy (nee Gallagher) McMahon, former lay missionary in Lae and ex-pupil of the Melbourne Sisters of Mercy, recalled the welcome she would receive during school holidays at the oasis of the Goroka convent.⁴⁴ The large boarding school also provided a home for out-of-town indigenous children attending Faniufa School. The garden tended by Algra Clarke was peaceful in its tropical beauty.

In the early sixties the Sisters of Mercy from Goroka and Wewak arranged to have a combined spiritual retreat there. Although the different governance structures of the Union and the Federation were in operation, this in no way disturbed the bond of Mercy sisterhood. Elizabeth recalled that at a barbecue the older sisters were sitting on chairs and the younger sisters were on mats further out on the grass. They could be heard saying: "We should all be one up here". In her heart Elizabeth fully agreed with this, but because the Mercy sisters had been canonically structured as the Union and Federation, her loyalties prevented her from being part of the general conversation!⁴⁵

Apart from the management of the two Catholic school systems by the Goroka community proving, at times, to be a contentious issue, the general picture was one of warm relationships with the parishioners who were welcoming, kind and co-operative, and many of whom maintained lasting friendships with the sisters. Yeryma, the wife of Jim Taylor, the early explorer, drove the sisters in her car in the days before they got their own transport. Prominent Goroka families, the Greatheads, Mullins, Taylors, Wells, Leahys and others contributed to the development of Christianity in the civic circles of the rapidly growing urban environment.⁴⁶

⁴³ From personal knowledge and archival records.

⁴⁴ Notes were taken from an interview in Adelaide in August 2005.

⁴⁵ Anecdotal evidence known to the sisters present.

⁴⁶ Mr Jim Taylor accompanied the Wewak missionary war survivors across the Bismarck Range to Goroka. This is known from anecdotal evidence and was also communicated by his daughter, Meg Taylor.

Living with difficulties, tensions and tragedy – ‘joys and sorrows mingled’⁴⁷

The sisters continued the teaching and administration of St Mary’s School with declining student numbers, while the student numbers of the sisters’ mission schools (Primary T Schools) quickly rose to the hundreds and two sisters, previously on the staff of St. Mary’s, were then fully dedicated to the education of indigenous children.⁴⁸ Occasionally, these contrasts were a source of tension, both for the sisters and the European Catholic community. The parishioners, as parents, understandably wanted the best for their children and the kind of Christian education that would allow them eventually to compete with students in Australian schools. They saw their children’s needs in this light.

By agreement, the diocese financed the sisters’ food, accommodation, some basic needs, and leave fares on a three-yearly basis to Australia, but money was short and school finances, so necessary to provide for the educational materials required, were always being stretched. In their spare time, the sisters sold second-hand clothes to pay for the stipends of the lay missionaries. Managers of commercial enterprises, including Mr Danny Leahy of Collins and Leahy, and Mrs Robinson of a town Bulk Trade Store, financially supported the sisters’ work in education. Money and school supplies were generously donated by the sisters and the school children in Australia, using imaginative ways of fundraising. Extra money was needed to pay for the transport and maintenance costs of the dilapidated jeeps, sorely tested on the narrow mountain tracks. At the Union Generalate of St Anne’s in Canberra, Mother Patricia, in her circular letters to the congregations, appealed not only for more sisters for the mission work, but also for added financial support for the upkeep of the sisters themselves.⁴⁹

There is no doubt that the sisters eagerly expended much of their time and physical strength in setting up and maintaining these pioneer schools in very difficult and complex circumstances. Reconciling the competing ideals of regular community life, which was the canonical norm before Vatican II, with the ever-growing mission demands, was a constant challenge. Furthermore, the so-called idyllic climate of the ‘eternal spring’ of Goroka proved a myth as illness befell some of the sisters, forcing their return to Australia.

Tragically, Fr McGee was killed in a plane crash when returning from Madang in 1962. As pilot of a light aircraft and, lost in heavy cloud cover, he had missed the opening of Bena Gap which led into

⁴⁷ The theme of the cross recurs in all the foundations, and I have chosen this heading from Catherine McAuley because it best portrays the faithful attitude of the sisters amidst suffering and sorrow.

⁴⁸ These were the schools for indigenous children in which a special syllabus for the Territory of Papua and New Guinea was used.

⁴⁹ Circular cited in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Victoria Square, Western Australia.

the Goroka valley.⁵⁰ Defying the official authorities, the senior Faniufa boys found their way through the jungle and were the first to find the crash site and tend Fr McGee's body. The sisters deeply felt the loss of this friendly and prophetic priest who understood their heartfelt desire for mission among the New Guinea people and guided and supported them in their initiatives.

About this time, a young assistant teacher at Faniufa, Maria Ika Aum expressed her desire to be a Sister of Mercy, and after novitiate formation with the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton, was accepted and professed as Sr Mary Damian on 26 September 1967.⁵¹ Returning to PNG she completed her teacher training at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen. Because of intense cultural pressures placed on her by her clan, Maria felt compelled to leave the Sisters in 1971.

During the early years, access for upper primary and secondary education was problematic as there were so few schools and, without main roads, air travel was the only viable option.⁵² With the willingness of the parents and sponsorship generously offered by some Goroka townspeople, the sisters arranged for students with potential, including those of mixed racial descent, to proceed with further schooling in Australia. To encourage the vast majority to continue and complete primary education locally, arrangements were made for those students who lived some distance from the school to stay with relatives (*wantoks*) nearby, or, in rare circumstances, board in very basic conditions at the school. As time progressed and educational opportunities in the Catholic, and particularly in the Mercy, schools in New Guinea improved, the practice of encouraging further education in Australia was discontinued.

During these pioneering years the sisters, who had been at the centre of the diocese since 1960, became more aware of the overall needs of the diocese, particularly in the Simbu District which was accessible through the Daulo Pass cutting through the mighty Bismarck mountain ranges.

First call to mission at Kup in the Simbu in the Goroka Diocese (1963-64)

The second place of Mercy ministry in the Highlands was Simbu, which the first foreigners, greeted with the word Simbu meaning 'welcome', mistakenly thought was the name of the place.⁵³ Its natural beauty, majesty and mystery has been captured from the following description.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Printed in the *Post Courier* newspaper a few days after the funeral in St Mary's Catholic Church, Goroka, attended by people of all different religious persuasions.

⁵¹ Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.

⁵² Some girls were accepted at Yrapos, the Sisters of Mercy Secondary School, which will be introduced in Part 2.

⁵³ In colonial times this region was referred to as Chimbu.

⁵⁴ Based on the eulogy given by Fr Michael McEntee at the funeral Mass of Fr Louis Ambane, the second, and much loved, Simbu priest, and used with permission.

To traverse the Simbu valley is to behold one of the specially beautiful places of this earth. The justly famed alpine regions of Europe do not outdo Simbu where the highest peak, Mount Wilhelm, is the same height as the highest mountains of Europe. Picture yourself confined in the deep valley, your eyes always drawn upwards, first to the mountains and then to the startling blue of the sky that seems to soar ever upwards, even to heaven itself. Hear the rumble of the streams rushing down the sides of the valley and joining the river, see the people going to wash and refresh themselves in the clear waters. Admire the terraced gardens of the breathtakingly difficult terrain in Simbu on which the people have gardened for tens of centuries...

This is a land that demands toughness; it imposes hardship and, from time to time, hunger on its inhabitants, yet it has produced a rich culture in the life of the village, regulated by customary law, productive of respectful relationships, and capable of spiritual yearnings. At the same time, the culture of the people was marred by frequent violence and by oppression of the weakest. It was a land ready for the message of the Prince of Peace preached by the missionaries.

On taking up his appointment to the Goroka Diocese in 1960, Bishop Bernard Schilling faced a serious pastoral challenge, as ninety per cent of his diocese comprised the Catholic population of Simbu, numbering over 200,000.⁵⁵ At first the language of instruction had been the common language for the Upper Simbu, *Kuman*. One of the pioneers of the Catholic Church, Fr John Nilles had studied this language and produced a dictionary for it. As schools proliferated with minimally trained catechist teachers *Tok Pisin*⁵⁶ was also used. Central parish schools were set up for selected male students to progress to middle primary level. A further tier was reached when the most successful upper primary male students were selected to proceed to the central boys' boarding school at Kondiu.⁵⁷ No such progression was envisioned for female students, relegated to junior and middle primary education.

The Mission Education Secretary, Fr John Wald, decided to plan for a system of complete Catholic primary schooling.⁵⁸ This was manageable at first, but as more and more parents were anxious to send their children to school, the system was stretched beyond its limit. Major obstacles were not only lack of finance for school buildings and equipment but also lack of qualified personnel.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Archival Records of the Goroka Diocese.

⁵⁶ Lingua franca in PNG at the time.

⁵⁷ Less numerous were the Lutheran, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist mission churches, with their own education and health facilities.

⁵⁸ From an interview with James Knight SVD (c. 2005). The diocese had adopted a policy to follow the American and Australian system of funding, managing and maintaining a complete Catholic primary system of education in which religious education was taught along with the secular subjects, and religious values were incorporated into the entire curriculum. This was chosen in preference to a practice found in some European countries where religious education and preparation for the sacraments occurred in junior primary Catholic schools and religious development was then followed up by qualified catechists in state-run upper primary schools.

⁵⁹ The lower primary grades were taught by "A" certificated indigenous teachers, qualified only to teach at that level. The middle grades in the English Primary Schools were taught by the very few lay missionaries. Some schools were

Although minimal government subsidies were available to qualified overseas teachers, the Church could not provide the staff numbers required for middle and upper primary classes, or the resources to provide salaries and housing for indigenous teachers.

After the first administration school was opened near the district headquarters at Kundaiwa in the late 1950s, more soon followed and a new policy of rationalisation requiring pupils to attend the nearest school was introduced. Missionaries then tried to provide catechists for religious education of the Catholics in administration schools. In light of the 1962 government policy prohibiting the use of *Tok Pisin* in education, as previously mentioned, the urgent need for teachers of English was felt particularly in the Highlands, which, because of their later discovery, lagged behind the rest of the country in education and development.⁶⁰ Fr Wald conveyed these concerns to the priests, among whom was Fr Jack Sheerin SVD, then in charge of the central mission station at Mingende.

When the nearby mission station at Kup was suddenly deprived of the parish priest, Fr Leo Joerger SVD, who had suffered a breakdown in health and the American lay missionary Head Teacher, Jerome Adams, and lay missionary nurse had left to return to the States, the crisis prompted immediate action. In the Christmas period of 1963-64, Fr Sheerin crossed the Daulo to make an urgent request for the Sisters of Mercy to come to the rescue and manage the station. Despite illness and reduced numbers, the sisters responded with whole-hearted enthusiasm.

Sr Patrick Mahoney assured Fr Sheerin that the sisters were sympathetic to the needs of the Simbu, as priests visiting Goroka had often spoken of it. Responding to the emergency and faithful to their commitments at Goroka, the sisters made plans for Mary Patrick Mahoney and Mary (St Roch) Moore)⁶¹ to go ahead immediately and keep things going over the Christmas vacation. It was decided that when Elizabeth returned from leave she and St Roch would settle there. Compromises to manage the situation at Kup and at Goroka were soon in place.⁶²

privileged to have specially trained teacher-catechist lay missionaries (for example, Genevieve Bühler and Hildegard Weppner of Koge). Apart from these, there were hardly any teachers qualified for the upper primary students, who were increasing year by year and the central (selective) school at Kondiuh could no longer assimilate the increasing number of boys. No provision was made for girls to continue beyond middle primary education.

⁶⁰ In 1931, *Tok Pisin* had been adopted by the Church as the language to be used in evangelisation. Cited by Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*, 1998.

⁶¹ St Roch, a triple-certificated nurse had first taught religious education at Faniufa until there was a medical position for her after original government plans for her to be engaged in managing a government leprosy hospital were abandoned. I have retained her religious name here, because that was the only name she was known by in Papua New Guinea.

⁶² Plans for managing the existing schools were made: Ursula Gilbert would leave Faniufa and go as Head Teacher and junior primary teacher of St Mary's school. One of the new recruits from Australia, Teresa Flaherty from Adelaide was to take Elizabeth's place, teaching the upper primary at St Mary's. Two others, Valda Finlay from Bathurst and Rita Hassett from Singleton, as well as the lay missionaries, Mary Jaier and Anne Lowndes, and a young indigenous woman from Lae, Maria Ika, who had a talent with the young ones, would help the Head Teacher, Marie Dagg, Margaret Clarke and Mother Patrick at Faniufa.

Thus, the Sisters of Mercy made their first move to cross the Daulo Pass into Simbu. The enthusiastic sisters, living in dark and cramped circumstances in the vacated priests' house, responded to the situation with few complaints and plenty of laughter. When Fr Willie Bohlen SVD arrived, they stayed on while he lived in a back room of the mission trade store. Elizabeth managed the school with the indigenous teachers, and St Roch was at last able to dedicate herself to full-time nursing. Assisted by basically trained medical staff, *dokta bois*, she managed the government health centre, made of bush materials, a few hundred metres down the road. It was not an unusual sight to see her on the bicycle at night, lantern on the handle bars, hastening to meet an after hours' emergency.

Within two years of the sisters' arrival, the cheerful, gentle, resourceful St Roch was diagnosed with cancer. There was great sadness among those who knew her in New Guinea when news reached them of her death on 1 April 1965, just a few months after her return to Singleton. Triple certificated nurse, Clement Mary (Winifred) Anderton from the Singleton Mater Hospital, generously volunteered to replace her at Kup.⁶³

The Mercy convent at Kup, provided by the Goroka Diocese, was completed three years later in 1968. Brother Christopher SVD was the main builder, assisted by lay helpers who were builders from the Singleton area. They had come in answer to the previous request of Sister St Roch and her lay missionary nurse and friend, Dorothy Quade. Later, Fr Peter Quoite from Forbes organised a group of Catholic youth from Australia to build classrooms. Unfortunately, within a year the new sisters' convent was burned down on 12 June 1968 in a devastating fire caused by the explosion of the kerosene fridge in the kitchen. Rita Hassett recalled the terrifying moments:⁶⁴

At 12:15 pm our native girl, Anna, who works in the kitchen, went to the small kerosene fridge to get some butter for the dinner vegetables... She said that as she opened the door black smoke and flames 'exploded'. She screamed! Hearing the screams in the school rooms nearly twenty yards away, we left everything and ran. By the time we reached the convent it was impossible to go to the doors. Two native teachers broke windows in the rooms at either end of the building and climbed in. The fire was so fierce and rapid that nothing practical could be rescued in that time... After about 20 minutes the whole convent had gone!

The church, a large grass building, was only 20 feet from the convent and all expected it to burn. We had the children remove everything from it, including the tabernacle. Hard, systematic work of the native teachers and the few people close by saved the church... We felt absolutely helpless, but the church was saved! We turned around and there was this small child anxiously holding the tabernacle and saying: 'Sister, what will I do with Jesus?'

⁶³ Records taken from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.

⁶⁴ Extract from Rita's letter of gratitude to the sisters in Australia for their help afterwards.

Without any hesitation Fr Willie Bohlen gave us his old house (which was our first home) and moved down to a grass roof dwelling (which we called the 'rat house') where he lived in very poor conditions for months and months, with no *water or electricity*.

Through the generosity of Australian volunteers with their financial and building help, a new convent was soon built. Donations were provided by the Australian Mercy Provinces and the Catholic Missions in Australia through the Propagation of the Faith. Fundraising was also done by the sisters' families and lay missionaries from Newcastle, Joan and John Montgomery, who had previously helped with the school buildings.⁶⁵

The whole ordeal itself was to have a devastating effect on Fr Bohlen's young successor, Fr Anton Mailander SVD, who offered his house to the sisters and took up residence in the school office room. While seeing to the building of the new church and convent, and carrying out pastoral duties during the day, he had only the privacy of a cramped school office space for his night's rest. This took a very serious toll on his health and he eventually returned to his homeland for medical care. His illness and departure were sadly felt by the sisters. They, with Elizabeth's sister and lay missionary, Monica Naylor, were powerless to do any more than offer their help, trust and compassion.

The sisters' prompt moving and settling in at Kup in 1963 gave the Simbu missionary priests from Europe and America some indication of the willingness, adaptability, professional approach and commitment to education and health of the rather unknown group of the Sisters of Mercy from Australia. In the interim years between the resignation of Bishop Schilling and Bishop Cohill's appointment as his successor as Bishop of Goroka in 1966 the priests made many urgent requests for the sisters' help on their mission stations.

The Sisters leave the first foundation at Goroka: 'joys and sorrows mingled'

Sickness and the sudden closures of schools in Goroka soon led to the sisters leaving their first foundation. In 1964 Algra Clarke had suffered a serious road accident when the brakes of her second-hand jeep failed on the Bena road on her way to Katagu.⁶⁶ The Katagu School was eventually taken

⁶⁵ Records from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton.

⁶⁶ During the months of her convalescence there was no one qualified to replace her in the school. The sisters arranged for the Katagu male students to board at Faniufa during the week to complete their upper primary years.

over by the Lutheran Agency. Later that year, with dwindling student numbers, the sisters' growing desire to reach out to the indigenous children in the Simbu and some pressure from the mission education authorities, St Mary's European school was forced to close.⁶⁷

With this seeming devastation of the hopes of the Goroka sisters, a new dream was able to be realised. Under the alternating leadership terms of Srs Patrick Mahoney and Elizabeth Miller, the sisters, with younger recruits from Australia, were able to make up the numbers, in twos and threes, to cross the Daulo to serve in the Simbu. Besides Kup, three other foundations were made in Simbu - Koge (1965), Goglme (1967) and Neragaima (1971).

The pioneer sisters experienced the human cycle of joys and sorrows in their lives. As they adapted to ever expanding possibilities, they contended with illness and some degree of misunderstanding in the face of different approaches to mission prior to Vatican II guidelines. Facing great disappointment, some sisters suffered ill-health and were re-appointed to Australia.⁶⁸

The educational work of the sisters continued in Goroka until the end of 1967 when the momentous decision was taken by the sisters to leave their foundation there. To meet the more pressing needs of Catholic education and health in the Simbu, they unanimously agreed to leave Goroka. The large new convent which they had helped design and which had been built by the Bishop of Goroka, John Cohill, as a Mercy regional house in the centre of the town, would be given to the Holy Spirit Sisters. The Mercy educational and pastoral ministries in the Goroka area were to be continued by the Holy Spirit Sisters, lay missionaries and indigenous teachers. With their missionary focus now on Simbu, the last exodus from Goroka occurred when Valda Finlay brought the final station-wagon load of belongings and school materials over the Daulo Pass, headed for Goglme in December 1967. The sisters' vision was not on establishing large educational institutions, but living in small groups, in helping the indigenous staff manage a Catholic Education system, struggling to grow and survive.

⁶⁷ Schools run by the sisters at Faniufa, and in the parishes of Tafeto and Yamiufa continued. The teaching and religious education at Yamiufa was taken over by the capable lay missionaries, Cecily Everding and Margaret Dahl.

⁶⁸ In due course, three of the founding sisters returned to the people of New Guinea they had grown to love – Marie (Dagg) to the Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen, (and later to Goroka), Algra Clarke to Pangia in the Mendi Diocese in the Southern Highlands (and later to Holy Trinity Teachers College) and Irene Carroll to the secondary education of girls at Mercy College Yarpas, in Wewak.

Foundations on the rural mission stations in the Simbu – Kup 1963, Koge 1964, Goglme 1967, Neragaima 1971: for Catholic education and health

Within a few years, the Sisters of Mercy were on four mission stations, radiating from the heart of Catholic mission activity at the SVD mission headquarters at Mingende. They worked according to the visions of the diocese, and were guided and encouraged by the Mission Education Secretaries, Fr John Wald SVD and his successors, Fathers John Gilmore SVD and Ignatius Kilage, the first Simbu priest in the diocese.⁶⁹

In communities of twos and threes in the rural areas, the sisters soon found themselves in charge of the expanding parish schools at Kup, Koge, Goglme and Neragaima.⁷⁰ As well as teaching the upper primary grades, they were responsible for the management of the school, the supervision and in-service of teachers, the co-ordination of religious education and, after hours, the upgrading of teachers through preparation, tuition and correction of secondary correspondence lessons. In almost all cases, the first challenge was to raise the education standard overall, including improving the daily attendance of the children!⁷¹ All this was essential for the schools to be granted (or regain) official 'registration', entitling them to government subsidies and allocated school supplies. Significant among the parish priests who offered regular support for new initiatives introduced by the sisters in the early years were Fathers John Nilles, Jack Sheerin, Willie Bohlen, Henk te Maarssen, Edmund Kurten, John Lorse, William Kurtz, Ed Mussig, Louis (Skip) Welling, Franz Behler, Bernard Fisher, Clement Voss, Jim Knight, Oliver O'Connor and Jurgen Ommerborn.

The mission stations were centres of parish-wide activities and it was not long before the sisters became involved in the wider concerns. The main parish school served several different clans in the surrounding mountainous areas and pupils had to cover long and difficult walking distances. School records showed that this proved impossible for the junior primary students, particularly the girls, whose attendance rates would inevitably fall by mid-year, only for them to enrol again each following year. Older and stronger boys who could manage to walk the long distances were usually the more able students selected to attend the main parish school from the *Tok Pisin* schools taught by the indigenous catechists. It became obvious that something needed to be done to reduce the dependence on the main parish school and provide equal opportunity for all youngsters of school age. The young girls, in particular, were at risk in the hour-long walks over the mountain tracks to school.

⁶⁹ Rita Hassett was requested to take over this responsibility, as will be explained in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ This is included with the original foundations in this time frame because of its similar educational purpose.

⁷¹ One of the memorable tasks was the initial enrolment of the scores of youngsters anxiously accompanied by their parents. Perhaps there would be a little child with appealing brown eyes, propped up on his/her father's feet, hidden behind the official table, anxiously awaiting the verdict about enrolment! In the absence of birth or baptismal records, it was the custom at the time to estimate ages by the 'teeth' or 'arm over the head' method. The 'onset of second teeth' and the 'fingers reaching the opposite ear' were considered signs of readiness for schooling. The results of the test categorised the child as 'too young', 'too old' or 'ready to start school'.

At this time the National Department of Education (NDOE) and the local District Education Centres worked in collaboration with the missions in expanding educational opportunities. With official approval and the cooperation of clan communities who voluntarily provided the bush materials and labour, many new Catholic schools were established in strategic locations. In the Koge Parish, junior schools were started at Tuli and Parua, while complete Catholic primary schools were set up at Giu and Nebare. The establishment of these schools, as well as two other administration schools at Silma and Konema, was largely due to the initiative of the parish priest, Fr Jack Sheerin, through negotiation with the local government and the relevant clans. Similar educational developments were found at Goglme, where Catholic schools had been established at Womatne, Barengigl, Gagnmambuno and Mai and at Kup, with its neighbouring school at Bi. These were times marked by a climate of close planning and collaboration – as well as some normal rivalry between administration and church schools. The desire and cooperation of clan communities who voluntarily provided the bush materials and labour was also remarkable. For some, these school buildings were the only public signs of progress or government improvement in the area⁷² and, with the sisters' supervision, vastly improved the educational opportunity for all, including girls, in the parish areas.⁷³

The preparation and selection of teachers for the Catholic schools and their in-service in the teaching subjects and Religious Education was in the hands of the sisters. Margaret Clarke, on her intrepid mountain treks from Goglme to Mai to introduce the teachers to new methods in Religious Education, was a familiar sight to the people working in their gardens on the steep sides of the Simbu mountain range.

Meeting the needs of general health care and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) on the mission stations

While the teaching sisters often worked together in a somewhat routine school system, life for the nursing sisters was very different. Based at the *haus sik* on the mission station they worked to set up health facilities and provide basic services in rural areas. St Roch in Kup was followed by Winifred (Clement Mary) Anderton (Kup, Koge and Goglme), Maria Goretti McCosker (Koge) and Margaret (Rose) Wilson (Goglme and Kundiawa). The nurse shouldered the burdens of raising the standard of health care and prevention of illness, tending to difficult births and saving lives in danger. In most cases, sister nurses worked with indigenous assistants (*dokta bois*) who, although minimally trained, were faithful in their service and were a daily help with the language and customs. Extra medical

⁷² The Nebare Catholic school was the first church/government building for health or education provided for the large Dom clan.

⁷³ In Simbu, on an official visit to Koge (c. 1967), the Headmaster of the main administration school, Mr Ray Anderson, who later became Inspector in Mount Hagen, commented with surprise on the girls and boys mixing together at recess time – equal contestants with the softball bat and ball – something which the sisters had worked towards and by that time took for granted.

resources from Mercy hospitals in the Goulburn, Singleton and Melbourne congregations supplemented limited government supplies. It was also often through the efforts of the sister nurses to get additional funding for essential services from family, friends and schools in Australia that basic water tanks and hospital wards were erected.

The sister nurses worked, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, serving people within the entire area. Medicines were needed for the common illnesses of colds, flu, pneumonia, abscesses, ear and nasal infections, ulcers, skin diseases, accidental wounds and malaria. The incidence of serious wounds from domestic violence and intermittent tribal fighting was high. Sister nurses carried out the responsibility of diagnosis and treatment that a doctor would do in overseas hospitals, and there were anxious moments when there was no mission transport available to get critically ill patients quickly and safely to the government hospital at Kundiawa or the Catholic one, run by the Holy Spirit Sisters, at Mingende. Sometimes the village people would carry the sick person in a bamboo stretcher, but at other times, they would be unable or unwilling to do so, causing the nurse great disappointment and frustration! The sister nurses would visit the lepers, who were ostracised beyond the bounds of the village, to provide medical treatment.

The sister nurses were responsible for Maternal and Child Health Care clinics (MCH) in the parishes. Margaret Wilson, working at Goglme and the neighbouring parishes of the upper Simbu district, found that through the influence of the British nurses of the Save the Children Fund in the area, the people became more receptive to modern hygienic methods. It was a significant breakthrough when pregnant women began to use the mission health services for ante-natal care, labour and delivery and care of the new-born.⁷⁴ Gradually with improved medical services and nursing care, infant mortality rates decreased dramatically.⁷⁵

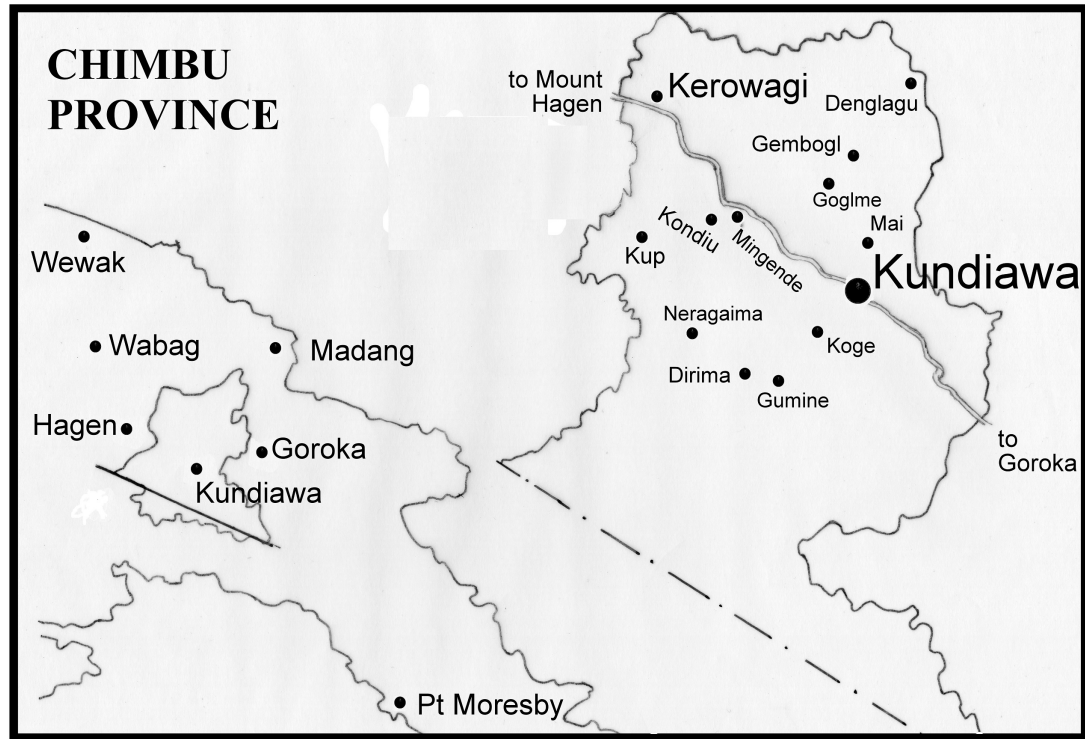
The incidence of malnutrition was common, but was more prevalent in isolated areas, where entrenched folklore and customary practices were sometimes detrimental to health and survival of mother and baby. With widespread illiteracy among the general population, the sister nurses relied on creating diagrammatic and pictorial charts to illustrate measures in spoons for doses of medicine and recommended diets of local foods and vegetables for very young children. Transport for Maternal and Child Care clinics was uncertain, as nursing duties were synchronised with the parish priest's pastoral rounds. On more than one occasion, nurses found themselves walking the winding path back to the main station after a day's work weighing and treating babies and pregnant mothers.

⁷⁴ Taken from an interview with Margaret Wilson in December 2006.

⁷⁵ As a teacher assisting the parish priest with parish records, I was appalled to see repeatedly the number of small crosses marked by the names of the deceased babies on the family's baptismal record.

The following map, based on the original by Sr Carmel Bourke of the Union leadership team, shows where the sisters lived and ministered. It was circulated throughout the Australian Union to inspire potential recruits. After Independence the province was named Simbu.

Map 3



The mission station communities – collaboration of priests, sisters, lay missionaries, indigenous catechists, teachers and health staff

The teachers and nurses worked closely with the SVD priests and brothers and were guided by their expertise and mission practice. Invariably, the household management and hospitality for the mission station fell to the sisters who, busy about their school and hospital duties, relied for the domestic chores on young untrained women to whom they taught new skills and responsibilities. The sisters became involved in the life of the parish, accompanying the priests to the many bush outstation churches for baptisms and Sunday Mass. They were filled with wonder at the crowds of people at the village markets, the throngs bringing anxious children on school enrolment day, patients seeking medication at the *haus sik*, the parishioners filling the main station churches for liturgy on Sundays and the whole congregation raising their voices in Simbu hymns of worship.

The sisters were profoundly moved by the power of the people to absorb scriptural truths and express themselves in the liturgy, their faith finding expression through their natural talent for drama and

story-telling. Another source of wonder was the clan cohesion, exuberance, vitality and wellbeing seen in *singsings*,⁷⁶ especially during the seven-year ceremonial pig-killing feasts. On special occasions of clan reconciliation, there were the rare evening celebrations of the Eucharist in the village, followed by the *mumu*.⁷⁷ The people expressed their unity in Christ, among themselves, and with their ancestors in their typically reverent, respectful, joyful cultural ways.

The sisters were joined in their mission work, as they had been in Goroka, by former Mercy students, friends and family. Jan Birmingham from Mount Gambier spent two years teaching at Koge, and ventured out to the remote station at Wangoi near Mount Elimbari, as the first Head Teacher of the new school, whose middle primary students had previously been boarders at Koge. Anne Flaherty (teacher) and Patricia Bubb (financial manager) spent some time at Koge, where their Mercy sisters, Teresa and Margaret, were stationed. Marie Nicholas, niece of Carmel Burke who was a close friend of Elizabeth Miller, taught for a few years at Kup.

Verbal communication with the people was difficult. The main language of the Upper Simbu, the place of origin of the Simbu clans, was *Kuman*. This language did not cover the wide variations of the numerous dialects, (each considered by linguists as separate languages), that the sisters encountered in the different mission areas. Their attempts to learn basic language sentences were often thwarted as their efforts were dismissed and variously corrected by their competent primary school pupils! *Tok Pisin* was gradually spreading from the Coast to the Highlands and this became the sisters' means of communication with parents. The indigenous teachers living on the station were on hand to interpret intricacies as they occurred. Depending on circumstances, some sisters became quite proficient in cross-cultural communication, while others tended to put their priorities into the basics required for day-to-day tasks.

Daily life on the mission station had its normal share of ups and downs, but there was plenty of vitality, inspiration and exchange. In addition to hospitality, the sisters assisted with the *Sked* (teleradio) and writing baptism and confirmation records. The station personnel included the indigenous catechist and teachers with their young families, the youthful and energetic lay missionaries working as teachers, builders and carpenters, and the enthusiastic SVD seminarians, Paul Beirne and John Reedy. There were also the occasional friendly visitors from neighbouring government and mission stations. There was excitement when the Divine Airways plane from Madang landed on the narrow grassed airstrip every couple of weeks and the priest pilot in his small Cessna, carrying mail and supplies, provided both real and symbolic links with the outside world.

⁷⁶ Traditional dancing within the clan to the beat of drums.

⁷⁷ Meal of meat and vegetables cooked in hot stones in a pit in the ground.

The networks of small road tracks, often revealing the half-metre of arable topsoil above the red clay in this densely populated district, were already being threaded together to meet with the arterial Highlands Highway. The 'time distance' between the various mission stations was thus reduced. After the fatal mission plane crash in 1965, in which three Divine Word priests, including the pilot, Fr Wallachy, were killed, mission flying in the Simbu virtually ceased, giving way to road transport. The parish priests provided the sisters with road transport until the 1970s when they needed four-wheel drive vehicles to supervise the teachers in their local area schools.

Although outings from the mission stations were rare, the sisters got together for retreats and holidays. Kup replaced Goroka as the Mercy centre with the overflow of younger sisters being accommodated in the appropriately named 'rat house'. The sisters' house at Koge, which had been extended to provide a common dining room for mission personnel, and the new convent buildings at Goglme and Neragaima, also served as gathering places and centres of hospitality. Later, with the increased number of sisters, Mingende and Kondiu became regular meeting places because of the more central facilities available and the willing hospitality extended by the sisters there.

Despite the necessary navigation of the dangerous roads and landslides in the wet season, these gatherings were very worthwhile, not only for relaxation and morale, but also for teasing out the Mercy identity as missionary Sisters of Mercy - a task which increased in magnitude and complexity as the sisters faced the tensions of a changing Church and society with an emphasis on their being 'guests' in the country. While the majority understood the reasons for such travel, some male missionaries saw it as neglect of duties as well as a disregard of the vowed ideal of poverty.⁷⁸ There is no doubt that community life on the mission stations was at times confining and constraining, and such revitalising breaks, brief though they were, were essential for the sisters' psychological health.

Finances for living expenses were at times tenuous, and there was some internal debate among the sisters as to whether, or to what extent, they should submit to the mission administration their government education and health subsidies and rely on the mission for their keep. Some of the clergy expressed the view that the subsidies should be made available to the mission, but they did not openly contest the issue.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The theme of diverse ministries on the rural mission stations in the light of impending church and political changes will be pursued in Chapter Four.

⁷⁹ The complexities of this issue differed in each of the dioceses, and threads of the complex financial issue are picked up in the following chapter. In the long term the question was decided when diocesan contracts became more common from the mid seventies.

The sisters became an integral part of mission life as they learnt to make cultural and ‘mission’ goal adjustments and adaptations and were recognised as part of the informal and formal diocesan structure. The sisters collaborated with church (through the Catholic Education Secretary) and the District Education Office in curriculum meetings and writing, preparation for Primary Final Examinations, government inspections and combined schools choral and sports competitions.

The general relationship between the colonial government and the missions was positive and collaborative. The government needed the mission services to achieve its social and political goals, and the churches needed some financial support and material resources and the advantage of collaborative planning and working.

Early Melanesian reminiscences of Sisters of Mercy in Simbu

Sr Mariska Kua, the first elected indigenous Leader of the Sisters of Mercy of PNG (2003-2007), reminisced on the early days at the Kup Mission station.⁸⁰

I was taught by the Mercies and that’s how I knew the Mercies. There were some people like Sister Elizabeth Miller, Clare Flinn, Rita Hassett, Mother Patrick, Sister St Roch, the nurse who died – a good number of sisters were there. There were a lot of activities round the station, they were the joyous moment of the people’s life – the children went to school – a lot of children. It was something new and the people were enthusiastic about the new development, they were active in the parish, the people wanted to do something. Every child went to school – it was like the pride of their life and they were curious about new things happening.

The church would be full up and a lot of people would be participating in the liturgy, for Christmas, Easter and feast days. There was something to do in the church and they would be preparing for months. It was like a social activity. We used to look forward to it and were fully involved. It brought joy and life into our life too. We were subsistence farmers, mostly in traditional clothes, but we were not poor. It was a time of hope. Civilisation was giving birth.

The [mission] station was half of my mother’s land and half of another line’s. Her father was the chief of the village and was very influential - he felt some kind of responsibility for what was going on at the station. My mother couldn’t go there herself because she was the daughter of the chief – it was a status thing. My parents believed that education was important and they put us into school; even my grandfather knew the importance of education.

My uncle Endemongo was a very strong man who believed in the education system and the change that took place. When civilisation was taking place, they needed this type of man, born naturally a

⁸⁰ Mariska’s mother, Elizabeth, was the first female church leader in Simbu and served for many years on the Board of Governors of Kondiu, the first Catholic High School in Simbu.

leader, who could look into the future and that people would respect... He would make sure all the children would go to school. He was the chief of the village, and when we were late he would be there watching us walking past, and he would make sure the students didn't run away. If there was a problem in the school, Endemongo would be there to negotiate and to sort things out, to make sure that the sisters were safe and sound and that the school was running smoothly. My uncle Endemongo was also a peacemaker in the society and the people had great respect for him.

Reflective Observations: Union Sisters in Goroka and Simbu 1956-1969

From the time of their arrival in Goroka the sisters adjusted to the realities of the situation, which seemed to offer so little to satisfy their mission expectations in relation to the indigenous population. They patiently inserted themselves into the missionary context, collaborating with lay missionaries and supported by the Australian Union leaders, Mercy schools and teachers. In Goroka they pioneered Catholic education for expatriate children and indigenous children beyond parish boundaries. Eventually the sisters responded to the compelling needs for Catholic education and health in the Simbu, responsibly handing over their convent and educational commitments at Goroka to provide as much continuity as possible.

The sisters were professionally trained, dedicated and, after communal discernment with religious leaders, willing to venture forth in very small Mercy communities to rural parishes in Simbu – Kup, Koge, Goglime and Neragaima. Largely building on previous educational endeavours of the Divine Word missionaries, they managed new or upgraded Catholic primary schools and health centres, which catered for all, regardless of religious denomination. They carried out these works with government authorisation.⁸¹ Conscious of the needs of those disadvantaged by poverty or disability, the sisters encouraged the attendance and participation of girls in education and tended the health needs of women and children in clinics and in the villages. While taking a responsible role for catering, hospitality and training of female domestic staff on the mission station, they energetically reached out to meet apostolic needs within the parish according to the resources available.

In the meantime, from 1957, the Sisters of Mercy of the Australian Federation had embarked on several foundations in the Wewak Diocese of Bishop Leo Arkfeld, SVD, and these beginnings are now reported.

⁸¹ The students and patients were Catholic or of other Christian denomination or adherents of traditional tribal religion.

Part 2. Foundations of the Australian Federation Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak Diocese: Kunjingini (1957) and Torembe (1958) – and further foundations

Section 1. Foundation to Kunjingini

After her election as Leader of the Brisbane Congregation Mother Damian Duncombe lost no time in responding to the Apostolic Delegate's appeal for missionary sisters. Just twelve months after the four Union Sisters landed in Goroka, a band of seven sisters from the Brisbane Congregation headed northwards for Wewak, destined for the remote mission station of Kunjingini. A year later five sisters from the Brisbane, Rockhampton, Cairns, Townsville and Grafton congregations made a similar journey to Wewak, on their way to Torembe near the Sepik River.⁸²

In 1948 a young and energetic priest, Leo Arkfeld SVD, had been appointed Bishop of Wewak with the title of Vicar Apostolic of the East Sepik Vicariate of New Guinea.⁸³ He decided to change the headquarters in his vast diocese of 15,000 square miles from Kairiru Island to Wewak and as there were no roads, he decided to level out airstrips at the mission stations and fly there by plane.⁸⁴ Linking the stations by air would make travel much quicker than by boat and enable him to keep in frequent touch with mission personnel and parishioners.

Furthermore, after the war some of the Wewak missionaries ventured inland to the grass country and the Sepik plains, which rose gradually from the Sepik River's edge to the coastal mountains some fifty miles to the north. To their amazement, they found an extremely densely populated area, similar to the Highlands villages, in the Maprik and Yangoru areas, and quickly opened up stations among the Wosera people, making Kunjingini their central mission station.⁸⁵ Soon the pre-war number of fifteen mission stations in the diocese was increased to forty!

⁸² Letters and reports in the Archives of All Hallows Brisbane give some indication of the leadership role Mother Damian assumed. She acknowledges that a spirit of friendship had developed among the Federation Leaders, who all shared the vision of mission, but were unable to spare sisters at the time. Mothers Philomena from Monte Sant' Angelo and Thecla from Parramatta, considering their desperate needs in the under-staffed Sydney schools, now crowded with post-war British migrants and European refugees and migrants, felt unable to put the pressure on Cardinal Gilroy to release sisters at this stage. The Central (Rockhampton), North (Townsville) and Far-North (Cairns) Queensland leaders were keen to send communities of their own sisters in the future.

⁸³ Notes from Geoff Brumm SVD (SVD Historian, Wewak) and Frank Mihalik SVD, *Readings in PNG Mission History: A Chronicle of SVD and SSps Mission Involvement on Mainland New Guinea between 1946 and 1996* (Madang: DWU Press, 1998).

⁸⁴ Ibid. His predecessor, Bishop Joseph Loerks who, with other European missionaries was executed on the Japanese ship, Akikaze Maru, in 1943, had his diocesan centre on Kairiru Island. This was a practical choice at the time as most of the stations were positioned along the coast on the islands and along the Sepik River, and thus were accessible by boat.

⁸⁵ Personal communication, Fr Kees Vander Geest SVD, 2006.

Religious sisters trained in teaching and nursing were urgently needed and his thoughts turned to his Australian neighbours, the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy.⁸⁶ He had heard from the Apostolic Delegate that, although the sisters were hard pressed in meeting the migrant needs in education and health in post-war Australia, they were prepared to go on mission. In particular, their newly elected Leader, Mother Damian Duncombe, first President of the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, had taken the appeals of Pope Pius XII seriously. She had a heart open to the call to mission and was much inspired by the vast needs as described in Bishop Arkfeld's correspondence.

Encouraged by this information, the young bishop set out in hope to make a personal call to Mother Damian at All Hallows Convent in Brisbane. He later recalled their meeting:

I have not forgotten the day I stopped at All Hallows and suggested to Mother Damian that I was interested in getting Mercies for Wewak. She made no comment, except, "I would not be against it!" That changed everything from LOW GEAR to HIGH GEAR – And it stayed in High Gear ever since!⁸⁷

Accompanied by the bursar, Brigid Higgins, Mother Damian travelled to Wewak to see the conditions for herself and choose a place for mission. The two sisters were welcomed by the Holy Spirit Sisters and the Rosary Sisters, a newly founded religious order of indigenous women, in whose convent they stayed. Bishop Leo took them by plane to some of the remote mission stations in the diocese – Kunjingini, Burui, Torembo, Kairiru, Dagua, Turubu and Marienberg – and Mother Damian chose the poorest place, Kunjingini, which was also the most populated area. At Kunjingini the *Luluais* and *Tultuls*⁸⁸ and many people were assembled and the Bishop told them that sisters would like to come. He then asked them if they would like that. After some consultation among themselves they agreed: "Yes, we would like sisters to come."

Consequently, on their return to Brisbane, Mother Damian went ahead choosing seven Brisbane sisters from a long list of 150 volunteers.⁸⁹ The names of the pioneer sisters were: Francis Regis Everingham (Superior), Isobel Condon (nurse), Bridie (Carthage) Fennessy (teacher), Val (Philip) Cervetto (music and cooking), Margarita Shannon (teacher training) Marietta Riedy and Cephas Philben (teachers). Margarita had been selected, not only as a teacher, but also as a pharmacist, who could make up the medicines that were unavailable in the remoteness of Kunjingini.

The Apostolic Delegate was grateful for the contingent of seven sisters and came to Brisbane for the presentation of mission crosses. The ceremony took place in St Stephen's Cathedral on 27 January

⁸⁶ Bishop Arkfeld had got to know some of the sisters a few years before, when he was assigned to carry out pastoral duties in Brisbane while waiting to get his visa to enter New Guinea once the ban on foreigners was lifted.

⁸⁷ Notes from Geoff Brumm SVD (SVD Historian, Wewak) and Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*.

⁸⁸ Men with administrative authority in the village during colonial times.

⁸⁹ Documents in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane. I have retained the title of 'Superior' in accordance with the terminology of the times. Gradually, after Vatican II the title of 'Leader' became more commonly used.

1957 at 3.00 pm in the presence of a packed congregation.⁹⁰ The Federation Sisters of Mercy left Australia for the remote mission at Kunjingini⁹¹ in the Wosera district in two separate groups. The first group of sisters left Brisbane on 29 January 1957, and after a brief stopover at Port Moresby, proceeded to Lae where with Bishop Arkfeld as their pilot, they were transported to Madang and Wirui airstrip at Wewak the following day. After a short induction of a week by the Holy Spirit Sisters and the Melanesian congregation of the Rosary Sisters, who welcomed them into their convent, they flew by plane to Kunjingini where they were officially greeted in a brief, but memorable, ceremony.⁹² They were soon joined by the second group of sisters who had travelled by ship with essential goods and resources, which had been collected by Mother Brigid Higgins from the sisters, lay people and Mercy school students.⁹³

Settling in on the rural mission station

The Kunjingini Mercy foundation was under the jurisdiction of the Major Superior in Brisbane, and considered as a Brisbane 'branch house' with the local Superior responsible for the care of the community of sisters. Excerpts from early letters portray Mother Regis' deference and openness in seeking permission for the sisters to visit village schools, as proposed by the parish priest and her description of the strangeness of communication with *Tok Pisin* faced initially by the sisters.⁹⁴

Father has mentioned five village schools he wants us to go to. He has proposed that we have three afternoons in here and four mornings at Kunjingini, and spend the other afternoon and whole day at the village. Have we permission to go to these villages alone, Mother General? ... The big problem is the Pidgin. The people speak at a terrific speed and pronounce their words with a strange accent. We find it hard to make out what they say. We can follow the Bishop's Pidgin and also the Priest's Pidgin. No doubt, we will get accustomed to it soon. Pidgin is not as easy as it seems especially when you want to say the simplest things and give an ordinary order. You find you cannot say it.

The Bishop sent out an extra priest to assist the Parish Priest, Fr Blasig, in preparing furniture for the sisters' arrival.⁹⁵ Proving to be a very handy carpenter, he assisted Fr Blasig in making tables, chairs,

⁹⁰ As reported in the Brisbane weekly paper, *The Catholic Leader* (undated), kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.

⁹¹ Kunjingini was recognised as the most deprived area in the East Sepik.

⁹² Those present were the parish priest, Fr Blasig SVD, Fr Crysberg SVD (from Maprik), Fr Peter O'Reilly SVD (the Diocesan Mission Education Officer (1957–70) who had helped Fr Blasig extend the house and make general preparations), Fr Seigal SVD, Mr Arthur Carey (the patrol officer of Maprik) and an assembly of catechists and government officials - the local *luluais* and *tultuls*.

⁹³ Excerpt from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kunjingini. These included tinned foods, groceries, utensils for the kitchen, folding wooden cupboards, stove, refrigerator, other household goods, educational materials and sports equipment. The generosity of the teachers, school children and lay people is to be noted.

⁹⁴ Excerpts from Mother Francis Regis' early letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

⁹⁵ Personal communication with Fr Peter in November 2005. Fr O'Reilly was the first of the Australian Divine Word Missionaries ordained from Marburg, the SVD seminary established west of Brisbane in 1945, to be appointed to New Guinea.

kneelers, and beds made of wood and laths of bamboo. Fr O'Reilly later assembled desks, the parts of which were made at the mission sawmill and delivered to Burui by boat and from there to Kunjingini by jeep.

The sisters soon settled into their routine. They recorded in their chronicle that outstations were visited on Wednesdays and the mode of transport was usually a horse, saddled in the early morning and ready for Mother Regis after her visit to the church. Olga, the one-eyed horse, always preferred coming home to going out. She had a foal and in the afternoons would be sure to speed across the bridge on which she had balked in the morning!⁹⁶

Meeting the demands of formal Catholic education – for females and males

The sisters assumed responsibility for the large parish primary school, which had opened in 1951. Early reports show the willingness of the sisters to encourage more enrolments, particularly of girls. Class numbers were 75, 56, 40 and 50 in the top class, and 'with the good news spreading' each day more and more pupils came. Boys, who always outnumbered the girls, boarded on one side of the station, with the girls on the other. Boys who showed potential were selected for upper primary education at Kairiru or Burui, which became a boarding school for boys. Very few girls progressed beyond middle primary.

According to the sisters' chronicle:⁹⁷

Women and girls were looked upon as being inferior and much pressure was needed to persuade the papas to send the girls to school, especially when school fees began to be expected. Gradually the people's resistance to sending their girls to school began to change. Mother Regis made a constant plea that, where possible, clans would send an equal number of boys and girls for enrolment. The message would go round the villages: One boy, one girl!

Bridie Fennessy recalled how difficult it was to get the pupils to perform in front of others the very first time at a concert attended by a small gathering of priests and held in honour of Bishop Arkfeld.⁹⁸ At the suggestion of the clergy the parishioners were invited to the children's next *singsing* celebrations on the airstrip at Christmas time. This was arranged, and with much success. The people were impressed, especially with the little ones, and seeing what the children could do, the catechist Joseph Langu, agreed to send his little daughter Anastasia as a boarder and she brought a friend along with her. Seeing this, the people were more willing to send their girls to school.

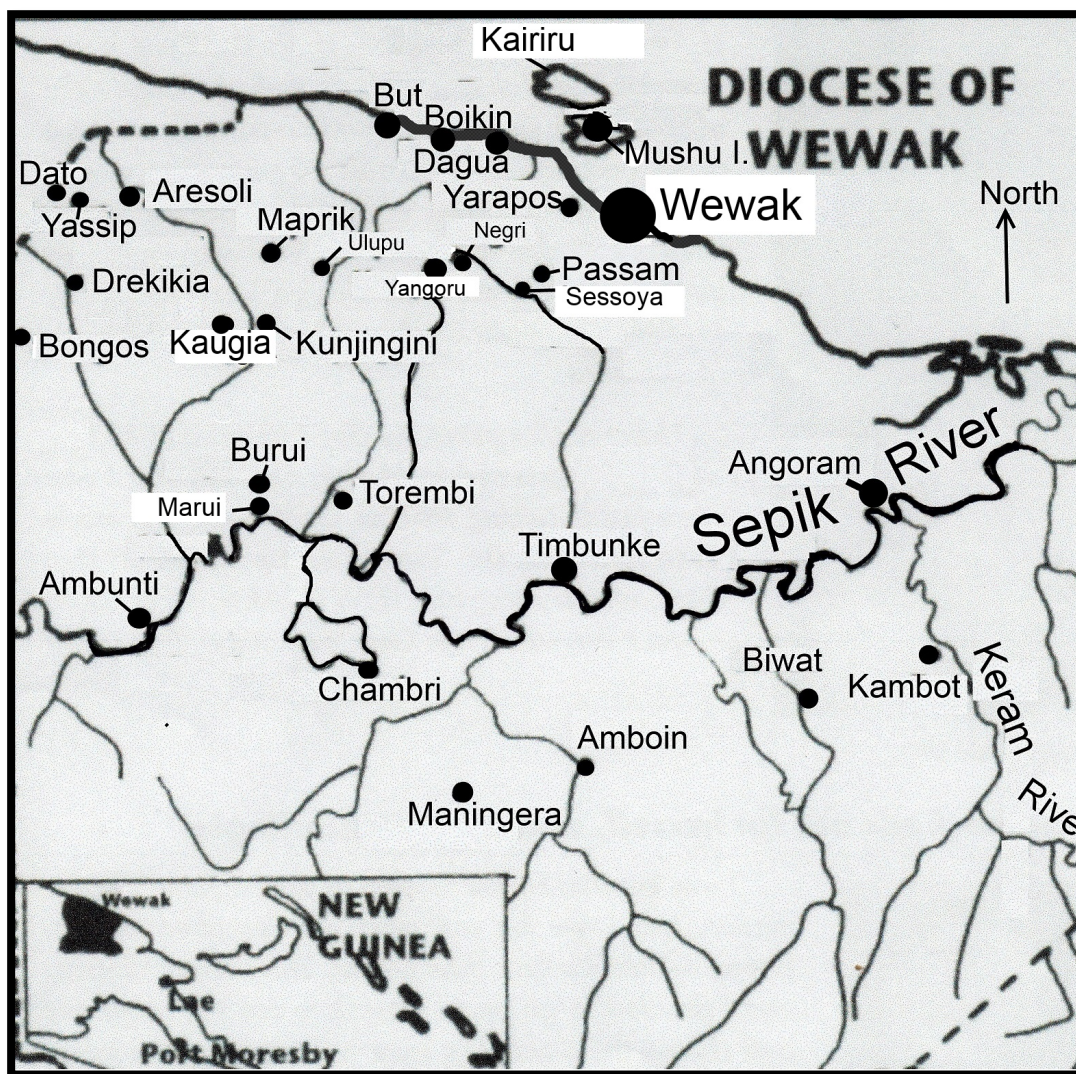
⁹⁶ Excerpts taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kunjingini, 1962

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Account written by Bridie Fennessy and kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

The following map, adapted from an original map depicting the Catholic mission centres in the Diocese of Wewak, identifies places of ministry of the Sisters of Mercy reported in this study.

Map 4



Meeting the needs of health at Kunjingini and surrounding villages

Isobel, who had served as an army nurse during the war, had a keen instinct for what basic health care services were needed and soon settled into the tropical scene. She went out for clinic work to the outlying mission stations on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and was kept busy with mothers and patients from the nearby villages, and with the hospital work. People came in large numbers from as far away as Kaugia for treatment. Realising that facilities needed to be improved she added her plan for a permanent maternity hospital to the list of buildings going up on the station. Cephas Philben reported on its progress.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Extract from Cephas' letter kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

The new building program in Kunjingini is quite full. Our big concern at the moment is the new maternity hospital. It is being built with concrete blocks made here on the station. The blocks are made down near the river where the water is at hand, but they have to be carried up quite a big hill to the site of the hospital. The outer walls have reached seven feet now, and the structure is beginning to look very fine. It is two hundred and fifty paces by the shortest route from our Convent, so it looks as if Sister Mary Isobel will need a bicycle to make her daily journeys. It is hoped that the new church, which is the next project, will be built in cement blocks too.

Shared ministries and education of indigenous women religious - the Rosary Sisters¹⁰⁰

In their foundation years the Rosary Sisters were guided by the Holy Spirit Sisters, particularly Sr Eurista, in Wewak. Seeing the opportunity for the two religious communities to work together and learn from one another, Bishop Arkfeld arranged for the Rosary Sisters to join the Mercy Sisters in their ministries of health and education. Cephas offered an account of this cross-cultural ministry:¹⁰¹

Three Rosary Sisters have joined us this year ... It is an inspiration to see the way the sisters go about their duties. They work with us here on the station and accompany us on the visitation and on our journeys to the outstations. Later it is hoped that a larger group will come to do their training as teachers. Sister Margarthis, Rosary Sister, who is a nurse, is a great help to Sr Mary Isobel. Sr Aloysia teaches in school. Sr Ludwina helps Sr Mary Philip. The sisters are a credit to Sr Eurista the Holy Spirit Sister who has trained them.

St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kunjingini: Meeting inter-diocesan needs for teacher education

The first teacher education centre in the Wewak Diocese began at Kunjingini under the competent and practical administration of the qualified and experienced teacher and pharmacist, Margarita Shannon. From the beginning with just ten student teachers from the Wewak Diocese, enrolment increased until the number of students almost outgrew the limited facilities available. Students eventually came from the Dioceses of Aitape, Vanim and Daru. They were all men at first and they did a one-year 'A' Grade course, which qualified them to teach in the lower primary classes. Demonstration lessons were given at the primary school every week and sisters teaching the lower grades assisted in the supervision of the weekly practice teaching lessons.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ The Napakoi Journal, "Commemorating the 40 years anniversary of St John's Seminary", November, 92, Vol 5 No 4, First Revision. With his major purpose as localisation of the Church – training future indigenous priests, brothers and sisters to take the place of overseas missionaries – Bishop Arkfeld had opened St John's Minor Seminary on Kairiru I in 1952, followed by the Sacred Heart Brothers in 1957 and the Rosary Sisters in 1958.

¹⁰¹ Extract from Cephas' letter above.

¹⁰² The first small teacher training building, erected by the parish priest, Fr Blasig, was later replaced by a more spacious construction, made of materials gathered from the bush to accommodate the increasing number of students.

Margarita's report on the beginning and development pointed out that standards and upgrading were in accord with government requirements and according to diocesan needs.¹⁰³ For many years the Inspector-Examiner from Port Moresby, Mr Bill Magnay, did much to promote Teacher Education at Kunjingini. At his instigation, one year was dedicated to in-service, as graduates from the previous ten years were brought back in three groups and given a term of up-dating and education in the New Maths.¹⁰⁴ Pam Quartermaine from the Teacher Education Division in Port Moresby came from time to time and was very supportive of the program. When the Continuous Teaching Practice was on, all travel was by air throughout the diocese, as there was no road to Kunjingini at the time. The small mission planes flew in and out, taking students to Ulupu, Torembi, Yangoru, Negrie – wherever there were teachers qualified to supervise them.

To cope with the increasing enrolments new staff members were recruited: Regina Mary O'Keeffe (1965) and Fr Don Grant (1968). When permanent buildings were erected it was decided to give a fitting name to the complex and it was named 'St Benedict's Teachers College'.

Kunjingini – a centre of rural mission and Mercy hospitality

In 1957, Val Cervetto had taken on domestic management of the convent when there was only an outdoor kitchen, consisting of a roof and supports, but no walls. Using a tiny wood stove, she learnt to make what the sisters called 'perfect bread'. Soon Val and the girls she trained catered for the large mission station community. Some domestic girls later found employment and many used their skills as wives and mothers far from the humble kitchen beginnings at Kunjingini.¹⁰⁵

As the roads increased, the use of the airstrips, so vitally essential in the early days of the missions in Kunjingini, Torembi, Ulupu and Kairiru, diminished. The Kunjingini Mission became a half-way house for priests and sisters returning to the mission stations within the Maprik Deanery and beyond to Burui and Pagui en route to the Sepik, as well as Tau, Dreikir, Aresili, and Yassip, and even Ningil in the West Sepik Province. Kunjingini became well known as a centre for hospitality and the priests of the area often went back to their remote bush stations with some homemade bread, biscuits and cakes, routine mail and store goods, besides a supply of clean, ironed church linen. Kunjingini remained the central house of the Mercy Sisters until Kaindi was later established, and it was Val Cervetto who transplanted a Mercy tradition of hospitality, which was to resonate well with the Melanesian traditional value of hospitality.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ This historic account is taken from a report written by Sister Margarita Shannon, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

¹⁰⁴ In 1962 Bridie Fennessy taught a group of Rosary Sisters in the Teachers College while Margarita was on leave. The male students went to St. Xavier's, Kairiru, where they were taught by Brother Canute FMS.

¹⁰⁵ Some of the pioneer Holy Spirit Sisters told me that they did much pastoral work in the casual setting with young mothers at the convent back door.

¹⁰⁶ The sisters had a wealth of cultural examples of the generosity of the village people through their clan celebrations, exchanges and liturgy food offerings.

Liturgical, cultural and linguistic insights

The sisters had profound experiences of the people's faith, expressed in special liturgical and culturally rich celebrations. Reflections of the first Christmas at Kunjingini by the musically gifted Val Cervetto, offer an insight into the beauty, wonder and awe of being part of such faith gatherings:¹⁰⁷

On 24 December 1957, people started to arrive at the mission station about 5 pm for midnight Mass. They sat around on the ground in groups, talking quietly and feeding their children. As it got dark they lit their lamps. Lights could also be seen through the trees as more people wended their way up to the station. As midnight approached, it was a wonderful sight to see hundreds of people sitting around their lighted lamps. When Fr Blasig rang the bell for Mass they all stood, gathered up their sleeping children and processed towards the church door. Fr Blasig had a strong singing voice and as he intoned the Hymn 'Yumi go long Bethlem ples nau, yumi lukim Jesus' (Let's go to Bethlehem now, to see Jesus') with one voice the crowd took it up. I thought they would raise the roof off the church. Even to this day I can feel that emotion when I think of our first Christmas night in Kunjingini. A most wonderful experience!¹⁰⁸

In the following years Kunjingini Primary School served as a registered demonstration school for the teacher training college, soon becoming, under the sisters' administration, a very large central school. The number of teachers increased as more sisters, lay missionaries and national teachers joined the staff. Among the PALMS lay missionaries who came for two-year terms, were Doris Zarb, Margaret Bolger, Patricia Cook and Pamela Smith.¹⁰⁹

With the later establishment of Catholic high schools for girls (by the Sisters of Mercy at Torembi, later to be transferred to Yarapos) and for boys (by the Marist Brothers at St Xavier's Kairiru), successful secondary students were qualified for entry into teacher training and a new two-year course offering a full primary teaching certificate was introduced. By 1968, when there were forty-four students at the teachers college, the rural facilities at Kunjingini were no longer adequate for the teacher education needs. A diocesan decision, leading to a merger between the Sisters of Mercy with the Christian Brothers, was made to transfer St Benedict's from Kunjingini to Kaindi, Wewak, at the beginning of 1969. Meanwhile, a second foundation of the Australian Federation was being planned for the Wewak Diocese.

¹⁰⁷ The following is taken from an account written by Val Cervetto and kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

¹⁰⁸ Val's story reflects the experience of many sisters who attended liturgies for the first time in bush churches in the Sepik area. Allowing for cultural differences, the sisters, attending liturgies in earlier times in other parts of PNG, were similarly drawn into a world of wonder and awe.

¹⁰⁹ These lay missionaries received training at PALMS, the Pacific Mission Institute, North Turramurra Sydney, conducted by St. Columban's Foreign Mission Society.

Section 2. Torembe: the second Federation Foundation of Queensland and Grafton Sisters (1958-1974)

Bishop Arkfeld's second request for Mercy missionaries in the Wewak Diocese was to the extremely remote Torembe parish, in an environment of jungle and swamplands. The mission station of Torembe was approximately 120 miles southwest of Wewak in the swamplands of the Sepik River and was very isolated as there was no access by road. Then, as today, the Sepik River, one of the longest rivers in the world, coiled 700 miles through jungles and swamps. Flash flooding could cause its waters to rise several metres and flood the villages along its banks.¹¹⁰

Mother Damian saw the Bishop's request as another opportunity for the Sisters of Mercy to respond to the needs of the poorest and most deprived. In order to make up the numbers for a foundation and to strengthen the bonds of the Federation, she sought assistance from the Federation congregations. Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton in Queensland and Grafton in northern New South Wales responded, and the first inter-congregational community of the Federation Sisters in New Guinea was formed.

The pioneer sisters formed a contingent of four teachers and one nurse - Joseph Xavier Byrne, Superior (Brisbane), Annunziata McNamara (Townsville), Therese (Vincent) Kelly (Grafton), Elva (Gertrude) Russell (Cairns) and Mary (Felix) Wildie (Rockhampton). The presentation of mission crosses was at St Stephen's Cathedral on 26 January 1958 and the sisters arrived at Torembe on 6 March 1958.¹¹¹

Beginnings on the remote rural mission station of Torembe

Having made the long flight from Brisbane to Wewak, the sisters were flown in by Bishop Leo Arkfeld in the mission plane to the station, landing on the long, hard airstrip, which was the only way in and out at the time. They were welcomed by Fr Franz Grubinger, and soon experienced the uniqueness of the environment, together with the isolation of being on the station and surrounded by sago swamps. The population of 4,000 lived in the twenty-five villages in the area.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Excerpt from Wewak Diocese Report, 1980.

¹¹¹ As reported in *The Catholic Leader*, 13 February 1958 and recorded in the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Torembe, 1958.

¹¹² Ibid.

The sisters' accommodation was a spacious bush building, which had been erected by Fr (later Bishop) Raymond Kalisz SVD, designer and builder. The village people provided the workmanship and the supply of bush materials. Therese Kelly's light-hearted account in one of her letters shows her appreciation of the dwelling, some of the inconveniences of living in the tropics and the sisters' desire for a chapel.

The building is of native materials – walls of pangal, roof, marota, floors, limbum.¹¹³ The floors are really exciting, they spring under the feet and writing is almost impossible when anyone walks as the whole place shakes. The bedrooms and dining room are mosquito proof – the Sepik is famous for *natnat* (mosquitoes) so we at least sleep and eat in peace. The people are really wonderful and have gone to endless trouble to build us a nice house. As yet we have no chapel – but it is in the making.¹¹⁴

The station itself, which was surrounded by sago swamps, was built on either side of the airstrip and the landscape possessed a peace and a beauty of its own. At times, the rain and mud were very depressing, but knowing how they depended on a few drums for water the sisters were ready to 'bless the Lord for the showers.'¹¹⁵

It was a ten-minute walk down the airstrip to the church, and the sisters soon learnt to manage this distance on bicycles – the more adept ones being able to wave in greeting to the mission dog as they sped along the flat surface at the edge of the airstrip!

Meeting the needs of formal Catholic education and primary health care

The sisters soon commenced the ministries of teaching and nursing. With the arrival of the sisters the school enrolment of 177 students, most of whom had some two hours' walk to and fro each day, increased rapidly. In the second year they took in boarders, both boys and girls, and soon there were 80 girl boarders and 40 boy boarders. Four years later, a letter by Fr Grubinger SVD states that there were 420 children on the roll.¹¹⁶

Besides teaching the school children, there were large classes for preparation for receiving the sacraments of communion and confirmation. The school children brought in the timber for the new church. Fr Grubinger had a pedal wireless and when he heard a boat on the Sepik was due in, the boys in the top grades would all go down to the river with some men and carry the iron and big posts that the men had cut in the bush.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Native materials used in construction of houses.

¹¹⁴ Extract from a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.

¹¹⁵ Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Torembo, 1958.

¹¹⁶ Dated 28 February 1962 in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.

¹¹⁷ From an interview with Elva Russell, May 2005.

The triple-certificated sister nurse, Mary Wildie, received a government subsidy for carrying out health services. When she arrived there was an established aid post and the *dokta boi*,¹¹⁸ Nicholas, who was of great assistance to her when she set up a clinic a short distance from the convent. He acted as her interpreter until she became more familiar with *tok pisin*. When Nicholas was transferred to Ambunti twelve months later, Mary managed the clinic alone.¹¹⁹

Maternal and Child Health Clinics (MCH) were set up in the villages and Mary, in the company of Father's haus-boi, would walk to the villages for clinics.¹²⁰ This would entail walking through the kunai grass well above her head, negotiating log crossings over rivers and canoe rides through swamps to reach her destination. Mary recorded:

Oh! To be young again and so trusting! I had no fear for my safety and trusted the New Guineans assisting me completely. They were happy days despite the extreme heat, mosquitoes and isolation.¹²¹

In their pastoral ministries all the sisters had to overcome their fear of crossing over the precarious bridges to reach the village people. Their first successful bridge crossing was recorded:

In visiting the villages we had to cross our first native bridge, a huge tree trunk about 20 ft. above a muddy river. Joanna encouraged me and led me by the hand safely across.¹²²

Shared ministries and induction with indigenous women religious - the Rosary Sisters

Bishop Arkfeld arranged for joint ministries in education and health with the Rosary Sisters, similar to the arrangements at Kunjingini. Madeleine Gumaure, their former Leader and a retired nurse, reminisced about how the Sisters of Mercy supported their fledgling institute in the early days at Torembi. She recalled how Jacinta (Mercy) and Sr Columba (RS) worked together in nursing, and the Mercy Sisters, Cephas Philben, Margaret Rush and Maureen Grant taught with two Rosary Sisters, assisting the other Rosary Sisters in their studies.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Health worker with limited basic training.

¹¹⁹ Information about the original dormitories and Maternal and Child clinics (MCH) was provided by Mary Wildie in a conversation in June 2007.

¹²⁰ A person who was both cook and house cleaner.

¹²¹ From an extract of a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.

¹²² Chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Torembi, 1958.

¹²³ Excerpt taken from an interview with Sr Madeleine Gumaure in Wewak, May 2006.

Adjustments, difficulties and cultural challenges

Dressed in their long, white, pleated habit, with covering headdress and veil, which was the regular Mercy religious attire of the time, sisters faced the ordeals of tropical swamp conditions, particularly the dreadful heat, the myriads of mosquitoes and the isolation (which they felt more keenly as the mission station was separated from the scattered and remote villages). Therese Kelly described their efforts to eradicate the mosquitoes:

The mosquitoes were atrocious – the kunai (plains) country always had a lot of mosquitoes. In one swipe of the hand over the arm you would kill 20 or 30 at once!¹²⁴

The sisters enjoyed teaching the children and had positive relationships with the people. From time to time, the priest and the luluais would come to enlighten the sisters about cultural traditions.¹²⁵ Other indigenous people who worked closely with the sisters on the station, the domestic girls in particular, would offer suggestions more directly, and sometimes playfully, but no less effectively, in the day-to-day carrying out of duties. One of the early sisters recalls:

Mother Damian has stressed we had to be aware of their own culture and not downgrade it as it was their culture and sacred to them.¹²⁶

Besides the novelty and strangeness of the surroundings and elusiveness of the culture, the sisters faced new adjustments in community and ministry. Having left the close companionship of the sisters of their home communities behind, sisters started out mostly in their new environment as strangers, gradually getting to know one another, as they followed the hallowed schedule of religious life practised in pre-Vatican II times and worked together, finding their way in ministry.

One afternoon, without warning, the bush convent building was shaken to its foundations by a freak wind and collapsed while the sisters were at prayer in the chapel. There was huge relief as each of the sisters emerged one by one. Though visibly shaken, they were unhurt, except for the last one who had stayed to put the sanctuary light out, and received a cutting blow from the swinging sanctuary lamp for her trouble!

Fr Franz Grubinger was panic stricken, but the sisters were alive, and amazingly no other building was damaged. There and then, Father gave his house to the sisters and stayed in the recently built

¹²⁴ From an extract of a letter in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Grafton.

¹²⁵ Clan officials appointed during colonial times.

¹²⁶ From an extract in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

hospital, until he managed to arrange for Brother Michael SVD to build a new convent of permanent materials. Every bit of timber and cement was carried in from Korogo on the Sepik to Torembe on the shoulders of the people. They did this with tremendous energy and good will, the men carrying the heavy timbers and the school children the lighter planks.¹²⁷

Excursions beyond the mission station for Mercy community gatherings

It became the custom at Easter or the Queen's Birthday weekend in June for the Torembe sisters to gather with the other Mercy communities. These annual gatherings, even if the weather was inclement, were opportunities to challenge the elements to come together in celebration, companionship and exchange. An example of the sisters' determination and ingenuity is taken from the Kunjingini sisters' chronicle of news and ideas.¹²⁸

The Queen's birthday became a day when the communities of Kunjingini and Torembe met at the half-way station of Pagui, on the Sepik River. Early in the day the double canoe, complete with a little shelter built between the boats, floated upstream to Pagui, bringing sisters from Torembe. The Kunjingini sisters were near the make-shift wharf, fully habited, wearing large brimmed hats against the tropical sun, then it was to the bank to be met by Fr Seigel, the Kunj station wagon and the overflow on the tractor. All too soon the day was ended, the trip was reversed and Torembe sisters were waved off, Australian flag flying. It was back to the sago swamps for another year.

This custom was carried on as the foundations increased. In years to come, Kairiru also offered ideal facilities for accommodation, relaxation, land and sea excursions, and also privacy and beauty for retreat and prayer.

Living the vision of primary and secondary education for girls in the Wewak Diocese

From the earliest years at Kunjingini and Torembe, the sisters encouraged the primary education of girls and female enrolment, attendance and achievement increased dramatically. Soon the possibility of girls completing primary school at Torembe and Kunjingini became a reality and the building of a Mercy boarding high school for girls at Torembe was planned. Mercy College would cater for the girls from the Wewak Diocese who had completed their primary education.¹²⁹

Valerie (Valentine) White, the first Headmistress, had the initiative, enthusiasm and drive for the task. Fr Grubinger arranged for builders to construct the school buildings for the school to commence in 1963. Under Valerie's leadership the early students of Mercy College (at Torembe and later at

¹²⁷ Extracted from the chronicle of Sisters of Mercy Torembe.

¹²⁸ This excerpt of the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane, was written by Sr Joan Hooper.

¹²⁹ As noted previously, some female students from the Highlands later received their secondary education at Yarpas

Yarapos) were certainly captivated by the spirit of learning. Some progressed first to Yarapos, then to All Hallows College in Brisbane to complete their secondary education.¹³⁰

Circumstances leading to the closure of the Mercy mission at Torembi

Within a few short years, tropical sickness befell two of the founding sisters, Annunziata McNamara and Therese Kelly and they were replaced by Joan (Chrysostom) Hooper and Shirley (William) Myers, sisters from the Brisbane Congregation.

After some years a diocesan decision was made that Wewak would offer a more central location for the secondary education of girls. Anecdotal references telling of the consequent ‘evacuation’ in 1966 have since been related among the sisters – of Sr Maureen Grant and the other Torembi sisters packing the books and teaching materials in an assortment of appropriately labelled boxes for mission air transport to Wewak!

The Sisters of Mercy continued their missionary work of education, primary health care and support for the Rosary Sisters until 1974. A combination of circumstances, leading to the decision to close the Mercy foundation at Torembi in order to meet new ministerial challenges, will be briefly addressed in Chapter Four.

Section 3. Brisbane Mercy Sisters’ foundation to Yarapos 1966¹³¹

When the Mercy high school was transferred to the more central location of Yarapos in 1966 land for the school was generously given by the landowner, Mama Christina.¹³²

The founding members were a youthful, enthusiastic and talented band of teachers: Sisters Christine Watt, Valerie (Valentine) White, Maureen (Augustine) Grant, Philippine Connors, and Denise (Brian Mary) Coghlan from Brisbane together with Mae (Bernard) McMurrough from West Perth. The first religious Superior of Mercy College Yarapos was Sister Christine Watt.¹³³

¹³⁰ Information provided by Mrs Rose Maule, and ex-Yarapos Sisters. Among these were Rose (Asoli) Maule, Heriberta Narombi, Elizabeth Saulep, Maria (Primong) Siria, Monica Tonjin and Christine Tamin, who later, as lay professional women, became social leaders as the world around them and their people was rapidly changing.

¹³¹ The sisters continued at Yarapos throughout the fifty years of this study, and since then to the time of writing.

¹³² From an interview with Christine Watt in Brisbane, c.1999. Christina had lived through the Japanese occupation, witnessing the clearing of two streams flowing through the property to make the Japanese base at Yarapos accessible to the sea at Wom, which was the point at which the Japanese there surrendered to the Australians about a month after World War II finished.

¹³³ Taken from records in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

In the early days the sisters lived in one of the classroom blocks while the campus was being built around them, with the convent eventually being built on the other side of the creek. Significant people at that time were Fr Kees Meier, the parish priest, and Fr Yoep Heinemans who managed the money matters concerning the actual building of the school. The foreman, Benedict, a Papua New Guinean, was a most trusted and reliable builder.¹³⁴

The school catered not only for those from the Sepik Province, but for girls from the Highlands provinces whose parents would only allow their daughters to proceed to secondary education because they were in the care of the sisters. The first enrolment comprised 126 boarders, with approximately 100 from the Sepik, 22 from the Highlands and a few from Vanimo. At times, difficulties of heat and malaria faced everyone on the campus. The girls amazed the sisters with their ability to endure pain and their resilience after malaria attacks. After bearing the croaking sounds of the frogs of the night, many hearts could be lifted with the early morning bird calls and the sound of a contingent of Yarpas girls, routinely and rhythmically wielding their *saraps* (grass-cutting blades) under the capable direction of the prefects, thus curbing the ever-encroaching jungle grasses.

Early traditions of ‘valiant woman’¹³⁵

Sheer hard work and physical labour marked the humble beginnings of Mercy College. The pioneer Yarpas girls co-operated with the sisters in clearing the ground and establishing agricultural plots to make the school as self-reliant as possible. This tradition continued in the following years as girls were empowered through leadership opportunities and learning the life skills of gardening and poultry raising.

Under the banner of ‘Valiant Woman’, Valerie White set the emphasis on human development – intellectual and spiritual, physical and moral, emotional and artistic. From the earliest times, music and singing formed the hallmark of the school curriculum and many were the musicals that enthralled audiences of young and old at the school and later in the Wirui Sound Shell. The first debate was held at the Brandi Administration High School in 1966, with teams from Yarpas, Brandi and St Xavier’s on Kairiru. A tradition of social and academic interaction developed.

Yarpas continued to be a major responsibility undertaken for the Catholic education of girls by the Sisters of Mercy throughout the fifty-year period and beyond, and subsequent developments will be reported in the eras 1970–81 (Chapter Four) and 1982–2006 (Chapter Five).

¹³⁴ From a recorded interview with Sr Christine Watt in Brisbane, c.1999.

¹³⁵ Taken from Archives of Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

Section 4. Brisbane Mercy Sisters to St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi 1969

The original diocesan teacher education college, which was established in Kunjingini in 1957, was the forerunner in 1968 to a joint, regional, inter-diocesan teacher training college in Wewak – St Benedict's Teacher Training College, Kaindi. The four founding bishops – of Wewak, Aitape, Vanimo and Daru – signed an agreement, which ratified their decision and provided the moral and legal basis for the new joint venture.¹³⁶ The college was under the management of the Christian Brothers (CFC, Queensland) working in conjunction with the Sisters of Mercy (RSM, Brisbane). These two congregations, as the 'contract religious congregations, undertook to provide a core of staff which the four dioceses were to supplement through recruitment and contribution of personnel'.

Beginnings of the Sisters at Kaindi

The founding sisters were three of the original band at Kunjingini - Francis Regis Everingham (Superior and Head Teacher of the Demonstration School), Margarita Shannon (Co-founder - Deputy Principal and Lecturer) and Valda Cervetto, (Music Lecturer and Liturgy, Household and Catering Manager).

For the first three months, the sisters were accommodated at Yarapos and travelled out each day in a yellow bus. When the Yarapos classrooms were built, one of them was used for the sisters' accommodation. Margarita Shannon reflected on early difficulties and challenges.¹³⁷

Life for everybody was a challenge during those early months. Sr Val and a helper cooked the students' meals in a small shed, with a roof and no walls. To get there she often had to walk through water up to her knees.

Getting the grounds into some order was a work in progress for many years. Brother Graeme Leach had a vision of what he wanted the campus to be, but achieving it was not easy. The land had been used as a vegetable garden by Japanese soldiers during the war and the furrows caused flooding until Brother Leach and Brother Cleary, with the men students, dug a very deep drain, almost a little canal, at the back of the college. At first there was no tractor to cut the grass and lawn mowers were out of the question, so everyone had plenty of practice using the *saraps*. During the first building period, there were also teams of casual labourers cutting bush, clearing tree trunks and digging ditches.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Taken from documents provided by Br Graeme Leach in May 2005.

¹³⁷ These and the following paragraphs on the beginnings have been condensed from reports by co-founder Sister Margarita Shannon) and original college archival records by co-founders, Brother Graeme Leach CFC (Principal) and Sister Margarita Shannon (Deputy Principal).

¹³⁸ The land was very swampy and needed to be drained. Despite the improvements, the campus continued to be subject to flooding after heavy rains.

The new college started with a group of seventy male and female residential students, enrolled in a two-year course to gain a certificate in primary teaching.¹³⁹ The expanded teacher education program at Kaindi greatly improved the educational qualifications of men and women, by providing teachers not only for the Wewak Diocese, but also those of Aitape, Vanimo and Daru. The story of the sisters' involvement in teacher education at Kaindi, begun in 1969, continued in the years ahead, as will be reported in Chapter Four (1970-1981) and Chapter Five (1982-2006).

Meanwhile, foundations continued to be made primarily for the purposes of Catholic primary education and health care within the mission station contexts and these are now introduced.

Section 5. Early Federation foundations for education, health and pastoral care on mission stations in Wewak – Ulupu, Yangoru and Negrie

In the 1960s three new foundations, made at the request of Bishop Arkfeld to the relevant leaders of the Federation Congregations, were authorised by Mother Damian Duncombe for Ulupu (1963–1976), by Mother Fabian of Rockhampton for Yangoru (1963-1982) and by Mother Pius of Townsville for Negrie (1970–1980).¹⁴⁰

Thus, the Australian Mercy Leaders responded to the call of Bishop Arkfeld to remote areas to address contemporary diocesan needs in Catholic education and health. The founding leaders were experienced missionaries (e.g. Mother Regis, Leader of Ulupu, was the original founder of Kunjingini, Mary Wildie, Leader of the Rockhampton foundation was a founding member of Torembe and Leonie Williams, Leader of the Townsville foundation had previously been a member of the Torembe community). The sisters, whether new recruits or experienced missionaries, were enthusiastic, qualified teachers or nurses who had volunteered for mission life. The Mercy sisters in the Wewak and the Australian dioceses concerned had sacrificed sisters in local ministries to free the sisters selected for these new foundations.

¹³⁹ Those who had at least secondary education were entitled to study for a middle primary ('B') certificate, while those who had completed secondary education to Form 4 were admitted to the upper primary ('C') certificate.

¹⁴⁰ Negrie has been included with the other foundations in this particular time frame because of its similar educational mission focus. By 1970 the Sisters of Mercy were dotted over a large area of north Queensland from Proserpine on the coast to the far west of Winton. Yet, despite their numbers being spread thinly, this congregation made a foundation to Negrie in the Wewak Diocese and supported a community in mission work there for ten years. Mother Fabian indicated the attitude of the Australian leaders in responding to these requests: Because we are living members of the universal Church, we cannot be indifferent to the cares and hardships, the sufferings and the burdens of our fellow members, whoever and wherever they may be. We cannot remain indifferent and complacent as long as the greater part of the human family does not know Christ. These were the reasons that prompted us to send a community of sisters to Yangoru in New Guinea in 1963 at the invitation of Bishop Leo Arkfeld SVD, Bishop of Wewak.

The founding members of Ulupu were: Mary Francis Regis Everingham (local Superior), Mary Loyola Boyle, Mary (de Padua) Scanlan, Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood (nurse) and Valerie (Jude) Birchley (experienced infant teacher). On 20 January 1963 they received their mission crosses, along with others of the Brisbane community who had been appointed as missionaries.¹⁴¹

The founding members of Yangoru, chosen from several volunteers, were: Sisters Mary (Felix) Wildie, Superior, Stancia (Philomene) Cawte, Patricia (Genevieve) Wood and Kathleen (Sarto) Breen. They received their mission crosses on 3 February 1963.¹⁴²

The founding sisters of Negrie were Marie (Leonie) Williams, Superior, Nina (Josephine) Barra, Rose (Giovanni) Pelleri and Jean (Louis) Murray.¹⁴³ They received their mission crosses from the Bishop of Townsville, Leonard Faulkner, at a concelebrated Mass in St Joseph's Church prior to leaving for Wewak on 3 February 1970.¹⁴⁴

The bishops of the Australian Church, as in the mission ventures previously mentioned, collaborated through the loan of diocesan priests and support of the laity through resources, funding, building and the supply of short - and long-term - lay missionaries. The concern for the Church in Papua and New Guinea was expressed by Bishop Francis Rush in the Rockhampton cathedral when the founding members for Yangoru received their mission crosses on 3 February 1963. His public address emphasised the concern of the 2,000 bishops at the Vatican Council (1962-1965) for universal mission. Similarly, the Bishop of Townsville, Leonard Faulkner, was supportive and took an active interest in the Sisters of Mercy ministries at Negrie.¹⁴⁵

Records show support from the Australian Church, and entries in the sisters' Negrie chronicle indicate their appreciation for these gifts and the prayerful support of their Australian friends in Townsville. Some examples are taken from the chronicle:

Mr and Mrs Jack Gleeson; sisters and students, Home Hill
Repairs and renovations to Negrie Church
Water tanks and shelters for Bukientuon and Parina villages
Sisters, Mater Hospital Townsville

¹⁴¹ Archival sources from the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

¹⁴² From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Rockhampton.

¹⁴³ From the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Townsville.

¹⁴⁴ Sources from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

¹⁴⁵ Corroborated by Leonard Faulkner, Archbishop Emeritus of Adelaide, in an email communication on 26 March 2007.

Medical goods used for treating sick and injured in Negrie
 Townsville St Vincent de Paul Society, Belgian Gardens
 Used clothing for the needy (that means almost everyone)
 Ingham St Vincent de Paul
 Medical goods and clothing for sick of Negrie and Aitape Hospital
 Mr and Mrs Thomas Camp, Mr A. Camp, Mrs Beryl Camp.
 Freight for used clothing, sewing table for Bukientuon Club
 Catholic Women's League of Lucinda
 Driver's licence for Catechist
 Lourdes Primary School Ingham, Santa Maria Girls' High, Ingham
 Water Tank at Negrie

The three new foundations show similar trends in the sisters' approach to mission¹⁴⁶

Forming small groups on remote rural mission stations, the sisters followed the same Mercy pattern of community life and prayer according to a set timetable, known at the time as 'the horarium'. As the decade progressed, the horarium was adapted to allow more flexibility in ministry and the religious habit was modified to suit the tropical climate.

The beginnings show that the sisters faced difficulties, of their convents not being ready at the time of arrival despite the priests' earnest intentions, tropical illnesses, physical hardships and isolation from familiar contacts and contexts. They adapted to the demands of life on the mission station and set about organising the improvement of educational facilities, resources, opportunities and standards, which included promoting the education of girls for the first time. They carried out professional in-service in religious and secular education for indigenous teachers. Sister nurses conducted clinics and carried out extensive patrols to the villages.¹⁴⁷ In short, they encountered the people in their daily contexts and in the type of institutions that were the norm at the time.

The sisters' ministerial work, including village visitation, offered them a deepening perspective and awareness of parish needs and of the diverse Melanesian cultures. The hospitality offered by the sisters on the mission stations was extended to priests from isolated parishes and nearby government personnel and their families. This friendly contact facilitated a rich exchange of contemporary questions and ideas about possible collaboration of church and government in religious and secular developments.

¹⁴⁶ Compiled from the chronicles of Yangoru, Ulupu and Negrie.

¹⁴⁷ The Negrie community comprised qualified teachers. Yangoru provided health services to Negrie.

Reference has been made to mission connections with Australia through family, friends, lay people and school children in all the Mercy foundations. Cross-congregational sisterly interconnections also feature in the Mercy history. The particular collaboration of Central (Rockhampton) and North (Townsville) Queensland forms an integral part of the Yangoru and Negrie missions and some examples are worth highlighting. Nina (Josephine) Bara had been part of the Yangoru community for four years before becoming one of the founding members of Negrie (and preparing the convent for the Rockhampton sisters' arrival). In subsequent years, Townsville sisters, Carmel King and Cheryl Camp, transferred to Yangoru to maintain the ministries of the vocational centre and teaching at Yangoru administration high school.¹⁴⁸

Adaptation of religious habit to tropical conditions

Reference has previously been made to the sisters' conformity to religious life regulations at the time, which included wearing the full religious habit.¹⁴⁹ From the middle 1960s, discussions on modifying the habit became a common topic among the Union and Federation sisters and comparisons of new models were made on home visits and on the occasional joint Christmas vacations on Kairiru Island (to be introduced in the next chapter). In the tropical heat the sisters felt considerable discomfort, clad in the long pleated white habits, firm stockings, starched headdress and long veil. In hot perspiring conditions sisters felt the inconvenience as they carried out the manual inside and outside tasks on the station and ventured out on foot on visitation to the villages. Countless grass seeds tenaciously attached themselves to the sturdy stockings, causing extreme skin irritation.

One fascinating twist on the path to a modified form of religious clothing was outlined by Sister Loyola Boyle, a young Irish woman from the Brisbane Congregation, who could not get rid of skin irritation and inflammation caused by prickly heat 'from head to toe'. She endured this for more than two years, with a growing fear she would eventually be forced to return to Australia.¹⁵⁰

At this critical stage (approximately 1965), Bishop Arkfeld appeared on the scene for pastoral visitation, and in his interested way, enquired how the sisters were. Loyola admitted that she was not able to manage the heat, whereupon the Bishop turned to Mother Francis Regis: 'Do you think you

¹⁴⁸ Some of these friendships had previously developed through study at James Cook University, Townsville.

¹⁴⁹ The religious habit was the recognised uniform attire required of women religious, worn also by the Union sisters in the Highlands where torrential rain and muddy and dusty conditions caused havoc with their appearance.

¹⁵⁰ Personal communication from Loyola Boyle, June 2007.

could write a letter to Mother Damian and ask her to change the dress?’ Mother Regis’s response was equally direct: ‘Yes, my Lord.’ Offering to add a covering letter, the Bishop departed, leaving the sisters grateful for his timely intervention.¹⁵¹

Within three weeks, the sisters received news from Mother Damian that the coif covering the head, ears and neck was to be replaced by a simple veil reaching to the shoulders. The habit was simplified to mid-calf length, with short sleeves. New ‘modified’ religious dresses, made according to each sister’s measurements, were soon posted from Brisbane to the sisters at Ulupu.

Reminiscences of the early days at Kunjingini

Alois Petau, the Headmaster of Kunjingini Primary School in 2005, recalled his experiences as a student in the mid-1960s, and the stories of his father, who was the first catechist in the Kunjingini Parish some five years before the sisters came. Alois began by recalling the names of the pioneer sisters – names that rolled swiftly off his tongue:

Mother Regis, Marietta, Brendan, Carthage, Val, Cephas, who knew the Tok Ples (vernacular) and Isobel, ‘the No.1 Meri bilong station clinic and who also knew the Tok Ples.’ Mother Brendan ruled the school area to the left and Sister Isobel ruled the area near the convent and hospital to the right.

The Mercy Sisters did a lot. Besides teaching the students who came from as far away as Dreikir, Wewak, Ambunti, Yangoru and Angoram they took in orphans, children with grille and skin diseases. They provided students with uniforms and shorts to wear.

The sisters planted the first fruit trees. Sister de Padua took the ex-Grade Six students who were not selected for high school and taught them life skills in the Skul Anchor.¹⁵² Kunjingini was a thriving place with the trade store, PMVs (local bus service), and the piggery and poultry farm. The buildings and iron roofs all came through the sisters from Australia.

Sister Isobel started with the school clinic, and this developed into the sub-health centre for students, workers, village people and the Australian soldiers doing research work. Sister Val taught us how to read notes, how to cook and to sew. Many of the ex-students are now in charge of many government departments.

¹⁵¹ This account offered by Loyola Boyle is to be interpreted in the context of the changes of religious dress and adaptation to the Church in the modern world, and reflects the gentle cleric’s friendly relationship with the sisters, rather than their need of any intervention in this matter.

¹⁵² An educational facility combining enriching academic courses and vocational training offered at the time for Primary School leavers.

Hilda Yangele, a novice at the novitiate at Coolock House in Goroka in 2005 was from the village of Mul, in the Kunjingini Parish. In recalling stories of the early days as remembered in the village she alluded to the effects of the sisters on the ordinary lives of the people, as reported to her by her mother, Grace.¹⁵³

My mother told me that the main sicknesses in that area were malnutrition and malaria. There were lots of people there and we had no land to grow crops and benefit from the food from the gardens. Sago is our main diet. The sisters helped by telling them to eat a lot of greens, like beans, for vitamins, to give them good blood, to eat the sago grubs for protein. They taught them to take care of their homes, to look after their own bodies like washing and hygiene to keep germs away, and sewing lessons with the women using their hands. They took the older people who had never been to school for literacy classes in Tok Pisin. Some of the older people taught the sisters about our language too.

Reflective Observations: Federation Sisters in the Wewak Diocese (1957-69)

Responding to the Bishop's requests, Mercy traditions were soon established in the first poor remote rural foundations of Kunjingini and Torembe and developed as the sisters expanded to Mercy College (later Yrapos Secondary School) and St Benedict's Teachers College (later St Benedict's Kaindi Campus of Divine Word University) and Ulupu, Yangoru and Negrie. At first living in bush accommodation, the sisters formed religious communities of well qualified and experienced teachers and nurses who eagerly accepted the rigours of tropical living and working, and set about improving the educational and health standards on the mission stations and throughout the parishes, using the accepted church and secular structures of the era. Cooperating in church and government initiatives, they also grew in knowledge of wider diocesan and inter-diocesan perspectives. As pioneers in female education, teacher education and nursing they were ready to subdivide their small communities to meet requests in the name of 'planting the church'.

The sisters were responsible for the catering, hospitality arrangements and domestic training of young women from the villages. Out of an attitude of respect for the culture, an approach that was emphasised by the Australian Mercy Leaders, they learnt through experience with the Divine Word Missionary priests, catechists, teachers and the village people to relate sensitively to cultural issues. The sisters relied financially on the mission in their daily lives and mission work, but were frugal, self-reliant and creative in their management of general maintenance, water resources and garden produce.

The sisters accustomed themselves to the cultural context of the mission station community and village life through visitation and nursing, and also through their growing command of *Tok Pisin* (which tended to replace the vernacular languages in the coastal areas) and their involvement in

¹⁵³ Information derived from an interview in Wewak, c. 2005.

religious instruction and liturgy. Clinic work and patrols for Maternal and Child Health Care service brought the sister nurses in touch with the people in their day to day living. In their ministries the sisters initially relied on the indigenous teachers or nurses for local knowledge. They engaged in a mutual exchange with the indigenous congregation of the Rosary Sisters and their close working relationship with them offered an undeniable exchange, not only in terms of local and professional knowledge and skills, but also of deep religious insights. The constant interaction with Melanesians, while at times unsettling, challenged and confronted many of the sisters' natural tendency to ethnocentric attitudes.

Like their Highlands sisters, they experienced the joys and sorrows, as expressed by Catherine McAuley. As well as suffering the tropical heat and malaria the sisters experienced loneliness, strangeness and isolation and, in some cases, disappointment in an earlier than expected recall to Australia.

Part 3. Foundations of the Federation Sisters of North Sydney in the Mount Hagen Diocese: Pumakos in Enga (1965) and Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen (1968)

In 1965 a third major Australian foundation was made by the Federation sisters of North Sydney, who responded to the request of Bishop George Bernarding of Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands for missionary work in the western corner of his vast diocese in the remote mission station at Pumakos in the Enga district.¹⁵⁴

To understand the significance of the original request for Australian sisters in 1965 one needs to step back twenty years earlier to the beginning of missionary activity in Enga.

First Catholic missionaries enter Enga and establish a mission at Pumakos¹⁵⁵

Enga, a vast mountainous area west of the Hagen Range, with a population of 200,000, was one of the last areas of the Territory of New Guinea to be opened to Europeans and the extremely fertile Tsak Valley, known as the 'hanging valley', was one of the four main valleys in the eastern half of the Enga district. Tsak-Pumakos was nestled within a backdrop of majestic ranges rising 3,850 metres above sea level and sweeping 2,000 metres to the valley floors below.

¹⁵⁴ Prior to this request, the Mercy Leaders of the Sydney Archdiocese had been unable to send sisters on overseas missions because, with the post-world war II influx of European migrants, in Mother Philomena's words, 'the need for nuns in the schools was at its peak.'

¹⁵⁵ Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*, 1998.

As soon as the region was officially opened in June 1947, missionaries of the various churches, including the Catholic Church, came in haste. Among the first to climb over the Hagen range were an American, Fr William Ross SVD, who had founded their mission at Mount Hagen in 1934, and his companion, a tall, young, red-headed Dutchman, Fr Gerry Bus SVD. Walking on the third day, they descended into the densely populated Tsak Valley and, having made their first contact with the people, Fr Bus decided on Pumakos as an ideal base on which to establish the Catholic Church in Enga.¹⁵⁶

Fr Jacques Donkers SVD, the first parish priest succeeded in acquiring enough land for a large bush mission station at Pumakos, as well as for numerous outstations.¹⁵⁷ As well as the main church, presbytery and school, churches and schools were constructed in the surrounding villages. This drive for education was characteristic of the Divine Word Missionaries, and soon Fr Donkers had catechists and teachers from the Coast around Alexishafen to teach the youngsters. Pumakos became a hive of intellectual activity at junior primary level! - but there were not enough qualified teachers to take the students further. For upper primary level, only selected boys were chosen to make the journey over the Hagen Range to board at the diocesan primary school at Banz.

Section 1. Mercy Foundation at Pumakos (1965–1994)

In 1965 the Apostolic Delegate, Domenico Enrici, visited New Guinea where the Bishop of the vast Diocese of Mount Hagen, George Bernarding SVD, persuaded him that Tsak-Pumakos then administered by Fr Tony Krol, would make an ideal mission place for sisters. On his return Archbishop Enrici promptly approached Mother Philomena Ryman of the North Sydney Mercies.¹⁵⁸

In the meantime, however, the Australian school situation had improved and, when the request was put to the sisters, it was received with enthusiasm. In her practical and responsible way, Philomena went to Pumakos with Marie Agnes, matron of the Mater Hospital, to check things out for herself and was satisfied that suitable living and ministry arrangements were being made for the sisters. She communicated all of this news to Mother Damian in Brisbane.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ After settling at Sangurap, near the present centre of the Diocese of Wabag.

¹⁵⁷ His companion, the energetic Fr Franz Bekerom SVD, arranged for the people to cut down trees from the surrounding mountain sides and saw them into lengths with the hand saws he had left with them.

¹⁵⁸ Prior to this request, the Mercy Leaders of the Sydney Archdiocese had been unable to send sisters on overseas missions because - with the post-world war II influx of European migrants - in Mother Philomena's words, the 'need for nuns in the schools was at its peak'.

¹⁵⁹ The two Mercy Leaders were kindred spirits and were soon to develop a close friendship through their love of mission among the peoples of New Guinea.

Mother Philomena's words in explaining the choice of the founding sisters show that she envisaged a community that would make a long-term religious and professional commitment to New Guinea.¹⁶⁰ Although the original request was for two sisters, the council decided to send four. Their names were announced in the community on the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, 1964.

Mary Francis Harcombe was chosen as Superior, a gracious, caring sister who would have the responsibility of establishing real community with the sisters, the priests and the people. (She served for 13 years, 1965-1978);

Clare (de Paul) Gilchrist, who had already spent 20 years at the Maternity Hospital, North Sydney, and who had demonstrated her adaptability to most circumstances with a great spirit of faith. (She served for 32 years, 1965-1997);

Helen (Augustine) McDonell, with a background of strong faith, ability as a teacher, and again a person of adaptability. She served for 24 years, 1965-1989); and,

Margaret (Imelda) Shakeshaft was the fourth member of the team and the youngest, a born teacher, strong in faith, destined to maintain the spirit of the foundation. She served for 34 years, 1965–1999).

Thus, after a moving missioning ceremony four sisters set out on a mission foundation to a people in a remote corner of New Guinea.¹⁶¹ ¹⁶² The sisters set out on their journey northwards from Sydney to Mount Hagen. On the first flight in the small mission plane Bishop Bernarding accompanied Mother Philomena and Francis Harcombe to Pumakos. Clare, Helen and Margaret were on the second flight and their eyes widened as they realised the ruggedness and remoteness of their new home as the light plane did a tight circle within the mountain walls to touch down on the short, narrow airstrip.

As they stepped on to Engan soil, however, the sisters got an immediate contrasting impression of the welcome and poverty of the people, with the assembled clergy of the district and throngs of parishioners, crowded in the massive timber church. Impressed with the faith of the people, the sisters were also amazed to see so many old before their time, particularly the women. They made a mental note, that if they did nothing else, they would work for the betterment of the women and children.

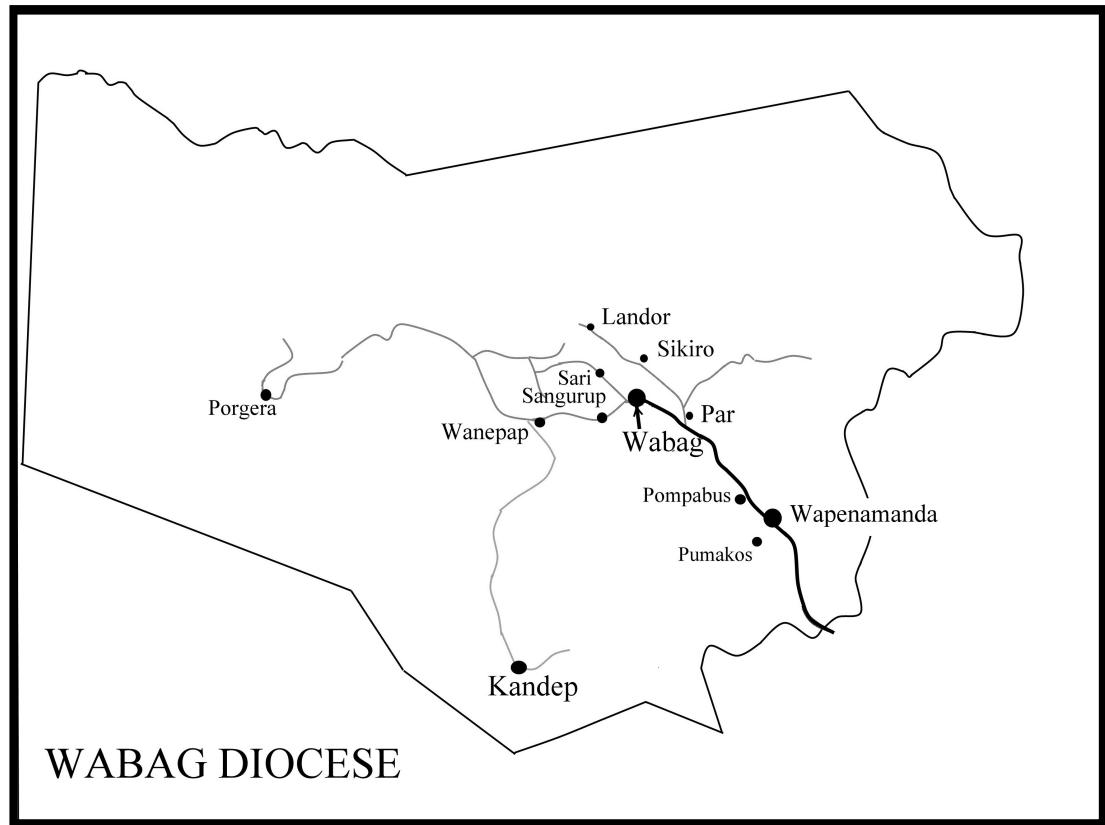
¹⁶⁰ A memorable and privileged personal communication with Mother Philomena who was ninety at the time.

¹⁶¹ Taken from interviews with Clare Gilchrist, Helen McDonell and Margaret Shakeshaft.

¹⁶² Significantly, this was 100 years after the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, from Liverpool in England in 1865.

The following map, adapted from an original of the Catholic missions in the Diocese of Wabag, shows the mission stations and centres where the sisters lived and ministered in the coming years.

Map 5



Settling in at Pumakos: Meeting the demands of regional education and health on a remote mission station

The sisters, surprisingly, found themselves responsible for a vibrant school system that catered for the students of the entire Wabag area. Pumakos had suddenly become pivotal in the diocesan education plan when the regional school at Banz was forced to close because of a prolonged drought and the Engan students were relocated to Pumakos. These boys who had completed their lower primary classes at Par, Wanepap, Pompabus, Sari, Sikaro, Pina and Laiagam were now accommodated at Pumakos. Most of them walked by themselves over the mountains, while others were driven by their parish priest. Thus with this influx, the school began in 1965 with 400 students. Teaching with the sisters were two indigenous New Ireland teachers, Lawrence and Kevin, who had come with the Standard Four and Five boys from Fatima.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Information provided by Sr Margaret Shakeshaft.

Compared with the generally low expectation for girls' education, the sisters took their role in encouraging female education seriously. They also showed a keen sensitivity to the needs of the Highlands children. This purposefulness can be seen from Sr Margaret Shakeshaft's account.

The first year I only had three girls from Pumakos in Standard Five and Helen's Standard Six class were all boys. In the second year my girls in Standard Six were joined by about six girls from Ulga who came to Pumakos as boarders. After that, even though the girls were fewer in number, they were actually coming from Pumakos because we were working hard to achieve that – to get equal numbers. When we enrolled children for Standard One each year we told the parents in Tsak Valley that we wanted an equal number of boys and girls.

The clothing the children wore was very poor. The sisters in Australia gave money and the Pumakos sisters sewed different coloured laplaps for each class. Because water was icy cold in the fast running streams, they used to have a bucket, towel and soap in the classrooms so the children could wash their hands and keep the books clean ... One of my school friends gave me a subscription to the National Geographic for the school. The children really enjoyed looking at the pictures and seeing many things very different from their own experiences and culture. They were always willing to learn and seemed to really appreciate us being with them in the Valley.¹⁶⁴

The pioneer sisters at Pumakos, Mary Francis Harcombe, Helen McDonell and Margaret Shakeshaft, were followed by Patricia (Anthony Mary) Crowe, Kathleen (Mary Matthew) Robertson, Jennifer Bailey and Gabrielle (Magdalen) Flood.

The people had often asked Fr Krol for a nurse of their own and as soon as they heard that a nurse was on the way, they gathered to build the 'hospital'. Thus it was, that after more than twenty years in the maternity section of the Mater Hospital in North Sydney, Clare Gilchrist, triple-certificated nurse, found herself nursing in a partitioned building of bush materials with an assistant, Mario, a semi-trained nurse (dokta-boi), as her faithful assistant and interpreter. All equipment and medical supplies were provided by the Mater Hospital in Sydney.

In the second year, Mr Frank Thomas, a builder from Lane Cove, Sydney, and his friend Mr John Denny, gave two months of their time freely to build a proper hospital and clinic - a New Guinea 'Mater' Hospital of 30 beds. They returned later that year, bringing with them Mr Ken Park of Lindfield, a master builder. Staying for five weeks they built girls' quarters for the boarding school – dormitories, dining room, kitchen, recreation room and toilet block.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ The North Sydney congregation paid their fares and supplied materials. They built two wards, a delivery room, a small maternity ward and an office-storeroom.

¹⁶⁵ Written by Clare Gilchrist in a report (7/10/1967) kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.

Cross-cultural consciousness

The sisters were inducted into inculturation issues through their parish priest. Fr Krol was extremely sensitive to cultural mores and carefully monitored the sisters' progress as they sought an understanding of the language and the traditional ways of the people of the various clans in the valley.

An example of appropriate adaptations applied to the sisters' situation comes from the experience of Clare in the nursing field. When Clare Gilchrist first opened her small bush hospital in Pumakos, she provided baby dresses, bonnets and booties to guard against the Highlands cold, but when she found that the mothers were not used to the idea that clothes needed frequent washing or that damp clothes needed to be changed - situations that caused illness - she immediately stopped this practice, in fact, she disposed of the clothes kept in storage! Many women came to her for help in delivering their premature babies. Clare knew that often a humidicrib was needed, but there was no such thing available in the bush hospital. Undeterred, she soon came up with an appropriate solution. The small baby was tucked up inside a carton over which she made a plastic tent, supported by bamboo. Outside the tent she had a kettle on the boil over a small primus stove. A plastic tube led from the spout and through a small hole in the plastic covering. This constant inflow of air helped the tiny one to breathe. Clare's inventiveness was capped off by gently applying milk to the baby's mouth with a small eye dropper. Thus, over the years, many tiny patients were able to breathe, gain sustenance and strength, and in the end survive – in contrast with the premature babies born in the remote areas who would normally die.

The people soon learnt that Clare, who was known by the people for many years as de Paul, was a person who put a priority on their health and well being and that of their families. They would call at the health centre or, in an emergency, tap on her bedroom window at night, and know that they would receive care and attention, even if it meant her driving them to the medical doctor at the neighbouring Lutheran Hospital to receive specialist treatment. Clare used her expertise and adaptability to diagnose and treat the many forms of illness – ulcers, infections, diarrhoea, colds and pneumonia, fever, complications in child births, malnutrition and cuts, and serious wounds from domestic and tribal fights.

Services and hospitality provided on the remote Highlands mission station

Pumakos was known as a place of welcome throughout the diocese. Fr Krol would encourage priests who were feeling the effects of isolation on their remote mission stations to take some time to recuperate there. He knew that the homely atmosphere, the sisters' care, nourishing food, and the refreshing Highlands' climate would all contribute to restore the spirits of those weighed down with worries and difficulties. He told the sisters that if they did nothing more than create a home where the priests were welcome, they would have done a wonderful thing for the mission.

Meanwhile, Fr Krol introduced the sisters to daily mission life. After regular hours of ministry, they enthusiastically accompanied him on treks to outstations for baptisms, confirmations and calls to the sick and dying. After a short induction, the sisters, particularly Margaret, helped with preparation for the exchange of the fresh vegetables and supplies for the twice-weekly Wewak-Pumakos plane flights. In addition, the sisters trained and supervised the domestic girls, who in time, took on reliable duties in cooking, cleaning and laundry. Firm, caring friendships developed among them.¹⁶⁶

There were more difficult treks on foot from the station, or by four-wheel drive across the mountains. These treks occurred when Clare set out on sick calls and the priests went on their pastoral visits to the outstations, accompanied by one or more of the sisters.¹⁶⁷ New recruits came from North Sydney to teach on the teaching staff at Pumakos.

Similar trends of mission development in the previous Mercy foundations of the Union and Federation sisters during the late colonial era are seen in the Pumakos foundation. These are: the request from the bishop for sisters to help in the building up of the local church; their early difficulties, adjustments, adaptations and challenges in education, health, and social concerns, working in professional structures that were the norms of the time, with a special focus on girls and women; being accepting and respectful of the different clan cultures and working within the expectations of the people; their involvement in hospitality and wider diocesan needs and in cooperative government and inter-church relationships, particularly with the neighbouring Lutherans; and their reliance on support from the Australian Church.

¹⁶⁶ The large Enga clans had a common vernacular language and the Lutheran pastors and Catholic priests were known for their cultural, linguistic and anthropological collaboration.

¹⁶⁷ When the sisters first came to Enga, travel by air, rare as it was, was more common than by road. The first wheels to touch down in Enga were those of a plane. Once the Lae-Goroka-Hagen-Wabag Highway was opened up, the Highlands people, even in the remotest places, using shovels, laboriously made tracks for vehicles in order to make vital links for commercial exchanges, education and health.

Early reflections of the pioneer sisters

A former student, Sister Marie Bernadette Serao SND, offers her impressions of the early days.¹⁶⁸

Sister Helen was the Inspector as well as the headmistress and most of the men who are now parliamentarians were her students. There was no other Standard Five or Six in Enga – so they came from Wabag and all over the province. There was a boarding school for Standards Four to Six. The boys were in round houses, and then they built a big boarding dormitory for girls, not for the boys. Mr Bellet, the builder, did this. I don't know who built the classrooms. It was well set up when I came. Sister Helen had them all in uniforms, and we had parades and sports events at Wabag. Only a small group was selected to go because of shortage of transport. It was a well-disciplined school. We were the elite.

The clinic was run by Clare (de Paul). In that valley that was THE clinic, any hour of the day or night. The people would tap on the window and call for assistance. There was the Lutheran Emmanuel Hospital at Mambasanda Centre, but Clare took care of all emergencies, but if she couldn't, then she would drive. There were no other drivers then, the sisters did the driving and it was a two hours' drive there. There were no guard dogs, no security. The relationship with the people was very good – they knew the sisters were there and took care of them.

New teaching recruits, as mentioned above, enabled the North Sydney Mercies to respond with similar missionary zeal in reaching out to emerging needs when the request came from the Bishop for their sisters to join the staff of Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen.

Section 2. Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen 1968¹⁶⁹

In 1968 three pioneer Sisters of Mercy joined the staff of Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands and Helen McDonell described the origin of the planting of the Catholic Church in this mountainous Highlands region.¹⁷⁰

The beautiful and populous Highlands of Papua New Guinea lay undiscovered by white people until 1933 when the gold-seeking Leahy brothers, Mick and Dan, reached the Wahgi Valley after walking west from Goroka. Little gold was found, but the explorers were able to announce to the world that the mountainous interior of Papua New Guinea was not sparsely populated as was generally believed, but pulsating with life and vitality. Between them, the Highlands Provinces - Eastern, Western, Southern, Simbu and Enga - contain approximately 700,000 of the estimated two and a half million people of Papua New Guinea. These Highlanders are people with many regional differences in dress, language and culture, who live in an area of superbly grassed valleys, towering mountains, turbulent rivers and a refreshing climate.

¹⁶⁸ Sr Bernadette SND offered these impressions in a noted interview at Mount Hagen in May 2005.

¹⁶⁹ The sisters remained at Holy Trinity Teachers College from 1968 throughout the historical period under investigation.

¹⁷⁰ Excerpts from a report by *Helen McDonell* for the North Sydney Chapter (1984-1985).

It was to this promising area that American Fr William Ross, informed by the Leahy brothers, walked from the Coast in 1934 to set up the first Catholic Mission in the Western Highlands. The flourishing Church in the Highlands today bears fitting tribute to the work of this now famous pioneer, Fr Ross.

An institution for the training of Catholic teachers, named Holy Trinity College, was moved from Banz to the more central location at Mount Hagen in the early sixties.¹⁷¹ Plans were made for its expansion as an inter-diocesan college for the Madang (Alexishafen) and Highlands provinces - Eastern Highlands (Goroka), Simbu (Kundiawa), Western Highlands (Hagen), Enga (Wabag), and Southern Highlands (Mendi).

The central role of education and the social and religious importance of teacher-training in implanting the Church are reported as the reasons for this expansion.¹⁷²

It is important that the Church engage in general education at all levels at the present time in New Guinea. General education in this area must be greatly extended so that the native people as a whole can raise the level of their lives socially, economically and spiritually. The rate of social change is so rapid that the younger generation especially must have a sound education in order to enable them to adjust to the new ways of life. The people in general are making a very heavy demand for education and if the Church does not rise to meet this demand in the social field it cannot hope to command a strong spiritual following especially among the young people.

The future of the Church in New Guinea depends on the supply of native priests, brothers and sisters. Such a supply in turn requires a strong educational system – primary schooling as widespread as possible and secondary schooling for all those who have sufficient ability. There can be no flowering of vocations unless educational facilities are widely available.... The consolidation and extension of the present mission primary school systems depends entirely on the provision of trained native teachers in large numbers and of high quality. The establishment of a large, well equipped and well staffed teachers college is therefore imperative to all mission work in New Guinea at present.¹⁷³

The request, put to Mother Philomena by Bishop Bernarding, was for sisters to staff the new teachers college and, in particular to be responsible for the welfare of female students, who were to be enrolled for the first time.

¹⁷¹ This was commenced in the Madang vicariate before being moved to the Highlands as a diocesan college at Banz (1957) under the administration of husband and wife lay missionaries, Peter and Leonie Meere.

¹⁷² Mount Hagen Diocese, about 1967, Archives North Sydney

¹⁷³ This report of the Diocese of Mount Hagen, c. 1967 is preserved in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.

Mercy Beginnings - Holy Trinity Teachers College

Mother Philomena agreed to Bishop Bernarding's request and with further recruits from Australia, re-organised the Pumakos community. In her practical way, she selected Cecily Geary from North Sydney, who was well qualified to be Deputy Principal, and Margaret Shakeshaft from Pumakos to be Head Teacher of the Primary Practising School (later known as the Demonstration School), coordinator of Practice Teaching and later lecturer at the College. Also lecturing on the staff was Marie Dagg, one of the original sisters from Goroka in 1956, representing the Goroka Diocese. Thus, three Sisters of Mercy formed the founding Mercy community of Holy Trinity Teachers College.

Thus, Sisters of Mercy became involved in teacher education and administration, welfare and encouragement of female students, the administration of the large teaching practice school, and the development and supervision of the growing indigenous staff. The convent, which was originally intended as a central house for the Pumakos and Holy Trinity Sisters, was financed by the Bishop.¹⁷⁴ Mother Philomena and the sisters were involved in the careful planning of the building. According to a letter from Archbishop Bernarding:

The Convent of Mount Hagen became the official residence of the Sisters of Mercy, and was called 'The Convent of Mercy' in 1968. The Sisters of Mercy furnished and equipped the convent.¹⁷⁵

The sisters' management of regular daily duties and balancing hospitality and availability with privacy needs were ongoing issues that had to be faced.¹⁷⁶

It was, however, some years before required renovations were made to the convent. According to Margaret Shakeshaft, there was constant building construction, which the expanding teachers college required, along with the manual labour of setting out paths, gardens and lawns.¹⁷⁷ In these inconvenient circumstances the college staff carried out school and college administration, teaching and supervision. Cecily recalled her impressions of the early days when the buildings were being constructed around them:

Without complaint, the students used to go down to the river to wash, and the sisters and students carried buckets of water for drinking and household use.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Basic items such as a stove, fridge and tables were also provided.

¹⁷⁵ Excerpt of a letter written on behalf of Archbishop Bernarding, when he retired to USA.

¹⁷⁶ Mother Philomena Ryman explained that when the convent was built at Holy Trinity the sisters decided, for the sake of privacy, on their living quarters being upstairs, with the kitchen and chapel downstairs.

¹⁷⁷ Thus, a commitment was made and followed in a building program with funding from the diocese and the German organisation MISERIOR.

¹⁷⁸ From an interview with Cecily Geary in 2001.

The Demonstration School 1968

A large school, the Holy Trinity Demonstration School, stood on the campus beyond the teachers college lecture blocks and was used for training purposes. It was the principal school for conducting demonstration lessons and practice teaching sessions, setting the standard for other Hagen administration schools used for the established 'block' teaching practice. Margaret Shakeshaft carried out the duties of Head Teacher from the beginning in 1968 to the localisation of the school in 1973. The college students and the pupils of the Demonstration School were anxious to learn and appreciated the help they were getting.¹⁷⁹

Members of the local community welcomed the sisters, and with the broader diocesan and town community, helped in various ways. When handing over the leadership of the Demonstration School to Margaret, the Principal, Peter Meere, introduced her to a band of committee men, who were leaders from each clan from the local community and were invaluable at this time of rapid social and cultural change.¹⁸⁰

They formed a pivotal point for communication with the parents and grass roots people of the area in the tumultuous years in preparation for Self-Government and Independence. Working with this group made many things possible. As Head Teacher, I had a meeting with them in Tok Pisin each week after school. These dedicated men were very active in helping the children gain all they could from the education being offered. Indeed, these men were my right arm in the running of the school. They were my advisers in cultural matters, and created an essential two-way parent-school network during changing times.¹⁸¹ In addition, two great clan leaders who constantly supported the College and the school were Peter Yaga and Sir Wamp Wan. I remember also with gratitude the great Western Highlands teachers and three excellent male teachers who were appointed from Madang, specifically to help raise the standard of this important teacher education practice school.

The beginnings, the incomplete building and educational challenges, were similar to those of St. Benedict's Teachers College, Wewak, and educational developments and consequences will be continued in Chapter Four.

Reflective Observations: Sisters in the Mount Hagen Diocese (1965-1969)

Josephine Byrnes, lecturer at Holy Trinity Teachers College and the second Leader of the Sisters of Mercy from North Sydney offered her observations on the pioneer sisters and their interaction with the Engan people.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ This information was provided in an interview by Sr. Margaret Shakeshaft.

¹⁸⁰ Margaret's explanation of the role of the committee and early community support derives from her earlier reports and from a recorded interview.

¹⁸¹ Margaret reported: I remember with great respect, gratitude and affection the original members of the school committee: Oni, Kunai, Kunjil, Ropra, Togual, Kerua, Oga, Rubiga and Pombra.

¹⁸² This report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, was written in 1974.

But the sisters came not only to change things. The sisters themselves gathered a wealth of valuable knowledge as they became more and more familiar with the culture and the traditions of the Melanesians whose way of life was so different from what we have experienced with our western background. For these, there were many ‘firsts’ which will not easily be forgotten – their first Sunday Mass as they listened to the strangeness of the Enga language and watched the village people at prayer; their first singing as they marvelled at the beauty of the Bird of Paradise plumed head-dresses which are among the people’s most treasured possessions; their first visit to the bush house – a low building of wood, bamboo and grass with no windows and a fire in the centre which is always lighted in the evening as a protection against the coldness of the air at an altitude of over 2,000 metres; their first vision of a large live pig tied upside down to a long pole being carried along on men’s shoulders for one of their traditional pig-exchange ceremonies.

As with the previous Union and Federation foundations in the Goroka and Wewak Dioceses respectively, those of the Federation Sisters of North Sydney were made in response to requests from the bishop of the diocese in negotiation with their missionary-minded Australian leader. In keeping with the Mercy charism to the needy, the first foundation was in a remote rural parish of Pumakos in Enga, focusing on primary education and health, with an emphasis on improving the quality and status of girls and women. The second foundation was to a more central location at the inter-diocesan Highlands teacher education institution. The sisters there were experienced and qualified teachers who received government subsidies and met the high accreditation standards required by the educational authorities of the central and local government.

These ministries were undertaken in the light of implanting the church in a missionary land. They depended on material, financial and building support from the Australian and European Church.

The Sisters of Mercy as ‘Agents of Mission’ in the Goroka, Wewak and Mount Hagen Dioceses

In responding to the requests of the bishops, the Australian Mercy Leaders of the Union and the Federation were committed to making religious foundations in accordance with the Mercy charism that would serve the needs of the church in a foreign mission country. They showed this clearly in many ways: by the choice of mission in poor, rural areas, the endorsement of mission cross ceremonies, exceeding the numbers of sisters originally requested and by replacing those who became ill and returned to Australia, recruiting new volunteers to allow for expansion and encouraging and providing for the sisters as best they could in changing circumstances. Once the first foundations were made they willingly consented to the wishes of the bishop, and to the sisters themselves, to move from the administrative centre to the rural areas (as in the case of the Goroka sisters in their move to the Simbu) or from the rural areas to the administrative centres (as in the case of the Federation sisters in their moves to Wewak and to Mount Hagen).

Despite the differences of governance between the Union and Federation Sisters and of the geographical contexts of the Highlands - Goroka, Simbu, Pumakos and Mount Hagen - and the tropical hinterland of Wewak - Kunjingini, Torembe, Ulupu, Yangoru and Negrie – there were certain similarities in the approaches taken by the sisters in these three main foundations. These were related to the fundamentals of Mercy religious life and their mission purpose of education, health and social outreach through visitation expressed in a fidelity to the spirit of Catherine McAuley. They were prepared to make adaptations in the external signs of religious customs and clothing demanded of the diverse ministry situations.

The initial and ongoing guidance of the missionary-minded Australian Mercy Leaders, including their collaboration and cooperation with the bishops, were an important factor in determining the place and direction of the various foundations.

The foundations were made in accordance with the diocesan vision to establish the indigenous church, through formation of clergy, men and women religious, catechists and educated lay people. Though financed mainly by the dioceses, foundations were supported, maintained and developed in significant ways through initial and sometimes urgent requests from the sisters to benefactors among family, friends and Mercy sisters and schools in Australia. Working within the accepted church and secular structures, the sisters placed a constant emphasis on Catholic religious education, the improvement of girls and the spiritual and professional training of young women. The support of the relevant Australian bishops (Francis Rush of Rockhampton in regard to Yangoru and Leonard Faulkner of Townsville in regard to Negrie) and the sacrifices made by lay builders and lay missionaries are examples of the contribution of the Australian Church.

The Divine Word Missionaries welcomed the sisters, and were ready to sacrifice their comfort and security, to provide appropriate housing for them. While they guided the sisters in language facility in the vernacular or *Tok Pisin* as well as in cultural and religious matters, the sisters themselves took the lead in management in the professional fields of education and health. Through their feminine influence they transformed the stations into centres of hospitality, training young women in domestic skills.

The primary work of evangelisation was carried out by the priests and catechists in the villages. At this stage the sisters generally did not address the deeper cultural, anthropological and linguistic considerations and advancing study in these fields undertaken more appropriately by some of the priests and others specialised in these areas.¹⁸³ They accustomed themselves to the cultural context of the mission station community and village life through visitation and nursing. In their ministries, the sisters initially relied on the indigenous teachers or nurses for local knowledge and there was a

¹⁸³ This cultural challenge was to be faced specifically by some sisters, as will be reported in the next time frame.

mutual exchange in terms of local and professional knowledge and skills. The sister nurses were in close touch with the people in their daily lives through the clinics and patrols for Maternal and Child Health Care service in the surrounding areas. The mutual relationship of the Mercy and the indigenous Rosary Sisters nurtured in the Wewak Diocese proved to be significant for both these expanding institutes in the years to come.

While the pioneer sisters followed the western system of education of the Australian curriculum of the colonial government, they were respectful of culture and dedicated in their service of education for the indigenous children. They saw Christian education, literacy and numeracy as essential for the foundation of a free, democratic country. They were coming from the historical background of the 1930s economic depression in Australia, the subsequent rise of the Catholic working class through Catholic education, and the generally held belief in the power of Christian education to transform society. In meeting the overwhelmingly widespread social demand to raise the levels of education of children and young adults, the sisters adopted the educational structures of the times, in primary education, secondary education and the training of teachers, undergoing the inspections from Education Department personnel required to maintain their registration and teaching subsidies.

They found that females were among the most disadvantaged, and from the beginning, within the accepted secular and church structures, placed emphasis on Catholic religious education and the improvement of girls with the spiritual and professional training of young women. The sisters were among the first to have a profound effect on the improved female opportunities and participation in education.¹⁸⁴

Despite hardships, and frequently learning by trial and error, the sisters had the motivation and determination to take the professional initiatives and make the cultural adaptations demanded of the situation, in keeping with their commitment to religious life and missionary calling. At times the missionary sisters, coming from their lived experience of appropriate changes for religious dress and mobility in ministry, saw these practical adaptations differently from their Australian religious Leaders who would only later oversee the emergence of similar experimental changes in Mercy life and ministry in Australia. However, there were avenues for the negotiation of such contested areas through the missionary sisters' local Leader and council and the Australian major Leader.

The sisters felt the awe and wonder of witnessing and being with people in their clan cohesiveness and regular subsistence way of life, their capacity to celebrate in ceremony, liturgies and *singsings*, and their generous hospitality. While all this challenged the sisters' accepted western values and norms, there was also the element of inequality and injustice in a colonial situation that proved a

¹⁸⁴ As previously noted, female teachers were rare, as the overwhelming majority of teachers were male except for the religious congregations and head mistresses of single-sex schools who encouraged female education and participation.

powerful incentive to the sisters to work towards social improvement. In their missionary approach the sisters demonstrated a responsive awareness and consciousness of the needs of the people whom they encountered.¹⁸⁵ Without denying the existence of cross-cultural misperceptions and frictions, the sisters, in their association with the people, developed an understanding, appreciation and friendship, particularly in the case of sisters who stayed for several years. Such experiences on the mission stations did much to correct pre-conceived attitudes and ethnocentric mentality of the Australian sisters as the decades of cross-cultural interaction progressed.

The sisters performed their traditional gender roles in religious life, normal for women during this post-World War II era. While they were homemakers, they were also professional teachers and nurses, performing significant public management roles. Their influence extended to, and across, many parishes and institutions in each diocese. Their rather flexible life-style, of living in smaller communities in rural areas, wearing modified religious dress and exercising mobility for ministry and community drew some level of clerical criticism, presumably based on comparison with the revered conventional female religious institutes.

Finally, reference to the constants and contexts in chapter one provides a scope for further reflection on the period under discussion (1956-1969).¹⁸⁶

The period coincided with the declining years of the phase that may be typified as ‘saving souls and extending the church’ based on a theology with its philosophical base in law and reason. With a strong emphasis on its institutional structure, the Catholic Church followed a pattern of ‘planting’ the church among non-Christians in foreign lands. Missionaries were inspired by their call to ‘save souls’ and lead them into the sphere of God’s grace. Engaged in the compelling and arduous work of evangelisation and conversion, bishops and priests, assisted by members of religious orders and lay missionaries, sought to establish the Church, with its organizational structure, law, ways of worship and theology in other cultures. In faith, home churches joined in this endeavour, through prayer and financial assistance, and support for missionary vocations.

Congruent with the mission model as ‘the discovery of the truth’, in which mission was carried out as a search for God’s grace ‘hidden within a people’s cultural, religious and historical context’, the sisters were largely influenced by the tradition and practice of the Divine Word Missionaries, applying their studies in missiology, linguistics and anthropology in the Melanesian context.

¹⁸⁵ An introduction to women within their patrilineal traditional cultures facing the transition from colonial practice and mentality has been given.

¹⁸⁶ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 18, 36, 19, as referred to in Chapter One.

The study demonstrates, in particular, how elements of the liberating and transformative model of freeing the poor (Luke 4:16-21) was basic to the mission approach of the sisters in Catholic education, health and social concern. In responding to the needs in the Church they demonstrated their flexibility, mobility, initiative and resourcefulness by a deep commitment to the Mercy traditions of religious life. The pattern of their ministry was within the tradition of women called to gospel discipleship and Christian mission throughout the ages.

How the missionary sisters developed these traditions, enlightened by the renewing winds of Vatican II and challenged by the socio-political movements towards Self-Government and Independence, is described in the next chapter exploring the time frame (1970-81).

Chapter Four

Foundations of the Australian Sisters of Mercy in the Goroka, Wewak, Mount Hagen and Aitape Dioceses of Papua New Guinea:¹ Adapting to ecclesial, cultural and political contexts in post-Vatican II and pre- and post-Independence contexts in primary education, health and pastoral ministries (1970-1981)

Introduction

As indicated in the chapter title, this period from 1970 to 1981, continues the account of the Sisters of Mercy in their established ministries in the original dioceses. It explores the sisters' missionary tasks in primary education, health and social outreach, which intensified as colonialism gave way to preparation for Self-Government (1973) and Independence (1975). The sisters, undertaking new initiatives in the spirit of Vatican II, were drawn to respond to emerging needs in parish, diocesan and national contexts, including specific team ministries in Port Moresby and Madang. These developments are described in relation to Goroka in Part 1, Wewak in Part 2 and Mount Hagen in Part 3.²

The last major foundation from Australia, authorised by the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy to Aitape is introduced in Part 4. Initiatives of the four Mercy foundations towards unity and the emergence of indigenous vocations to the Mercy way of religious life in Papua New Guinea were influenced by the movement in Australia towards new structures of unification. These new structures were soon effected through the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia in 1981. These developments are reported in Part 5. Reflective Observations are incorporated in each major part.

The political context – education, health and social concerns³

The promise of economic growth and social liberation in an age of 'development', ushered in by the first UN 'Development Decade' in the 1960s and the belief that a new economic order would restore the unequal and unjust balance between the rich and poor countries with the wealth of the world being 'redistributed in favour of the poverty-stricken and suffering was proving elusive'.⁴ The early seventies saw the huge scale of malnutrition, illiteracy, disease and preventable death, particularly in the post-colonial emerging nations of the 'developing world', soon to be referred to as the Third

¹ With Self-Government in 1973 and Independence in 1975 the previous administrations of New Guinea and Papua were replaced by the new nation of Papua New Guinea.

² The accounts of the larger Dioceses of Wewak and Mount Hagen are divided into sections for the sake of clarity.

³ As previously noted, because these contexts are interwoven in reality, they provide a composite understanding of the historical forces faced by the sisters during this significant decade.

World. Australia, prompted by the United Nations, dramatically increased its financial contribution in Papua and New Guinea, as a preparation for, what was generally understood to be, a gradual transition to Self-Government and Independence.

The implications of this were felt particularly in the inequities of education and health between the two systems of church and administration. Limited government education subsidies were insufficient for the mainline churches that had been the backbone of educational and health services.⁵ The Catholic Church, through the leadership of Fr Paul McVinney SVD,⁶ National Education Secretary, had the support of the Catholic religious brothers and sisters who, in their local areas, advocated on behalf of their teachers and nurses for rights to equal salary with their administration counterparts.⁷ In 1970 an Education Ordinance established a united Territory Education System, which the administration and most of the mainline mission systems joined. Equal conditions were granted to teachers, in the passing by the House of Assembly of the Education Act (1970) and the Teaching Service Act (1971), when the National Teaching Service, combining the various education agencies of church and government, was formed.

This policy brought the registered primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, such as Holy Trinity Teachers College and St. Benedict's Teachers College, under Catholic administrative agencies within a united, but decentralised national system. While the institutions were under the control of the National Department of Education (NDOE) in Port Moresby, the provinces, formed according to the regional divisions, were given increased local responsibility. The churches soon had their structure in place with Provincial Catholic Education Secretaries and National Catholic Education Secretaries managing such issues as recruitment, placement, curriculum, religious education, religious formation of teachers and local management boards. A similar structure was set up for Catholic Health Services. Sister nurses were part of the diocesan health team within the National Catholic Health Services.

Government policies were directed towards increasing the number of educated citizens and building a national identity. After the early establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby in 1967, the primary teachers college at Goroka moved to secondary teacher training in 1974, then to university status as the Goroka campus of UPNG (1975). National high schools,

⁴ Words from this era by the then British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson by Peter Adamson, "A Measure of Progress" New Internationalist March 2013,11.

⁵ Bray and Smith, ed. *Education and Social Stratification in Papua New Guinea*, 59. The churches provided payment and housing of teachers in primary and secondary schools, including teacher training institutions.

⁶ As referenced in the Library of Divine Word University, Madang.

⁷ Srs Coral Hedley and Teresa Flaherty in Simbu were among the many Mercy Sister advocates in the Goroka, Wewak and Mount Hagen Dioceses.

uniting secondary students from various provinces in central boarding institutions, were established in Port Moresby (Sogeri), Rabaul (Keravat), Goroka (Aiyura) and Wewak (Passam).

In a selective system, only a few successful primary school students gained entry to secondary or technical education. Through national policies of cultural studies and agriculture in the primary schools, the newly established National Department of Education attempted a more integrated curriculum to incorporate ex-students into their village life. Many teachers vigorously pursued these initiatives, but such measures could not stem the tide of the majority of ex-students seeking an elusive livelihood in the towns. Seen as ‘drop-outs’ or failures within their clan communities, many joined the nationwide trend of flocking to the towns to stay with *wantoks* (extended family and clan members), seek work or resort to criminal activities, the social phenomenon referred to as the ‘urban drift’.⁸

In 1971 the government announced its imperative of localisation of staff of primary education for 1973, and this policy galvanised many expatriates engaged in the public service, commercial enterprises and missionary work to face future realities.⁹ There was some degree of fear and insecurity, fanned by accounts of the bloodshed accompanying the recent Independence in the former Belgian Congo and, as political Independence approached, there was a noticeable exodus from the Territories of Papua and New Guinea.¹⁰ Similarly, the introduction of localisation policies in health promoting indigenous staff in clinics, hospitals and Maternal and Child Health (MCH), was particularly relevant to the churches that managed most of the health facilities in the rural areas.¹¹

Independence in 1975 was the most significant event of the decade, as people of over 850 different languages and cultures united to form one nation. The written Constitution endorsed both traditional values and Christian principles as the foundation for the new nation state. Prominent among the traditional values – expressed as ‘Melanesian ways’ – were reverence for the spirit world and the spirits of the ancestors, commitment to family and clan, obedience to custom and law, respect for elders, care and preservation of the environment and hospitality.¹²

⁸ This also resulted in destabilisation of village life, depletion of workers and reduced productivity.

⁹ The term localisation embraced an important concept in government policy and planning of replacement of expatriate by indigenous personnel, and was seen by missionaries as a desired goal of empowerment as well as promotion of the laity in the Church.

¹⁰ The issue was a very personal one for the expatriate sisters as it raised the question of continuing ministry in Papua New Guinea or returning to Australia.

¹¹ Unlike the mandated education policies regarding localisation, those involving health, depending on the more urgent needs of the area, were generally more flexible.

¹² Preamble of the Constitution, *The Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby: Government of Papua New Guinea, 16 September 1975).

The ideals of the Eight Point Plan were endorsed, prioritising equal distribution of economic benefits, decentralisation, self-reliant economy, equal and active participation of women in all forms of economic and social activity and the retaining of Melanesian cultural ways.¹³ The disadvantaged status of women was also recognised with an international and global focus, when 1975 and the following decade (1975-85) were declared by the United Nations as dedicated to women's rights. This focus resulted in some affirmative policies being formalised and channelled to improve female education and employment opportunities in the country.

Though illegal in colonial times, the practice of tribal fighting - a traditional way of settling disputes once negotiations had failed - resurfaced after Independence, particularly in the Highlands. This was particularly so in the case of clan rivalries and provincial and national election disappointments. Fighting and killing of enemy warriors, rape of women, destruction of gardens and burning of houses, were part of the terrifying cycle. Similarly, there were signs of breakdown in the rule of law through outbreaks of violence on the roads and premises in Wewak, Enga, Mount Hagen and Aitape.

The context of church, mission and culture

The renewed theology of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) signalled the Church's embrace of the modern world and her call to 'read the signs of the times'. The Church in Papua New Guinea, including the Divine Word Missionaries, with their tradition of respect for the local cultures and languages, enthusiastically embraced the theology placing the mission of God at the very heart of the Church.¹⁴ They responded to the change from an ambivalent stance to modernism to one of embracing the modern world in the Gospel ideals of love, care and responsibility for humanity.¹⁵

From the mid-sixties the first Council documents were being read and disseminated - albeit unevenly due to general communication difficulties - through the bishops, religious leaders, including the Australian Mercy leaders, and the various Catholic Church institutions.¹⁶ The main documents were: the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Decree on the Church's missionary activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, along with the Decree on the up-to-date renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.¹⁷

¹³ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 156.

¹⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 444 and *Gaudium et Spes*, 163, Vatican Council II, Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations, the Basic Sixteen Documents ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, and Dublin Ireland: Dominican Publications, 2007).

¹⁵ Ibid. *Gaudium et Spes*, 163.

¹⁶ The Sisters of Mercy were generally in rural areas.

¹⁷ These were noted in Chapter Three but are incorporated in the text here because of their significance in relation to the missionary work of the sisters during this time-frame. Also essential were: the Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

Prominent themes were explored: inculturation – seeking and developing gospel expressions of life and truth within the various Melanesian cultures; using the language of the people instead of the ancient Latin language in the Liturgy; encouraging the use of the Bible as the Word of God; and seeking mutual relationships with non-Catholic denominations and non-Christian religions. Likewise Paul VI's encyclicals, *Progressio Populorum* (1967), which clarified the Church's commitment to development, liberation, solidarity of the human family and openness to the truth of other religious ways and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1976), which reinforced that the Gospel message be absorbed, interpreted and enlivened within particular cultural contexts, rather than through the channel of western culture, were creatively explored.

National and local Vatican II implications within Papua New Guinea were discerned with the people through the Self-Study of the Catholic Church (1972-75) authorised by the bishops and conducted by the Melanesian Institute.¹⁸ As a result of its major finding, 'We are the Church', local issues were identified: the family, ministry training of catechists and church workers, formation of priests and seminarians, and the rights, responsibilities and participation of the laity. Thus, more concrete direction was given to the vision of the Church as the pilgrim 'People of God', offering a more organic approach to counteract the previous emphasis on the institutional focus of the Church.¹⁹

During the decade there was a flowering of new initiatives in 'planting the Church'. Institutions and centres at national and inter-diocesan level were formed to explore the theological, cultural, social and pastoral implications of the Vatican II guidelines and sisters were seen as instrumental in these plans. National institutes, authorised or supported by the bishops, included the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service (MI) which was ecumenical in its charter, membership and mission (1973), the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (LCI, 1974) and the Communications Institute (CI) (c.1976) - all located in the Goroka Diocese.²⁰

The Sisters of Mercy as apostolic women religious

The place of religious in the Church was further clarified in the decree on the renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.²¹ Religious institutes were urged to return to the spirit of their founders and to be attuned to the Holy Spirit's guidance of their congregation's beginnings, and also to their

¹⁸ The Mercy sisters actively promoted and contributed to the Self-Study of the Church as reported to me in a recorded interview by the first Director of the Melanesian Institute, Fr Herman Janssen MSC.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Through the generosity of John Cohill, Bishop of Goroka, land was made available for these institutes. Other significant centres were created at the various diocesan levels, and the sisters' leadership and involvement in these will be addressed below.

²¹ Ibid. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 385-7.

own contemporary mission and ministry, particularly with the poor and underprivileged. The emphasis on the rightful place of women religious in sharing in the life of the Church ... 'in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social' was heartening as the Sisters of Mercy responded within their own Union and Federation government structures, through their gatherings and retreats and in their ministries within the Church.

The Vatican II guidelines were an inspiration to women religious in general as they explored implications in their call to mission. Of particular note was the influence of Mother Flavia, Catherine O'Sullivan, a remarkable woman with a far-reaching vision, who had recently been elected leader of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart (OLSH), a well established missionary order in the Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Rabaul areas.²² Catherine was convinced that the expatriate and indigenous religious women of the twenty-eight international and indigenous congregations in the country had an important role to play in the renewal of the whole Church. To do this they would need to be exposed to the new teachings, inspired by them, and united so they could act and speak with one voice.

The Vatican Council had barely concluded in 1965 and the Self-Study of the Catholic Church was not even yet on the horizon, when Mother Flavia embarked on a course of action. She informed the major superiors of all the religious congregations in the country, including those originating from Australia and in the south-west Pacific region, of her plans, inviting them to send representatives to a proposed meeting in Port Moresby in 1967.²³

As a result of this meeting the Statutes for the Union of Women Religious of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were devised and approved, office bearers elected and arrangements made for the body to be legally registered. Furthermore, Archbishop Virgil Copas of Port Moresby approved the plan for the new building for appropriate renewal programs for women religious. Xavier Institute of Missiology for Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands was built on a leveled hill top near Bomana Holy Spirit Seminary, the first of its kind in the southern hemisphere, in 1970.²⁴

²² Sr M Venard, *The History of the Daughters of our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Papua New Guinea: Missionary Beginnings* (Port Moresby: Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Provincial House, 1978), 102. Catherine was a survivor of the Ramale concentration camp in Rabaul during the war.

²³ Mother Philomena Ryman from North Sydney, in particular, played a key consultative role, from her experience as a Major Superior of Mercy Sisters in Enga and Mount Hagen, and being on the executive of the Conference of Women Religious of Australia (representing Papua New Guinea and the neighbouring Pacific islands) and as a delegate for meetings of the Union of the International Superiors General in Rome. This information was provided in a recorded interview.

²⁴ A recorded interview with Sr Christine Watt. The major funding was to come from the religious orders involved, gifts from donors, and after 1973, support from the German organisations Missio and Misereor. John Wild was the architect and the building was completed with the official opening on 11 October 1970.

While it was an exciting and hopeful time for many, this era of early implementation of Vatican II gave rise to tensions and uncertainties. Hallowed church practice was challenged and pastoral implications tested and, in line with trends witnessed in the western world, there was some exodus of clergy and religious from the country.

Towards closer Mercy unification in Australia

The movement towards closer union of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia was influenced by the publication of *Perfectae Caritatis*, mentioned above, and in particular by Article 22 which urged closer union among religious of similar origins and of similar spirit.²⁵ Consequently, with both the Union and Federation in operation, an association styled the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy was formed in 1967 to revise the Constitutions, update the customs, liturgical practice and prayers, develop a program for sister formation, reach agreement on a common Mercy habit for Australia and promote the cause for canonisation of the Founder. In the Union Chapter of 1972 the Superior General, Maria Joseph Carr, was mandated to ‘continue seeking means to strengthen the bond of unity within the Union and between Union and Federation’.²⁶ The desire for unity was also being expressed in Federation meetings.²⁷

The channel for these converging ideas was the National Assembly of the Conference in 1977, convened by the Executive Director, Patricia Pak Poy, and attended by approximately 800 sisters. During the sessions ‘the sisters gave tangible expression to their desire for unity and their commitment to manifest their mercy charism in forms of ministry which promoted justice’.²⁸ The president of the Conference, Valda Ward, concluded that ‘a strong groundswell of opinion from the sisters revealed the need to hasten the formulation of a proposal for the new structure of governance’.²⁹

The pragmatic outcomes of this National Assembly in terms of the various foundations of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea are described in a later period of this time-frame (Parts 4 and 5). Meanwhile the story continues with developments in the Goroka Diocese.

²⁵ Kerr, *The Land that I will show you*, 41. Particularly applicable to the Sisters of Mercy was the guideline for institutes ‘who have practically identical constitutions and rules and a common spirit’ to unite.

²⁶ Ibid. 52. ‘While the union had canonically and constitutionally the full powers of a centralised government, its whole history was one of devolution of powers to the provincial level, of allowing for local initiatives, of permitting and fostering diversity, of encouraging preservation of provincial identity’. Similar comments had been made to me in a personal interview circa 2001, with Maria Joseph Carr, who had been Union Leader during this time.

²⁷ Ibid. 45, 66. e.g. by Mother Philomena Ryman of North Sydney at the ninth Biennial Federation Conference Meeting. In addition, ‘while emphasising autonomy as a cornerstone of the edifice of Federation’, the Federation achieved a remarkable degree of unity of policy and practice, ‘comparable to that achieved by the Union system of government’.

²⁸ Ibid. 47.

²⁹ Ibid. 48.

Part 1. In the Goroka Diocese (1970–1981)

The establishment of new national institutes in the more central location of Goroka soon led to an unexpected influx of sisters to Goroka.

Sharing in the wider vision of mission of the Goroka diocese in Simbu

The sisters were heartened in their desire to consider wider perspectives of ministry by Bishop John Cohill, who had been appointed Bishop of Goroka on 15 November 1966. They were guided by a new diocesan policy aimed at ministries with catechists and teachers, vocational and secondary education in Simbu and with ex-students of Catholic schools in secondary teacher education at Goroka.³⁰

Localisation of primary education: cultural and national goals

The indigenous teachers, particularly in the Highlands areas, lagged behind their government counterparts in qualifications and experience required to undertake school management. Achieving an inspection report recommending ‘eligibility for promotion’ became an abiding incentive for mission teachers, particularly those with leadership prospects! As they made their first tentative steps towards this goal the sisters found themselves as catalysts in the new orientation of improving the relevance of curriculum, particularly in curriculum studies, traditional dress, art, *singsings*, and agriculture. Together with teachers, who were mostly from the Simbu, and community elders, the sisters were actively involved in creating appropriate syllabi.³¹

Recommended by Elizabeth Miller and Bishop Cohill, Teresa Flaherty joined the Public Service in 1970 to carry out advisory and inspection visits in the many far-flung schools in Simbu, assisting the teachers in the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran mission agencies to become an integral part of the new ‘unified’ system with their administration counterparts. By 1973 all the primary schools of the Catholic Mission were localised, including the schools managed by the Sisters of Mercy at Kup, Koge, Goglme and Neragaima.

³⁰ Strongly advocated by Fr Leo Joerger, who had recuperated from his earlier illness at Kup and resumed pastoral duties.

³¹ This was with varying degrees of success as many of the parents resisted this deviation into informal education on the grounds that they were already paying school fees for formal English education.

Nationalisation of health – a changing scene for the sister nurses

Impending policies of localisation soon influenced the sister nurses' management of health care on the mission stations. In the report of her visit to the sisters in 1973, the Union Leader, Maria Joseph Carr, referred to the Government Health Plan, recognising the role of the Catholic health sub-centre at Goglme in preparation for Independence.

The House of Assembly aims at producing a comprehensive National Health Plan by October. As part of this plan indigenous nurses are being trained at Goglme. Mary Rose (Margaret Wilson) supervises three nurse-aides and one mothercraft nurse trainee; she is responsible also for seven village patrols and five school patrols. At Goglme itself she looks after the *haus sik* with fifteen beds, a small delivery room and a registered aid post. Soon, we are told that only those nurses with special qualifications will be allowed to enter the country and work as paid personnel. Future development is uncertain in nursing as for those teaching in primary schools.³²

The nursing facilities at Kup were returned to complete government control and those at Koge were replaced by the government district health centre at Muaina, nearer Koge village, where Winifred Anderton worked for some time. When the sub-health centre at Goglme was localised, Margaret (Rose) Wilson gained a position, first in nursing at the Kundiawa Hospital, then in supervising the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) work throughout the Simbu Province. Her comments shed light on how some Goglme patients helped her to make the transition from the mission to a government establishment.

It was an interesting transition from Goglme to Kundiawa – some of the patients would know me and they'd call me Sista bilong Goglme, so I had an identity.... So I carried the Goglme identity with me, and I suppose part of the missionary respect.³³

Margaret's rural mission and provincial government experiences had shown her the need for good health education and supervision of nurses. At the end of her contract she left for Australia to complete a degree in Nurse Education and on her return, she began her new ministry at the Mount Hagen School of Nursing.

Parish initiatives of pastoral ministry and rural vocational education

Unsettling signs of the dislocation of formal education from traditional life had prompted some sisters to leave the education system, even before the government localisation initiative. Margaret Bubb (1972) and RoseMary Baker (1973) introduced significant alternatives to formal education in

³² This report, from the Union Archives, served at the time to inform the sisters of the different provinces in Australia and encourage them in their support of the mission work.

³³ Excerpt from an interview with Margaret Wilson in December 2006.

the form of rural vocational education and pastoral work with adults at Koge. They were encouraged by the parish priest, Fr Jim Knight, SVD. The Australian Union leader, Maria Joseph Carr, explained that Margaret, with Frank Yur from Mingende, was managing a Rural Vocational Centre for twenty-six young village men and thirty-six women, and that RoseMary was engaged in the first pastoral ministry with women in Simbu.³⁴ Carrying her spade, RoseMary walked to the villages, working side-by-side with women in their food gardens, conversing with them and engaging in faith dialogue as the moment arose.³⁵

The Rural Vocational Centre at Koge continued for some time with considerable success. When Margaret later returned to Australia for medical treatment, Clare Flinn took over the management. Unfortunately, when the prospect of raiding local produce of chickens and fish, proved too tempting for some local youths, sorely testing the church-community relationships, the Centre was forced to close. Clare taught for a short time at Muaina High School, so that RoseMary's ministry in village pastoral work could continue.

In 1973, appointed by the Bishop, and with Mingende as a base, Rita Hassett from Kup commenced the demanding task of management of Catholic education in the diocese, with the official role of Secretary for Catholic Education.³⁶ At the same time she carried out the role of renewal courses for the catechists. Rita was joined at Mingende in 1978 by Margaret Bubb, who carried out the specialist ministry as Co-ordinator of Religious Education in Catholic Schools.

Kerowagi Provincial High School

From 1972 to 1975, Noreen Collins (previously from Kup and Neragaina) was appointed to the academic staff of the government high school at Kerowagi, with pastoral duties to the Catholic students and particular care of the young women students. Noreen was the first of the Union sisters to live on the campus of a government institution. In 1981, Julie Rees was appointed there, before moving to Aiyura National High School.

Rosary High School Kondiu and the secondary education of girls (1974)

In the early 1970s, a diocesan request was made to the Union Sisters of Mercy for sisters for Simbu girls entering secondary education at Rosary High School (Kondiu). This was a new initiative as

³⁴ From Maria Joseph Carr's Union report written after her 1973 visit to the sisters in Goroka.

³⁵ As noted above, RoseMary was supported financially by her Mercy community.

³⁶ Within a few years the diocese was saddened by the sudden accidental death of Bruno Wena whom Rita had trained to take over as Secretary. Rita later trained Mrs Maria Kumo to take over this position at Goroka, a position she was to hold for many years.

provision for girls in the Catholic system had not occurred before this time.³⁷ The two sisters who responded to this request in 1974 were Valda Finlay, who moved from Goglime Primary School, and Elizabeth Devine from Perth, who had spent her first year at Neragaima Primary School to help her get in touch with the culture and the rural mission environment of the students. The female dormitory was not ready, as the designer/builder/carpenter Br David was occupied with many extensions to the school itself. For some months the female students were accommodated at the former Catechist Training School, a considerable walking distance for students and sisters.

It was not long before the sisters found themselves facing a familiar 'localisation' situation – this time with the task of supervising and training national teachers for senior management positions in secondary education. Among the many teachers who progressed to higher levels of administration were Solange Arua OLSH and Mr Peter Miria, who was later to serve as National Secretary for Education for many years.

Peter Mays, a long serving Principal, reminisced that there were dilemmas surrounding secondary education for girls in the Simbu. One such debate was in session at a staff meeting at Kondiu when things seemed to be at a stalemate. Sr Elizabeth Miller, who was by then quite elderly and highly respected, having served on different mission stations and currently holding the post of librarian at Kondiu, intervened.

The staff had been engaged in a tiring afternoon meeting during which different ones expressed their contrary views rather strongly. Just before the tea break, a calm, white-haired lady in the corner made a quiet interjection. She pointed out that it was obvious that each one, from the oldest to the youngest, had the interests of Rosary High School at heart, and it would be good for everyone to keep that in mind as they tried to reach a solution. The staff thoughtfully pondered her words, and after the tea break, the meeting resumed with noticeably more trust and confidence.³⁸

The pioneer sisters were replaced by Clare Flinn from Koge and new recruits from Australia - Srs Eamon Brennan, Mavis McBride, Carmel Carroll and others. The sisters' work, in collaboration with the De La Salle Brothers, and under the successive administration terms of Brs Columban, Peter Mays and Ed Becker, was to continue in the diocese for twenty-six years.

³⁷ Individual arrangements had been made by the parishes, at the sisters' instigation, for high achieving girls to proceed to Mercy College, Yrapos.

³⁸ This incident was related in an impromptu meeting at Goroka University c. 1998.

An era of Sisters of Mercy on the mission stations in Simbu closes (1963-1975)

Road travel grew increasingly more dangerous, particularly with the eruption of violence during times of tribal warfare or the clan rivalries in the post-national or provincial elections. During the mid-1970s, the outbreaks of tribal fighting and the vandalism of supply trucks and attacks on unwary road travellers on the Highlands Highway led to times of the 'state of emergency'. Highly trained police riot squad patrols were introduced to capture the vandals and restore order on this lifeline from Madang and Lae on the coast to the Western and Southern Highlands.³⁹ Similarly, there were instances of serious breakdowns in law and order in the other provinces of Wewak, Pumakos, Aitape, as well as in other parts of the country. The sisters in all provinces faced dangers of assault and vandalism as they carried on their educational, nursing and pastoral work on a regular, daily basis.⁴⁰

Making one's way through the mountain regions of Simbu, whether on the main roads or the narrow connecting tracks, could be precarious and unreliable, and often in the wet season, impossible. This was the case both for the experienced drivers and the mature-age learners! There were some serious accidents suffered by missionaries – priests, sisters and lay missionaries. There was the perennial fear of inadvertently running over a pig – not only in terms of unknown financial consequences of compensation and the loss of life of a defenceless pig, but of facing instant threat to one's own life in retaliation.

Sometimes sisters would be away for the week, returning to their base on the weekend. In their travels, it was not unusual to be stranded at some village or government or mission station – or heartily welcomed by Brother Joseph to a cup of hot coffee and biscuits at the mission centre at Mingende!

In meeting the emerging needs, the small band of sisters was stretched beyond maintaining their community presence on the mission stations. The convents of Kup, Goglme and Neragaima closed in 1973 and that of Koge towards the end of 1975.⁴¹

³⁹ For important community meetings, the sisters occasionally took advantage of being escorted by these armed patrols over the winding sections of the Daulo Pass and round the Simbu turnoff where potential ambushes threatened. Unfortunately once past these areas, the sisters, in their small vehicles, could not keep pace as the patrols increased their lead over the open stretches of road.

⁴⁰ The Simbu village women related accounts of tribal fights in former times as they had to flee to the safety of the bush areas, clutching babies and protecting young children. The women communicated these unwritten stories to the sisters in *Tok Pisin* and demonstrated how they would occasionally sit quietly among themselves singing these experiences in plaintive vernacular chants to keep the memory alive.

⁴¹ In these circumstances, partings for all concerned were painful. Shortly after Independence in 1975, the sisters' homes of permanent materials that had been extended and maintained, once again became the dwelling places of the priests,

Elizabeth Miller's hastily hand-written letter (November 1971) to the Union leader, Marie Therese Moore in Canberra, indicates some initiatives being considered among the sisters.

Dear Mother,

The Director of Education is accelerating the programme of getting all primary schools run by New Guineans. We must prepare for this so that we can be ready to step into other works – but sisters would have to be trained if it is to be catechetics or social works. I have written to the Bishop and his Senate and asked them where they think we could be most useful. We have thought of – being on staff at Kondiu Co-educational High school, or Kerowagi High school or Goroka Teachers College – conducting vocational school for girls (cooking, sewing etc for girls who miss out on High School) – in charge of Catechist School or Leadership Courses, Area supervisors of schools or curriculum advisors. Sisters in the High schools would get salaries too.

The [Government] Health Centre to be set up at Muaina near Koge needs a nurse for Mothercraft and Child Health Care, and they are offering it to Sr Clement Mary... It would be a secure position for her, whereas the Admin might not help with medical supplies or subsidy if she wanted to keep the Aid Post at Koge.

If something of this sort comes about our community structure would be changed. We envisage sisters holding posts in various areas and we think we would be better off with one Superior instead of one in each house [Kup, Koge, Goglme and Neragaima] as some of the sisters will be moving around. It would be better if each Sister was given a living allowance like the lay missionaries, and be responsible for their own clothing, doctor's bills, etc.

Then comes the question of Sr Teresa's salary. It will be about \$5000 per annum. At present sister gets a cheque for \$140 or thereabouts every fortnight. The original arrangement was that the sisters' salaries went to the Station that was supporting her, but we consider that the Station should get the amount we earned before.

We would like a fund set up so that the sisters on the mission could feel free to sometimes travel to other parts of the Territory if it would be in the interest of her work, or to do courses or for the orientation courses and suchlike.

I have scribbled it down in a hurry now as Father will be able to post it tomorrow and it is late and I haven't had time to think connectedly, but at least it will give you some idea of the changes we see coming in the not too distant future. I would be glad if you could consider what changes would be acceptable. I know it will mean a lot of responsibility being put on the individual sister, but I feel we could better serve our people in this way than by keeping all in one place – or a few places – and it looks as if something of this kind will come about.

S M Elizabeth

who had, in almost every case, handed them over to the sisters on their arrival while they themselves sought temporary shelter in houses made of bush materials.

At the time the letter was written sisters had already been actively involved in planning among themselves in line with diocesan possibilities. The letter demonstrated a high level of trust between Elizabeth and the younger sisters and between Marie Therese and herself. The imminent changes and those of the years preceding and following Independence are tabled in Appendix 2.

The women, as did their counterparts in the other dioceses, undertook further study to acquire the qualifications needed for these new ministries. Education and religious education were completed via distance education at Australian universities, catechetics and pastoral ministries were undertaken at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippines, nursing education in Australia, and pastoral ministry, as applied to PNG, at a special nationwide course at Maiwara in Madang.

At this stage the sisters' appointments and applications for contract renewal were considered and decided upon by the Union leader in consultation with the sisters.⁴²

New ministries in Goroka in a national or inter-diocesan context

After leaving Goroka in 1967 the sisters' ministries had been based and carried out in Simbu. Towards the end of 1973, Rita Hassett accepted the role of religious formation of catechists and teachers in Simbu (as previously mentioned). This included responsibility for the Goroka schools of Faniufa, Tafeto and Yamiufa. Shortly after, with the opening of national and diocesan institutions, one by one - from Simbu, from Wewak, or as new recruits from Australia - Sisters of Mercy appeared again in Goroka.

In Secondary Teacher Education: Goroka Teachers College – University of Goroka 1974

In January 1974 Teresa (Tess) Flaherty made a memorable return journey over the Daulo Pass to begin ministry as a lecturer at Goroka Teachers College, the government-run secondary teacher education institution.⁴³ As she took on the duties of lecturing and pastoral care of students, she found herself working with international staff and with students from all parts of the country and other

⁴² Once the Sisters of Mercy united in Papua New Guinea in 1981 this role was assumed by the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy PNG.

⁴³ Teresa's experience in advisory and inspection work in the Simbu had exposed her to the significant role of education and teacher education in promoting equality and unity in the emerging Christian nation, as well as the needs for ongoing faith support of the Catholic students.

Pacific Islands nations.⁴⁴ She was accommodated at the diocesan centre at Kefamo and inducted into the government scene by Mona Sackley OLSH who was also living there and working at the Teachers College. After moving to the teachers college campus, there were times when Teresa alone formed the Sisters of Mercy Goroka! At such times she was grateful for the support of friends in the parish, the religious and lay missionaries of the diocese and staff members of the Goroka campus. Winifred Smith OLSH, former Principal of Kabaleo Teachers College, Rabaul, was often at hand to offer a listening ear.

At the Melanesian Institute (MI)

Four years later other Sisters of Mercy began to arrive – not as communities like the first group – but to take on specialist ministries. Some of the sisters from the Goroka and Wewak dioceses were among the first to serve under contract in new national and diocesan institutes. The sisters brought their parish and diocesan experience into the crucial arena of the development of a nation as the Church was in the process of redefining its role in the modern world and in particular cultures. Guided by the resounding message of ‘We are the Church’, vigorous attempts were being made to build upon Melanesian foundations of spirituality and culture.

Key members of the Melanesian Institute and the Liturgical Catechetical Institute were Frs Herman Janssen MSC and Joe Knoebel SVD (founding members of MI), Fr Ennio Mantovani SVD (later its Director), and Frs Jim Knight SVD and Bill Seifert SVD (research staff members). Frs Kees van der Geest SVD and Henk te Maarssen SVD, early directors of LCI, saw the potential of particular Sisters of Mercy and encouraged them in these new fields.

Wendy Flannery from Yarapos was the first to join the academic research staff of the Melanesian Institute in 1978 and was for a time Deputy Director. Wendy participated in conducting orientation courses for missionaries, and was engaged in ground-breaking research into Melanesian spirituality and in particular, contemporary indigenous religious movements.

Two sisters from Australia responded to requests for staffing assistance. Romley (Vianney) Dirrman organised, modernised and extended the research library.⁴⁵ Helen O’Brien served as editor of the

⁴⁴ At various stages, Lecturer, Coordinator of Primary School Teaching Practice, Head of Department of Educational Foundations, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education. Teaching practice supervision, and in time, consultations with the major teacher education institutions and United Nations consultancies to the trouble-torn Province of Bougainville offered her an exposure to local and national issues.

⁴⁵ On her departure to update the one at Kairiru, the Melanesian Institute library was managed by a lay person, Mrs Beatrice Maamo.

ecumenical Melanesian Institute publications – *Catalyst* and *Point*. These published articles fostered a reliable knowledge base and growing consciousness of the reality of Christ in Melanesia in all areas of the nation – church and religion, politics and government, culture and language, ecology, changing society and economic development.⁴⁶

At the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (LCI), 1978

Situated in North Goroka, this national institute was formed to publish and distribute materials in ‘controlled English’ and *Tok Pisin* for use by catechists and teachers. At different times, sisters played important roles on the staff of LCI. Judith Hourigan from Wewak served as editor. Marie Dagg, from the original founding group, moved from Holy Trinity Teachers College to become manager of the bookshop. Marie also did evening pastoral work with the families and clans of her former students in the village centres round Goroka.

At Aiyura National High School (from 1978)

Invited by the Bishop of the diocese, sisters were appointed under contract to the Aiyura National High School, situated some 70 kilometres east of Goroka, just off the Highlands highway in the direction of Lae. During successive years from 1978 to 1989, Bernadette Marks, Julie Rees, Agnes Murphy and Miriam Devine were on the academic staff and exercised the role of Dean of Women Students there. The sisters were influential role models for young women seeking to achieve their academic potential, particularly in the subjects of mathematics and science which were the particular specialisations of these sisters. In addition to teaching and religious education commitments, the sisters performed specific pastoral roles for the students, particularly the young women in their care and the Catholic staff. As subject department heads, they were responsible for the professional development of national staff. The sisters were respected for an openness and impartiality, which enabled them to be an acceptable part of the social fabric of Aiyura and similar institutions.⁴⁷ The sisters were regarded as being in an active ministry of the diocese and an integral, though geographically separated, part of the Union community. They undertook the rigours of the journeys to the Goroka to visit the Union sisters and, when possible, these visits were enthusiastically reciprocated.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For a time, Mrs Lynn Giddings assisted in the editing task, and later the position of editor was assumed by an indigenous lay person, Mr Alphonse Aime.

⁴⁷ Anecdotal evidence from Inspectors and Principals, regarding sisters’ roles at Aiyura, Passam and Keravat.

⁴⁸ Miriam Devine was the last sister to leave Aiyura in 1989.

At the Diocesan Centre at Kefamo before 1981

Margaret Bubb, who had worked in vocational and religious formation of teachers in Simbu, was requested to assist in the co-ordination of the Pastoral Centre at Goroka. Leaving the arduous travel of Simbu behind her, Margaret moved to Goroka and collaborated in this ministry with Deacon Francesco Sarego.⁴⁹ She also played an important role in supervising the national young women in charge of the domestic arrangements until her return to Australia in 1984.

Union sisters missioned to other dioceses⁵⁰

To the Archdiocese of Madang

In the pioneering years the Goroka Sisters of Mercy had gone to Alexishafen periodically for retreats, workshops and holidays, travelling via Divine Word Airways, but were not involved in ministry in the Madang diocese.

In 1977 RoseMary Baker, a former teacher who had qualified in pastoral ministry at Maiwara and since become engaged in full-time ministry with women at village level in the Simbu, conducted a Christian Living Program for the wives of pastoral workers at Maiwara near Alexishafen. Archbishop Noser saw her as ideal to assist the Sisters of St Therese, an indigenous institute, whose particular charism was related to the family apostolate. RoseMary spent the first year in Madang and the second year in the parish on Karkar Island, where two of the St Therese Sisters, Gabriella and Christine, participated in a specially devised guided training program in village pastoral catechetics.

To the House of Prayer, Nazareth – Port Moresby

In February 1980, Winifred McManus from Kondiu responded to an invitation from the Handmaids of the Lord in Nazareth to be part of the core community of the House of Prayer in Port Moresby.⁵¹ With Fr Philip Kurtz SJ as Director, Winifred carried out this task until July 1982 with enthusiasm, constancy, wisdom and graciousness. Upon leaving the House of Prayer, Winifred assisted some of the Handmaids of the Lord (AD) preparing for final profession, until she was unfortunately forced to

⁴⁹ Francesco was later ordained to priestly ministry, elected as Provincial of the PNG SVDs and ordained Bishop of Goroka in 1996.

⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, Margaret Wilson returned from Australia to take up duties at the Mount Hagen School of Nursing. Maria Ika, the former assistant teacher at Faniufa, returned from Singleton as a professed Sister of Mercy and was in the Holy Trinity Mercy community in Mount Hagen for her teacher training, which she completed in 1971.

⁵¹ Letter dated 25 July 1981, written by the Handmaids of the Lord seeking volunteers for the core community. At different times the core community comprised Sister Charlyne Wolfe OSF, Sister Marie Dominic AD, Sister Bibiana AD and Sister Marie Langtry CSB, two sisters from the Solomon Islands - Sisters Denis DMI and Nellie DMI - and Sister Norbertine OLSH. The centre began in 1976 to serve the Port Moresby Diocese, but soon included religious from almost every congregation of men and women in the country.

return to Melbourne with heart trouble. She recalled her time at the House of Prayer as a most precious experience through which she gained much, and ‘appreciated the wonderful support of the great bunch of Mercies in PNG!’

Searching for a way forward for Mercy mission in the spirit of Catherine McAuley

In order to articulate their Mercy mission, the various small mission station communities of sisters gathered together whenever possible (which in hindsight required some considerable effort and exposure to danger). ‘The Mission of our Community’ was prepared as such a document.⁵²

As missionaries we are commissioned to help build up the Christian community and shape it into a symbol of God’s presence in the world (Ad Gentes, 15,19). Under the direction of the Bishop, we willingly accept this commission and all the responsibilities for working towards this in co-operation with fellow missionaries and the local Church.

As Sisters of Mercy in a developing country we feel the one challenge urging and uniting us: to bring ‘Mercy’ to those we work with by helping them to come closer to personal fulfilment – to increase their sense of responsibility, of human dignity and pride. We strive to help them to equip themselves to control their own destinies. This ‘localisation’ is the greatest service of mercy we can offer. We meet this call in many ways – in families, in civic groups, in social, educational and medical services.

During this time of change, PNG Union Leaders, with certain powers of local authority, were appointed by the Australian Union Leader after a process of nomination and consultation with the sisters. These were: Elizabeth Miller (1968-1973), Teresa Flaherty (1974-1976) and Rita Hassett (1977-1980).

Reflective Observations: Adaptability, flexibility and collaboration of sisters in community and in ministry

In developing their Mercy mission identity in the light of Vatican II theology, the sisters were influenced and inspired by the Divine Word priests of the Simbu and Goroka areas. In addition, those of the emerging Melanesian and Liturgical Catechetical Institutes and Xavier Institute in Port Moresby were also powerful pivotal sources of contemporary mission theology and renewal of religious life.

⁵² The introduction only is given here to indicate something of the common understanding that helped forge the unity and common purpose of the sisters.

Changes in ministry did not proceed smoothly, and there was a degree of tension, uncertainty and sometimes opposition, in mission circles. As mentioned previously, sisters faced difficult questions about the financial situation, such as whether to be dependent on, or independent of, the mission. This was somewhat bound up with the question of missionary identity; some felt a closer bond was possible with greater financial contribution to the mission, while other sisters saw that financial resources were necessary for particular ministries and for the freedom to afford more personal items. They were also aware of the financial constraints shouldered by their parish priests trying to pay the bills and provide for the sisters. In time, opinion swayed towards a more self-reliant approach with the sisters managing their stipends, subsidies or salaries for their communities, seeking grants from Australia or receiving what was required from the parish or diocese for mission work.⁵³ As noted previously, the question was somewhat clarified when diocesan contracts became more common from the mid-seventies.

This time of transition also brought some testing situations and uncertainties to the church leaders and major religious leaders in both countries, as well as the sisters themselves. Issues were raised about the essence of mission and community in changing times, applying the new teachings on religious life, working for inculturation and confronting western influences – consumerist, educational, religious, legal and economic – on traditional ways of life. The practicalities of mission living, possibilities for future ministry and modifying religious dress and customs, were all points of discussion and debate. Needless to say, there were no simple, and very few unanimous, solutions. Differences of opinion were common, but the sisters pressed on, attempting to discern as a united group, encouraging and enabling each other's response to emerging needs, and grappling with the realities of every day. The sisters undertook further study to acquire the qualifications needed for new ministries.⁵⁴

The complexities of changing community and ministry were not easy for the sisters to articulate on the ground, or for the Australian Union Leaders to comprehend from afar. The emerging situations seemed to take sisters away from regular community life as they attempted to find new forms of living and working with those of other religious congregations, denominations or faiths, while retaining close Mercy bonds. Many were the sisters' gatherings as they attempted to discern these new directions and express them in the written word.

The Australian Union Leaders in Canberra, Mary Therese Moore (1966-1971) from Bathurst and Maria Joseph Carr (1972-1977) from Singleton, were very concerned for the sisters on mission, and for the integrity and renewal of religious life. They were solicitous and generous in their pastoral

⁵³ As indicated by Elizabeth Miller's letter above.

⁵⁴ In some early cases particular sisters were recommended by Divine Word Missionaries and funded by the diocese but, as the sisters took more responsibility for their mission preparation and involvement, application was made more frequently by the communities, with funding sought from their own funds, through salaries in PNG and from Australia.

care and there was much soul-searching in their attempts, both to guide and to accompany the sisters. Although they were witnessing trends towards the opening up of religious to wider social needs, which would indeed soon burst upon the Australian scene, the extent of this evolution was not forecast at the time. Despite some initial caution, the Union Leaders exhibited incredible levels of trust; they provided valuable guidance and did much to publicise the needs of the mission and to attract more volunteers from Australia.

Part 2. In the Wewak Diocese (1970–1981)

As with the Highlands sisters, the Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak diocese, responding to their missionary call in the spirit of Vatican II, made adjustments in community and ministry to meet the emerging social and political needs of an independent nation.⁵⁵ These were seen in adjustments regarding the localisation of primary schools and health, secondary school education, teacher education and the new foundations at St. John's Seminary, Kairiru Island, and for pastoral work in a remote rural parish at Drekikir.

Section 1. Localisation of Primary Schools and Health - new possibilities on, and beyond, the mission stations in Wewak

Localisation of Primary Schools

The sisters' main focus in the area of primary education in the early years of the decade was on the training and development of teachers to manage their Catholic primary schools. However, there were related challenges as the sisters followed, adapted and implemented new curriculum initiatives of the National Department of Education to counter-balance the largely western oriented curriculum. In addition, cultural adaptations appropriate for the majority of students, who, because of a selective secondary education system, were unlikely to proceed beyond village life, were introduced. Examples of this are taken from the Negrie sisters' chronicle.

By 1972, with the prospect of only about one third of the students advancing to high school, 'cultural activities' were introduced into the curriculum to train the students for life in the village. The parents of Negrie Primary School had been asked to help and various ones came in to the school to teach the children blind making, pottery, grass skirt making and bead work. Sr Louis (Jean Murray) began taking her class to various villages to hear stories from the old men and to learn something of the history of the place. The children then recorded these stories. Agriculture was also introduced in the school curriculum.'

⁵⁵ As indicated in the chapter introduction.

In the early 1970s vocational centres were set up for students unable to proceed to high school at Kunjingini by Mary Scanlan and Br Terrence Kane FMS and at Yangoru by Stancia Cawte who saw the establishment of a vocational centre as a way of offering them livelihood and Christian leadership skills.⁵⁶

In 1972 Marie Williams, with the approval of Bishop Arkfeld and the Mercy General Council in Townsville, resigned as Head Teacher at Negrie to work more closely in pastoral ministry with village women.⁵⁷ Marie started 'taking wads of material out, and saving up and buying sewing machines, making bread and all those kinds of things, having sports between the different groups'. Josephine Martyn later continued this work, which sometimes entailed overnight stopovers, sleeping on a bed of coconut leaves on the floor of the house of one of the families. During these visits, religious instruction and prayer meetings were combined with social work. Similarly, Maria Jean Rhule from Rockhampton was appointed to this work at Yangoru.⁵⁸ Her pastoral work involved visiting the women in the many villages, instructing them, consulting and advising them personally in groups and at meetings.

Localisation of Health Services

Government and church policies regarding empowerment of national staff were implemented by the sister nurses at Kunjingini, Torembe, Ulupu, Yangoru, and Kairiru.⁵⁹ As part of the diocesan health team within the National Catholic Health Services these women continued their roles of primary health care, prevention of diseases, adaptation to local needs, as well as mentoring of national staff.

Kunjingini. Qualified sister nurses Jacinta Wiedman and Jill Stringer succeeded Isobel Condon at Kunjingini during this period, carrying out clinic duties on the station and in the villages.

Torembe. Jacinta Wiedman continued the work of Mary Wildie at Torembe, conducting clinics on the station and visiting the remote villages for Child Welfare Clinics and nursing care with the assistance of an indigenous nurse. The vast scope of this rugged existence is captured in some lines from the sisters' chronicle.

⁵⁶ For more detail, refer to 'Setting up a vocational centre for young women' and 'Stories from the village' in T. Flaherty, *Crossings in Mercy: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea 1956–2006*, (Adelaide: Openbook Howden, 2008), 116.

⁵⁷ By this time the school had gained its official government registration and Jean Murray took over the responsibility as Head Teacher.

⁵⁸ To gain the added skills necessary for this special work, Maria Jean completed a course specially designed for pastoral workers at Xavier Institute of Missiology, Bomana (Port Moresby).

⁵⁹ These policies were also followed by the Holy Spirit Sisters at Timbunke, Marienberg, Dagua and Wewak.

To two of these villages, Marap and Kosimbi, the nurses are taken by plane, but have to walk home. In the case of Marap this is a six-hour walk. However, in order to break the walk sister stays overnight in another village, Yamok, doing the clinic there the following morning. When the weather and road permit there are four villages which can be reached by jeep. The clinics for the closer villages are done on the station.

Yangoru. The nursing services continued to develop in the Yangoru district. Marlene (Marie Bernard) Fitzgibbons, who succeeded Mary Wildie, commented on the collaboration between government and mission. Noting that a newly built rural health centre at the Yangoru government station was lying vacant, she approached the government health authority, Dr Gobius, for approval to take it over in the role of supervisor. With his willing consent, Marlene moved into the health centre, and applied for nurse aids, vehicle, *dokta bois* and also supplies, and particularly, a ward for deliveries. She had a jeep and it was just seven minutes away, across the airstrip to the convent.⁶⁰

I did all my own clinics with one *dokta boi*. I went to most of the villages – the furthest being two to three hours away. Because we took over the Government Health Centre we were responsible for the whole area – Fr Willie Mormon's parish at Wilaru, Negrie and Yangoru Parishes. We covered about 50 on a monthly basis.

She also focused on preventative medicine and safe practice. Betty Busuttin replaced Marlene in providing health care until localisation was effected in the government health services. A specific example of localisation in health is provided from the sister's chronicle when, after years of service, one of the *dokta bois*, Mr John Hausepongu, a married man with eight children, became fully qualified and was put on the government payroll, receiving a government salary each fortnight.

John ... began working for the sisters at Yangoru when Sr Felix was here. He did some training as a dokta boi but received most of his training through working with Sr Felix and then Sr Marlene, assisting with clinics and outpatients. So for about thirteen years John worked faithfully with the sisters and was paid by the mission. In the last five years the Mater Hospital in Mackay sent enough money for his salary and this helped us considerably. And so now John, his wife Cecilia, and family have reason to rejoice. John is now an Aid Post Orderly at Kumbukum, his own village.⁶¹

Ulupu. The sisters continued their constant health ministries throughout the parish in relative isolation as only two pilots, Bishop Arkfeld and Fr Ruiter, would attempt landing on the short, steep airstrip there.⁶²

⁶⁰ Sr Marlene related that, with village help through the council, the health centre provided a vegetable garden the whole length of the airstrip, with peanuts, greens and sweet potatoes to help the malnourished babies.

⁶¹ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yangoru.

⁶² When the main road was built by the Australian Army in the late 1960s it joined Yangoru and Maprik, bypassing Ulupu, which was linked only with a narrow track to the highway.

The Mercy Sisters in the diocese – Gwen (Vianney) Chatwood from Ulupu, Jill (Raymond) Stringer from Kunjingini, Jacinta Wiedman from Torembo, Mary Wildie and Marlene (Marie Bernard) Fitzgibbons from Yangoru, and Margarita Shannon from St Benedict's Kaindi – worked together on what was needed for the common ailments and enjoyed this challenge. The sister nurses found that certain medication could cure the skin disease, called *grille*, which could cover the whole body. To their surprise and delight, the suffering person would soon be restored to complete health. The sisters also got large quantities of ointment, which was successful in treating even the most advanced tropical ulcers. As a pharmacist, Margarita would get bulk quantities of vaseline from Australia, mix the ingredients for the ointments and supply them to the sisters in bulk.

A cross-cultural Religious Movement in the Yangoru-Negrie area

The rise of a particular indigenous religious movement, referred to as *Cargo Cult*, gathered momentum prior to Independence in the Yangoru-Negrie area.⁶³ The alleged contentious issue of the cult was the erection of markers visibly placed by land surveyors on Mount Turu, which the cult adherents saw as a sign of European intervention, denying them access to the 'cargo' that was rightfully theirs. The adherents of this movement, involving hundreds of followers, set out to restore the perceived balance of justice. This contemporary clash of world-views, embracing traditional cultural and Christian influences in 1972 called for sensitive pastoral responses.

Concerned for the safety of the Yangoru and Negrie sisters, when members of the cargo cult planned to assemble with clans from other areas at Mount Turu on 7 July 1972, Bishop Arkfeld arranged for their evacuation. The sisters' concern for the cult members and their profound relief at their peaceful demonstration are reflected in two excerpts from their chronicle:⁶⁴

The sisters trusted their own people but could not be sure how the many outsiders who had come for the public protest, objecting to the government land markers that had been placed on Mount Turu, would react to them. The sisters had a last Mass in the church and left, feeling very upset and 'somewhat like traitors'. The people accepted Father's explanation that we were only '*meris*' (women-folk) so he had to look after us by getting us away from the crowds of strangers.

On the 7th July itself we were worried about the fate of our people and our mission. Thank God there were no incidents. Daniel [Hawine, the cult leader] had complete control as he had promised he would.

⁶³ Re *Cargo Cult*, Indigenous religious movements are extremely complex and, while an elaboration on such issues is not necessary in this thesis, the impact on the missionaries, in this particular case, was momentous. The cult adherents held basic beliefs in a period of heaven-sent wealth and prosperity here on earth. The people expected their ancestors to be instrumental in sending them goods – money, food, tools, luxuries, equipment, furniture and means of transport – which Europeans had intercepted. These goods would become available to them if they acquired the secret knowledge to access their ancestors, thus preventing their perceived wealth going to the Europeans. Religious ceremonies and practices set up by the cult leaders required fervent adherence and strict conformity from the followers.

⁶⁴ Excerpts from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

No one was allowed to take arms of any description with them on the 7th. The markers were removed in silence and handed from hand to hand from the top of Turu to the Government office at Yangoru. The members of the cult stretched all along the road – about ten miles. The only sound heard was the saying of the Rosary... At the end the crowd quietly dispersed.⁶⁵

The rise of the cargo cult was to have a direct influence on the pastoral involvement of the missionaries in the Yangoru-Negrie area and the Sisters were actively involved in the planning and implementation. The Negrie priests had a keen pastoral team approach, inspired by the Vatican Council and the Self-Study of the Church. Frs Patrick Rasmussin from the Rockhampton diocese and Patrick Gesch SVD in the Wewak diocese were soon joined by enthusiastic young Divine Word Missionary seminarians, Roger Schroeder (USA) and Michael Knight (AUS), who were engaged in their overseas training program. Cheryl Camp reflected on her experience of this unique approach to ministry:⁶⁶

What I think was significant for others, and especially so for us Mercies at Negrie was the teamwork between the priests, ourselves and the seminarians. We planned and worked and ate together and this provided a richness of community that was unique. They were the halcyon days of pastoral ministry and what I learned in those years still influences my missionary activity today, 30 years later. What has also endured are the friendships we formed with each other in those days.

In a later communication, Cheryl, reflecting on the Negrie team experience of sharing meals, the Eucharist, planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation of pastoral ministry, added that through the challenges of this time they were ‘doing’ and ‘living’ theology.

The team developed a regular system of pastoral visits to all the villages of the parish. Most of this was done on foot in a hilly area and in the afternoon tropical heat, so as to be with the people in the evening after their day’s work. On arrival they would have discussions – the sisters with the women and the others with the men – followed by a Eucharistic celebration. Marie recalled that at first, it was not uncommon for a woman to dart suddenly from the women’s circle across to the men’s group to check out a response to a question and return satisfied with the right answer! The women’s confidence grew with each session. Topics were related to the Self-Study and were an attempt to draw upon the people’s lived experience within their culture to deepen their sense of God’s loving presence in their lives.

⁶⁵ Fr Herman Janssen MSC, founder of the Melanesian Institute, who was interested in researching the deep religious meaning of the cargo cult visited Negrie in 1972.

⁶⁶ This was communicated in a letter, c.1999 and was later reinforced in a written communication.

Describing the sacramental aspects of Reconciliation and Eucharist in these outdoor settings, Pat Gesch SVD commented on the role of the sisters:⁶⁷

In the later years, the sister always had the job of getting the reader prepared, arranging for the prayers before communion, and of getting a singing leader, and perhaps someone to do [prepare] the penitential service at the beginning of Mass....I definitely got the impression that there are things a man does in a parish, and things a woman does. She comes to help the people in the parish. A man cannot go to the women about personal things. When he asks deep questions a man may be sending out the wrong messages. With the sisters the women found it easier to give an answer as they were not shy, or embarrassed.

The practical follow-up was the Negrie sister's setting up a pastoral centre for the deanery to train church leaders and prayer leaders from the parishes of Ulupu, Maprik and Kunjingini.⁶⁸ Their aim was to promote basic Christian communities as the new model of Church.⁶⁹ Leonie Williams, Cheryl Camp, Josephine Martyn and other sisters became energetically involved in planning and teaching the programs and leadership courses, which included both men and women, for prayer leaders, church leaders and catechists.⁷⁰ Practical aspects of the courses were implemented in the villages, and the Divine Word Missionary seminarian, Roger Schroeder, was a key figure in these arrangements.

At the end of 1975, Marie Williams was requested to teach at the Tangugo Pastoral Centre, which had been established in Wewak by Wim Valkx SVD. Programs were offered for catechists and women intending to take up catechetical work and for a small group of married catechist men preparing for the diaconate. Their wives and children were with them so that the whole family would understand the nature of this ministry.

The Vicar General's significant Pastoral Letter 1976

An official pastoral letter of the Vicar General (dated 20 May 1976) by Fr Ray Kalisz, Vicar Administrator of the Wewak Diocese (who was to succeed Bishop Arkfeld) to Catherine Courtney, Leader of the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy, offered encouragement and new possibilities in ministry.⁷¹ It is of significance that, at the time the letter was written, the sisters had already embarked on the transition implied and were engaged in the diversity of works suggested. New initiatives had been taken through informal and formal consultations with the Mercy Leaders. These were not determined

⁶⁷ Extract from an interview with Pat Gesch SVD at Divine Word University, May 2005.

⁶⁸ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Negrie.

⁶⁹ Fr Joep Heinemans SVD, chaplain of St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, was very much in favour of this new pastoral dimension of plurality of leaders, an idea which had emanated from the Self-Study.

⁷⁰ One of the teaching team, particularly in programs with women, recalled how she was guided by the sisters in retreat work and village visitation. This information was volunteered by Sr Conronata Tumburme Rosary Sister, then an experienced pastoral worker at Sikoro parish, in a chance airport meeting, 23 June 2007.

⁷¹ The title of 'Leader' replaced the traditional title of 'Superior General' from around this time.

by the church authorities alone: rather, the sisters concerned, as individuals or as communities, showed their agency through their willingness to initiate or participate in these plans, and to do what was required to prepare themselves for new social needs as urged by Vatican II.

The future Bishop recommended that the sisters continue their current involvement on the mission stations and extend their educational work in both church and government educational institutions, in addition to urban and village pastoral work and family counselling.⁷² The reasons given for teaching in government institutions were that in the Wewak Diocese 'eighty per cent or more of the students were Catholic, while, on the other hand, practically the total expatriate teaching staff was non-Catholic and many were atheistic'.

Urban pastoral work through the formation of Basic Christian Communities was considered important as a way of bringing Christ to the people. Sisters were needed to initiate Bible study and shared prayer groups as well as the formation of women's clubs.⁷³ Through pastoral work the sisters would reach the different groups of the adults and the youths in the villages. Furthermore they could assist in the selection and training of church leaders and prayer leaders, as many school leavers wandering around the villages had practically no knowledge of their religion and adults needed updating in their religious knowledge. These needs for sisters are explained:

True, the aim of the Church in New Guinea is to localise, to hand over the leadership in the Church to the local people in as many areas as possible. But here is the rub – the parish priest on his own cannot find and train these leaders because he is so divided [diversified] in his work.

Fr Kalisz concluded his letter with words of encouragement and appreciation:

The Wewak Diocese has been blessed by Divine Providence in having the Mercy Sisters share in this mission work and the fruits of their labour are very evident. One has only to read over what I have said about the areas of their commitment and to know that God has blessed their work with success in all these areas to realise what their work has meant to the establishing of the Church here.

In this time of change, the sisters, according to their own experience, personalities and talents, sought ways of meeting new needs while ensuring the stability and continuity of their commitment to the mission stations, secondary education for girls and teacher education. Maintaining the viability of their communities as their numbers were stretched and subdivided for emerging ministries proved an immediate challenge, which the sisters, in their enthusiasm and courage, were prepared to make.

⁷² This was carried out informally before being officially established by the Holy Spirit Sisters in their Family Life Centre at Goroka.

⁷³ These pastoral ministries were already being carried out by the sisters at Negrie and Yangoru.

Closure of the Sisters' Convents on the rural mission stations – Torembi, Ulupu, Negrie and Yangoru

Although new recruits came from Queensland to increase the ranks, numbers decreased significantly during the era of Independence. Despite the sisters' efforts to provide continuity on the mission stations, unavoidable closures of convents at Torembi (1974), Ulupu (1976), Negrie (1980) and (1982) occurred.

Special efforts were made to keep Yangoru open for as long as possible. Margaret Houlihan from Ballarat stayed for some years (1974-78) at Yangoru High School caring for the female students and teaching Home Economics and other subjects. Carmel King left Negrie to manage the vocational centre until its closure. Cheryl Camp resided at Yangoru in her last years of pastoral ministry at Negrie. By 1982 only three sisters remained: two Mercy Sisters, Justina Bedford and Maria Jean Rhule, and one Rosary Sister, Sr Wilhelmina, who was living in community with them.

A mutual agreement was reached between the two religious institutes and negotiations were put in place with the Bishop for the Rosary Sisters to take over the convent and ministry. Maria Jean and Justina took care to ensure that the transition was a smooth one for the Rosary Sisters and the people. The official changeover occurred in December 1982 when Maria Jean handed over the keys of the convent and the car to Theresia Allen, Leader of the Rosary Sisters. The Rosary Sisters carried out their ministries from 1983-1997,⁷⁴ when the Marist Brothers took over pastoral ministry of the Yangoru Catholic Mission.

With community closures, more sisters were free to provide continuity of religious education and Christian formation of teachers, as well as to reach out pastorally in the most remote areas.

Section 2. Developments and innovations: secondary education and teacher education

The political developments and the Church's renewed respect for the action of the Spirit within cultures stemming from *Ad Gentes* were reflected in initiatives in the established educational institutions for female Catholic secondary education at Yrapos and co-educational Catholic teacher education at St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Former Parish Priest of Yangoru, Victor Roche SVD reported to me at Mount Hagen in May 2006: 'When the sisters went it was a pleasant, meaningful transition. Initially the people were a little worried that the Australian sisters were leaving. But the people adjusted very well to the Rosary Sisters and it was a satisfactory transition.'

⁷⁵ *Ad Gentes*, Recognising the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in ages past as well as the present.

Mercy College, Yrapos - female Catholic Secondary Education

Under the leadership of the early Headmistresses the school, begun in 1966, developed – Valerie White (1963-66), Christine Watt (1967-68), Denise Coghlan (1969-72), Abina Looney (1973-76) and Maureen Grant (1977-82). The sisters continued their commitment to Mercy College, Yrapos, through increasing student numbers, classrooms and dormitories. Extensive work was required in creating relevant curricular materials. Encouragement and promotion of indigenous staff were ongoing goals and the sisters put a consistent localisation program in place. Significant milestones towards localisation were the appointment in 1968 of the first indigenous lay female teacher Maria (Pimong) Siria in 1968, followed by Juliana Pige in 1971. The first lay male teacher, Joseph Valerian, was appointed to the staff in 1978.

It was during this era that the Grafton Mercy Sisters made a commitment to Yrapos.⁷⁶ They were a continuous presence from 1970 to 1993. Margaret Bray commented on their initial move to Yrapos:

In 1970 the Grafton sisters volunteered to go to Mercy College Yrapos to enable the Mercy Congregation of the Brisbane sisters to send sisters across to the Minor Seminary on Kairiru. We were a very small congregation but we volunteered to help the local Church establish its own national clergy.⁷⁷

Wendy Flannery and other early sisters of Yrapos were involved in adapting Religious Education programs to suit the Melanesian cultural context.⁷⁸ As a member of the Bishops' Sub-commission for Secondary Religious Education, Wendy produced materials for students and teachers that were for use in Catholic high schools in PNG.⁷⁹ The challenge of these changes was passed on to the young women students, and as a result, powerful and inspiring liturgies in the parish church, supported by the Divine Word Missionary chaplains, become a tradition. The first long-serving chaplain (1966-1979) was Kees Meier SVD.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ The Grafton Congregation encompassed the northern rivers area stretching from the north coast to the western boundary of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales.

⁷⁷ Extract from the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Centre, Grafton.

⁷⁸ In a noted interview Wendy informed me that all the Yrapos senior girls assembled to participate when the Constitutional Planning Committee came to Wewak in 1973.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Wendy reported to me that she compiled 30 editions of the New World magazine consisting of a student leaflet (8 pages) and teachers' notes (4 pages). Based on the new theology and radical African writers, these publications were funded by the Commonwealth British Council. The high schools of some other churches used them as well so that the content became progressively ecumenical.

⁸⁰ A tentative list of later Chaplains (mostly SVD) was compiled by Sr Angeline Singiat in May 2006: Frs Leo van der Helm, Cornelius Jooren, George Schubbe, Mike Hughes, John Moran, Tony San Pierre (OSB), Carl Wand, Liam Horsfall, Wojciek Beben, George Riffa (as deacon) and Liam Dunne. In recent times when there was no priest available for appointment as chaplain, young PNG parish priests fulfilled this role. For example, Fr Otto Separi, the Parish Priest of Kaindi-Yrapos-Hawaian visited regularly for Mass and the sacraments as well as for meetings.

A small community was formed from Yarapos in 1974 to provide a home and a Christian environment for indigenous young women. Denise Coghlan was the instigator of this form of community living. From 1974-76 sisters lived at the Christian Living Centre, a house on the Wewak beachfront, which they called '*Lait bilong moning*' (Morning Light). The teachers commuted to Yarapos each day, while Jill Stringer carried out her work as Tutor Sister at Wewak Government Hospital, Boram. The young women went to their daily work. Those who formed the community at different times were Denise Coghlan, Carmel McCormick, Maura O'Shaughnessy and Jill Stringer. While none of the resident young women felt called to the Mercy way of life, one responded to the call of religious life. Theresia Solatum joined the Franciscans at Aitape and later became their institute Leader.⁸¹

Secondary Teaching at Maprik and Yangoru Administration High Schools

The sisters were being called beyond the parish. For example, in response to Bishop Arkfeld's request for a missionary to join the staff of the Maprik High School, Marie Williams agreed to apply for a position teaching Rural Science and Religious Education. Managing the teaching at Maprik with a mid-week overnight stay with her community at Negrie involved considerable travel. Consequently, teaching at Maprik was assumed the following year by the sisters at Kunjingini, together with Malcolm Hall of the Marist Brothers.⁸²

National High School at Passam

Br Pat Howley FMS, formerly Headmaster of St Xavier's Provincial High School on Kairiru, was the first Principal of Passam National High School.⁸³ He was keen to have one or two Marist Brothers and Sisters of Mercy on the staff. He saw them as essential, not only for teaching their specialisations, but also for pastoral care of the male and female students. He also saw the religious as being a Christian and uniting influence on staff and students. Consequently, in 1979, Frances Hanrahan, who was a secondary Mathematics specialist teacher at St John's seminary at Kairiru, was invited to apply for a position, including that of Dean of Women Students there. Frances outlined her anticipation of this new move for 1980.

⁸¹ Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception from Australia.

⁸² A former Headmaster of Maprik High School, John Colwell, informed me that the sisters were a support to him in achieving his goals for the good of the students, localisation of staff and relationship with the local town and village community. This conversation occurred at Sogeri NHS, Port Moresby, c. 1999.

⁸³ As previously noted, this institution, along with similar institutions at Sogeri (Port Moresby), Aiyura (Eastern Highlands), Keravat (East New Britain), catered for upper secondary students selected throughout PNG.

The school has only been operating for six months and next year it will have its first intake of girls – 40 girls and about 300 boys. It will be a couple of months before I will know if I am accepted.... The present principal is a Marist Brother....Passam is only half an hour from Wewak by road so we would not be far from the sisters in there.⁸⁴

Other sisters who followed at Passam were Miriam Devine (Science) and Cynthia Griffin (English and Social Science). Because of their specialisations, these sisters, in addition to their role as Dean of Women Students, were often Department Heads, and in that capacity, supervised and encouraged the growing national staff. By the time Cynthia, who had accepted the request to be Deputy Principal, completed her contract, the staff was almost completely localised.

Sisters from Yarapos missioned to other dioceses⁸⁵

As early as 1970 Christine Watt, the first community Leader of Yarapos, and fresh from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), accepted a position to Xavier Institute in Port Moresby. She was to assist Mother Flavia OLSH (Catherine O’Sullivan), who had been elected as its first Director. Christine soon found herself taking on more and more of the administrative responsibility as Catherine’s health declined.⁸⁶

St Benedict’s co-educational Teachers College, Kaindi - 1969

Margarita Shannon, founder of St. Benedict’s Kunjingini in 1958, and first Deputy Principal of Kaindi, reported on developments in teacher education.⁸⁷

When Catholic schools and colleges became part of the newly formed National Teaching Service, in 1971, conditions for everyone became much easier. Teachers in the field now received the same salary as teachers in government schools, while all tertiary students were given a fortnightly allowance for personal needs and text books.

The College has been staffed by Christian Brothers, Sisters of Mercy and lay people, assisted at times by religious sisters and brothers from other congregations. Some of the lay staff are Papua New Guineans, quite a number of whom are graduates of the College, while others are members of volunteer organisations such as AVA (Australia), CUSO (Canada) and VSO (New Zealand).

⁸⁴ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kairiru.

⁸⁵ As previously mentioned, two sisters left the staff of Yarapos to engage in national ministries at Goroka - Wendy Flannery to the Melanesian Institute (1978) and Judith Hourigan to the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (1979).

⁸⁶ From an early report written by Christine Watt in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane. Christine was later followed by other Sisters of Mercy, and their involvement will be related in Chapter Five.

⁸⁷ Sr Margarita offered this information as guest speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November 1990.

Through the assistance of Brother Hubert Umlauf SVD, the procurator at the Central Wirui Mission, early funding for the College was obtained through Misereor [German Government Funding Organisation], and through their generous donations all the buildings for lectures for the College were erected, including the dining room, Great Hall, dormitories, library, clinic, Science block and staff houses. Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD, the main builder, was assisted for a number of years by lay missionary builders and plumbers from New Zealand, Basil Doherty, Allan Smith, John Whitcombe and Jerry Noris. They put up new buildings, as well as a unique spiral staircase in the library, and we owe a great debt of gratitude to them.

The College chapel, a very beautiful building, was the gift of the German bishops. It is set in the middle of what has become a very attractive campus. 1991 marked the beginning of a three-year course in teacher education.

Over the years Sisters of Mercy have played a vital part in the growth of the College. They have been instrumental in assisting national sisters to gain a foothold in teacher education, under the Associate Lecturer Program, and have been a guiding force for other young sisters doing their pre-service training.

Margarita commented in her report about the participation of women at the College:

One very strong tradition in the College that has always been dear to my heart, is the earnest effort that has been made over the years to ensure that women were given equal opportunities with men, and that, as far as possible, numbers of men and women enrolled were comparable. This reflects one of the main ideals in the Constitution of this country.⁸⁸

St Benedict's vigorously pursued a policy of the promotion of women students and was the first teacher education institution in the country consistently to have equal numbers of male and female students. This positive outcome was possible because of the success of the equal gender policy practised by the sisters in all their schools and the increased supply of graduates from Yarapos.⁸⁹

Student government was revolutionary in the sense that women students were given equal responsibility and status with male students. Their responsibilities, like that of the male leaders, extended to all organisational areas of student welfare. For several years, Irene Callanan, while on the academic staff, was also Dean of female students, often spending time after hours informally counselling them.

During the period of localisation sisters sometimes withdrew from positions of administrative responsibility; for example, after retiring from duties as Deputy Principal and lecturer, Margarita

⁸⁸ A continuation of Margarita Shannon's report mentioned above.

⁸⁹ One of the stories repeated among the sisters is of Mother Francis Regis' encouragement and persistence for parents to send one girl with each boy for enrolment in primary education.

Shannon ably set up the St Benedict's College Library. Others, who had come for a specific purpose as lecturers, working side-by-side with national staff and supporting the ethos of the college with their specific skills and talents, were prepared to return to Australia. As an example, Christin McIntosh from Parramatta came for two years (1974-1975) to specialise in Primary English Method. Christin noted that at the end of her term her position was localised.⁹⁰ The then Principal, Brother Graeme Leach CFC commended her contribution:

Sr McIntosh made a major input into the development of the English Curriculum of the College, being responsible for the Method Strand. The Curriculum itself presents evidence of her professionalism.... Particularly noteworthy has been her work with the student-teachers in the area of remedial English.⁹¹

A significant organisational innovation initiated at St Benedict's was that of the Cluster System of Practice Teaching in which teacher trainees were transported to the network of rural primary schools in the various areas of the plains (Kunjingini), mountains (Yangoru), and coast (Dagua).⁹² The students were accommodated and supervised on a daily basis by St Benedict's lecturing staff. Religious sisters, particularly the Sisters of Mercy and the Holy Spirit Sisters, made this remarkable system work by their ingenuity and sheer physical effort and determination. For eleven years, diminutive Bernadette O'Dwyer was engaged in this demanding role of living in remote areas for three of the four terms in the year, caring for the welfare of approximately thirteen students, and encouraging, instructing and evaluating them in their practice teaching. Similarly, Desma Clarke and Irene Masterson were also involved for several years in an organisational and management role within the cluster system at Yangoru.⁹³ Dominique Coles SSpS likewise valiantly managed the supervision of the Dagua area.

Sisters of Mercy, including Francis Regis and Brendan Daly, served as Head Teachers and demonstration teachers at the Kaindi Primary Demonstration and Practice Teaching School and, in their leadership role, were dedicated to the process of localisation.⁹⁴ The first professed Papua New Guinean Sister of Mercy, Petronia Gawi, was a graduate of St Benedict's and a former teacher in the Demonstration School.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ From a recorded interview with Sr Christin McIntosh in Parramatta, c.1999.

⁹¹ Written 17 November 1975 and signed by G.J. Leach, BA, BEd, MEd, MACE – Principal, St Benedict's Teachers College.

⁹² This information was conveyed to me in various interviews, as well as through anecdotal evidence.

⁹³ After completing her last year in the primary school as senior teacher at Yangoru, supporting the new national Head Teacher and other members of staff, Sr Desma Clarke took up a position in St Benedict's Teachers Training College, Kaindi. She was appointed as lecturer and supervisor of the practice-teaching student teachers in schools near Yangoru throughout the year. This role involved extensive travel to the schools in the area. She was joined by Sr Irene Masterson, cf. footnote 59 in Chapter Five.

⁹⁴ In the earlier years Sr Brendan was instrumental in a number of Rosary Sisters completing their primary education in order for them to proceed to Mercy College, Yarapos.

⁹⁵ Sr Margarita offered this information as guest speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, 1990, mentioned above.

Girls vocational centre at Kaindi

In 1977, after having spent some time teaching at Yarapos, Alberta Bussutin from Negrie, moved to Kaindi in response to a request from Fr Eddie Bauer SVD to commence an urban vocational centre for female school-leavers.⁹⁶ Practical and domestic lessons provided the young people with life skills in a Christian environment, preparing them to face the future with hope. It was also felt that these young men and women had ways of helping their own people during times of rapid change. Alberta faced the teething problems of designing the curriculum and putting it into action. Alberta was followed by Sr Helen Lieffering (Franciscan) who was Father Bauer's cousin.

A Team Approach to Religious Education and the Formation of Teachers and Catechists – Diocesan and National levels

In seeking to promote contemporary methods of teaching religious education in accordance with Vatican II directives the Sisters of Mercy took a leading role in writing and trialling new approaches in curriculum, and in promoting national staff within the religious education departments. This approach was based on nation-wide goals expressed by the bishops and made known generally through the Sub-Commissions for Catechetics.⁹⁷ The Sub-Committee for Primary School Catechesis led by Genevieve Bühler in Madang, was responsible for the Primary School Religious Education Syllabus, the *Skul Katolik* text books, and the Sacramental Program materials.⁹⁸ Carmel McCormick was responsible for the Syllabus and *Skul Katolik* Books for Grade Four. Bernadette O'Dwyer and Margaret Shakeshaft were recognised as exceptionally gifted teachers, influential in this curriculum area.

The sisters at Yarapos and Kaindi, as well as others in the diocese, worked together in their efforts to provide religious education materials and visit the schools to assist in the formation of Catholic teachers and catechists. Carmel McCormick did the groundwork in Religious Education in Catholic and Administration Schools throughout the Wewak Diocese.⁹⁹ She explained the process used to

⁹⁶ In a recorded interview with Sr. Alberta Bussutin c. 1999. Similar centres had been set up on the rural mission stations at Kunjingini, Kairiru and Yangoru to cater for the needs of the many urban school leavers whose educational chances were lost by a system of selection at the end of Grade Eight.

⁹⁷ The Catholic Teachers Colleges were St Benedict's Teachers College (Wewak), Holy Trinity Teachers College (Mount Hagen), Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (Kabaleo) and St Paul's Vunakanau (Rabaul). Later Vunakanau joined Kabaleo.

⁹⁸ The members of the Sub-Commission for Primary School Catechesis were Brother Finian Markwell CFC (Rabaul), Sister Monique (Bougainville) and Sister Carmel McCormick RSM (Wewak).

Sister Margaret Shakeshaft was on the Sub-Commission for Primary School Catechesis in the Mount Hagen and Enga Dioceses before her appointment to St Benedict's Teachers College, Wewak.

Sister Wendy Flannery at Yarapos, while on the Sub-Commission for High School Catechesis, wrote High School Religious Education materials which were used in all Catholic high schools in PNG. The high schools of some other churches used them as well, as the content became progressively ecumenical.

⁹⁹ Carmel taught Religious Education in the Administration Schools, including Brandi High School, Wewak.

reach as many teachers, catechists and students as possible. Carmel began by referring to writing the materials for Grade Four:¹⁰⁰

Originally, I worked with a team of talented East Sepik Teachers and then put it all together. The Syllabus was the starting point, but it was a working document and subjected to many changes as the books were written and the lessons tried. Later it was refined with all the additional information necessary for use in schools and teachers colleges. Sr Bernadette Dwyer and Margaret Shakeshaft also taught Catechetics in the teachers colleges, but there were others before us – Sr Abina Looney, Nola Gray and others.

The Wewak Diocese appointed Fr Clem Gawlik SVD to take care of Religious Education in the Wewak schools in the early 1970s. I joined him in 1973 and took over the catechetical side of things while he concentrated on the religious formation of the teachers. I translated the *Skul Katolik* materials into Tok Pisin so that the local catechists also could use it as a valuable resource. I know the catechists at Tangugo Pastoral Centre were glad of it when they came to Kaindi to learn how to use the Skul Katolik Materials.

Later Brother Canute Sheehan FMS took over from Fr Clem and we were joined by Sr Anne Frances in the 1980s. My role in the meantime had been to teach in the teachers college and on three days a week travel around the schools supervising and helping the teachers with Religious Education.

Anne Frances Carroll (formerly of Ulupu), who was transferred to Yarpas to be a key member of the diocesan team for the co-ordination of Religious Education and spiritual formation of teachers in the diocese, commented on this ministry:¹⁰¹

As Diocesan Religious Education Co-ordinator, I was part of a very supportive and well integrated team with two Marist Brothers, Canute and Terry. With over ninety Catholic schools throughout the East Sepik, at that time, we were constantly on the roads, rivers and skies of the Sepik as we moved to where teachers were rather than their coming to us. Our programs of faith development and in-service were much appreciated by the teachers but more importantly they valued the opportunity to meet with other teachers and with us in their remote stations.

Some painstaking work was done in the sisters' spare time. The first *Tok Pisin* Hymnal (*Ol Singing Bilong Lotu Katolik*) was formatted by Wendy Flannery and the music notation was laboriously done by Val Cervetto using a crochet hook indented on a wax duplicating stencil.¹⁰² Wendy and Val stayed awake all night to finish it on time for Fr Wim Valckx to take to Madang the next morning. Carmel McCormick typed the Kaindi English Hymn Book 'Sing to the Lord and Praise Him' while she was

¹⁰⁰ Extracted from an email communication from Carmel McCormick, 20 April 2007.

¹⁰¹ From a recorded interview with Anne Frances in Goroka, c.1999.

¹⁰² This was printed by the Liturgical Catechetical Centre in Madang in 1972. The second *Tok Pisin* Hymnal was printed in 1973 by the National Liturgical Catechetical Centre, Alexishafen, Madang.

on twelve months leave in Australia in 1981.¹⁰³ In addition, research articles on cultural and theological issues were written and published by Cheryl Camp and Wendy Flannery.¹⁰⁴ Sisters in teaching and teacher education were constantly engaged in writing and adapting curricula for their diverse religious, secular and pastoral programs.

Balancing community commitments and engaging in continuing and emerging ministries

Encouraged and guided by the Vicar General's letter of 1976, as well as being generally challenged to a deeper consciousness stirred by the cargo cult, the sisters willingly engaged in new and diverse directions in the parish, deanery and diocese. Furthermore, they were prepared to leave the convenience of familiar living arrangements to meet new apostolic challenges - challenges in which the sisters had had a voice and part in the planning and implementation.¹⁰⁵

After gaining new qualifications, training and skills, the sisters embarked on new ministries requiring collaboration with other religious and lay people in ministry and inter-congregational living and working. They also branched out to people in their unique societal context, without attempting to segregate them from the realities of their daily life and culture. These features can also be seen in the sisters' foundation for seminary education at St John's seminary on Kairiru Island (1970-93), and pastoral ministry at the remote rural parish at Dreikirir.¹⁰⁶

Section 3. New Foundations for seminary education and pastoral work

In 1969 the Bishop made yet another urgent appeal to Mother Damian Duncombe of the Brisbane Congregation, for two sisters to join the staff at St John's Seminary on the island of Kairiru, north of Wewak. At the time, the sisters were just getting established at Mercy College, Yarpas, and St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, but, sharing the Bishop's vision for the growth of the local

¹⁰³ The music notation was done by Val Cervetto and the book was published by Wirui Press, Wewak. The English Hymn Book was used by the Dioceses of Aitape, Goroka, Lae, Madang, Vaimo and Wewak and later spread to the island provinces.

¹⁰⁴ Cheryl Camp, "A female initiation rite of the Negrie Area" (68-83) and Wendy Flannery, "Appreciating Melanesian myths" (161-172) in *Powers, Plumes and Piglets: Phenomena of Melanesian Religion*, ed. N.C. Habel (Bedford Pk, SA.: The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979).

¹⁰⁵ Examples from the Rockhampton (Yangoru) and Townsville (Negrie) communities represent the mentality characteristic of many sisters at this time (e.g. sisters' moves from Negrie to Yangoru (Vocational Centre and Yangoru High School), to Kunjingini to teach at Maprik High School, and Yarpas and Kaindi (Vocational Youth Centre) and to Wewak (Tangugo Pastoral Centre).

¹⁰⁶ Bishop Arkfeld's initiatives to ensure that there would be indigenous priests, brothers and sisters to take the place of the overseas missionaries by opening St. John's Minor Seminary on Kairiru (1952) and founding the indigenous institutes of Brothers (1957) and Sisters (1958), have been previously mentioned.

church, Damian Duncombe was able to make up the numbers for a small foundation of four sisters by taking sisters from the rural station communities of Kunjingini, Torembo and Ulupu.

St John's Seminary, Kairiru (1970-1993)

The membership of the founding community reflected the traditional teaching and nursing pattern found on the mission stations. Those selected were: Misericordia Carter (Leader and Head Teacher of St Martin's Primary School), Maureen (Augustine) Grant and Loyola Boyle (secondary school teachers) and Jill (Raymond) Stringer (nurse at St Martin's Clinic). As was so often the case, the sisters' convent was not completed when the sisters arrived.¹⁰⁷

Teaching at the seminary

Long-serving Divine Word Missionary priest lecturers and rectors were supportive and appreciative of the sisters in their ministry. They noted in particular, their feminine influence on their young charges. Jeannine Kalisz, close relative of Bishop Kalisz, and lay missionaries served on the staff.¹⁰⁸ At the main parish house, the whole community enjoyed evening meals cooked by the loyal, long-serving Petrus. This was a chance to share friendship and learn from one another about coping with the day-to-day challenges of ministry and isolated island mission living.

At the time, as St John's was not formally part of the national education system, it was not entitled to government supplies. Consequently, from the beginning there was a constant effort to provide relevant curriculum materials, particularly for the upper secondary classes. Helen McDonnell recalled being rescued by her sister, Josette, who sent sample copies from the National High School at Keravat, near Rabaul, where she was then teaching. Many long hours were spent reproducing the lesson materials on an ancient gestetner! In 1980, Vianney Dirrman, a librarian from the Melanesian Institute at Goroka, improved the learning situation considerably by setting up a modern library.

Sisters of Mercy maintained their ministry at the seminary for nearly twenty years, from 1970 to 1989. They played a prominent part in educating many of the 700 seminarians who graduated from

¹⁰⁷ The builder, Brother Szaak Swinkels SVD, who was also busy with constructing school buildings at Yarpas, was not able to complete the task for some time. Br Michael Weiskamp SVD, an elderly brother who was both builder and carpenter, later kept everything in running order. Fr Kalisz SVD built the hydro-electrical plant which was the envy of almost every other mission station in the country, except for Denglagu, where a similar plant had been constructed harnessing the headwaters of the Simbu River in the Highlands.

¹⁰⁸ Fr Raymond Kalisz (later Bishop), Ray Cashmere, Don Grant and Clem Gawlik, as well as staff members, John Dwyer, Freddy Kell, Bernie Fisher and Dick Wolff and parish priest, Geoff Brumm). Alphonse Aime, later to become editor at the Melanesian Institute and lecturer at Divine Word University, was a former teacher there. Fr Mihalik, author of the first Melanesian *Tok Pisin* Dictionary and a prolific writer on PNG topics, including his Readings in PNG Mission History, featuring the Sisters of Mercy, spent some years of retirement on Kairiru, occupied tirelessly with writing and translation work.

St John's during its existence (1952-1995). The first graduate, Fr Cherubim Dambui, was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Wewak and later appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Port Moresby. Many other priests followed, including Bishop Michael Marai, originally of Mushu Island.

Adapting to the pastoral needs of the parish

While the teaching and formation of the seminarians was the prime reason for the sisters' presence, the small community soon addressed the education, health and pastoral needs of the entire parish, both in Kairiru and the neighbouring island of Mushu. Public notice for parish activities and maternal and child health (MCH) patrols would be taken to the villages by word of mouth, or *Tok Save* as it was called, by the church leaders and catechists.¹⁰⁹

The sisters soon embraced a pastoral vision for the whole parish. The following account from entries in the sisters' Kairiru chronicle gives some idea of the heartaches many of the primary school teachers faced when the education selective system prevented the majority of their students from proceeding from primary to secondary education.

As the time for selecting pupils for high school comes round the air seems electric. It is a cause of concern that people have come to see the sisters, especially a Standard Six primary sister, as someone who can get them material gain by getting a child a place in high school, or worse-still, as someone who can prevent their having this much coveted education. To make both adults and children understand that a missionary has something far more important to give, Sr Mary Misericordia feels the urge to disassociate herself from all this, and be more concerned with giving Christ's message.

Misericordia's consequent pastoral ministry involved overnight stays in villages and strenuous and often dangerous boat journeys round the island and to neighbouring islands. She was followed by Joan MacGinley, who spent four years there during this time frame.

Mercy support for the indigenous Rosary Sisters on neighbouring Mushu Island

When the Rosary Sisters were considering who would guide them in their novitiate, they looked to the Mercy Sisters, as 'these kind of people had time not only for study but for the spiritual side of

¹⁰⁹ Information provided by Mercy Sisters from Kairiru, Sister Angeline Singiat and Sister Theresa Boyek. The administration of the parish (St Martin's) was divided into three areas – the first two on Kairiru and the third on Mushu Island – which was situated somewhat to the west between Wewak and Kairiru. The Kairiru parish areas were separated by mountain slopes, treacherous to walk over during the wet season. Because of the fertile soil throughout the island, the people were able to grow good vegetable gardens, particularly on the 'front' side opposite Wewak. This was more suitable for the preparation of sago, which, with a plentiful supply of fish, formed the staple diet. People on the 'far' side had some land on the 'front' side and resided with relatives to prepare their sago.

things – their thing was to balance them’.¹¹⁰ With the blessing of Bishop Arkfeld and that of Mother Marcella, the Brisbane Leader, the Rosary Sisters approached Maureen Grant to be their Formator at Stella Maris Novitiate on Mushu for 1974.¹¹¹

Maureen also responded to a further request from the Rosary Sisters to assist them in their renewal year,¹¹² and their ‘independence’ too, for at the end of that year, elections were held and Sr Josepha, Madeleine’s blood sister, was elected Mother General. During this era Brendan Daley (former Headmistress of Kunjingini) spent a year teaching the Rosary Sisters at Wewak to raise their educational levels and help strengthen their spiritual formation. Other Wewak Mercy sisters were involved in this ministry. For example, Denise Coghlan returned from Australia to help the Rosary Sisters write their own Constitutions. Madeleine summed up this relationship:

All the Mercy Sisters supported us. They prayed for us and supported us in courses. They always had time for us. They contributed the time, their love and support for us to stand and live – to know our own vocation.¹¹³

Sisters’ holidays and retreat on Kairiru

The appreciation of the priests, not only on Kairiru, but elsewhere in the diocese was expressed in various practical ways. As rector, Fr Kalisz, regularly gave up his holidays to see that everything was just right for the influx of the Wewak sisters, and occasionally those from Goroka, for their annual retreat and holidays by the sea. This entailed attending to a host of chores, like preparing the dormitory and repairing the dam for the hydro-electric system when it was blocked by flood waters. Marist Brothers - Canute Sheehan, Terence Kane and Patrick Howley - were helpful in managing the boats and leading the sisters across the island or taking them to the nearby islands of Mushu, Yuo and Unai for picnics.

Transport was hazardous in every way – by air, sea and on land. Access to the island was by plane, which was normally a short five-minute journey from Wirui, but the passage was rough and the landing problematic because of the fierce cross-winds and the narrowness of the air strip on the paddock between St Martin’s Church and St Xavier’s High School, which was run by the Marist Brothers.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Recollections of Sister Madeleine Gumaure, former Leader of the Rosary Sisters.

¹¹¹ The sisters’ Kairiru chronicle entry records that instead of attending the traditional Easter Monday get-together at Yangoru, the sisters enjoyed the company of the community of the Rosary Sisters from Mushu.

¹¹² Enlisting the cultural and religious expertise of Fr Heinemans SVD.

¹¹³ A further comment: Rosary Sisters and Sisters of St Therese (founded in Madang) were appointed throughout the dioceses, often living near or with the Sisters of Mercy.

¹¹⁴ Because of the difficulty and the degree of experience and skill required, Bishop Arkfeld was the main pilot, with Fr Ivo Ruiter SVD in reserve for regular excursions for personnel and supplies.

Once on Kairiru, movement on or around the island for pastoral purposes was mainly on foot or by aluminium banana boat, and many were the times the sisters took their chances with the weather – Jill Stringer on her MCH patrols, and the sisters in pastoral work. A welcome luxury was a ride (though somewhat bumpy!) from St John's to St Martin's in the old rusty tractor which Brother Terence Kane FMS used to bring firewood, supplies and vegetables for the students and which he somehow almost miraculously managed to maintain in working order!

The sisters' chronicle records dangerous times when sisters crossed the Bismarck Sea for health care, pastoral work or in-service with teachers. On a return journey from giving in-service sessions on Mushu Island, Loyola Boyle had a terrifying experience. At first the double outrigger canoe she was in was being paddled in calm seas by seminarians from inland Yangoru and Ulupu who were not accustomed to navigation.¹¹⁵ When the boat got unsteady, one of the lads, in his attempt to balance it, made the mistake of standing on the outrigger instead of walking down the middle. Without warning, the boat capsized and Loyola, unable to swim, and weighed down with her long pleated habit and veil was dragged underwater. In her desperate struggle she lost her veil and glasses, but was at last pulled to safety by the seminarians, and in a rather undignified state returned to the safety of the shore. The community later offered a Mass of Thanksgiving for the lives saved that day! So terrifying was the experience that Loyola was not able to summon the courage to travel in small boats again.¹¹⁶

When the strong winds of the *taleo* or the *rai* seasons played havoc with the boats – ranging from small motorised banana boats to the large passenger and supply boat, the Tau-K – there were challenges for captain and passengers alike.¹¹⁷ Mr Frank Kilgannan, an Australian lay missionary, was captain of the aluminium boat, which was later christened the 'St Paul'. In the early seventies he managed this as yet unnamed boat in all weathers, carrying food and cargo from Wewak to St John's. His successor was Graham Lynch, a New Zealand lay missionary.¹¹⁸

The Remote Rural Parish and Deanery Centre at Dreikir (1979-1992)

The last foundation made during this time-frame (1970-1981) reflected the Brisbane sisters' concern for the disadvantaged remote rural areas of the diocese and their desire to provide pastoral care and nursing services. Dreikir was 64 kilometres past Kunjingini or a total distance of 165 kilometres from Wewak, with the roads deteriorating the further one travelled from the Province centre. It was

¹¹⁵ A canoe with a light wooden structure added for balance.

¹¹⁶ Confirmed by Sr Loyola in a personal communication, June 2007.

¹¹⁷ The *taleo* were the south-easterly winds (approx. Easter to October) and the *rai* were the westerly monsoon winds (approx. October to Easter), as informed by Graham Lynch on Kairiru.

¹¹⁸ Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*, 82. Graham Lynch took on the duties of full-time station manager, captain of the boat, master of maintaining the hydro-plant, electrician and general repair man. His expertise in maintaining the self-sufficiency of the mission by managing livestock, such as cows, pigs and chickens, collecting the eggs and catching fish, and his generosity to the sisters, became legendary.

part of the Maprik deanery and a centre for several remote mission stations beyond – Aresili (40 kilometres) Tau (20 kilometres), Yassip (16 kilometres) and Bongos (40 kilometres).¹¹⁹

The first community consisted of two: Anne O'Regan and Nell Callaghan (former secondary teachers at Yarapos and Kairiru respectively). As with most other foundations, the convent building was not ready in time, and the sisters began in a small school office at Tau.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the wet season had set in, making the remote roads impassable.¹²¹ With the convent completed at last, two lay missionary nurses, Adele Cottrell-Dormer and Dorothy Sheehan, who were living in Yassip, a station run by Fr Peter O'Reilly SVD, Adele's second cousin, joined the sisters at Drekikir, according to plan.¹²² They managed health care at the time, including patrols to the outstations.

The two sisters began pastoral work, finding their way and adapting to the needs of the different parts of the parish. Though, in Ann O'Regan's words, their task was 'a bit fuzzy and not clearly defined', they began by carrying out a needs analysis throughout the parish, training and working alongside prayer leaders and church leaders, and seeking ways to improve the lives of the women. Although they had hardly any resources, they equipped themselves with a few hand sewing machines, thread and laplap¹²³ and resolutely went out to the village women offering lessons in sewing, bread-making in drum ovens and Bible sharing. When any woman was able to sew certain garments and service a machine she earned possession of that machine and could begin to use it in the village for her livelihood.¹²⁴

Once at the permanent base of Drekikir, the two sisters were able to be more dedicated to the growth of lay participation in the Church with prayer and church leaders and other forms of parish development. In accordance with the diocesan vision and working with the priests, they started with ideals of the pastoral programs adopted by the diocese.¹²⁵ They were keen to get the people to express their own goals for themselves, but this was not easy at first because they were more used to being told, than being asked their own thoughts! However, a level of understanding, trust and influence grew as the sisters carried out their demanding tasks, with much work carried out for hours on foot and with few resources.

¹¹⁹ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Drekikir.

¹²⁰ The lay missionary builder, Basil Doherty, was also involved in construction of the Kaindi Church, the Yarapos teachers' houses and Kunjingini convent renovations.

¹²¹ The wet season lasted approximately from November to May.

¹²² The details of the arrangements and beginnings were provided by Sr Ann O'Regan.

¹²³ Lengths of material for sewing.

¹²⁴ As time went on, representatives of the East Sepik Council of Women visited Drekikir and were impressed with what was being done. They valued the sisters' support of the women in these remote areas and donated five sewing machines.

¹²⁵ At first 'The Movement for a Better World' and later the 'New Image of the Parish' (NIP), which began with Christian Community Retreats being conducted in every village in every parish.

Sister nurse, Jacinta Wiedman, succeeded Nell Callaghan in the second year. The sisters who followed in pastoral were Misericordia Carter and Ann Hook, followed by a Papua New Guinean sister, Veronica Lokalyo. Petronia Gawi was the first indigenous Sister of Mercy to teach in the primary school.

Reflective Observations: Sisters in the Wewak Diocese (1970 – 81): Diverse, flexible and collaborative missionaries

During this era of rapid social and political change the Sisters of Mercy in the Wewak diocese showed a diversity, flexibility and collaboration in new ministries and individual and communal commitment to the vision of Church and nation. It was a time of implementing the revised theology of Vatican II within the context of consolidating the indigenous church.¹²⁶ The sisters in senior management in education and health worked towards localisation - the empowerment of indigenous people through preparation for new roles of responsibility. Localisation was accomplished in five primary Catholic schools. The attendance, retention and participation of girls and young women improved consistently, due, in no small part, to the sisters' influence in earning the trust of the parents and clan leaders.

The sisters remained faithful to the ministries already undertaken, such as Kunjingini, Yarapos and Kaindi, and engaged in new ministries at St John's Seminary, Kairiru, and the remote rural parish of Dreikir. They exhibited their agency in the planning and execution of these changes, supported by their Australian Mercy Leaders in consultation with the Bishop.

The Catholic institutions, that were formerly free to choose their students to maintain their religious identity, became subject to a system of selections across religious, geographical, ethnic, and gender lines, determined at national or provincial levels. This initially caused some degree of anxiety among the sisters and teachers who felt a strong commitment to maintain the Catholic ethos. However, the reality of many Catholic students being selected for non-Catholic institutions was a firm reminder that the country was in a new social and ethnic mix on the path to social and national integration.¹²⁷ The sisters shared in this reality by ensuring that the Religious Education programs were upheld in the schools and institutions, and continued the practice of teaching Religious Education in the administration high schools.¹²⁸

In light of the establishment of the local church, the sisters were involved in the formation, education and training of the indigenous Rosary Sisters and the seminarians on Kairiru. Through a process of

¹²⁶ As had been outlined in the previously mentioned encyclicals and *Ad Gentes*.

¹²⁷ Cf. Vicar Administrator's official letter, referred to earlier in this part.

¹²⁸ Cf. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, using a contemporary ecumenical approach.

updating, relevant modifications of the religious habit were negotiated with major leaders in Australia.

Compared to the other Mercy foundations, the number of Australian Mercy sisters was greatest in the Wewak diocese, and when some sisters returned to Australia after localisation of primary schools, their absence was keenly felt. However, they formed part of a significant reverse missionary influence on the Australian Church, which will be briefly discussed in Chapter Five.¹²⁹ The sisters who chose to remain after Independence maintained a remarkable overview and continuity of missionary vision through their involvement within the educational and health structures.¹³⁰

Part 3. In the Mount Hagen Diocese (1970–1981)

This section continues the development of the foundations made by the North Sydney Congregation of the Australian Federation of the Sisters of Mercy at Pumakos and Holy Trinity Teachers College Mount Hagen.

Section 1. Pumakos mission station – continuity and response to new ministries

The school at Pumakos was managed by the sisters for seven years, during which time they worked assiduously for the Christian education of the students and for the goal of localisation. At first, nearly all the students were male, but with the sisters' encouragement the number and retention rates of female students increased.

Localisation of the primary school and continuing ministry with Catholic teachers

Pumakos did not remain as a regional school for long. As the schools in the other parts of the Enga District developed they retained their own students, diminishing the concentration of students on Pumakos. Some of the sisters managing the school and implementing measures towards localisation were Mary Francis Harcombe, Helen McDonell, Margaret Shakeshaft, Anthony Mary (Patricia) Crowe, Mary Matthew (Kathleen) Robertson, Jennifer Bailey and Gabrielle (Magdalen) Flood.

¹²⁹ Some examples are the work of sisters for donations, giving mission presentations, and generally exuding their compassion and appreciation of the peoples of Papua New Guinea in their relationships.

¹³⁰ As mentioned, these included Catholic education and formation of teachers in the diocese, curriculum writing in religious education, the cluster system of supervision, management of diocesan and government health institutions, liturgical publications and research articles on cultural and theological issues. The sisters in education were seriously engaged in writing and adapting curricula for their diverse religious, secular and pastoral programs, including high school subjects and teacher education courses.

The sisters' task of localisation was achieved soon after the introduction of the National Teaching Service in 1971 and the sisters left the school at the end of 1972. However, they maintained their commitment to the people at the wider level of primary education, health and the new ministry of the training of catechists.

During this transition, Helen McDonell was employed by the Public Service as Inspector for three years (1971-1973) to help the teachers of all the schools of the Administration, Catholic, Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventist agencies to work together in the new system. This ministry involved travelling vast distances on dangerous roads and, with no fixed abode, being accommodated in teachers' houses in remote rural places. In 1975 Helen agreed to be Catholic Education Secretary for Enga. Once again, she bravely and energetically confronted the challenge of mountain roads and a degree of homelessness as she sought accommodation with the teachers' families in the near and far locations of Catholic schools. It was several years before she was given a small dwelling as a base in the Catholic mission centre at Sangarap.

Mercy Sisters on the staff of the Catechist Training Centre at Pumakos - A work of collaboration

With the transition to localisation of primary education behind them, the sisters were able to respond to emerging needs at Pumakos. The diocesan catechist training centre was to be moved from Kepelam to Pumakos! As the Parish Priest, Fr Tony Krol and the Director, Fr Ben Kuhnert SVD, were on leave, the task of organising the building of nine dormitories (carried out by Fidelis Pyangatae) fell on the competent shoulders of Sr Clare. That same year, 1974, Jennifer Bailey was asked by Fr Ben to join the Catechist Training Centre (KTC) as a staff member.

To understand the climate in which a decision to have a female staff member in such a male enterprise was made and approved, one may refer to the vision of the local Church as expressed by a Highlands Bishop, Fermin Schmidt OFM (Cap) of Mendi Diocese, in 1975.

The Catholic Church is still in the process of being born as a local Church. At this stage we have only a handful of local clergy and only three nationals as bishops. It is the responsibility of the bishops of the country to establish the local Church in its entirety. This can be done only with the assistance of missionaries, and other resources from our parent Churches.

... The shortage of priests has compelled the bishops to make extreme use of the more highly trained catechists to actively be in charge of parishes. Many catechists (or evangelists) provide the services of which they are capable. As extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, they conduct Sunday (Communion) services, including instructions, generally modelled on the Mass. This development because of the shortage of priests has been a good thing, and it will be continued, since we know we will never have an

adequate number of priests. But there is a point when the shortage of priests brings the efficiency of a mission below the zero point. We are approaching that in many areas: *catechist training centres could be given stability and status by the presence of religious sisters.*¹³¹

Although there was limited funding, the centre expanded with increased numbers of trainee catechists from Enga, Western Highlands, Simbu and the Eastern Highlands.¹³² A director's house, staff housing and classrooms formed the complex. The catechists and their wives grew garden food for themselves and their families. The basic courses of the two-year program were conducted by Fr Ben Kuhnert SVD, Jennifer Bailey and Hans Gertringer, an Austrian volunteer.¹³³ An extra classroom was transported from the school compound for women's special courses in literacy, health, hygiene and domestic skills. Janet Connellan worked for a short time in 1977 as a staff member, while also taking on informal pastoral ministry, with a focus on being a listening presence to the people.

Continuing health needs at Pumakos: extending and adapting services and cultural implications

For twenty years Clare Gilchrist was in charge of health care at Pumakos, serving as the church's representative on the Catholic Health Board and on the Provincial Government Health Board. Unfortunately, when the Provincial Government was suspended, accused of alleged maladministration in the 1980s, the churches were deprived of their united voice. However, the various church health bodies in the region worked well together as nearly all the staff were mission trained. Eventually, the Mater Hospital at Pumakos, which started humbly as a bush structure, grew in size and number of indigenous staff and patients. The government recognised it as the Health Centre for the district. There were two 15-bed wards, a 10-bed obstetric ward and general wards of 50 beds. Clare summarised her demanding work schedule (approximately 1980):¹³⁴

Now I see an average of 100 patients a day, and I go to two outstations each week. Since September, 1966, I've been keeping good records and since that time I've seen 8,787 patients.

As Clare conducted Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinics in the different clan areas throughout the Tsak Valley, she saw some devastating cultural effects on women. There was a strong tradition of preference for sons, and this could have very serious consequences on the health, and sometimes the life, of the women who bore only daughters; it could also severely threaten the bond of Christian

¹³¹ Writer's emphasis.

¹³² Mihalik, *Readings in PNG Mission History*, 140.

¹³³ Old and New Testament, liturgy, doctrine, ecumenism, PNG history, geography, sociology, problems of economics, politics and Independence, language issues in Enga and *Tok Pisin*. The Austrian volunteers played an important part in the training of the catechists and their wives.

¹³⁴ From a report (7-10-1967) written by Sr Clare Gilchrist, kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.

marriage. In light of this, Clare introduced the Natural Planning Method of birth control (known as the Billings Method), which she found resonated well with the women. She also tried to counteract the very poor educational opportunities available to girls and their high drop-out rates from school by giving practical lessons in nutrition and cooking. She formed nine women's clubs for this purpose, and selected some of the women to do further courses in soil and garden management, conducted by a graduate of the Engan Agricultural Centre. Upon completion of their courses, these village women accompanied Clare on her MCH patrols, and if there was any mother in need, such as one trying to cope with newly-born twins, they would give her individual help at home. In introducing these practices, Clare involved her helpers in supporting women in their valued domestic roles in traditional society.¹³⁵

In the meantime, on the other side of the range, the inter-diocesan Catholic Teachers College with its small, but talented and energetic band of Sisters of Mercy, was entering its third year.

Section 2. Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen (1970-1981)¹³⁶

The nationalisation of the teaching service had implications for Catholic education, as previously discussed in relation to St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi. Some common challenges facing the two colleges were maintaining a Catholic identity while including students from other Christian denominations and working towards gender equality through improving female selection and retention rates. To maintain high academic and professional standards the sisters adapted and compiled relevant curriculum materials, consciously striving towards empowerment of young professional staff through localisation and continuing their commitment to the welfare of the young women students.

Sisters of Mercy: Responsibilities and collaboration in teacher education

Selection of male and female staff from other Highlands dioceses was the responsibility of the bishops. Valda Finlay from Simbu was recommended to succeed Marie Dagg as a representative of the Goroka Diocese. Helen McDonell from Pumakos performed a vital role of in-service of Teachers of the Highlands areas. Other North Sydney sisters on the staff were Margaret Shakeshaft, Francis Harcombe, Josephine Byrnes, Helena Scoins and Josette McDonell. Tending the sick in the clinic, Gaudiose van der Linden SSps – fondly known as Sr Gaudi - was renowned for her tireless and cheerful nursing attention to staff and students.

¹³⁵ The practice continued for about seven years until an outbreak of serious tribal fighting prevented the women from travelling freely – an account of which follows later in this section.

¹³⁶ In contextualising the involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in teacher education in the Mount Hagen Diocese, the reader is referred to the chapter introduction and the account of the beginnings described in the previous chapter.

The sisters worked under various expatriate and national principals. After Peter Meere, these included Jim Smyth, Fr Paul McVinney SVD, Paul Hukahu (former seminarian from St John's Kairiru), Brother Edward Becker De La Salle, Brother Peter Gilfedder De La Salle, Joseph Waka and Kubod Laien. Marea (Verona) Roberts performed an important role as assistant registrar in 1974. The Principals were assisted by the Deputy Principals, such as the Sisters of Mercy, Cecily Geary, Joseph Wightley and Agnes Murphy. The sisters worked in collaboration with Divine Word Chaplains Frs Basil Aerni, Peter Sylvester, Garry Roche and Don Grant. The role of Fr Gerald Theis SVD, as Chair of the Board and Vicar General, was very significant.

The management of such a large college depended upon effective leadership and support – not only in the academic areas but also in administration and welfare of students. The organisation and supervision of community service through the care and maintenance of the grounds was one in which the sisters and brothers were engaged.

Sisters' flexibility in the process of empowerment of national male and female staff

Sisters of Mercy at Holy Trinity Teachers College, like those at St Benedict's Kaindi, were involved as department heads in the academic fields and as the number of national staff increased, they became more actively involved in localisation policies and implementation. The process was a rigorous one in which national staff would test their capability at a particular promotional level, supported by the sisters who had previously held the position and had assisted in their training. As an example, Joseph Wightley assisted Arnold Koim from Mount Hagen in his role as 'Associate Deputy'. Sometimes the person concerned received a promotion at another teacher education institution, or was not deemed ready to assume responsibility at a higher level. The sisters found themselves moving in and out of positions of responsibility. They had localisation of the institution at heart and keenly felt the professional 'ups and downs' of people with whom they worked closely over a number of years. Sisters particularly active in this localisation process were Margaret Shakeshaft, Josephine Byrnes, Valda Finlay, Helena Scoins, Ellen Dunn, Pauline Masters, Carmel Carroll, Helen White and Carmel Martin.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Teacher education personnel of the National Department of Education, including Pamela Quartermaine, frequented the College in their advisory capacity.

Holy Trinity Teachers College Demonstration School

The demonstration school formed a vital complementary link with the Catholic teachers college and required complex responsibilities.¹³⁸ Pumakos pioneer, Margaret Shakeshaft, performed the duties of Head Teacher from the beginning in 1968 to the localisation of the school in 1973.¹³⁹ When Margaret went to the Philippines to complete the East Asian Pastoral Institute Program in Theological Studies, Kathleen (Matthew) Robertson stepped in as Head Teacher and Jennifer Bailey moved from Pumakos to teach the primary final class, Grade Six.

Policies were introduced to encourage the local communities to claim ownership and responsibility for the primary (re-named 'community') schools and Kathleen Robertson energetically and creatively pursued this goal.¹⁴⁰ Kathleen continued to promote these policies in her next appointment as Inspector for the Provincial Government, working, as Helen McDonell did before her, under contract with the Public Service.

College Chapel and Convent Centre for hospitality

The college chapel held a significant place in the community life of staff and students. Daily Eucharistic celebrations were led by the various chaplains with lively participation from students and inspiring liturgical music. This tradition was first established by Marie Dagg, followed by Helena Scoins and the Welsh musician Br Ambrose Gwynne De La Salle. Spectacular and moving ceremonies were designed by the students, guided by their Religious Education lecturers. Among these were Josephine Byrnes RSM, Sr Raphaela SSps, Carmel Martin RSM and Sr Catherine SSps. The SVD chaplains who lived on campus were available for counselling and spiritual guidance.

The original large convent was a regional house of the Sisters of Mercy and a centre for hospitality. The sisters from Enga came periodically for supplies, for health reasons, or travel to and from Hagen airport. Sisters from the Simbu and Goroka found it a place of welcome. Members of other religious women's institutes, as students or serving on the staff, also made it their home. It was a transit house for the Franciscan sisters and other missionaries en route to Mendi in the Southern Highlands.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Teaching, religious education, relevance of the curriculum, encouragement of girls' educational opportunities, as well as their contribution to teacher education and promoting the government's localisation policies.

¹³⁹ During this time the National System of Education was introduced (1971) and policies of localisation and 'relevant curriculum' were initiated.

¹⁴⁰ To promote an understanding of new directions in education, Kathleen organised weekly visits of teachers and students to offer their services to the village communities. This would take the form of assistance with coffee picking, weaving of *pitpit* (small bamboo) walls, or similar community tasks and an opportunity to exchange ideas.

¹⁴¹ As well as being the centre of the Western Highlands Province, Mount Hagen was at the crossroads of several Provinces – Goroka-Simbu (also Madang and Lae), Enga and Southern Highlands.

The need for domestic help soon became evident. In the second year, Mother Francis Harcombe, the generous and gracious founder of the North Sydney group to Pumakos, was appointed for ministry in music and hospitality. Suitable young women were recruited to be trained in domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, and offering hospitality. Within a short time, a firm bond of loyalty and friendship developed as the young women worked closely with the sisters and carried out their duties capably and reliably. Visitors soon came to appreciate the welcome offered by these cheerful, caring and dedicated young women.

Later, Monica Raper was chosen for the very busy ministry of hospitality. In addition, Monica conducted religious education beyond the campus in the Administration Schools in the town – the Mount Hagen, Tarengau and International Primary Schools, and the Hagen Park High School. Pioneer sisters involved in weekly religious education ministries were Margaret Shakeshaft and Francis Harcombe.

A significant national event in 1977 hosted by the sisters of Holy Trinity was the Union of Women Religious Congress. Findings of a nationwide research study into future directions in ministry of religious women in the post-Independence era, which had been carried out by the President, Mary Petrosky FMM, were presented.¹⁴² In addition, Teresa Flaherty, who had been requested by Mary to analyse the data, presented the findings on pastoral ministry, findings which recommended future training and concerted involvement of sisters in pastoral work.¹⁴³ The report proved to be a catalyst for women religious, not only in encouraging sisters by legitimising their work and supporting training programs at Xavier Institute, but also by challenging the opposition of some of the clergy who doubted the sisters' potential and credibility in this new area.

Holy Trinity Convent Study Centre for young women interested in religious life

Significant initiatives in support of young women interested in religious life were implemented at the convent towards the end of the decade. When the North Sydney Mercy Sisters had been working in the Highlands for about fifteen years, some young women expressed their interest in religious life as Sisters of Mercy. Up to this time, the sisters had directed any potential candidates to the indigenous religious congregations, but now that these were firmly established, Mother Philomena approached Archbishop Bernarding, seeking his consent to accept young women expressing an interest in the

¹⁴² Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

¹⁴³ Teresa Flaherty, RSM, 'Challenge at the Crossroads: National Survey: Pastoral Work of Expatriate Sisters-in Pastoral Ministry', in *Catalyst, Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia*, Melanesian Institute, 7. 4, 1977.

It is of note that the Sisters of Mercy had embarked on pastoral work in the Simbu (RoseMary Baker) Pumakos (Janet Connellan) and at Negrie (Leonie Williams) before this time.

Mercy way of religious life. With his positive response, she duly appointed one of the original foursome, Helen McDonell, as Vocations Director. Equipped with a four-wheel drive vehicle and travel budget, Helen visited interested young women in their home villages. She soon found that there was an urgent need to raise their educational qualifications to secondary level. With the willing consent of the De La Salle Principal, promising young Highlands women, selected by Helen and accommodated in the women students' dormitory, received tuition for their correspondence lessons.¹⁴⁴ The young women also acquired some basic housekeeping and hospitality skills by managing the convent dining room and offering a welcome hot coffee to the staff or missionaries on their weekly supply visits to the commercial centre of Mount Hagen.

When Helen was requested to leave her beloved Highlands to teach at the seminary at Kairiru, Sr Eamon Brennan from Kondiu continued with the correspondence tuition (CODE) at Holy Trinity. Two of the early students who continued secondary studies in this way were later to become Sisters of Mercy - Veronica Lokalyo and Sophie Samiak.

Essential to the missionary dreams and outcomes of the sisters was the continuous support of the church, including the church in Australia.¹⁴⁵ This support came in the form of new recruits of sisters and Australian lay missionaries from PALMS¹⁴⁶ and also through the financial and material contributions of those making sacrifices on behalf of the missions at home. As well as the school mission groups and the North Sydney sisters, friends, family, the St Vincent de Paul, and others who might have only heard of the sisters' needs in the mission, continued their valuable support. This support grew as sisters from other dioceses joined the Holy Trinity community and benefactors from their dioceses rallied to support the mission financially, materially and spiritually.

Reflective Observations: The Sisters of Mercy in the Mount Hagen Diocese – resourceful, flexible and collaborative ministries, including support of indigenous vocations

With the successful localisation of the primary school education the sisters continued to show their agency through their adaptability and flexibility as they maintained continuous links with the people in the Tsak Valley and Mount Hagen. Although, compared to that of the Wewak diocese, this was numerically on a smaller scale regarding personnel, it included similar ministries in Catholic education and formation of teachers and management of health care. Of note are the diverse educational works of Helen McDonell, as Inspector and Advisor to teachers in the new national

¹⁴⁴ College of Distance Education – CODE.

¹⁴⁵ Generous support came from the Church in Europe and America.

¹⁴⁶ The Australian Catholic Lay Missionary organisation.

system and Catholic Education Secretary for Enga, and of Jennifer Bailey in the formation of catechists at the Catechist Training Centre at Pumakos.

At Holy Trinity Teachers College, with the selection of students across religious, geographical, ethnic and gender lines being determined at national or provincial levels, a constant emphasis was placed on Religious Education programs with an orientation towards ecumenical knowledge and understanding within the College and in the Mount Hagen primary schools. The sisters at Holy Trinity also conducted religious education beyond the campus in the primary and secondary Administration Schools in the town. With the approval of the De La Salle Administration, the sisters made arrangements to improve the educational level of young Highlands women interested in religious life.

Thus, the sisters from North Sydney remained committed to the Archdiocese of Mount Hagen, including the western district of Enga, which was to become a separate diocese (Diocese of Wabag) in 1982.

Part 4. The Australian Conference of the Sisters of Mercy to Aitape (1977-1992)¹⁴⁷

In 1977 Bishop William Rowell OFM in the Franciscan Diocese of Aitape faced an impending crisis - his Catholic hospital at Raihu was threatened with closure as the current community of English sisters, who maintained the 100-bed hospital and managed the diocesan health services, was being withdrawn.¹⁴⁸ At the time the Australian Mercy National Assembly was being held he made an urgent plea for help to Valda Ward.¹⁴⁹

The National Council saw the request as an opportunity to respond to a desperate need and also as a sign of what could be done together that could not be done as separate units. Having both the Union and Federation groups working together was seen as strengthening the newly found Conference. Without the luxury of long-term preparation and planning, as the FMDM Sisters were to leave within two months, almost immediately volunteers were offered: Margaret Ryan from Melbourne, Vicki

¹⁴⁷ Aitape was situated on the north-west coast where the pioneer members of the Society of the Divine Word had first arrived.

¹⁴⁸ At an earlier Chapter of their institute, in the face of diminishing numbers worldwide, the FMDM Sisters [Franciscan Sisters of the Divine Motherhood] from England, were recalled to rationalise the missionary foundations elsewhere.

¹⁴⁹ This development was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The request was based on some evidence. Sr Jacinta Wiedman, after twelve challenging years in the swamp lands of Torembi, moved to the mountainous terrain of Ningil in the Aitape Diocese. She responded to a request from Fr Tim Elliott OFM, to take charge of the Ningil health services where travel to the outstation clinics was on horseback. In addition to Jacinta's example, Bishop Rowell was also convinced that the Sisters of Mercy 'never refuse any need'.

Dean from Goulburn, Therese Quinlivan from Perth and Margaret Moran, a lay missionary nurse¹⁵⁰ from Ballarat. These were the pioneers of a ‘holding operation’, which was to last for fifteen years!

Temporary Task Force to the Raihu Hospital in Aitape Diocese

On 2 November 1977 the three Sisters of Mercy and the lay missionary landed in a small plane on a stretch of jungle clearing, which was the Aitape airstrip, on the north coast between Wewak and the West Papuan border. They were young, highly trained and experienced nurses, familiar with Australian nursing conditions. Though strangers to one another, they were bonded by a mission to manage the diocesan Raihu Health Centre for twelve months.¹⁵¹ The FMDM Sisters stayed on for about two weeks to help the Mercy Sisters, taking their departure on 21 November, leaving the convent and hospital stocked with all that was required, and carrying the smallest of cases with their personal belongings. The four Australian nurses were on their own!

Valda Ward, who had accompanied the small band, stayed with them in their settling in period. Margaret Moran, who had been accommodated at the Santa Anna Mission Headquarters in Aitape because of the strict rules of enclosure of the FMDMs, now came to live with the sisters. Their convent was within the hospital compound, which consisted of several buildings, fanning out from the chapel, the heart of the complex.¹⁵²

Domestic and professional arrangements were soon put in place: Margaret Ryan was appointed Matron of the hospital and responsible for nurse education. Therese Quinlivan was named Leader, contact person with the Bishop and the one responsible for the Maternal and Child Care clinics (MCH) and bush patrols. Vicki Dean was in charge of the men’s ward, tuberculosis and leprosy sections, and assistant in the operating theatre, while Margaret Moran took charge of the children’s ward, women’s ward and maternity sections and supervised the outpatients department. She also gave the obstetrics lectures in the School of Nursing.

The nursing community found themselves supported by Bishop William Rowell OFM and his successor, Brian Barnes OFM, and the Franciscan missionaries of the diocese – priests, brothers, sisters and lay workers. The congregations of religious women in the diocese – the Presentation Sisters, Franciscan Missionary Sisters, Poor Clare Sisters, Handmaids of the Lord, Josephite Sisters and the Mercy Sisters – formed part of the diocesan family. Like the other missionaries, the Sisters

¹⁵⁰ The future hope of the services of an Australian doctor was not realised.

¹⁵¹ Their initial induction to tropical nursing conditions was an informed visit to a hospital arranged with the OLSH Sisters in Port Moresby and with Sr Margaret Wilson at Mount Hagen.

¹⁵² An aerial photo taken in the mid-1980s after considerable building development, shows the fan shaped hospital compound bordered by the Raihu River with the Torricelli Mountains in the background. The hospital was approximately four kilometres from Aitape town.

of Mercy were welcomed into the home of prominent townspeople and parishioners, Rob and Margaret Parer. In this very demanding nursing ministry, many lasting friendships were made, particularly among those – both overseas and national – who worked side-by-side bringing Christ's healing touch to relieve the suffering of others.

From the beginning the contingent of four committed themselves to health care in the hospital and nurse training as their immediate priority. They were constant in their efforts to provide adequate treatment and were able to save the lives of many suffering from tropical illnesses, such as malaria, malnutrition, tuberculosis, deadly snake bites and accidents. Infant mortality was high and maternal deaths were common. There were some occasions where a patient hovered between life and death and the nurses, in new and strange circumstances, all rallied round supporting each other as they provided specialised nursing care, with the anxious family positioned nearby. Faced with seemingly traumatic incidents, the sisters did not shrink in fear. Instead, they stood as one, determined to give of their best.

Within the context of the Diocesan Health Services

The Catholic Diocese of Aitape had a contract with the PNG Government to administer and staff the Raihu Health Centre and the district health program and the Sisters of Mercy were under contract with the diocese for this purpose. The aims taken from the medical policy of the diocese, written in 1984, but practised within the diocese long before this, show the guidelines within which the sisters worked, and which they themselves helped to develop.¹⁵³

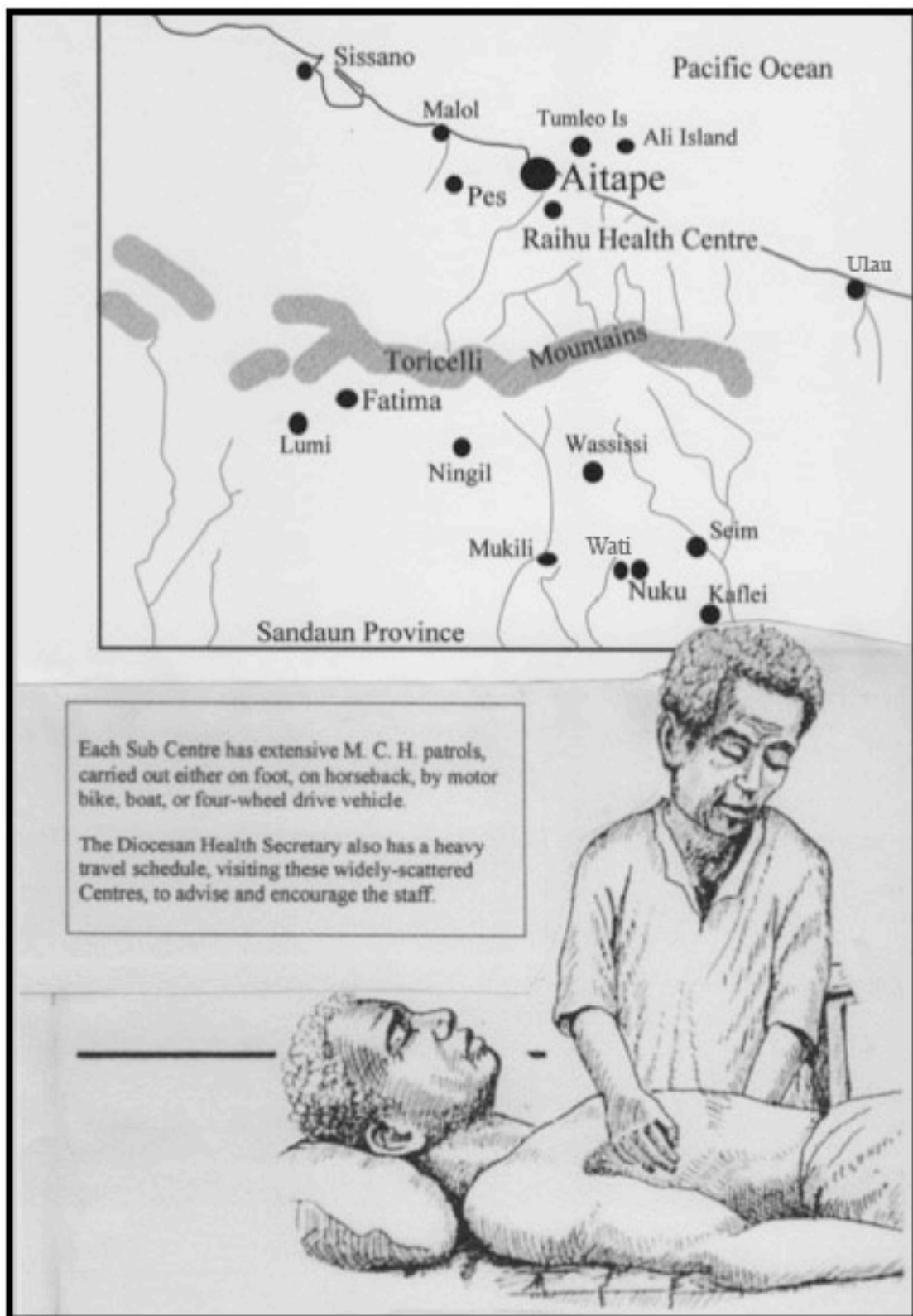
- To show the love of Christ in the healing ministry, by administering safe and efficient medical care and health education.
- To provide training and develop skills for health workers within the Diocesan Health Services.
- To provide health services within the framework of Provincial and National Health Policies.
- That Ministers of Religion be considered as members of the health team, and therefore given every help in ministering to the welfare of the patient.

The following map of the Diocese of Aitape Health Services is included in the above mentioned document, and illustrates the difficult terrain in which the Franciscan missionaries and the Sisters of Mercy in this study, worked.

¹⁵³ Taken from a document kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney.

Map 6

Catholic Health Services in Aitape Diocese



The Mercy missionary nurses sought to understand the culture and the peoples' natural remedies so that they could use this knowledge in their nursing. A sharing of medical and cultural matters was a two-way process among staff and students. To get to know the different people and villages, the sisters willingly took their turn participating in the Maternal and Child Clinics bush patrols with the Health Secretary, Br Xavier Nicholson OFM. On these occasions they learnt much about the ordinary daily cultural practices and natural bush remedies. In addition, they adopted the practice of an annual orientation with new students who came from the far corners of the diocese, questioning them about the time-tested natural herbs and remedies used by their people. This was valuable knowledge for their nursing teaching and practice.

The sheer work load of the pioneer group in the trying tropical conditions was almost beyond belief. They were without a medical doctor for the first eight months and this meant the huge responsibility of diagnosing and treating patients was placed on their shoulders. With the arrival of Dr Brady and the gentle insistence of the more experienced missionaries, the courageous pioneers began to realise that they could not relieve every disease or save every life. Dr Brady found that the general condition of the people, particularly the women and children who suffered from respiratory weakness and malnutrition, meant they were very vulnerable when struck down with other illnesses. In time, the sisters set their priorities to include health education and the training of national staff, along with their regular hospital care. It was a brave commitment. Yet, while attempting to attend to the needs of others, the pioneers themselves, and the other sisters after them, like their patients, became victims of tropical illnesses, particularly dengue fever and malaria. Working with physical weakness and constant tiredness became a fact of life.

There were crises caused by the forces of nature. When the Raihu River overflowed and flooded into the hospital (which was prone to happen before new buildings were eventually built higher above the ground), the sisters were faced with having to evacuate all the patients and settle them on higher ground on the mission property. After a few days the waters in the wards subsided and the patients were brought back when normal duties resumed. The students of St Ignatius High School, with Mr Frank Evans, as Headmaster, helped in the tedious and unpleasant clearing up process.

When making road journeys to and from Wewak for supplies or transporting nurses and students, many were the times the sisters faced the dangers of flooded rivers or being stranded by sudden flash flooding between the several streams, which became treacherous with overnight rains in the mountains.¹⁵⁴ Although some of the major rivers were eventually bridged, the journeys were always fraught with difficulties, mostly by the prospect of flooding, but in later years also the threat of *raskol* (criminal) attacks, as traditional disciplines in tribal life broke down with a rapidly changing society.

¹⁵⁴ Sr Francois Wridgway reported that over 200 of these flooding creeks have actually been counted through the laborious process of navigating the crossings! (Adelaide, September 2006).

Raihu Hospital was often short of medical supplies. The sisters depended on donations so they could buy essential supplies locally. Funds were also needed to upgrade the hospital buildings and to pay wages. For many years the hospital could not afford an emergency vehicle. When there was an acute shortage of staff, Mrs Margaret Parer, who was a qualified nurse, would help at the hospital.

Adapting to emerging needs: wider and deeper perspectives to nurse education and training

It was not long before the sisters adjusted to the reality of a situation that went beyond the confines of the hospital complex. They saw the great need to save lives, not only by the cure, but also by the prevention of illness and disease. They devoted themselves to conducting the Nurse Aid Training Program, and the intensive rounds of Maternal and Child Care Clinics in the bush centres which could take up to three months each time. Seeing from the start the need to upgrade the indigenous male and female staff, the sisters consciously made localisation a priority among themselves and introduced in-service training programs to update and re-educate trained staff members, and to raise the standards, morale and status of the health institution. Within two years, the sisters saw the need and introduced a special course to upgrade enrolled nurses who had been trained in other parts of the country to general nurse level.¹⁵⁵ This post-diploma course was the dream of Margaret Ryan and the first of such courses for the country. Another constructive initiative taken by the first Matron, Margaret Ryan, was to seek scholarships for male trainees, who tended to stay within their own areas, as well as female trainees, who were likely to marry and move outside the diocese.

The post-diploma course was further developed by Catherine Hefferan. In the remoteness of Aitape, and in a time before phones were common in town areas, Catherine constructed the curriculum through writing letters of consultation to the Principals of the Health Training Centres throughout the country. This relationship was continued under the Principalship of Marie Britza and Catherine Harris.

Part of a collaborative team

The professional and cultural adjustments required of the pioneer group and the new recruits from Australia to manage, maintain and develop the health services were enormous. The sisters used their energies and expertise in the day-to-day running of the hospital, but also employed their professional insights by influencing decisions to increase numbers of specialist staff and improve and extend facilities. Over a prolonged period, they worked closely with the tireless and understanding diocesan Health Secretary, Francois Wridgway FMIC, the dedicated and considerate hospital Administrator,

¹⁵⁵ The sisters found the presence of these mature professional women had a great impact on the young trainees whose life experience had not gone beyond the remote Aitape Diocese.

Br Xavier Nicholson OFM, and his long-serving indigenous Deputy, Mr Pius Bobby, the volunteer doctors and registered local and overseas volunteer staff. Br Garry Hill OFM was an energetic and helpful Health Extension Officer in charge of the leprosy and tuberculosis units while also carrying out province-wide patrols. Fr Matthew Darby OFM faithfully provided chaplaincy services.

Based mainly on the major mission stations of the diocese, there were fifteen sub-health centres run by the Franciscans, Presentations and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMIC), with their MCH nurses who operated clinics at the centres and in the remote bush areas. A spirit of close co-operation developed between the managers of these centres and the administration and staff of the Raihu Hospital. This understanding was vital to get the seriously ill patients, who needed urgent medical attention, from these places by air or mission transport to the Raihu Hospital and from there, if necessary, to the better equipped base hospitals at Wewak or Vanimo.

Difficulties and challenges as a Mercy foundation - Melbourne Congregation takes on responsibility for Aitape

One of the difficulties for the foundation was the tenuous nature of the Mercy commitment to Aitape. The arrangement of the twelve months' holding position kept being extended. There seemed to be an expectation among the people that the Mercy Sisters were there indefinitely, and in terms of the Mercy Congregation, the Conference which had authorised their mission to Aitape, had no power once the Conference session had formally closed. The situation the sisters found themselves in had no canonical basis as a foundation, although the sisters held their original bonds, with their rights and responsibilities, in their home congregations. The anomalous situation was brought to a head when the near-death experience of one of the sisters by drowning and her survival were not conveyed promptly to the relevant Australian Leader.¹⁵⁶

As this incident highlighted the fact that the Conference had no canonical authority over the sisters, Gabrielle Jennings, as Leader of the Melbourne Congregation and also secretary to the Conference, took on responsibility for the Aitape foundation. Besides the congregation providing medicines and resources, two Melbourne Sisters of Mercy, Brenda Grant (Director of Nursing, Mercy Private) and Helen Monkivitch (Director of Nursing, Mercy Women's Hospital), came to Aitape to assist with planning and negotiation with the diocese. They made a further commitment for the Melbourne Mercy hospitals to help with staffing. This was a very significant intervention providing stability and continuity for the Mercy services at Aitape - until more unitive structures evolved.

¹⁵⁶ The complex situation was explained to me by Sr Gabrielle Jennings in Melbourne (c. 2005).

Part 5. Towards Consolidation of the Sisters in Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia (1978-81) ¹⁵⁷

Following the proposals of the National Assembly of 1977, the first draft of the new structure devised by the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia was ready for circulation in September 1978. Dorothy Campion, newly-elected Superior General of the Union, Valda Ward, President of the Federation, and Pauline Smith from Parramatta who had replaced Patricia Pak Poy as the Executive Officer of the Conference, were instrumental in this. The two major Leaders of the Conference, Valda Ward (Federation) and Dorothy Campion (Union) presented the details of this proposition for official approval to Rome. Governance, in the Mercy tradition, rather than being highly centralised, as was the case with most religious orders, was to remain with the local congregations, with the role of the Institute Leadership Team being in the nature of animation and guidance.¹⁵⁸ Following due process, the Leaders prepared the final draft for submission, and with minor alterations, the new canonical entity was ratified by the Decree of Establishment of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia, and proclaimed by the Apostolic Delegate on 15 December 1981.¹⁵⁹

United in spirit: moving forward together

These events, unfolding in Australia, were also influenced and, in the eyes of many sisters, precipitated by developments in Papua New Guinea.¹⁶⁰ The complexities of the sisters' diverse ministries were often confusing to the various Australian Leaders, who dearly wanted to respond to the needs of the emerging church of Papua New Guinea. They were thus led towards seeking greater unity within Papua New Guinea as well as in Australia.

The Australian Conference leadership requested Stancia Cawte (former Leader at Yangoru and Congregation Leader of Rockhampton) to come to PNG to explore the wishes of the sisters about forming a united group. In the first half of 1981 she consulted with every sister and found that in general there was a great desire for joining together.¹⁶¹ Furthermore Stancia commented:

The thing that was overwhelming for me, even though I didn't know the individual sisters, I met the same intangible spirit. They had come from all parts of Australia, yet that common spirit was there. I found that quite fascinating.

¹⁵⁷ This continues from 'Towards closer Mercy unification in Australia' at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Fortunately, this was a concept of governance in the Benedictine tradition and in that light was eventually understood.

¹⁵⁹ Kerr, *The Land that I will show you*, 61-62. 'This unification is one adapted to Australian conditions, geographical, cultural and political it is adapted to the needs of the Australian Church, facilitating the effective and appropriate service of local needs, while being flexible enough to embrace a national vision; above all it has grown out of mercy history and is faithful to the charism of the foundress and of the Congregation.'

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 64. There are also many sources of anecdotal evidence to confirm this.

¹⁶¹ Once the fear of losing links with their home congregations was faced and resolutions proposed, the sisters seemed ready to go on.

The Highlands sisters of the Goroka and Mount Hagen Dioceses held a combined meeting towards unification in 1979 attended by two Australian Leaders, Patricia Kerin (North Sydney) and Valda Ward (Ballarat), President of the Conference. At this meeting the sisters emphasised their urgent desire for unity by expressing their willingness to accept a leader from within the large Brisbane Federation group (that had a leading role in the Mercy communities in the Wewak Dioceses) and to make this more emphatic in the hope of hastening the process, they named Cephas Philben as their proposed Leader. Following this, united in common hope and purpose, the sisters organised combined gatherings of Highlands and Coastal sisters to tackle the vital issues of unity and formation.¹⁶²

Meanwhile the canonical status of the Aitape task force was not clearly defined. They formed an inter-congregational group and, as such, did not belong to a canonically constituted congregation;¹⁶³ nor did they have a formal structure within the firmly established Union and Federation groups of the Coast and Highlands.¹⁶⁴ They were advised by Dorothy Campion to explore ways of uniting at the first combined formal Assembly organised in Wewak in 1980. Consequently, after the Aitape sisters had presented their report on their life and ministry it was agreed that they be an official part of the process towards a unifying structure within Papua New Guinea.



1980 Assembly, St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, Wewak

¹⁶² Ibid. 64. 'A major initiative came from the sisters themselves Papua New Guinea was, in one way, the harbinger for union in Australia'.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 74.

¹⁶⁴ As there was no sign of any other religious institute to take on the management of the Raihu Hospital, the holding operation still continued.

In their combined elective National Assembly in July 1981, the sisters founded under Union (Goroka), Federation (Wewak – Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville), and Mount Hagen-Enga – (North Sydney) plus Conference (Aitape), united to form one structure – the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea.¹⁶⁵ Recognition of this new structure within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, which had been approved in principle in January, was validated by a Roman decree in June 1981.¹⁶⁶ The Papua New Guinea proposals were officially accepted when the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, was formally established in December later that year.

The elected Leader of the combined group of sisters at the Assembly at Goroka was Helen O'Brien. The granting of local autonomy meant authority would mainly be exercised by the national Leader, who had the benefit of understanding the context of Papua New Guinea. Helen began the vital task of drawing the bonds of unity together among the previously separate groups and requesting sisters to accept transfer from familiar places for the sake of building up the whole. The Leaders of each region, Margaret Bubb from Goroka, Val Cervetto from Wewak, Clare Gilchrist from Hagen and Julie Anne Ryan from Aitape, formed the membership of the first leadership team.



Leadership Team - Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea 1981
From left: Margaret Bubb, Julianne Ryan, Helen O'Brien, Clare Gilchrist, Val Cervetto

¹⁶⁵ Kerr, *The Land that I will show you*, 75. Stancia Cawte's consultation indicated that the sisters in PNG were envisaging the formation of a local Congregation of Sisters of Mercy, convinced that the local church was better served by a united Mercy presence. Also that unity would give security to the indigenous sisters wanting to join and would allow the total group to achieve greater efficiency in ministry.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 59.

Reflective Observations: Goroka – Simbu, Wewak, Mount Hagen-Enga and Aitape

In their Gospel call to assistance in ‘planting of the church’ the sisters tentatively, but courageously, stepped out in collaboration with the bishops, priests and co-workers, learning from them. Increasingly, they also collaborated with, and learned from the indigenous peoples of the country – the parents and school children, the patients at their hospitals, catechists on the mission stations, colleagues, indigenous sisters, and eventually their ‘graduates’ who became civic leaders in the fields of education, health and pastoral work, in both church and public life. Referring to the mutual exchange of love and friendship and what they had learned from the ‘Melanesian’ culture and ways, sisters who returned to Australia overwhelmingly attested that ‘they received far more than they gave’. At times confrontation of western and indigenous cultures resulted in personal, communal, social and economic costs to the indigenous peoples, and to the Australian sisters as well, although these broader issues cannot be explored within the scope of this thesis.

In an optimistic ‘age of development’ education and health were seen as crucial to the integral human development of the people of the emerging nation.¹⁶⁷ The Sisters of Mercy continued to work at raising the education standards of their schools. There was tremendous joy in seeing their teachers, and in time, their former students, take on new positions of responsibility. On the other hand, there was disappointment as an imposed selective system meant that, on the completion of primary education, only a minority of successful students gained entry to secondary or technical education, or received opportunities for technical training or unskilled employment. The newly established National Department of Education attempted a more integrated approach to curriculum to incorporate ex-students into their village life. The sisters vigorously pursued these initiatives. They also set up vocational training centres and embarked on pastoral ministry in the rural areas.

Sister nurses were engaged in training and promoting indigenous staff as they continued their work as managers and staff in hospitals and in Maternal and Child Health, and serving on Provincial or Diocesan Health boards. The Sisters of Mercy sought to provide stability and continuity in their ministries, and to meet the various requests of the bishops for individual sisters to move into uncertain futures. Sisters’ living arrangements changed as they moved into smaller communities, with other religious congregations, or in ecumenical and secular settings. For some, constant travel was involved, whether by foot, at the steering wheel, by plane, or on the seas. The agency of the

¹⁶⁷ Cf. The political context – education, health and social concerns at the beginning of this chapter. Sir Paulias Matane emphasised Integral Human Development as the underlying post-independence Philosophy of Education.

sisters through their personal and community discernment, negotiation and collaboration, was an essential dynamic.¹⁶⁸

As with their founder, sisters met ‘the Cross’ in the form of sickness, weakness and failures. In the changing social situation, incidents of threats, assaults, injuries, evictions, loss and confrontation occurred on hazardous routes for their ministry or to unite with their sisters in community for religious gatherings and celebrations.¹⁶⁹

The sisters as justice and peace figures

Fr Brian Byrne SVD, one of the early chaplains and a former student of the Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane, reflected on the work of the Sisters of Mercy. He claimed they were prophetic figures in the Church in Australia, setting high standards in health and education for over 100 years until the government ‘caught up’. They continued the same trend in Papua New Guinea.

They were the initial justice and peace figures for a century and I went up to New Guinea and I found exactly the same thing going on. They had pretty rough conditions, as they had in Brisbane. You had people like Margarita Shannon – she stands out as a person who really put education on the map in Wewak – and there were other sisters there too, and then it was the same thing for health care. They set the standard that the government had to live up to, and we haven’t recognised that because we always relegated what they were doing to ‘corporal works of mercy’, that wasn’t the mainstream activity of the Church. The mainstream activity of the Church was forgiveness of sin and reconciliation, which it still is, and which it should be – a sacramental Church – but what the sisters were doing IS part of the mainstream activity of the Church, the proper mission of the Church, and it is only since Vatican II that we’ve done it....Our task is to bring the Kingdom of God on earth – through the corporal works of mercy, through justice and peace in all these areas, not just to find our way into heaven. It’s a whole shift of emphasis, but the Sisters of Mercy were doing it for a hundred years, but it was relegated to secondary status, but it’s not, it’s mainstream and I think it has to be recognised. Victoria Crosses have to be handed out posthumously!

In the coming years the Mercy mission would continue in the original foundations in Goroka, Simbu, Wewak, Mount Hagen, Enga and Aitape and spread across several dioceses – albeit with sharply declining numbers from Australia. A young contingent of Papua New Guinean sisters would gradually help shape the liberating missionary model of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG in the next twenty-five years. These developments are explored in Chapter Five (1982–2006).

¹⁶⁸ The flexibility and adaptability in the various works undertaken to meet emerging needs reflect the pattern set in Ireland by the first Irish Sisters of Mercy.

¹⁶⁹ The issue of violence towards women will be discussed in the following timeframe (1982–2006).

Chapter Five

Within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia the united Sisters of Mercy - Papua New Guinea create new leadership structures, develop policies for Mercy formation of indigenous women and adapt to emerging needs for mission and community in the new nation (1982-2006)

Introduction

This chapter explores the continuing mission of the Australian Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1982-2006) introduced by the contexts as in previous chapters.¹ New structural developments with the main focus on governance and the formation of Melanesian Sisters of Mercy are described. Historical developments in community and mission in the various dioceses during the period follow: ² Part 1. Goroka and Simbu, ³ Part 2. Wewak, Part 3. Mount Hagen and Enga, ⁴ Part 4. Aitape and Part 5. Other dioceses – Port Moresby, Madang, Rabaul, Bougainville and Daru-Kiunga. Part 6 traces significant developments with a particular focus on the growth of Melanesian responsibility and the multi-cultural dimension to Mercy religious life. The chapter concludes with Reflective Observations.

The political context – education, health and social concerns

The years after Independence had witnessed nationalisation and consolidation of indigenous management in, for example, the airline ‘Air Niugini’, banks, hospitals, educational institutions and agricultural and commercial businesses - changes which were evident to residents in their daily lives. Continuing efforts were made to strengthen government at all levels – national, provincial and local.

The optimism of Independence and of the years immediately following, was replaced by the realities of the new nation being a Third World country competing for resources with rich and powerful First World nations. The economic divisions between the rich and the poor countries were increasing, accentuating the indicators of poverty, inequality and injustice. Problems of civil unrest, lawlessness, tribal fighting, *raskolism* - all forms of violence, particularly towards women – escalated.

¹ The general context is given in terms of the political, including education, health and social concerns, and the religious, including church, mission and culture, followed by that of Mercy religious life. Sections, which are subdivisions of the larger components within the narrative, have been introduced where necessary.

² In accordance with the sequence given in the previous chapters.

³ The Diocese of Kundiawa was created in 1982, as previously mentioned.

⁴ The Diocese of Wabag was created in 1982, as previously mentioned.

External and internal reasons for the uneven national development were complex, but I will concentrate on the general educational emphasis of the thesis. The limitations of the formal education system were addressed in the Educational Reform of the nineties and resources were poured into implementing a more inclusive model.⁵ Aspects of this were: encompassing –‘Tok ples’ (vernacular) elementary education; strengthening the identity of primary schools as ‘community’ schools geared towards cultural enrichment and the future rural livelihood for the majority; broadening secondary education through provincial senior secondary schools to supplement the four national high schools; and making a commitment to inclusive education through provision for children with disabilities.⁶

Women, education, poverty and violence

Many sources indicate a link between women’s limited educational opportunity, lack of work opportunities, poor health, poverty and social violence.⁷ With violence increasing, particularly towards women, Papua New Guinea adopted policies and practices promoting consciousness of the role of women in education and development. The goal of *Equal Participation* of men and women had been clearly stated in the National Goals and Directive Principles in the preamble to the Constitution (1976).⁸ Global initiatives like the United Nations declaration of the Decade of Women (1975–1985) were largely supported by women’s groups (local, provincial and national, church and NGO groups) and influenced government policies on behalf of women, such as the PNG Women’s Policy (1990), and PNG’s commitment as a signatory to the Beijing Declaration (1995).⁹

Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. (Beijing Declaration {13} 1995).

In the following paragraphs I draw on a published document by UNICEF exploring the implications for Papua New Guinea.¹⁰ While the problem of gender inequality in development was stated, the positive traditional cultural factors and the contribution of the churches were acknowledged.

⁵ Despite undeniable educational expansion initiated by government planning and investment, formal education had never provided for the needs of all children. This was seen to be divisive favouring an educated elite. It was estimated that 85% of the population continued to live in rural communities and maintain a subsistence based livelihood.

⁶ Br Graeme Leach, founder of Callan Services, was influential and instrumental in the Government’s adoption of these policies.

⁷ Words attributed to Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General ‘There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls’.

⁸ This goal was not seen in isolation from the accompanying ones of Integral Human Development, National Sovereignty and Self-Reliance, Conservation of Natural Resources and Papua New Guinea Ways.

⁹ Similarly, the governments of the Pacific nations recognised the need to address gender inequality in all aspects of development. For example at the Port Vila Declaration of September 1993, as reported in the South Pacific Commission, 1995, 4.

¹⁰ UNICEF, Children, *Women and Families in Papua New Guinea: A Situation Analysis* (Port Moresby: Government of Papua New Guinea and United Nations Children’s Fund, 1996) 149, 150, 42 and 17-18.

Gender equity was far from reality in Papua New Guinea. Women's unequal social, economic and political status was reflected in their poor health and the insufficient opportunities available to them for education, employment and income-earning activities. Women were the primary food producers and relationship between women's workload and their health presented a serious constraint to overall productivity.

Papua New Guinea had its own unique traditional social resources of the family, clan and community. The cultural values of reciprocity and redistribution of resources, and the strength of clan identity and ties to customary land provided a positive foundation for ensuring integral human development. Each new generation continued to find meaning and purpose in social relationships and affiliation with the extended family, clan, and community. One of the nation's major strengths was in its cultural diversity and ability to nurture tolerance and understanding between different cultural groups while supporting common Melanesian values. Current mobility and internal migration reflected the dynamic of inter-dependence between rural and urban communities.

The various religious and church groups had the most established networks of any organisation, both government and non-government, throughout the country. Despite limited government funding, the churches operated a large network of education, health and other social services, and provided up to 90% of health service coverage in some remote rural areas. 'Church activities provide an important means for women to exercise leadership and literacy skills, and enhance their status and influence in the community'.¹¹ Furthermore, women, whose literacy rate at 40% was 10% less than that of men's, benefited from the literacy and non-formal education programs initiated by the churches, the Provincial Governments, and the Non-Government Organisations operating in the country.

The context of church, mission and culture¹²

During this period fundamental change was recognised by the local Church being responsible for evangelisation, evidenced locally by the change from Catholic mission to Catholic Church. Empirical signs of this change were the creation of new dioceses to coincide with the provinces, for example, Catholic Diocese of Wabag (Enga, 1982), and Catholic Diocese of Kundiawa (Simbu, 1982). The Church continued to implement policies towards the indigenisation of parishes and dioceses and the Sisters of Mercy collaborated in this.

¹¹ Ibid. 90.

¹² Sources for this were the Lineamenta: Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Oceania: *Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking his way, telling his truth, living his life* (St Paul's, 1997), and Philip Gibbs SVD ed., *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, 1998–2005. Point Series 30*, (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 2006).

During this period there were local disruptions and catastrophes, such as violence in Enga and Simbu, the Bougainville crisis, West Papuan refugees, the Tsunami in Aitape and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS – needs to which the Sisters of Mercy responded and which are reported later in this chapter.

Enga. In particular, this Highlands province was caught in a turmoil of rapid social change between traditional and modern ways. With the early introduction of steel tools and machinery, the workloads of men and women were destabilised by decreasing those of men and increasing those of women. The encroachment of western ways led to the breakdown in local customs, such as food preparation, husband and wife sharing the one house as a nuclear family, and being separated from their extended family. Social changes were occurring throughout the country, but in Enga they were occurring more rapidly within little more than a generation. The discovery of gold at Porgera in the 1980s brought instant and untold wealth to a few, but led to the social consequences associated with the early days of a gold rush – poverty, homelessness, prostitution, venereal diseases (including HIV/AIDS), neglect of family, highway robbery, gambling, drugs, drunkenness, brutality and urban crime.

Bougainville. The causes of the prolonged political conflict in the North Solomons Province (1987 – 1997), involving the Bougainville Copper mine and landowners, were complex, and do not form an essential component of this thesis. The tragic consequences were of loss of life, division among families, fear of enemy reprisals, deprivation of homes and land, poverty and hunger in the daily existence of the various groups involved. These were the ordinary people, the Bougainville Resistance Army (BRA), the PNG Defence Force, or other militants aligned to resistance or government forces.

The Tsunami of 1998. In 1998, the horrific force of the tsunami struck the coastal villages at Malol west of Aitape, causing death to at least 2,253 people and total destruction of their homes and livelihood.¹³ The Church responded immediately with medical attention and evacuation of the wounded to the nearby mission hospital.¹⁴ It also assisted the government officers in providing food, water, clothing and shelter, and trauma and grief counselling to the survivors.

West Papuan refugees in the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga. The incidence of Melanesian asylum seekers fleeing over the Indonesian border of Irian-Jaya (West Papua) seeking sanctuary in Papua New Guinea territory erupted in 1978. After some negotiations between the two countries and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) about 9,300 refugees remained in camps on the border.¹⁵ This situation was a growing concern of the Catholic Church and the refugees' most vocal advocate was the former Bishop of Vanimo, Bishop Etheridge CP. Bishop Gerard Deschamps SMM of the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga was also supportive.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ According to the report by Franciscan Fr Austen Crapp (later Bishop), former Administrator of Aitape, many of the survivors, suffering loss of limb or other forms of physical disability, also experienced the grief of loss of family and loved ones. The hospital referred to was the Raihu hospital formerly run by the Sisters of Mercy.

¹⁵ Waiko, *A Short History of Papua New Guinea*, 199-200.

The Sisters of Mercy as apostolic women religious

The Vatican II documents, particularly *Perfectae Caritatis*, invited religious to a deepening of their baptismal call and commitment to mission.¹⁶ This was further elucidated in the Synod on Consecrated life Rome 2 – 29 October 1994, and, with the Papua New Guinea context in mind, I draw upon notes taken by Bishop Francesco Sarego, Bishop of Goroka, who was at that time Chair of the PNG Catholic Bishop's Conference.

Consecrated Life is a gift from God to the church calling for a personal response and is a sign of the presence of the Spirit in the church. It is a radical following of Christ expressed by the vows in ecclesial communion and is an integral part of being the church. All the institutes of consecrated life can and must follow their own manner of participating in the missionary action, each according to its own style. They face challenges also in deepening their spirituality and community life and discerning the changing roles of women.

Bishops from all over the world expressed their gratitude for the presence of religious congregations, especially in a mission context of evangelisation – paying attention to the needs of the world today, especially among the poor and underprivileged. Without the help of the religious/missionary/apostolic congregations, of which women religious comprise 72%, the local churches could not be established. According to *Redemptoris Missio*, no believer in Christ, or church institution can withdraw from the supreme duty of the announcement of Christ to all the people. Fundamental challenges in mission lie in the needs of the world for justice and peace.

Women were asking to be recognised, consulted and invited to participate in decision making. They felt the church was male controlled and that it needed to discover its feminine side. In the report the recommendation of Bishop Gerard Deschamps of Daru-Kiunga diocese was quoted: 'Special efforts are recommended to give women religious the place they deserve without discrimination as St Paul says: 'There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28'.¹⁷

For Sisters of Mercy guidelines for the 'participation in the mission of God' were to be found in the Gospel tradition of mercy of Catherine McAuley and were focused on both community and mission.¹⁸ The following map shows the diversity of ministries of the Australian sisters at the beginning of the period under discussion 1982.

¹⁶ As previously mentioned in Chapter Four women religious were challenged, guided by their early traditions, to interpret their call of service to the poor and underprivileged in the contemporary world.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, (United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia: CTS Publications 1991), 21.

¹⁸ 'The God who has called humans to participate in the saving mission of the world is present to all people in Christ, and the love of God and love of neighbour cannot be separated. Christ meets people in each other'.

Map 7



Section 1. Beginnings - Implementing a governance structure to support the Mercy formation of Melanesian Sisters

When the newly-elected National Leader, Helen O'Brien, began the task of governance of the new entity – the Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea - the community comprised forty-four Sisters of Mercy from Australia and three indigenous women preparing to enter Mercy religious life. Seeking to unite the previously separate Australian groups of Union, Federation and Conference into a cohesive whole, Helen requested key people to cross over from the familiarity of their Highlands home to the Coast and vice-versa. She herself led by example as she courageously and conscientiously managed as a somewhat itinerant Leader.¹⁹

¹⁹ Helen's temporary accommodation began at the Melanesian Institute and the Goroka Diocesan Centre, then at the Mercy Convent at Holy Trinity Teachers College. A permanent residence for the Leader was not available until the Mercy Administration Centre was established at McAuley House, Mount Hagen in 1989.

The first leadership team included Helen and the Leaders of the four diocesan regions of Wewak, Goroka, Mount Hagen and Aitape.²⁰ As the newly formed Institute in Australia (ISMA) had no canonical authority in relation to governance of the sisters in Papua New Guinea, different Australian Congregations assumed an authorising role for the sisters in each region (Brisbane for Wewak, Adelaide for Goroka/Kundiawa, North Sydney for Mount Hagen/Wabag and Melbourne for Aitape. In time, the Brisbane Congregation, which had assumed a responsibility for formation, became the single authorising congregation. Helen O'Brien was re-elected for a second term (1985-1987) and team members were elected representatives of the total group instead of from the four regions. As a result of this process, Clare Gilchrist (Vicar), Cephas Philben, Joan MacGinley and Clare Flinn were elected. Subsequent Leaders were: Joan MacGinley, 1988-1992, Maura O'Shaughnessy, 1993-1997, Helen O'Brien, 1998-2002, and Mariska Kua, the first indigenous Leader, 2003-2007.

The first indigenous Sisters of Mercy



First Papua New Guinean Novices 1983

Petronia Gawi (1982) (Centre) Veronica Lokalyo (L) and Theresia Gongi (R) ²¹

After some initial debate, as some Australian Leaders favoured the novitiate being held in Australia, the new Leader, Helen O'Brien, firmly insisted that it should be in Papua New Guinea and not in Australia.²² One of the Kaindi staff buildings was offered as accommodation by the Principal of St

²⁰ Cf. Chapter Four, Part 5.

²¹ Original photo taken as postulants in 1980.

²² This was communicated to me personally in an interview during 2008.

Benedict's, Br Graeme Leach CFC. Thus, the Mercy novitiate opened on Papua New Guinean soil at Wewak in 1982 with Ursula Gilbert, an early missionary to Goroka, (cf. Chapter Three) as Formator and Petronia Gawi as the first novice.²³

The Kaindi location offered the benefit of close proximity to, and contact with, the teachers college community while also being a central point for other Mercy foundations in the diocese. It was also close to the Rosary Sisters' novitiate and, in keeping with the relationship that had developed between the two institutes, the basic formation program was combined. Religious priests of the Divine Word missionaries regularly offered their theological and pastoral expertise.

In 1983 Theresia Gongi and Veronica Lokalyo joined Petronia in formation. Ursula Gilbert requested that the pioneer, Elizabeth Miller, offering the wisdom of her years, be a presence in the novitiate, a practice that was later followed as senior sisters, Cephas Philben, Frances Readman and Nell Callagan formed an integral part of the novitiate community.

In the second year of the program Carmel Bourke, a member of the Institute Team, and renowned for her specialised knowledge of Catherine McAuley and Mercy spirituality, was requested by the leadership teams in Papua New Guinea and Australia to offer her services with the novices and expatriates.²⁴ Her task was to enlighten and animate the sisters on the life and spirit of Catherine McAuley and help them explore the Mercy charism. Carmel's reflections in her report to the Institute in 1985 offered valuable insights into the early 'inside' novitiate story as she saw it.²⁵

Like all their people, they [Petronia, Vero and Theresia] have a great reverence for their ancestors and their folk traditions.....They grew to love the person of Catherine McAuley, and were proud to accept her as their great 'ancestor' and guide on their journey to a Mercy vocation.

There was in the novitiate a spirit of simple hospitality and homely lifestyle, and a genuine desire not to lift those young women out of their natural sphere, or to alienate them from their own people. As they came from different regions in PNG and spoke different tribal languages, they communicated with each other in *Tok Pisin*. This was the language used for most of their lectures (except mine!) and frequently for prayers and hymns in our liturgies. They were encouraged to eat their own familiar food, much of which they grew in our little garden, or bought at local markets. They enjoyed cooking a meal outdoors as they did at home in their villages They all contributed to an atmosphere of ease and naturalness, as their religious training was being made to conform to their own living traditions.

²³ Prior to taking up this appointment and to prepare herself for the task, Ursula visited the indigenous institutes in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

²⁴ Carmel Bourke's notes were later published in *A Woman sings of Mercy*, (Sydney: EJ Dwyer, 1987).

²⁵ Sister Carmel Bourke's report to the Institute, 1985, Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea.

Following in the steps of the first three professed sisters, young women continued to join. Inspired by religious life, as lived by the early sisters and Melanesian pioneers, many came to recognise a deep inner call that resonated with the spirituality of the Australian community of Catherine's Sisters of Mercy. Mariska Kua, Theresia Nakankwien, Angela Kaima, Angeline Singiat, Helen Pili, Sophie Samiak and others were accepted into the novitiate. The weekly routine covered the formation program, spiritual duties and mercy hospitality, maintaining the household, cooking, gardening, driving lessons, typing, correspondence lessons, visiting the sick and those in prison. The novices were also preparing for the call to ministry in the rapidly changing wider society. They faced this reality during the land dispute at Kaindi as they were forced by violent threats and physical abuse to evacuate – the professed sisters to Yarapos and the novices to Kairiru, where they continued their program on the island until peace was restored and it was safe to return.²⁶

As the indigenous Sisters of Mercy progressed in religious life, they became more actively involved in ministry and community, particularly as their numbers increased, and also as the numbers of Australian sisters decreased – topics which are pursued below.

Mercy Administration Centre – McAuley House

In 1989, under the leadership of Joan MacGinley, and guided by Nance Munro's expertise in practical financial matters, the sisters acquired a property for a permanent administration centre in Mount Hagen. Located on the outskirts of the commercial district in the centre of Hagen town, this private residence was large enough, with the added rooms of the 'garden house', to provide accommodation for sisters and occasional visitors as well as the offices required for administration. It was situated conveniently near the market, the hospital, St Paul's Church and Secretarial College, and the town's Highlands Highway bus depot. Hagen itself offered direct flights from the airport at Kagemuga to Wewak (and further on to Aitape), Kundiawa and Goroka (and on to Madang, Lae and the Islands) and was an hour's flying time to Port Moresby. Through the Highlands Highway road travel was accessible to all the Highlands centres and the Coast.

This Administration Centre was the home of the national Leader and the sister appointed to the position of bursar. Commencing with Nance Munro, these included Pat O'Shea, Clare Flinn and Julie Anne Ryan. These sisters conducted in-service in financial matters and records, particularly as training for the Melanesian sisters. Consultations with the financial managers of the Divine Word Missionaries - Fr Kevin Cantwell, Br Damian Lunders and Fr Stephan Gerdes, whose provincial house was in Mount Hagen - were highly valued.

²⁶ These events are related later in this chapter.

The complex was secured by a high fence as a protection against vandalism and the encroaching roadside vendors and, under the sisters' constant care, offered homely aspects: the *haus win*,²⁷ the steep vegetable garden area, the beautifully kept lawn and borders with shrubs of greenery and flowers of vivid, tropical colour, and the gravelled parking area for the four-wheel drive cars which seemed to be kept on the move with routine trips to the town, for ministry, or picking up visitors from the airport.

McAuley House became the central gathering place of the Sisters of Mercy in the Highlands. The Highlands-based sisters came together on special weekends for seminars, workshops, jubilee celebrations and gatherings for young women interested in the Mercy way of life. Visiting sisters from Australia or within the country were welcomed there and at Holy Trinity. McAuley House served the purposes of administration, home for the sisters involved in leadership and ministries, and warm hospitality.

In 1999, largely due to the foresight of Julie Anne Ryan, extensions and renovations were carried out to make the premises more suitable with an office area and archives space. The Archives were conscientiously nurtured by Agnes Murphy, who stored appropriate copies of documents requested from the Australian Mercy Archive centres.²⁸ The extensions also provided room for precious memorabilia tracing the Melanesian sisters who had made their profession.²⁹ Left of the Archives section is the small chapel, with its spiritual and Melanesian atmosphere, with one's attention being drawn to the tabernacle – a small wooden structure crafted by Brother Phil Redding CFC, originally for Clare Flinn's house at Mount Wilhelm.

At times, McAuley was a home to the young sisters discerning their vocation to religious life. For example, Catherine Jambet completed her postulancy within the McAuley community, while other sisters from the novitiate lived there for defined periods to experience the normal routines of community and ministry. Sisters in temporary vows, such as Theresa Boyek (1993) and Schola Fakiwi (1999) lived there while completing their courses at St Paul's Secretarial School. After upsetting incidents and closure of Neragaima (cf. below Part 1), Maryanne Kolkia resided there. When Mariska finished teaching at the United Church School to assume duties as Vicar, Maryanne

²⁷ The *Tok Pisin* term for outside shelter for cooking and socializing.

²⁸ On completion of her term as Melbourne Archivist, Sister Joan Doolan, spent some weeks sorting and cataloguing the precious collection. In her systematic and careful manner, Joan later came back to ensure the task was completed to her satisfaction.

²⁹ E.g. the beautiful cultural apparel and adornments representing their various home places – ceremonial spear, colourful grass skirt, decorative *pulpuls* (the traditional dress made up of single strands falling from the waist and worn by females), patterned *bilums* (woven net bags) and majestic *kundus* (traditional drums).

succeeded her and completed her Diploma in Education Studies at the Mount Hagen Extension Studies Centre. Patricia O'Shea assisted Veronica Lokalyo and Theresia Nakankwien with distance education studies (CODE), as did Maura O'Shaughnessy and Clare Flinn with Philomena Waira.

The close proximity of Holy Trinity and McAuley allowed some interchange of sisters. Veronica Lokalyo spent several years in pastoral work at St Paul's Parish and Theresia Nakankwien, in her pastoral ministry on the diocesan team, spent time in both places. Theresia was significantly involved in the National Assembly of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and in the follow-up process, preparing guides in *Tok Pisin* for use throughout the Mount Hagen Diocese.³⁰ Her work covered strenuous rounds of in-service of church workers throughout the diocese.

McAuley House was the hub of Mercy connections, which once stretched west to Enga, north to Wewak and Aitape, east to Simbu, Goroka, Madang, New Britain and New Ireland, and south to Port Moresby and Australia. Many were the arrivals and departures of the national Leader following these routes on road and plane journeys on pastoral visits to the sisters. Some of these were joyous occasions, particularly the religious ceremonies of the Melanesian sisters and the jubilee celebrations of the Australian sisters, while others were times of gripping sorrow, because of serious illness or accidents involving the sisters, or death of family members of the Australian and indigenous sisters. The closure of communities was a particularly sad and onerous duty.

When Julie Anne Ryan, who had been financial administrator for eight years (1999-2006), returned to Australia, the sisters continued the financial management with the periodic help of Gwen Garland of the previous Institute Team whose visits at McAuley were much appreciated.

Melanesian Sisters in the Gospel Tradition of Mercy

Experiential accounts of the early Melanesian sisters reflected their trust and commitment in responding to their vocation to Mercy.³¹ They felt strongly that God was calling them to the religious life of the sisters they had come to know and love and not to any of the other known national or international religious congregations. One offered her faith summary (Veronica 2005).

I had my first ideas to join the Mercies when working with the Notre Dame sisters. At that time I already knew the Sisters of St Therese and the Rosary Sisters, and I saw their charisms were different from the Mercies. It was the Spirit that called me to work with Helen McDonnell [Vocations Promoter in the Highlands] and I was coming to see and know that God was calling me to this Congregation.

³⁰ This involved the whole Catholic Church in PNG and took the form of involvement of the Self-Study of the 1970s.

³¹ From recorded interviews in 2005.

Then I asked the Sisters to join them. They said they were not ready to accept Papua New Guineans yet, and I said: “In that case, I’ll go home. God is not calling me to these other Congregations in my area.” Later ... we were accepted as postulants in 1980.

Other considerations were the important value of remaining closely identified and bonded with their own people, as well as the relationship of trust and the integral part of prayer among the sisters they knew. These are illustrated in the following excerpts from recorded interviews in 2005:

When the Sisters of Mercy started wearing ordinary clothes, back to the charism of the Foundress I said: That’s what I was looking for, to be wearing simple clothes, and to be with the community, to be with my own people, and for them to be free to open up dialogue and freedom to respond. So when I asked my parents to be a Sister of Mercy, and told them they were the ones in Kup, they said: “They are the ones we know.” And it was OK with them. (Mariska Kua).

I wanted to belong to a group where prayer is the main aspect of our living Many of our activities uplift the spirits of our women as we share their problems and share prayers if we are able. (Angeline Singiat).

In some cases the perseverance in their vocation was tested as they worked for several years to support their parents and *wantoks* (extended family).

Catherine’s spirituality, based on the gospel foundation of the spiritual and corporal works of Mercy is reflected in the recollections on their ministries by two of the pioneers, Theresia Gongi, a qualified and experienced nurse, and Veronica Lokalyo, qualified in catechetics, pastoral work and HIV/AIDS counselling.³²

When I first started nursing at the General Hospital I did not take it seriously. Then I reflected on it – that God led me here to do his work and look after his people. Now I feel that God has given me this work to do, and it is very important for me. I see Jesus in these people in very critical situations in the hospital. I read that a soldier once saw a broken statue of Jesus with no hands and he heard Jesus say to him: “I have no hands but yours.” Whatever their needs are I must provide them. I must follow the routines and do them well for the patient. This is Jesus lying here, and I work for him. (Theresia Gongi, 2005).

I chose Pastoral Ministry because I wanted to be in the hearts of the grassroots people, like Catherine McAuley. I feel that pastoral work is all Catherine’s work. In the first place she went for the poor people. I don’t have things to give, but being with them reminds me of the spirit of Catherine McAuley. They are *somebody*, they have identity in the society. I believe Catherine did this kind of work in her time.

³² E.g. Mercy, the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who desire to follow Him....

I try to walk with them in the villages, settlements, the poorer areas – young people, really old, different aged groups, drug addicts HIV/AIDS victims, rascals. Being poor puts their spirits down If Jesus had been here, he wouldn't let them go. He came for these very people. Reading the signs of the times I have to walk with these kinds of people that are rejected by family and community. People who are sick fear the bad spirits are coming to destroy them, and I try to get them to forget about all sorts of bad spirits of fear and believe in the good spirit that gives joy, love, happiness and strength to walk. Many people come to me in the house, trust me and share with me. (Veronica Lokalyo 2005).

These comments indicate spiritual foundations and responses of Mercy ministry related to particular times and circumstances, as perceived by the pioneer Melanesian sisters.³³ In the years that followed, and as they settled into religious life, the sisters worked and studied diligently to get the qualifications to enable them to fulfil the ministry to which they felt called.³⁴ These were in professions of teaching, nursing, pastoral work, catechetics, secretarial studies, and eventually, development knowledge, skills, practice and management through *Mercy Works*. They received qualifications through the major teacher education, community health and pastoral institutes in the country. Some acquired specialised knowledge and skills through Callan Services for Disabled Persons, Xavier Institute of Missiology and Divine Word University. Individual sisters completed renewal programs, including the 'Walking with Catherine' retreats in Dublin, cross-cultural and development in-service in the Philippines, Australia, England, South America and the United States. All of the professed sisters had experience of living in community and serving in ministry with expatriate sisters and with one another. They took part in the Assemblies which guided the development of a Melanesian dimension of Mercy.

With this general introduction to the Melanesian sisters, the chapter continues the developments in ministry of expatriate and indigenous sisters. Continuing the trend in the previous time-frame (1970-1981), the sisters in the various dioceses, in addition to their formal education commitments, engaged in diverse social ministries addressing the various strata of concerns faced by youths, adults and families in the cultural and socio-economic contexts of daily living.

³³ While a profound exploration of the theme was not warranted because of the widely defined scope of this historical research, it could well be followed up in future research.

³⁴ Similar examples are given in Teresa A Flaherty, *Crossings in Mercy, The Story of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea 1956 – 2006*. (St. Mary's, Adelaide: OpenBook Howden, 2008, 2010), 317-319.

Part 1. Goroka and Simbu (1982–2006)

On the retirement of Bishop Cohill, Raymond Caesar became Bishop of Goroka, including Simbu (10 September 1980). When the Vatican rearranged dioceses to coincide with government provincial boundaries in 1982 William Kurtz SVD was appointed Bishop of Kundiawa in the Province of Simbu.³⁵ When he later became the Archbishop of Madang, Father Henk te Maarssen SVD, who as parish priest, had first invited the sisters to Goglime, succeeded him as Bishop of Kundiawa.

Diocese of Kundiawa

The sisters' various intensive ministries in primary education and health there had ceased with localisation by the mid 1970's, but the sisters continued their commitment to secondary education at Kondiu and some were prepared to respond to new requests.³⁶

The sisters at Kondiu faced similar challenges as those at Yarapos, for, as well as regular teaching, they were engaged in localisation of both male and female staff and writing curriculum materials for secular and religious education subjects. At times, schooling was interrupted by tribal fighting, which would generally occur in the aftermath of the national or provincial elections, when ancient clan enmities and rivalries tended to be reignited.

In all, twelve Sisters of Mercy served at Kondiu, and in the final years, the Australian sisters were joined by one of the first Papua New Guinean sisters to cross from the Coast to the Highlands, Angeline Singiat. Mary Stallard, formerly of Yarapos, was the last Sister of Mercy at Kondiu. During her final year in 1990 she lived with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Les Soeurs de Sacré Coeur de Jésus), who, under the leadership of Ghislaine Marion SSCJ, replaced the Sisters of Mercy at Kondiu.³⁷

The Australian sisters leave the Simbu

As Kondiu could not cater for all the girls seeking secondary education from the upper Simbu region the Diocese sought provincial approval for a Catholic High School at Mt Wilhelm. Clare Flinn was requested to leave Kondiu to teach there for the welfare of female students and to be a pastoral

³⁵ Cf. Chapter Three.

³⁶ As explained in the previous section Rita Hassett and Margaret Bubb continued their ministries with Catholic teachers until it was too dangerous to continue. The importance of the role of the Sisters of Mercy in the co-educational institution of Rosary High School, Kondiu (1974-1990), in relation to the secondary education of female students, who were particularly disadvantaged in the Highlands, has previously been explained.

³⁷ Other Sisters of the Sacred Heart to serve at Kondiu were Cynthia Koliba, Denise Samson and Laura Reitsma.

presence for the predominantly Catholic body of staff and students (1987–89).³⁸ Travel for supplies and community commitments on the narrow, steep mountain roads was often dangerous, due to landslides or speeding oncoming traffic. Similar dangers were faced on the Highlands Highway.

One week-end Clare had visited the Sisters in Mount Hagen and was returning when a tragic incident occurred on the highway at Minj. It seemed at the time that Clare's car, which had struck a woman walking by the side of the road, caused her death shortly after. A throng of angry people gathered quickly, and with outstanding bravery, Clare drove to the police station to report to police authorities. When the immediate danger of retaliation had passed, she expressed her deep distress to the husband and family. In the months afterwards Clare continued faithful to her school duties. After several weeks, in accordance with custom, compensation offered by the Simbu Diocese was made to the clan. It was not till some years later that a member of the family divulged that the husband had deliberately pushed his wife into the approaching car.

In the meantime, sister nurse Joan Adams from Singleton, who had already responded to a request from Bishop Caesar for assistance and management of a new health sub-centre at Neragaima, continued this work. Joan, as officer in charge, planned the building with the builder, Brother Hermann Gemms SVD. She carried out general nursing clinics and Maternal and Child Health clinics throughout the parish, assisted by her lay missionary friend, Paulo Reid. Although there was an understanding that building finances would be provided by the diocese, Joan generously assisted by procuring money from Australia for water tanks, hospital furnishings and a hospital vehicle. In 1984, a fine building, consisting of two general wards, separate wards for men and women, a maternity ward, storeroom and office, was completed. For a short time, Elizabeth Miller was Joan's companion in community. Two other pioneers, Marie Dagg from Goroka and Therese Quinlivan from Aitape, served temporarily at Neragaima. After Joan's departure, the Sacred Heart Sisters continued in the nursing ministry at Neragaima.

The involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in Simbu gradually drew to a close, largely determined by localisation, but also influenced by increasing violence and, in particular, lack of diocesan openings for pastoral ministry.³⁹ Julie Rees moved from the Simbu Provincial Government High School at Kerowagi to teach at the Aiyura National High School on the Goroka side of the range.⁴⁰

³⁸ Clare Flinn ministered previously at Kup, Muaina and Kondiu.

³⁹ Rosemary Baker's pastoral work, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, was not financed by the Diocese of Kundiawa.

⁴⁰ The story of the Melanesian Mercy sisters, who later served for a few years at Neragaima, will be reported later in this chapter, 'Refugees from Pumakos and Wanepap'.

The Diocese of Goroka

When the Bishop of Goroka, John Cohill, who, had encouraged new ministries throughout the 1970s, retired from office, the co-adjutor Bishop Raymond Caesar succeeded him. After the sudden death of Bishop Caesar in 1985, Fr Michael Marai from Wewak was ordained Bishop of Goroka in 1989. When Bishop Marai retired he was succeeded by Francesco Sarego, who was ordained Bishop of Goroka on 29 January 1996. All of the Goroka bishops provided inspiration and encouragement by including Sisters of Mercy in their visions for the Church. They offered accommodation and hospitality to them for retreats, religious celebrations, assemblies and gatherings at the beautiful Diocesan Centre at Kefamo, which became almost a second home.

The sisters' initiatives continued in the University of Goroka (to 2003), the Melanesian Institute (to 1997), the Liturgical Catechetical Institute (to 1989), Aiyura National High school (to 1984) and the diocesan Pastoral Centre at Kefamo, which served the dioceses of Simbu, Mount Hagen and Enga (to 1984).

Marie Dagg was followed at the Liturgical Catechetical Institute by Anne Frances Carroll from Wewak as editor of English and *Tok Pisin* publications (1984-87). When Anne left for the Melanesian Institute she was able to leave these responsibilities in the capable hands of a former Yarapos student, Rosa Koian. As financial manager, Nance Munro from Australia brought expertise in financial management and previous experience on the Union General Council in Canberra. Nance worked diligently helping Francesca Worovi, a national woman, to develop the skills that enabled her eventually to replace Nance in the position.

While working as secretary for the Commission of Bishops and Religious, Mavis McBride, formerly at Kondiu, resided at the Melanesian Institute. Working in the nearby diocesan centre and assisted by her secretary and typist Josephine Druagle, Mavis prepared and published materials appropriately translated into 'controlled English'.⁴¹ She also organised and managed the accredited religious education programs by distance mode, serving the needs of Melanesian religious brothers and sisters and Catholic teachers in the field.

The Directors and key members of the Melanesian Institute and Liturgical Catechetical Institute were caring in their provision of accommodation and appreciative of the professional contribution made by

⁴¹ Simplified English translations for adult religious formation appropriate for people whose first language was not English. For example, *Catechesis in our Time (Catechesis Tradendi)*, trans. Teresa Flaherty in August 1984 and edited by Helen O'Brien and copyright by Commission of Bishops and Religious. Wirui Press, Wewak PNG.

the sisters.⁴² Directors of LCI when the Sisters of Mercy were there were John Reedy, a lay missionary, with his family, from the Catechists' Training College at Pumakos, followed by Gunther Koller SM from the Diocese of Bougainville.

The original Mercy sisters at the Melanesian Institute were followed by Anne Francis Carroll (1989-91) who served as editor of the Tok Pisin periodical – *Umben* [Net]. Then, as the Catholic Church prepared for the Year of Jubilee for the millennium she was requested by the Conference of Bishops to be Director of Evangelisation (1992-1997).⁴³ In this role Anne continued to work diligently to involve national people in the pastoral field. Sr Bosco Taman FMI whom Anne had mentored, replaced Anne in this position in 1998.⁴⁴

Commenting that Bishop Kalisz of Wewak led the Commission of Evangelisation and that the bishops trusted Anne in this role, Sr Bosco added:

Anne had a vision for localisation and was willing and interested in training people to be leaders For me personally, being in training was not an easy job, and Anne wanted me to be stabilised in the job, to be responsible and committed.

She was a concerned woman who wanted more and more women to take up responsibility. She stood for that – for raising the women's dignity, and she was against anybody downgrading the position of women, especially in matters about evangelisation in the dioceses.

She insisted the whole process of evangelisation had to be implemented in each diocese, that is, bringing the Good News, making alive the Gospel values in every ministry – in politics, family life, in prison, in all walks of life. Evangelisation has to do with everyday life – the way we talk and socialise with the community. It is about presenting the Christ within us to others, and in our courses in the diocese it was our job to help people understand this more fully. We targeted groups in education, family life, youth and women.

Changes, transfers and departures

In the early 1980s Rita Hassett, whose work as Catholic Education Secretary for the Dioceses of Goroka and Kundiawa was localised,⁴⁵ was requested by the new Bishop of Wabag, Hermann

⁴² The significance of the Melanesian Institute and Liturgical Catechetical Institute and their pastoral, cultural and social importance continued to be felt throughout the dioceses of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands through the Orientation Courses for new and experienced missionaries, research, publications and seminars by the former and Tok Pisin and English publications of religious curriculum materials and contemporary issues by the latter. At one of the early Conferences, the long-serving Director of the Melanesian Institute, Ennio Mantovani SVD, spontaneously volunteered his personal appreciation to the writer of the contribution of the sisters' presence and expertise.

⁴³ While engaged in these ministries, Anne immersed herself in study and understanding of the cultures of PNG, and in the dialogue of faith, culture and life in a changing PNG.

⁴⁴ Sr Bosco Tamian later became Leader of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate FMI, Rabaul.

⁴⁵ As previously mentioned, the position was taken over by Mrs Maria Kumo, whom Rita had mentored.

Raich SVD to serve in pastoral work there. Also Margaret Bubb left the Pastoral Centre and her work in training and hospitality at the Diocesan Centre to return to Australia in 1984. There were changes and departures from Aiyura National High School.⁴⁶ Julie Rees (1982-83) returned to Australia, Agnes Murphy (1984-86) transferred to Holy Trinity Teachers College and Miriam Devine (1987-89) returned to Australia.

A new ministry in hospitality was undertaken at the Burning Bush House of Prayer, located in the grounds of the Goroka Diocesan Centre at Kefamo, first by Sr Eamon Brennan, after completing her work at the sisters' study centre at HTTC, then by Vicki Sant from Rockhampton (1995-97). The House of Prayer was founded by the Divine Word Missionaries and Holy Spirit Sisters under the directorship of Fr Ed Dudink SVD and Patricia Sneider SSpS.⁴⁷ Many were the pilgrims - priests, religious and lay people throughout the country who found solace and peace at this Retreat Centre within the beautiful and tranquil setting of the Kefamo grounds.

By this time the number of sisters in the Goroka Diocese had been reduced to three. Angeline Singiat worked as a research officer in training at the Melanesian Institute during 1999. Clare Flinn was responsible for catering and hospitality at the Diocesan Centre, and Teresa Flaherty, who had undertaken a new ministry in Goroka in 1974, continued in secondary teacher training.⁴⁸

Secondary teacher education: Goroka Teachers College

In twenty-nine years at Goroka (1964-2002), Teresa Flaherty was part of the development of the institution as it passed from the status of Secondary Teachers College to that of Campus of the University of Papua New Guinea (1975) and finally tertiary institution in its own right as the University of Goroka (1997). During that time, the administration of the institution was completely localised and the academic staff almost entirely so – a number of administrative and academic staff being Teresa's former teachers college students. Teaching practice supervision, and in time, consultations with the major teacher education institutions and United Nations consultancies to the trouble-torn Province of Bougainville, offered an exposure to local and national issues as well as vital opportunities for contact with the Sisters of Mercy and other women religious throughout the country.

⁴⁶ These schools which had been established for selected students for the matriculation years of Grades 11 and 12 were seen to have fulfilled their original purpose. They were being superseded by the Senior Secondary Schools, which were gradually introduced in the provinces as part of educational reform in the 1990s.

⁴⁷ These founders were followed by Father Alois Klein SVD, Christa Murphy SSpS, Margaret Scheimer, SSJ, Father Alois Blasil SVD, Ignatiele Forsthövel SSpS, and Pat Hogan SVD.

⁴⁸ Teresa's nearest Mercy community, by then comprised Melanesian sisters living on the Simbu side of the Daulo Pass at Neragaima (to be reported later).

The first Vice Chancellor was Dr Mark Solon, and the first Chancellor was an ex-student of Faniufa, Mr Stephen Eka. Completing higher qualifications at Michigan State University (MA) and Macquarie University (PhD) enabled Teresa to express a new 'voice' for women in education through publication and negotiating official policies for girls and women in educational institutions.⁴⁹

Melanesian Mercy Sisters to Neragaima (1999–2002)

In 1999 the Sisters of Mercy were called a third time to Simbu when a request was made for the sisters to return to Neragaima. A community of national sisters replaced the expatriate community of former times, which was a significant step, reflecting the localisation of the Sisters of Mercy. The first community comprised Sophie Samiak (nurse), Maryanne Kolkia (teacher) and Margaret Roni (nurse). In 2000, Claudia Apalenda (nurse) and Theresia Tina (teacher) joined Maryanne to form the second community. However, the situation, which started out with promise, deteriorated as tribal fighting divided the local communities. The sick were no longer brought to the health centre, nor was it safe for nurses to travel to the outstations.

In 2002 when Claudia was transferred to Callan Services in Wewak, the community was reduced to two - Maryanne and Theresia. Law and order problems escalated throughout the province during the election process of 2002 and sisters were faced with hardship when going to Kundiawa for food supplies, posting their Distance Education assignments - both sisters were upgrading their teaching qualifications to Diploma level - and communicating with the Provincial Department of Education about the tenuous school situation and the Primary Final Examination requirements. The Bishop of Kundiawa intervened in an attempt to bring peace, but to no avail.

Theresia Tina's report explains the danger and the inability of civil authorities to bring about justice and peace in the area and security for the sisters.⁵⁰

The national elections of the year 2002 - a time of blood shedding and weeping and mourning. Fires blazed out everywhere burning down houses of various shapes, sizes, and colours and of course the red and yellow flames of the man-created fires swallowed all of God's creation. All this happened around June and July. In the ninth month, a few children came to school but teachers were absent because they were scared that their enemies would attack them. Normal classes were carried out in the tenth month

⁴⁹ Doctor of Philosophy Thesis: The Women's voice: Theoretical perspectives of the educational and professional goals of women secondary school teachers in four provinces of Papua New Guinea, Macquarie University, January 1995. It was through a grant from the Canada Fund with the support of the Co-ordinator, Mrs Hélène Anderson, and the services of Father Nick de Groot (Director of the Melanesian Institute) and publications staff, that the thesis findings were reported in "The Women's Voice in Education," published by the Melanesian Institute in 1998.

⁵⁰ Sr Theresia Tina's letter to the sisters describes the events that led to the withdrawal of the Sisters of Mercy from Neragaima at the end of 2002.

with still only a small number of students and staff in most schools in the Highlands provinces.

It was a fine day on the first day of November when I drove to Kundiawa in our little green Suzuki to collect the Grade Eight examination papers and to do our house business. All was done successfully in town. I was driving home at three o'clock to a place called Kumunul when four men with home made guns came out on my way and I could not move any further. One of the men came to my side, pointed his gun at me while the others got in and collected all they wanted from the car. I was numb and didn't know what to do. After collecting everything, they let me go with only a few *kaukau* (sweet potato) on the floor of the car.

I drove up the mountain as fast as I could in search of help but all the houses were burnt down so people were no longer living along the roadsides. They moved in to the bushes to protect themselves from the enemies. As I was going up a mountain called Calvary another lot of armed men came out of the bushes. This time I was ordered to come out of the car and thought they were going to take away my life without God's permission. Now I prayed, "God my life is in your hands", again they went in and collected the left over *kaukau* and disappeared into the bushes.

We (Sister Maryanne and I) reported the matter to the police. Unfortunately, we couldn't go any further although we spent many good weeks going and coming to and from the police station.

Thank you all for your prayers, support and concern. All is appreciated and treasured by us, the ex-Neragaimas. Thank you and God bless you all as we journey on.

Your sister in Mercy,

Theresia Tina RSM

Shortly after these incidents, Helen O'Brien, the national Leader, had no hesitation in withdrawing the sisters, whose lives were in extreme danger, and who were no longer able to carry out effective ministry with the people.

'Joys and sorrows mingled' in Goroka and Simbu (1982-2006)

As seen above, times of peace were interspersed with incidents of tribal fighting, law and order assaults and attacks and threats to life on the road. As the sisters travelled on the Highlands Highway for leadership team meetings, retreats and consultative and elective Assemblies they experienced these ordeals, but refused to be deterred from their community commitments.

After the sisters left Goroka they had no recognised central gathering place and community and ministry meetings had been held on the mission stations (Kup, Koge, Goglme) and at Rita Hassett's education house at the main mission centre at Mingende. Throughout this earlier period the beautiful diocesan centre at Kefamo was made available to the sisters. Its function as a central place for

hospitality, assemblies, celebrations and farewells increased when the different Australian groups united under one leadership as the Sisters of Mercy – Papua New Guinea in 1981.

Very significant events occurred at Goroka – the election during the Assembly of the first Leader of the unified group of Sisters of Mercy, Helen O’Brien in 1981, and the election of the first Papua New Guinean sister, Mariska Kua, as Leader to begin office in 2003.⁵¹ These were milestones in the Mercy history and occasions of great jubilation and sense of new beginnings.⁵²

While working at the Pastoral Centre, Margaret Bubb also played an important role in supervising the national young women in charge of the domestic arrangements. Clare Flinn, after completing her contract at Mount Wilhelm High School and term as financial manager of the united Sisters of Mercy at McAuley House, became manager of the Kefamo Centre and did much to maintain the beauty of the rooms and the surroundings, in the tradition of the SVD brother, Damian Lunders, whose artistic talent and hospitable spirit were evident in the original setting up of the complex. At the request, of Bishop Marai, Nell Callaghan spent some months at Kefamo while assisting in the localisation of the clerical staff at the diocesan administration centre.

The Goroka Diocesan Centre was a popular venue for the Union of Women Religious (UWR) meetings. The Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS), Sisters of Notre Dame (SND), Marist Sisters (SMSM), Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI) and the Sisters of Mercy gathered in solidarity in prayer and sharing of developments in ministry. Originally the sisters from Lae, Little Sisters of Jesus, formed part of the group, but the constant dangers of travel eventually made their attendance impossible. Members of religious institutes working in the diocese - the Christian Brothers, Marist Brothers, Franciscans, John of God Brothers and Holy Family Priests from Poland, frequented the Diocesan Centre for retreats and social events. With the growth of the local Church, these groups were enriched and enlivened by vibrant young national people – priests, religious and lay who were at first in the minority, but gradually outnumbered their expatriate elders.

The Sisters of Mercy received many a warm welcome at the houses of other women religious in Goroka – the Holy Spirit Sisters, Gerarda and Sebastian, followed by Ewaldine, Erminberg, Wilhelmina, Mary Angela and Mary Anthida, and Srs Winifred Smith and Norbertine of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

⁵¹ A third event, which pertains to the governance of the Sisters of Mercy, is appropriately reported towards the end of this chapter.

⁵² As previously mentioned, after the unification of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG in 1981, the new Leader, Sister Helen O’Brien, had temporary pilgrim status there in her first years, until her move to Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen, and the eventual establishment of the administration centre at McAuley House.

The temporary existence of the Mercy Sisters at Goroka changed when they were presented with an opportunity to purchase a permanent residence there.

Mercy Formation House - Coolock

In 2003 a new property was purchased as a residence for the sisters on the outskirts of Goroka town.⁵³ As bursar, Julie Anne Ryan had shown foresight in looking out for properties on offer in Goroka and Mount Hagen, and the ideal one eventually presented itself towards the end of 2002 – the future Coolock House.

Coolock House is some 15 minutes drive northwest from Goroka town, depending on the state of the unsealed parts of the road! Once the protective bitumen covering is left behind at the Goroka Base Hospital, the gravel road winds through coffee growing areas on the way towards the prison at Bihute, in the direction of the Unggai mountains and Simbu beyond. Near the turnoff to Bihute, perched high in a commanding position overlooking the Asaro Valley, lies Coolock. This is on a wide plot of land, with the house and *haus win* attractively surrounded with shrubs, orchids and flower beds on the rather flat top section and, after a series of steep terraces, the sisters' vegetable gardens stretch in rows below. From the veranda one can witness the ever-changing beauty of the landscape opposite. One's gaze rises easily from the mottled greens, browns and golds of the hillsides covered with defined vegetable and coffee plots, dotted here and there by the villagers' homes, to the dark blue of the towering mountain ranges stacked unevenly in the distance, and on to the restless clouds of the skies above.⁵⁴

From the beginning, the property was used as the House of Formation. Carmel Martin, the Formation Mistress and two sisters in temporary vows, who were attending the Goroka Grammar School, Lilian Yopichi and Marylyne Yull, were in residence.⁵⁵ In 2005, the decision was taken to establish the novitiate at Coolock and Helen White, Mistress of Formation, Theresa Boyek, in pastoral ministry, Catherine Hopil, a Junior Professed sister, and Hilda Yangele, a novice, formed the community.

⁵³ Previous attempts several years earlier to acquire a land lease for a novitiate in the cool, invigorating climate of the Highlands had proved fruitless until the successful acquisition of this property, which was seen by many sisters as an answer to prayer.

⁵⁴ This picture tells a story of the many different clans – Simbus, Bundis, Unggais – that have settled in the rural areas outside of Goroka town, seeking work on the coffee plantations or having been offered land leases by the original Gahuku owners.

⁵⁵ For the two previous years, Philomena Waira, who was then joined by Lilian and Marylyne, had been kindly accommodated by the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Sisters in their House of Studies in North Goroka.

Mercy ministries in Goroka

The sisters soon engaged in the life of the local Church through ministries in the area, including the women in the prison at nearby Bihute. Besides prayer and Bible sharing, Theresa Boyek introduced the women to adaptations of the cooking and preservation of local food, skills that would be useful on their return home with their families. Besides companioning the sisters in formation, Helen White, as did Carmel Martin before her, carried out a special Religious Education program initiated by Br Andrew Simpson CFC for the lecturers of St Benedict's (Wewak), Holy Trinity (Mount Hagen) and Kabaleo (Rabaul).

The sisters experienced support from Father John Ryan SVD, the parish priest of St Mary's, Goroka. The catechist, Peter Umba, a former student of the sisters at Kondiu, living with his family beside the village church, acted as a most reliable support, 'care-taker' and 'security' person for the sisters, particularly in their settling in time.

Part 2. Diocese of Wewak

Bishop Kalisz SVD replaced Bishop Arkfeld who was transferred as Archbishop to Madang, as Bishop of Wewak. On Bishop Kalisz' retirement he was succeeded by Bishop Anthony Burgess in 2002.⁵⁶

Section 1. St. Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi⁵⁷

At St Benedict's Teachers College the sisters worked in collaboration with the Christian Brothers under the leadership of Graeme Leach and the various Principals - John Stevenson, Peter Harney, Andrew Simpson, Vince Stallard and the first lay Principal, Leonard Kiminja. This cooperation in ministry extended also to the regional Leaders of the Christian Brothers, Brothers Barry Louisson, Graeme Leach, Phil Redding, Andrew Simpson and Vincent Duggan.

With some cross-transfers the sisters continued their commitment to teacher education at St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi, Wewak and at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Anthony Burgess was ordained Co-Adjutor Bishop of Wewak in 2000 and Bishop of Wewak on 14 August 2002.

⁵⁷ Of the nine primary teachers colleges in the National Education system, three were managed by the Catholic dioceses in Mount Hagen (HTTC), Wewak (St Benedict's) and Rabaul (Kabaleo, which was pioneered by the OLSH). As previously mentioned, though each was inter-diocesan in organisation, the students were selected from all provinces within the nation as the institutions worked within the policies, regulations and guidelines of the National Department of Education. A stated aim was to combine students from all the provinces in order to build a sense of solidarity and nationhood.

⁵⁸ An attempt is made to show the general trends in Teacher Education in the Primary Teachers Colleges of St Benedict's and Holy Trinity Teachers Colleges.

As well as working consistently towards localisation of staff as Heads of Department, they were involved in curriculum writing for their secular subjects and Religious Education. In response to the National Department of Education initiative to upgrade the standard and cultural relevance of primary teacher education, they prepared assiduously for the three-year Diploma in Education, which was to replace the two-year Certificate in Education in 1990.

There were positive influences due to the United Nations Decade of Women (1985 to 1995) that helped supplement the earlier efforts of the sisters for gender equality by the official pronouncement of policies and practices of equal opportunity for women during this time. As noted in Chapter Four the enrolment of female students at St Benedict's Teachers College was more consistently equal to male enrolment figures from the beginning in 1969. In comparison, records show that when the sisters started at Holy Trinity Teachers College in 1968, enrolment of the women students, compared to men, comprised approximately one-quarter. By 1990 this proportion had risen first to one-third, then in the early 1990s to one half.

Sisters who combined the welfare of women students with their regular teaching and administrative responsibilities were Irene Callanan, Irene Masterson and later Sophie Samiak, when she was working as a nurse in the Kaindi clinic. Irene Masterson recalled the overall duty of care of students, in addition to her arduous role as Deputy Principal:⁵⁹

One can have anxious moments with sick youngsters, particularly with malaria and rising temperatures. In tropical areas like Wewak, a person can fall dangerously ill, quickly and without warning, putting a huge burden of responsibility for care on the shoulders of the one in charge. When the students had raging temperatures or were seriously ill, I somehow managed to leave the College, visiting them several times a day and spending nights trying to get their temperatures down. Many were the anxious hours I spent waiting at the hospital with very sick students. At such times Brother Matthew (Bouten), who was Diocesan Catholic Health Secretary, was untiring in his dedication and support.⁶⁰

The sisters' concentration on gender equity in the two teachers colleges led to a significant advance for women in the general teaching force and, in particular, for the staffing of Catholic schools in the dioceses of Wewak and the Highlands regions.

⁵⁹ Irene was a long-serving staff member and her years as Head of the Education Department were followed by more than fifteen years in college administration, first as Deputy Principal, then as Acting Principal, including six months as Principal in 2002. Taken from interviews with Sister Irene Masterson in Cairns, May 2005 and in Wewak, June 2007.

⁶⁰ For several years Br Matthew Bouten SVD was Catholic Health Secretary in Wewak and his medical advice was invaluable, particularly in the case of sick students at Kaindi and Yarapos.

National perspectives: ministry with disabled persons

The teachers colleges responded to the social and political events of the country and addressed inequalities. In 1991 Brother Graeme Leach introduced Callan Services for Disabled Persons at St. Benedict's Teachers College and soon established a training branch at Holy Trinity Teachers College – the Callan Special Education Resource Centre. Courses on the principles and practice of identifying children with special learning and physical needs, making referrals for their treatment and teaching them were introduced into the teacher education program at both campuses. Children suffering hearing loss and impairment were taught sign language and given equal opportunities in primary and secondary education.⁶¹

The sisters were eager to respond in the implementation of this program and using the principles of learning with disabilities and inclusive education, developed curriculum materials and conducted and supervised lectures and tutorials. Among these were lecturers, Helen White and Angeline Singiat, and nurses, Sophie Samiak and Claudia Apalenda - who became qualified in the diagnosis and treatment of eye and ear diseases.⁶² Irene Callanan, who served on St Benedict's for eighteen years was project and financial manager of the Callan Services until the position was localised. Elementary education was an initiative of Callan Services at the Mount Hagen and St Benedict's campuses. Emma Awehi was the first indigenous Sister of Mercy to train in early childhood development.

Working with Callan Services, Maura O'Shaughnessy was involved in HIV/AIDS education in the Wewak and Bougainville Dioceses before being contracted with the East Sepik Provincial Government as overall Care and Counselling Co-ordinator responsible for the HIV/AIDS programs. Based at the Diocesan Sepik Centre for Hope, she worked with, and encouraged, national team members. When conducting week-long programs in remote parts of the province, Maura led by example in the preparation and loading of teaching resources and food on the truck, sharing the driving load, and making do in village accommodation. Margaret Roni also formed part of the team conducting HIV/AIDS programs. As the uniqueness of each college is better preserved by a separate treatment, the thesis continues sequentially with St Benedict's Teachers College in this section with that of Holy Trinity Teachers College in the next.

⁶¹ This soon grew to an impressive complex, encompassing related specialist institutions.

⁶² The Resource Centres soon grew into impressive complexes, extending to other institutions.

National perspectives – refugee students from Bougainville and West Papua

It is not surprising that in the aftermath of the Bougainville crisis, support came from the Catholic Teachers Colleges. According to Irene Masterson, St Benedict's stepped in to provide places for the disadvantaged male and female students whose secondary education had been disrupted by the closure of schools on the war-torn island. Thus during the late 1990s the Bougainville students began to trickle back. Irene was profoundly moved by a statement from one of the students: 'You don't know how terrible it was to be hiding in the jungle all those years!'⁶³

There were no schools in the West Papuan refugee camp on the Vanimbo border.⁶⁴ The College arranged for four adult students to come there each year to improve their English with the understanding that they would go back to teach in the camp. Brother Terrence Kelly CFC took a leading role with the staff, devising special programs to help the students succeed in these difficult circumstances.⁶⁵

St Benedict's new tertiary status and celebrating 50 years of Mercy Sisters' involvement in Teacher Education

St Benedict's continued as a major establishment, progressing from Certificate to Diploma in Primary Education in 1991. New directions on an impressive scale were taken when it qualified for amalgamation with Divine Word University Madang in 2003. In August of that year, Brother Alfred Tivinarlik CFC, PhD, was appointed the first Pro-Vice President of the Divine Word University - St Benedict's Campus.

In 2007 St Benedict's celebrated their founding by Margarita Shannon and the Sisters of Mercy in Kunjingini fifty years earlier in 1957. The combined theme adopted was: Mercy Sisters Jubilee and 50 Years of Teacher Education in East Sepik, June 2nd, 2007. There were many memorable events on the program, but one, in particular, captured the fifty years in a special way.

Many lecturers and former students took part in a simple, but impressive march past, organised according to years of involvement. The Kunjingini pioneers, Val Cervetto and Bridie Fennessy, took their place at the head of the line and stepped forward to the powerful beat of traditional drums. They were followed by pioneer Mary Wildie and many early sisters - Margaret Rush, Joan Hooper, Jacinta Wiedman, Carmel McCormick, Irene Callanan, Irene Masterson and others. At various stages

⁶³ Taken from an interview with Sr Irene Masterson in Wewak, June 2007.

⁶⁴ Soon after the establishment of the relocation site for the refugees in East Awin, Helen White voluntarily spent her entire summer holidays of seven weeks teaching English to the teachers, together with Brother John Stevenson CFC, both from St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Sr Irene Masterson's interview.

along the moving time line, different ones joined in. These included Father Peter O'Reilly SVD, Mission Education Officer at the beginning of the era, who shared the vision and had the drive to supervise work on the new Teachers College; Brother Graeme Leach CFC, the first Principal; Gerard Buzolic CFC, long serving staff member; and Alfred Tivinarlik CFC, the then dynamic Administrator of St Benedict's. It was very moving when the Melanesian Mercy sisters and other religious and lay people took their place. The national lecturers, particularly those in positions of responsibility, swelled the ranks, offering an impressive picture of the localisation of the university campus. The marchers formed an unforgettable line of religious educators, carrying on the traditions of St Benedict's inspiring motto of 'prayer, study and work'.

Section 2. Yarapos: Mercy commitment to the empowerment of girls through secondary education

In the early 1980s Yarapos was experiencing a difficult time due to shortage of staff, and the increasing number of senior students. Despite this, the Headmistress and sisters on the staff of Yarapos offered a second chance for the young Mercy and Rosary Sisters, who, like most females, had been unable to complete their high school education.⁶⁶

With the added help of lay missionaries and a few sisters from other congregations, however, the school continued to grow. Loyola McGrath PBVM from the Presentation Institute recalled her impressions of teaching at Yarapos (1984-1987).⁶⁷

I went to Yarapos, the first college for girls in the Wewak area, in response to a need. The sisters were looking for somebody, as they were short of expatriates to teach the higher grades.

I felt very much at home in the community and shared community life with the sisters at Yarapos and Kaindi and I was very impressed by their hospitality. Val Cervetto stands out very strongly for hospitality and care. There was a great difficulty because of the land problem, but no matter how hard the problem was, and was getting worse, the sisters didn't want to move out.

I learnt from talking and listening to the Mercy Sisters about formation because in that year (1984) we Presentations had our first thoughts of accepting young women. Therefore, the Mercy Chapters and meetings were a great help and I was able to pass it on, and when we started in 1985 we made many references to these ideas. Later when we had young sisters of our own, we sent some of them to Kaindi and the leadership roles there helped them considerably in leadership skills in the little Aitape Presentation group.

⁶⁶ Two sisters, Claudia Apelanda and Theresia Boyek, were in this program for some time.

⁶⁷ As a result of a conversation at a chance meeting at Wewak airport, the following report was posted to me by Sr Loyola McGrath PBVM.

The sad news of the death of Mama Christina, the Yarapos landowner, reached the sisters in the early hours of the morning on 27 December 1987. Christina had generously given land to the sisters for the secondary education of girls and with her wide vision she had welcomed them, not only from the Yarapos area, but from all over the Sepik Province. At the time the sisters from Kaindi, having been evacuated to Yarapos during a land compensation disruption (see below), were present and able to help with funeral arrangements and transportation for relatives and friends. Bishop Kalisz and Fathers Wand and Heinemans concelebrated the funeral. The sisters reported on this at the time:

So the hand of God was certainly in our moving to Yarapos, so that we could be present at Christina's Mass and funeral to say 'thank you' to her for her contribution to the education of young women of PNG. Some of these young women who have passed through Mercy College Yarapos have been outstanding not only in the service of their country, but also very active in raising the standard of women.⁶⁸

Evincing an enduring Mercy commitment to upper secondary education of Sepik girls, many made constant collaborative efforts towards achieving the goal of localisation. Maureen Grant (1977-82) continued the constant localisation program of previous Headmistresses and Angeline Singiat first served for a short time as Headmistress in 1982. Other sisters followed: Maura O'Shaughnessy (1983-mid-1986), Carmel McCormick (mid-1986-90), Maureen Grant (1991-1994), Angeline Singiat (1995-1997), Mrs Raphaela Bengo (1998-2000), Beverly Whitten (2001 Term 1), Agnes Murphy (2001-2006).⁶⁹

In 1991 Cecilia Hollis, one of the Grafton Sisters, who had taught at Yarapos during the pre-independence years from 1971 to 72 and from 1974 to 75, made a return visit for the celebration of the silver jubilee (22-8-1991) and was impressed with the influence of the Yarapos ex-students on the development of the young nation, not only in the Sepik, but in other parts of the country. She related her impressions:⁷⁰

I was astounded at the roles of so many of the ex-Yarapos girls in the country. We had Anna Solomon who was Editor of the Wantok, and the publisher of that and several other national newspapers, Maria Sarman who was head of one of the departments of the Moresby hospital and Josepha Namsu who was the top lawyer in Moresby. There were so many of our girls who were in major leadership roles throughout the country. They were in so many major roles in politics, in law, in education, and in hospitals. They were involved in all the major aspects of the life, and doing a marvellous job.

The appointment in 1995 of Angeline Singiat, a Melanesian Sister of Mercy and former student, as Headmistress, was a significant historical moment. Angeline felt she was entrusted to carry on the

⁶⁸ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Yarapos, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

⁶⁹ Important milestones towards empowerment were the appointment in 1968 of the first PNG lay female teacher Maria (Pimong) Siria in 1968, followed by Juliana Pige in 1971. The first PNG lay male teacher, Joseph Valerian, was appointed to the staff in 1978.

⁷⁰ Cecilia's account is taken from a report in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

traditions begun by her former teachers. She mentions the professional and spiritual spheres.

The Sisters of Mercy had a special gift of being great organisers. When they supervised the students they did it thoroughly and properly through every stage until it was completed to their satisfaction. They also believed in the power of prayer – their own, those of the staff and students and their families.⁷¹

The appointment of the first female lay Headmistress, Mrs Raphaela Bengo (1998-2000) was a further significant moment of a qualified, capable, energetic and compassionate lay woman running a large educational facility for girls in the tradition of Mercy. Furthermore, Mrs Bengo was assisted by highly experienced department heads, long-serving staff members and the school bursar, Frances Readman. This hardworking sister kept the financial records in accurate order and was instrumental in planning and implementing building improvements. As well as the Mercy Dormitory and administration block in 1995 she organised the building of a five-bedroom staff house and new four-bedroom convent constructed beyond the immediate school buildings, thus providing more space for school expansion. The new building was completed in 2000, the third and final year of Mrs Bengo's term as Headmistress.⁷²

When efforts to recruit a suitable successor to Mrs Bengo were unsuccessful the sisters, during their 1999 Assembly, made a commitment to investigate ways for the school to continue and to progress to senior secondary education.⁷³ As a consequence of this, Sr Beverly Whitton, a well qualified former Yarapos teacher from Grafton, returned as Head Mistress for the first part of 2001, until Sr Agnes Murphy, newly appointed to the position of Headmistress, was able to assume duties. When the school was granted upper secondary status in 2004, Agnes Murphy became the first Principal of Mercy Secondary School, Yarapos.

Yarapos was a centre long recognised for its hospitality. Both the old and the new convents provided a home to Mercy Sisters, not only to those on the staff, but also to those engaged in other ministries.⁷⁴ Many indigenous Mercy Sisters made their home in community there, while in formation and after final profession. Their varying roles included those of students (Theresia Gongi, Veronica Lokalyo, Mariska Kua), secretarial duties (Theresa Boyek, Schola Fakiwi), primary school teachers (Petronia

⁷¹ Angeline continued: 'As an example, there was once a lot of sickness, and it seemed that there were certain places on the property where the girls would show signs of fear and hysteria. The senior national female staff, Rose Maule, Jill Matui, Marie Bai, Monica Sikas and I turned to prayer. We gathered to have a special prayer ritual at these particular places to pray for protection from illness for the students. Shortly after, the frequent bouts of sickness ceased'.

⁷² The old convent was incorporated into the school complex – its two wings were renovated to provide for a computer centre, named the Maureen Grant Computer Centre, and an education resources centre, embracing the former dining room, library, chapel and kitchen, named the Sister Frances Readman Education Centre. Sister Fran was able to leave the school with a sound financial backing, and because of this, it was possible to apply for, and receive, an Australia PNG Incentive Fund Grant for further improvements.

⁷³ This was especially in the circumstances of the proposed development of upper secondary education in line with the Education Reform.

⁷⁴ Sisters Anne Frances, Co-ordinator of Religious Education in the diocese, and Margaret Shakeshaft, responsible for the junior professed sisters' formation programs, resided at Yarapos.

Gawi, Mary Nambakwen, Theresia Tina), nurses (Sophie Samiak, Claudia Apalenda), and a high school teacher, Deputy Headmistress and Headmistress (Angeline Singiat). As postulants, Petronia Gawi taught at Yarapos Primary School and Mariska Kua did some secondary studies. As well as their vital personal contribution, the presence of these young religious greatly enriched the Australian Mercy Sisters in their understanding of Melanesian values and spirituality.

During this period Yarapos was one of four schools for girls in the country to maintain a commitment to secondary education for girls and resist the trend towards co-education.⁷⁵ Despite seasons of floods and drought, and times of threat and violence ignited by land disputes, Yarapos staff and students resolutely kept the school in operation, sharing a belief in Mercy College Yarapos as crucial for the education of young women in the East Sepik. This faith was to be seriously challenged in events that soon followed.

Local clan threats and assaults at Mercy College, Yarapos, 2004 - 2005

Moves to expand the Yarapos school buildings to accommodate senior secondary students and staff angered some members of one of the nearby village clans, who reacted with volatile threats and assaults.⁷⁶ In dangerous and life-threatening circumstances, the sisters, who bore the brunt of the attacks, responded with heroism and constant duty of care of the students. In 2004, matters reached a climax, and it seemed that the school would be forced to close and the building project, with the threatened withdrawal of AusAid funding, abandoned. Agnes Murphy, who was suffering physically from the ordeal, and as advised by Dr Jo Taylor CP, the surgeon of Wewak Hospital, sought urgent medical treatment in Australia.⁷⁷

Marie Geddes, Deputy Principal, stepped in temporarily as Principal, and through her timely intervention the PNG Incentive Fund Committee and the Provincial Government renewed their agreements of support, injecting hope and a measure of reconciliation into the situation. Soon building construction resumed, and at the beginning of 2006, educational and building progress was again under way.⁷⁸ During the ordeal, former Mercy students in the Highlands and Coastal regions publicly raised their voices in solidarity with the sisters and staff, protesting with letters to the national newspapers.

⁷⁵ The others are Kumdi in the Western Highlands, run by the Notre Dame Sisters (SND), Marianville in Port Moresby, and Vunapope in Rabaul, both managed by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH). Memories of the plant and buildings of these complexes continue to inspire in the writer a sense of wonder and admiration. They are testimony to decades of dedication and administration by women religious in their planning and construction and also of the responsibilities by staff and students undertaken for their maintenance.

⁷⁶ The underlying reasons are complex, and not crucial to the subject of this thesis.

⁷⁷ The Sisters of Mercy owe much to Doctor Jo Taylor, CP (surgeon from England) as she provided crucial medical treatment and advice for many years.

⁷⁸ The details of this were conveyed to me at Yarapos by Sister Marie Geddes in May 2005.

Section 3. Other initiatives in Secondary Education

The sisters carried out their ministries in the National High School system at Passam, for twelve years. Fran Hanrahan was followed by Miriam Devine and Cynthia Griffin.⁷⁹

In the 1980s Sisters of Mercy were requested by Church and government authorities, to respond to needs in secondary education in neglected Catholic areas in Wewak. Sisters were chosen for the teaching of Religious Education and academic and practical subjects, not only with a focus on female education, but also to build up the Catholic school community through localisation practices and pastoral ministry.

Angoram High School (1983-84)

Supported by the diocese, Maureen Grant (former long-term Principal of Yrapos) was asked by the provincial education authorities to be part of the establishment of a remote new school at Angoram by the Sepik River and she accepted the position of Deputy. Accommodated in a small teacher's house, Maureen spent her days and early evenings at the school teaching, attending to administration, tending to the problems of building and maintenance and carrying out a pastoral role with students and female and male staff. At first she was accompanied by American Franciscan pastoral worker, Jeannine Kalisz.⁸⁰ Maria Jean Rhule from Yangoru, engaged in pastoral ministry in the villages of the Keram River parishes,⁸¹ made her base there in the second year, before Maureen's transfer to Wewak.⁸²

Bishop Leo Day High School Wirui (1985-1988)

After two years at Angoram, Maureen Grant was requested by the diocese to apply for the position of Headmistress at a town school recently established near the diocesan headquarters at Wirui, called Bishop Leo Day High School. Maureen continued in her role of assistance to, and promotion of, the national staff, and was busily engaged in all areas of administration, plant maintenance and pastoral care. For three years, she was accompanied in a small teacher's house on the campus by Nell Callaghan, who was secretary to the Bishop. When Maureen left, the school was localised in administration and teaching staff.

⁷⁹ Both returned to Australia after completing ministries in secondary education - Miriam after eleven years (Yrapos, Kairiru, Passam, and Aiyura) and Cynthia after seven years (at Keravat and Passam). When the schools in this system were seen to have fulfilled their original purpose they were phased out, being superseded by the Upper Secondary Schools gradually introduced in the provinces as part of educational reform.

⁸⁰ A close relative of Bishop Kalisz.

⁸¹ A mighty tributary of the Sepik.

⁸² Maria Jean then moved to a room under the parish house at Angoram, and when she was joined by Theresia Nakankwien, both sisters moved to the parish house at Kambot.

Maprik High School

The work that was begun by Sr Leonie Williams was later continued for several years by sisters from Kunjingini - Maura O'Shaughnessy, Margaret Scroope, Mary Stallard, and Beverley Whitton. A former Headmaster of Maprik High School, Mr John Colwell, spoke of how the sisters were a support to him in achieving his goals for the good of the students, localisation of staff and relationship with the local town and village community.⁸³

Kunjingini - continuing health care and Mercy community (1982-2006)

Kunjingini Health Sub-Centre served an area of twenty square kilometres and a population of 12,051 in the Wosera Gawi local government area, bordering the Sepik River. Anne McDonnell (1982) and Julie Anne Ryan (1986) succeeded the previous expatriate sister nurses (Isabel Condon, Jacinta Wiedman and Jill Stringer).

The Health Sub-Centre was the overall responsibility of the Catholic Health Services Agency of the Wewak Diocese. Its significance in the health localisation plan was outlined in a 1986 advertisement requesting recruits from Australia to manage the outpatient and maternal and child welfare clinic.⁸⁴ Expatriate sisters were required to assist during a transitional stage in the ongoing development of the young national staff and sisters in this geographically disadvantaged and poor area.

Melanesian sister nurses followed: Terry Gongi, Sophie Samiak, Claudia Apalenda, Sebastina Yangin, Margaret Roni and Philomena Waira. In the later years of this period, the diocesan position of Health CEO was in the capable hands of a Rosary Sister, Sr Celine, and Melanesian Mercy sisters served on the staff rather than in management. A subsequent report by Margaret Roni showed that the health demands in the intervening years had not decreased, and, in addition, there were treatments for patients with tuberculosis and HIV infection.⁸⁵ There were new developments in collaborating with the Save the Children Fund, a non-government organisation (NGO), in the training of village health volunteers capable of giving first aid treatment in the villages and assisting as midwives in deliveries. The Kunjingini nurses offered these village volunteers in-service training at the health sub-centre and assisted them in village work.⁸⁶

⁸³ In a conversation at Sogeri National High School, Port Moresby, April 1999.

⁸⁴ The application was devised by Officer-in-Charge at Kunjingini, Sister Julie Anne Ryan.

⁸⁵ Malaria, pneumonia, skin diseases, sores and scabies were more serious due to some cross-infection by those who did not complete their treatment. It was not easy to detect HIV/AIDS in the rural areas, as the symptoms were similar to tuberculosis, recurrent malaria and diarrhoea.

⁸⁶ Further comments are taken from Margaret's report in Listen, Journal of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, Vol 24, 2.

Like the pioneer Sisters of Mercy, the Melanesian sisters went out for Maternal and Child Health Care to the surrounding villages of Gupmapil, Serangwando and Miko and, sometimes, even to attend to night calls and births.⁸⁷

The religious communities of Kunjingini, comprising expatriate and Melanesian sisters engaged in nursing, primary teaching and pastoral ministry, were gradually replaced by small Mercy Melanesian communities continuing similar ministries, though in changing and deteriorating circumstances. Their story, with a focus on pastoral ministry will be continued in the next section.

Section 4. Pastoral ministry in the Wewak Diocese and Mercy communities at Kairiru, Dreikir and Kunjingini

Pastoral ministry in the Wewak Diocese was given a high priority and seen as an essential component of promoting lay participation in the Church.⁸⁸ By 1982 Bishop Kalisz had introduced a well structured pastoral plan for parishes.⁸⁹ Misericordia Carter, Fr Michael Marai, Fr Gregory SVD and Br Tom comprised the diocesan team, while the sisters, Cephas Philben, Joan MacGinley, Maria Jean Rhule and Ann O'Regan were the backbone of the area groups. After Misericordia left the diocesan team, Ann Hook took the lead. Tragically Ann was badly injured in a road accident, forcing her return to Australia for medical treatment. She was replaced on the pastoral team by RoseMary Baker.

Parish priests were involved in organising and conducting retreats in the villages, but it was mostly the Sisters of Mercy who took a leading part in the training of small area teams and in giving the retreats, thus keeping the momentum going. This was a mammoth undertaking, as there were approximately forty parishes in the Wewak Diocese with fifteen to twenty villages in each one.⁹⁰ With the help of a few key priests, the sisters nurtured the pastoral program so that it eventually developed into a diocesan-based program – the Program for the Renewal of the Diocese (PRD).

The following accounts incorporate this priority of pastoral ministry within the context of seminary teaching and Mercy community life at Kairiru, and in conjunction with health care on the remote rural mission centre of Dreikir.

⁸⁷ Interview with Margaret Roni in June 2007.

⁸⁸ Sisters were involved in the diocesan pastoral team, but they had for many years been carrying out pastoral work in the rural areas of Kairiru, Dreikir and Kunjingini as well as Negrie, Tangugo Pastoral Centre and Yangoru (cf. Chapter 4 Kairiru, Adapting to the needs of the parish, and The Remote Rural parish and deanery Centre at Dreikir.

⁸⁹ At the time this was known as the “New Image of the Parish” (NIP) and was based on the idea of Small Christian Communities, where in each small unit of about thirty people, everyone could be involved, instead of just a few key people. The pastoral approach in relation to the Wewak Diocese is discussed later in this chapter.

⁹⁰ Details provided by Ann O'Regan.

Mercy community and ministry at Kairiru⁹¹

As described in Chapter Four, the Mercy community engaged in seminary teaching and pastoral ministry on Kairiru. For a few years when there was no parish priest, Sister RoseMary Baker, who was responsible for the pastoral work ministry there, was requested to induct the PNG married deacon, Reverend Benny Samiat, in pastoral duties.

Sophie Samiak from Chambri Lakes, who began her high school studies with Helen McDonnell in Mount Hagen, continued them at Kairiru. Maura O'Shaughnessy, while teaching at St Xavier's in 1992, supervised the external studies of Helen Kiponge. Nell Callaghan mentored Theresa Boyek and Veronica Lokalyo in their studies. None of these sisters was accustomed to boat travel on the high seas.

Theresa Boyek recalled a story told her by her people when she was a junior high school leaver at home in her village on the far side of Kairiru. The whole parish had organised a pilgrimage to place a statue of Mother Mary on the mountain top. This was in 1987 when the sisters who had fled from Kaindi, because of the land dispute, happened to be there. Among them was Moira Cleary, the Deputy Principal at Kaindi, but because of serious illness⁹² she was unable to join in the pilgrimage. However, her simple words and actions of faith on this occasion were long talked about in the village.

The large crowd of people were making their way up the mountain slopes and the Sisters of Mercy were among them when they gathered at the top. Far below Sister Moira met up with some of the women walking some distance behind the others. She told them she probably wouldn't make it to the top, but wished to offer up to God whatever efforts she could to be united with the people in their faith: she felt her inability could be used by God to gain graces for peace at Kaindi.⁹³

This account illustrates Catherine McAuley's description of the Christian life as 'joys and sorrows mingled', and the deep mystery of suffering in the history of the Sisters of Mercy.

During the 1990s the islanders experienced severe hardships because of the declining economy and some breakdown of social cohesion, leading to lawlessness. Personal safety was at risk and some

⁹¹ The sisters' response to the invitation to teach at St. John's seminary and their involvement in diverse ministries on Kairiru since 1970 has been outlined in the previous chapter.

⁹² This incident was only a few months before her early death from cancer.

⁹³ Recorded interview with Theresa Boyek, May 2005.

sisters were attacked carrying out their ministry.⁹⁴ The last Mercy community members on Kairiru in 1993 were Theresia Nakankwien and Elizabeth Pepom. It was with very heavy hearts that the sisters made the final crossing back to Wewak. The convent building remained a hopeful reminder that the sisters might once again minister among the island people of Kairiru and Mushu.

Mercy community and ministry of pastoral work and health care based at Dreikir (1979-92)

When Nell Callaghan returned from Dreikir to teach at the seminary on Kairiru in 1981, Ann O'Regan was joined by Jacinta Wiedman who carried out her nursing ministry. Ann embarked on the pastoral program adopted by the diocese.⁹⁵ Together with priests from the neighbouring parishes, she concentrated on the growth of lay participation through work with prayer and church leaders and other forms of parish development. Her particular role in the five parishes of the Dreikir area was working in the team and giving the Christian Community Retreats, as well as training local teams to give retreats.

Ann recalled carrying out this pastoral ministry:

That entailed a lot of walking and mountainous walking at that, particularly in Aresili! In all I counted that I gave 50 Christian Community Retreats and Training Courses and about half of those I gave with Father Waldemar, the priest team member of the Dreikir area. The emphasis was in the strengthening of small Christian communities. I remember the growth of shared prayer among the people. In the beginning of those days we were asked to get people in those groups to share a prayer. You had to teach them how to make a prayer out of what they had said – and based on the scripture passage somehow. And it was a struggle. Now when I hear what happens today in shared prayer and charismatic groups, and Prayers of the Faithful and people are able to pour forth spontaneously their prayer – old people, men, women, young people – I can see a tremendous growth in the skill of sharing prayer. Before they could not share anything.⁹⁶

The sisters who followed in pastoral work in Dreikir were Misericordia Carter, Ann Hook, and Veronica Lokalyo. Getting the people to express their own goals for themselves was not easy at first because they were not used to being asked! However, a level of understanding, trust and influence grew as the sisters carried out their demanding tasks, travelling for hours on foot and with few resources. Petronia Gawi taught in the primary school.

⁹⁴ Under similar circumstances, and with the overall number of Australian missionary sisters decreasing, some foundations in the Highlands and Coast were forced to close. Among the convents forced to close in the Wewak area were Kairiru and Dreikir.

⁹⁵ The diocesan vision of the 'New Image of the Parish' (NIP).

⁹⁶ This information was provided in writing by Sr Ann O'Regan.

Jacinta's strenuous round of clinics to Tau, Bongos, Aresili, Dato and Dreikir showed her amazing commitment and endurance. She had long distances to cover, and while some places could be reached by car and mission plane, others required long bush walks of up to five hours and overnight stopovers in villages. The realities of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) work in bush areas were not new to Jacinta as she already had eighteen years of experience in Torembi, Ningil (in the Aitape Diocese) and Kunjingini and was to continue in Dreikir area for another ten years!

Father Jan Szweda SVD, who was the Divine Word Missionary Provincial Leader in Papua New Guinea in 2005, recalled his impressions as a young missionary.⁹⁷

Being in Bongos (1980-1981) and then in Yassip, I always admired Sr Jacinta for her commitment and dedication. She was a great bush walker and an excellent driver on the very bad roads. Young nurses walking with her could not keep up with her walking speed. She could handle the many mothers with their babies excellently. There was always order and serious business in the clinic when Jacinta was around. Her inevitable concern was the bad condition of the roads in the area.

The sisters carried out their ministry within the vision of the Wewak Diocese, rejoicing in the growing contribution of national sisters and priests. This is captured in the following account recording the sisters' departure from Wewak for Dreikir:⁹⁸

This morning Sisters Misericordia, Veronica and Sophie set off for Dreikir. This is a significant step for the congregation. The Dreikir area is now serviced by a team of national priests. With Veronica and Sophie also in the area it should be a challenge for growth in the local Church. Our prayers go with them. It will not be easy. But then the Cross is part of the Mission. They were in joyful spirits setting forth this morning. I'm sure this venture would have been close to Catherine McAuley's experience. The poor, the ignorant and the under privileged are certainly in the Dreikir area.

The Melanesian priests referred to in the excerpt were: Father John Siere (Dreikir and Aresili), Fr Otto Separi (Tau and Bongos), and Fr Lawrence Tanu (Yassip-Dato). Sophie Samiak recalled the departure referred to above:⁹⁹

In 1992 I was asked to go to Dreikir (Feb) and I left Wewak with Misericordia. I remember her saying, "Get into the car, Sophie, and drive to Dreikir." The road was muddy. Misericordia continued: "Sophie you can make it, just go on driving." And that's when I experienced being the missionary going to unknown places. I was reminded of the expatriate sisters. You didn't know the language, the culture, or the place, everything else, but you went because of the need of the people. That idea was in me when I was going. Well, this was how the first sisters came, so why not Sophie? Give it a try and see!

⁹⁷ Personal conversation in Mount Hagen followed by email communion in June 2005.

⁹⁸ Excerpt taken from the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy Dreikir, in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

⁹⁹ Excerpt from an interview with Sr Sophie Samiak, November 2005.

Unfortunately, during 1992 there was a serious attack made on Sophie while on a MCH bush patrol. Sophie was leading the single file of female carriers and nurses when she was accosted and threatened by a masked youth, demanding money. One of the young carriers raced ahead and placed herself between Sophie and the attacker, who was wielding his bush knife. She cried out: “If you want to touch Sophie, you will have to kill me first!” That sudden act of bravery changed the situation from defence to attack. A second quick reaction came from the Officer in Charge, Susan Teriken, offering the money in her bilum. The would-be assailant grabbed the money and slunk away into the jungle.¹⁰⁰

Escalating lawlessness, and the difficulty of matching sisters with diverse ministries eventually forced the sisters to leave Drekikir. Their imminent departure was communicated in a letter (dated 10 October 1992) to the sisters by the National Leader, Joan MacGinley.

The closing of Drekikir in 1992 was a significant withdrawal of the sisters from ministry in the isolated areas of the East Sepik Province.¹⁰¹ Sophie Samiak, with Ann O’Regan and Vero Lokalyo, had the sad duty of closing the convent and leaving the people in this remote area.¹⁰²

Section 5. ‘Joys and sorrows mingled’ – Wewak Diocese

The cycle of joys and sorrows in life continued. To capture what seemed to be recurring themes I have used Catherine’s phrase in relation to the experience of suffering or the “cross”, hospitality, farewells and celebrations. Some examples have already been mentioned or implied, such as the closing of convents and the departure of expatriate sisters. Others depict the grave danger to the sisters in their public ministerial roles such as during the land disputes at Kaindi and Yarapos and targeted violence against women at Kunjingini – themes which are now explored.

Land disputes and evacuation from St. Benedict’s Teachers College

Disruptions were caused periodically by land disputes as the landowners sought compensation for their land on which Kaindi had been built. Despite efforts of the Catholic Church to seek justice for the landowners, the problem tended to flare up with threats to the campus residents, particularly the sisters and brothers, inciting fear and violence, distress and danger. Brief accounts were recorded in the community chronicle and reported in the newspaper:¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ From the chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Drekikir.

¹⁰¹ The letter is kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

¹⁰² Information provided by Sr Sophie Samiak, June 2007.

¹⁰³ The chronicle of the Sisters of Mercy, Kaindi, December 1987 and *The Times*, 20 January 1988, 14.

The Saure people delivered a letter at approximately 4 pm on Monday 9th December, 1987. The letter, also sent to various other officials, demanded immediate transfer of the land, and, if not, the ultimatum that we – all people living on the Kaindi campus – be off the premises by one minute past midnight on 23 Dec. Enquiries revealed that the portioning of the land had not been gazetted by the Lands Department, and the delay had aroused the Saure people.

Negotiations to unlock the stalemate, between the National and Provincial Governments and the landowners were initiated by Bishop Raymond Kalisz and the Christian Brothers, Peter Harney and Graeme Leach. These attempts were successful for a time, but the Kaindi land problem, like so many other indigenous land claims, tended to resurface, due to differing conceptions of land tenure, and the fact that in the mind of Papua New Guinean citizens, land is inalienable.¹⁰⁴

Kunjingini - protesting against violence

When violence against women escalated in 2000 in the markets and on the highway in the Maprik area and in Wewak town, Father Otto Separi, urged by Ann O'Regan, signed a public letter of protest. An excerpt of this letter, written 'in the name of the priests and deacons of the Maprik Deanery', now follows.

We are extremely offended, hurt and diminished, when we see, encounter, or hear of women being maltreated by men, culture or society in any way. We are particularly disturbed by incidences of rape, especially gang rape, even in our own District and Province. We are disturbed by violence against women, whether it be physical, verbal or emotional. We are disturbed when justice is not seen to be done to women in cases of rape, where the male assailant is often given an insignificant sentence in relation to the damage done to the woman, mentally, emotionally and physically.

We ask our brothers to recognise the dignity of women, which is given to them by God.

Otto Separi¹⁰⁵

Hospitality, liturgical celebrations and farewells

Convents renowned for hospitality, liturgical celebrations and farewells in the Wewak Diocese were Kaindi, Yarapos and Kunjingini.

The Kaindi convent, which had been built by the diocese in 1969, became a central house for the increased numbers of sisters in the various communities of the Wewak Diocese. At first they congregated from Kunjingini, Torembi, Yangoru, Ulupu and Yarapos, and later from the foundations made during the 1970s and 1980s at Negrie, Kairiru and Dreikir. Sisters from the rural mission

¹⁰⁴ Further details of this situation were communicated to me in writing by Sr Joan MacGinley.

¹⁰⁵ This was addressed to the editor of the *Independent Newspaper*.

stations, especially, found it a welcome base after travelling the dangerous roads, which were subject to flooding and vandal attacks, for supplies, or health reasons.

Periodic Assemblies were held at Kaindi, during which the Australian Leaders offered their support and expertise in paving the way in a practical sense towards the ideal of Melanesian Mercy.¹⁰⁶ Each succeeding Assembly witnessed the growing presence of young Melanesians - constant reminders to their Australian sisters of the riches of traditional Melanesian cultures with the close relationship between the sacred and the secular, and the divine embrace of all aspects of human life and the world of nature.

There have been other occasions, such as retreats for all the sisters, the junior professed or the novices. For example, former Mercy Sisters in Papua New Guinea, Margaret Bubb from Bathurst and Bernadette Eckersley from Grafton, using their professional expertise, led the sisters through the 'call to Mercy', and Ursula Gilbert from Melbourne conducted a Mercy spirituality retreat there, and in Mount Hagen, in January 2004.

From its earliest days the Kaindi Chapel, within its peaceful setting, was the home of many vibrant and moving liturgies. The voices of student choirs were raised in accompaniment with the rich tones of Sr Val's organ and their own cultural musical instrumentation, lifting the congregation's hearts and minds in prayer. The students' creative imagination and youthful energy were expressed in music, drama and singing processions, expressing the richness of their Melanesian heritage in Christian worship! In her role as Head of the Religious Education Department, Bernadette O'Dwyer spent time after hours with individual students helping them to lead the Eucharistic service of *Komunio Lotu* and inspiring them with her firm belief in, and creative suggestions for, lay participation in the Church.¹⁰⁷

Margarita Shannon spoke of a tradition and sign of the students' real involvement in the liturgy of the Church.¹⁰⁸

Drama, liturgical dance and colorful posters have always marked the big feast days of the Church, as well as the Sunday Masses. The Holy Week and Easter liturgy each year have become a time of really entering into the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection. It is also pleasing too, in more recent

¹⁰⁶ The historic first Assembly of the sisters from the Highlands (Goroka, Simbu, Mount Hagen and Enga) and the Coast (Wewak, Aitape, Rabaul, Madang and Port Moresby) in April 1980 has been mentioned. This was the first combined meeting towards unification when Sister Anne McLay introduced the new Constitutions to a united Australian group, postulants, Petronia Gawi, Theresia Gongi and Veronica Lokalyo, were accepted and the Aitape Task Force sought, and was granted, normal inclusion among the PNG Mercy foundations.

¹⁰⁷ The *Komunio Lotu* was a Eucharistic service commonly held in village communities and conducted by Eucharistic ministers where no priest was available for regular Sunday liturgies.

¹⁰⁸ From Sr Margarita Shannon's speech as Guest Speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November 1990, mentioned above.

times, when priests are not always available, to see students leading Communion liturgies. All of these activities not only enrich one's spiritual life, but are also valuable learning experiences for teachers, who must be prepared to take an active part in liturgical functions, in areas where few people have had the advantages of a Christian tertiary education.

Kunjingini Parish celebrations and farewells 1991, 2001

Two of the original Kungingini founders who had set up Kaindi in 1969 returned to Kunjingini almost thirty years later.¹⁰⁹ Margarita Shannon came in 1987 as first Director of the diocesan Bible Centre, housed in the renovated buildings of the original teacher training complex. Val came in 1989 to guide the restoration and replacement of timber in the perilously dangerous white-ant ridden structure of the sisters' convent. She also planned and supervised the building of a new kitchen and storeroom. Within a few years, these tasks were accomplished and the time for the sisters' departure came round.

The men, women and children of the whole parish participated in a formal farewell Mass and *singsing* celebrations for these two pioneers. Margarita recalled these joyful farewell celebrations:

As part of the celebrations, including Mass in the big church, it was time for the *singsings*. Each group had its own distinctive headdress, decorated with bird of paradise, cassowary and other feathers. Pieces of brightly coloured crotons were attached to arms and legs, and faces were painted in traditional designs. As the evening grew into night, the *kundu* drummers with their steady beat and accompanying songs and dances, continued. They explained that this was their expression of appreciation of what many Sisters of Mercy had been doing in their midst, over a period of 34 years.

The song that touched the sisters most, however, was the processional song of the village leaders:

Before you came we had nothing,
And our parents and grandparents had nothing.
You brought us books and pencils and gave us education.
You looked after us when we were sick,
And you looked after our children.
Now you are going home,
And we are taking your place.

Margarita reflected that it was a missioning ceremony of another kind. "We were being missioned home! The people saw themselves with the mission call to take our place!"

¹⁰⁹ From Sr Margarita's speech as Guest Speaker at the Kaindi Graduation, November 1990, mentioned above.

Celebrations to mark the 50 years of Kunjingini Parish in 2001 were also a joyous testimony of the faith of the people. The solemnity of the occasion was heightened by the visit of some pioneer sisters from Australia – Bridie Fennessy, Joan Hooper and the long-serving Val Cervetto.

One particularly remarkable process of formal recognition of the sisters' contribution, in the best women's tradition of Melanesian protocol, is worthy of note. One of the parish women's groups performed a dance, progressively and rhythmically moving forward, with a gift of a special carving held aloft. As they approached this could be seen to be an elaborate Sepik carving, with a decorative battery clock face set in the centre - a gift for the sisters. Once in front of the formal gathering, the women handed the precious gift to the two main celebrants who carefully passed it over to Sr Val. On her return to Mount Hagen, the Sisters of Mercy PNG Leader, Helen O'Brien, placed it in the administration centre at McAuley House.

After the Eucharistic Liturgy, men, women and children gathered to celebrate in *singsings* in an area marked out on the old airstrip. The writer, touched by the gentle ceremonial clock exchange of the women, asked some people in the *singsing* crowd the reasons for their gift. The answer was a straightforward one: the sisters had brought education to their children, looked after their families when they were sick, and taught them healthy ways to look after themselves and their families.¹¹⁰

A new purpose for Catherine's House – Mercy Education Program

Kaye Bolwell undertook the task of providing secondary education for young women, including sisters and young women interested in the Mercy way of life. How this came about is recorded in the document 'Mercy Education Program Policy'.¹¹¹

For many years there has been an acknowledgement of the need for education, especially for women in Papua New Guinea, and various sisters have searched for ways to maintain programs. In the late 1970s a formal CODE (Distance Education) program was started by the sisters at Holy Trinity Teachers College, Mount Hagen [and carried out by Sister Helen McDonell and Mary Eamon Brennan]. This program which continued for about 10 years served in assisting with the upgrade of education of the women interested in joining the Sisters of Mercy. In 1981 an informal education program was also established in Wewak. About this time too a group of interested women was sent to study at Our Lady of Mercy College, Yapos. In 1985 the right wing of Catherine's House was opened as a CODE centre and the ministry was later extended to include assisting prisoners in Boram gaol.

¹¹⁰ Veteran missionaries, Fathers Kees van der Geest SVD and Arnold Steffen SVD, confirmed in May 2006, that the Wosera people of the area had vastly and visibly improved in health and mental and physical stamina over three decades of the sisters' influence there. Also cf. Hilda Yangele's quote in Chapter Four.

¹¹¹ Extracted from a document regarding the educational project, offered by the Principal, Sr Kaye Bolwell, at Kaindi in May 2006.

The Sisters of Mercy Leadership Team, aware that more and more women were seeking to upgrade their studies, sought to develop a policy that would be a guide to enable a study program to be set in place for both internal and external students.

The Mercy Education Program is not an initial training program for women to become Sisters of Mercy. Like Catherine, the Sisters of Mercy are willing to assist the women who in one way or another have been deprived of receiving formal education.

It is in accordance with the goals of the program to provide opportunities for the upgrading of the education levels of the sisters to qualify them for entry to professional programs for their future ministries. Sister Emma Awehi, working part time in elementary education within the Callan Services, and Robina Eide continued their secondary studies through the Mercy Education Program.

Part 3. Mount Hagen Archdiocese and Diocese of Wabag (Enga)

In their ministries in the Mount Hagen Diocese, the sisters were encouraged by Archbishop Bernarding and his successors, Michael Meier, and Douglas Young.¹¹²

Section 1. Holy Trinity Teachers College¹¹³

During the late 1980s when the college was well established and the role of the sisters as lecturers was diminishing, a decision was taken to leave the large two-storey convent building and move to an ordinary staff house on the campus. This move allowed the large building to be used for female accommodation, which had become overcrowded in the existing dormitories. It then formed part of a cluster of female dormitories appreciatively named after some of the pioneering Deans of Women Students from the different religious communities – Josette McDonnell RSM, Ellen Dunn RSM, Marilyn Chall OSF and Carolyn Pile FMI. In front of these buildings were planted beautiful, colourful garden beds, a few leafy shrubs and towering gum trees.

The simpler accommodation allowed the sisters, Helen White, Valda Finlay and Veronica Lokalyo, to identify more with the growing number of national staff and their families who became their close neighbours. It was also more manageable for the smaller numbers in community and more suitable for the young Melanesian sisters acclimatising to religious life and home management.

¹¹² The words of appreciation of these ecclesiastical men, along with those of a lay co-worker with the sisters, are expressed in Flaherty, *Crossings in Mercy*, 243-247.

¹¹³ The sisters' responsibilities, collaboration and flexibility in the process of empowerment of national male and female staff in teacher education at Holy Trinity Teachers College and the trends Holy Trinity had in common with St. Benedict's Teachers College have previously been discussed.

The Sisters of Mercy worked under the administration of the De La Salle Brothers. William Shaw, former staff member (1985-1993), reflected on the leadership role taken by them - as Principals, Heads of Department (HODs), lecturers, mentors to junior national staff and counsellors to students. The first community were Edward Becker, Ambrose Gwynne and Patrick McInerney.

De La Salle Brother and former staff member (1985-1993), William Shaw reflected on the central role the religious congregations played in social interaction as they promoted a spirit of friendship and cohesion on the campus.¹¹⁴

The De La Salle and Mercy communities, as well as those of Sisters of Notre Dame, Franciscan Sisters, Patrician Brothers and Holy Spirit Sisters established a sense of community amongst the religious, including the various chaplains who officiated at HTTC.

The Sisters of Mercy, who had been there from the beginning, worked beside the Divine Word Missionaries, and other religious communities. They had a keen interest in, and took on an equal responsibility for all that concerned the welfare and overall good of the College. This involvement enhanced social cohesion.

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Papua New Guinea and the Eucharistic celebration at the large central park lands in May 1984 was a momentous occasion. Josette McDonell recalled that the Sisters of Mercy placed thousands of hosts in sacred vessels for the seventy-five thousand people expected from all over the Highlands, as well as contributing in many other ways. However, this contribution, along with their well-known mission involvement in the diocese, seemed to be overlooked when it came to a matter of protocol.

Among those selected to receive communion from the Pope were the Leaders of the religious orders, women and men, currently working in the Highlands. There was one notable exception to this privilege – our National Leader, Sister Helen O’Brien. Helen was denied the privilege because the Sisters of Mercy were not wearing veils as we had dropped the custom some years before.¹¹⁵

Later that year the sisters held their second National Assembly and the Notre Dame Sisters at Kumdi offered to provide food and accommodation in the boarding school. This act of generosity was initiated by Marissa Connors, Helen Rita and Rose Bernard, early pioneers in the Highlands, and cheerfully endorsed by their Congregation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ This was a recollection offered in person and followed up by email communication, April 2007.

¹¹⁵ These events were recalled by Sr Josette McDonell in a recorded interview in 2005.

¹¹⁶ The Notre Dame Sisters had close links with the North Sydney sisters, particularly as Mother Philomena had offered hospitality to their sisters in Sydney en route to Toledo, Ohio for their home leave. As former Matron of the Mater Hospital she was in a good position to secure the services of the Mater Hospital for missionaries when medical services were required.

Individual Mercy Sisters called to Mount Hagen Archdiocese

While Holy Trinity and McAuley were the bases for communities working predominantly within the town boundaries, some sisters were appointed further afield in the Mount Hagen Diocese.

Rulna Health Sub-Centre

When Joan Adams left St Mary's Hospital, Aitape, somewhat exhausted by the heat and malaria, she felt that she had enough strength to start again in the Highlands. Responding to a request to raise the standards of a Health Sub-Centre at Rulna, Joan set out in earnest – though not quite expecting, on her maiden journey to the remote rural parish of Rulna, to be driving a four-ton truck of building supplies on dangerous mountain roads with hair-pin bends in the wet season! On hearing of this, Archbishop Michael Meier immediately arranged for a small Suzuki, which was more in keeping with what diminutive Joan could handle.

Facilities and security were improved through the voluntary work of Br Kevin Deiderich SVD. Working with national nurses, Joan was able, with her qualifications, expertise and determination, to raise the standards of health care at the centre and through Maternal and Child Health Clinics. Tragically, a violent gang attack on her life, led to Joan's return to Australia.¹¹⁷

Fatima Secondary School¹¹⁸

Fatima Provincial High School at Banz, run by the Christian Brothers, was one of the first in the country to gain approval to operate as a Senior Secondary School. Petronia Gawi, having successfully completed her Diploma in Teaching (Primary) and the Bachelor of Education at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), applied for a position on the staff at Fatima and was appointed Dean of Women Students. Petronia taught the senior classes and carried out these duties with competence from 1995 to the end of 1998, when she left to take up duties at Divine Word University.

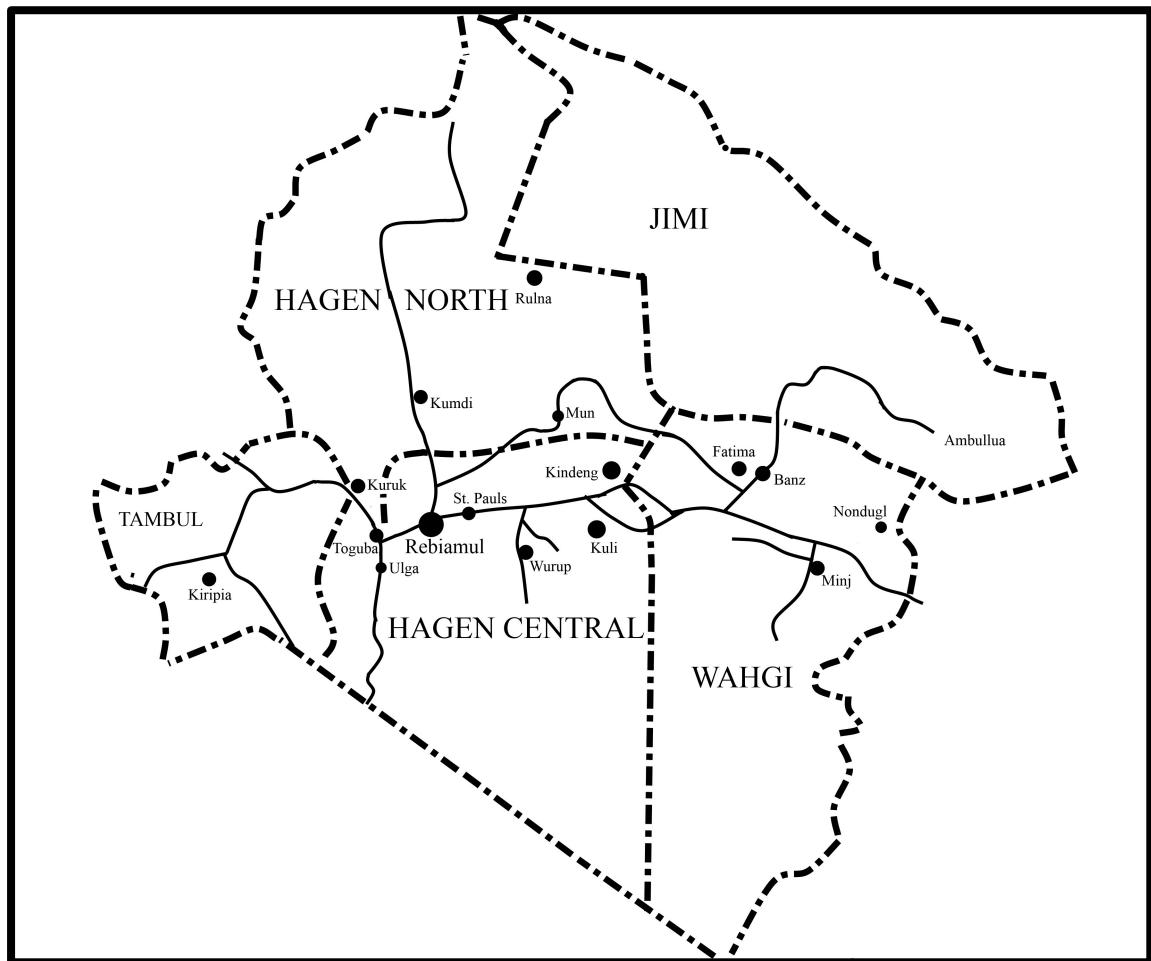
The following map shows the Catholic mission stations of the Mount Hagen Archdiocese, including places of ministry of the Sisters of Mercy mentioned in this study. A copy of the original diocesan map was emailed by Douglas Young SVD, Archbishop of Mount Hagen.

¹¹⁷ Despite the sisters' long-held hopes for justice, the perpetrators were never penalised.

¹¹⁸ The introduction of senior secondary at selected schools in the Provinces was established as a policy of the National Education Reform Committee outlined in the Introduction to this Chapter.

Map 8

ARCHDIOCESE OF MOUNT HAGEN



Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World

After carrying out leadership responsibilities for five years in Mount Hagen, Joan MacGinley resumed pastoral duties in ministry in the Mount Hagen Diocese.¹¹⁹ Working with Fr Arnie Steffan SVD and Br Peter van der Weil SVD, she was on the National Team for Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World. Joan explained the significance of this:¹²⁰

As a member of the National Team of the Movement for a Better World here in PNG our aim is to accompany the dioceses in their planning. At present there are seven dioceses in PNG following the renewal programs A very important component of diocesan renewal is the spirituality of communion. A careful re-reading of the Vatican documents revealed to the Synod of Bishops in 1985 that we are all being called to a communitarian spirituality....

¹¹⁹ Joan had formerly carried out a leading role in pastoral ministry in Kunjingini and Kairiru while on the diocesan team.

¹²⁰ This was explained in a written communication, 30 March 2005.

The Community Animation Service of the Movement for a Better World is an intervocational group made up of lay people, religious, priests, and bishops. The bishops preside as guarantors. The group serves the renewal – conversion of the Church and society towards the universal unity desired by Christ for the salvation of the world.

Section 2. Mercy Sisters in the new Diocese of Wabag (Enga)

As seen in the general introduction to this chapter, Enga was caught in a turmoil of rapid social change between traditional and modern ways within little more than a generation.¹²¹

The Sisters of Mercy support the new Diocese

On 29 March 1982, Hermann Raich SVD was appointed Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Wabag to serve Enga, which had been made a separate province a few years earlier.¹²² In a spirit of energy and enthusiasm the priests formulated a practical diocesan pastoral plan to strengthen the local Church – one in which Sisters of Mercy were to play a key role. Bishop Raich continued to cement the close and supportive bond that had grown up among the religious and church workers in this remote, but well defined region. Despite the many clans and sub-clans, one major Engan language dominated, and this helped promote a sense of unity among Engans, except when clan loyalty or survival was threatened. As the years progressed, more and more Engan men and women were involved actively in church and lay ministries. The Engan Catholics proudly expressed their faith and place in the universal Church as they carried a huge timber cross in pilgrimage from station to station across the mountains. The pilgrimage culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist by Pope John Paul II in the assembled Highlands gathering of the faithful at Mount Hagen in 1984.¹²³

Jennifer Bailey's contribution to the training of catechists was recognised in the new diocese and she continued in charge of the Catechist Training Centre from 1982 until 1991. As well as being overall manager and teacher of residential courses, Jennifer conducted in-service sessions in the parishes, often in conjunction with parish priests. She also supervised the catechists in their field work practice in the parishes. RoseMary Baker was on the teaching staff (1981-1984), specialising in liturgy.

¹²¹ With the introduction, decades earlier, of steel tools and machinery, a cash economy and wage employment, the workloads of men were decreased while the domestic responsibilities of women were increased, destabilising traditional work roles. The encroachment of western ways led to the breakdown in local customs, such as food preparation, husband and wife sharing the one house and being separated from their extended family.

¹²² As previously introduced in Chapter Three.

¹²³ Many who took part in, or witnessed, this carrying of the Cross claimed to have been deeply moved by this experience. They commented that the Cross seemed to assume an energy to keep hurrying along.

Margaret Shakeshaft returned from Hagen to Enga to assist the fledgling diocese by her work in the Catechist Training Centre (1982-1985). Helen Law from Parramatta and Ann Hook from North Sydney were recruited from Australia. Lay staff members at Pumakos Catechist Centre were John Reedy (later Director of LCI Goroka) and Mr Mark Kolande who specialised in Pastoral Theology and Counselling Methods, respectively. John's wife, Manjula, a qualified nurse, was a welcome contributor to the health care of the growing mission station personnel. Some Sisters of St Therese – as staff members (Laurentia, Leonie, Marie Goretti and Petra) or as students (Heriberta, Bernadette and Maria Goretti) - lived for a time in community. Veronica Lokalyo, the first Sister of Mercy from Enga, completed her two-year catechist training course and served on the staff for a short while.

The sisters had a close relationship with the Sisters of the Holy Spirit at the Health Centre at Yampu (formerly the leprosarium) and, later on, at the Pastoral Centre at Par. Sr Henrilena SSps was much appreciated for her hospitality, cheerful service and excellent cooking! The pastoral needs in the parishes and diocese were met through short residential courses at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre at Par, directed by Fr Doug Young SVD, and where Margaret Shakeshaft, living in community with the Holy Spirit Sisters, Miriam and Henrilena, served on the staff for three years. Margaret assisted young women with their secondary correspondence lessons.

Forming the educational foundation of Catholic primary education as Catholic Education Secretary, Helen McDonell, successfully passed this responsibility on to Mr John Yangal, after a period of on-the-job training.

Pumakos Mission Station

When Clare Gilchrist, who had worked constantly towards localisation, left for urgent medical treatment in Australia, the hospital was nationalised for a year. In 1985, Maureen O'Donnell from Aitape took on duties as Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Mercy Hospital, as well as Catholic Health Secretary. Maureen worked conscientiously ensuring high standards were maintained while promoting localisation. Sue Smith arrived from Brisbane in August 1985, and the two young, efficient and well-qualified sisters worked untiringly together – Maureen in the hospital and Sue with the maternal and child health clinics, school health and aid post orderlies. When Maureen returned to Australia, Sue took on duties as Catholic Health Secretary (1988-1991) and responsibility for the hospital (1989-1991), the maternal and child health clinics and supervision of student nurses and aid post orderlies. She continued the demanding task of empowerment of indigenous nursing staff by training them for top level positions of responsibility. In addition, Sue selected further training courses and put specific plans in place for the staff to apply for these.

Sue Smith recalled aspects of the normal side of living at Pumakos (1985-1991)¹²⁴

The air was crisp and cool as I stepped out from the house in the early morning. The kaukau leaves were covered with dew. I could smell the soil in the new garden dug nearby. The earth was rich and dark brown. As I looked out across the Tsak Valley, the clouds hung below the peaks of the mountains and wisps of smoke meandered up from the houses nearby. Children's cries and laughter were heard in the creek below as I began another day in Tsak Pumakos. Tsak means 'green valley', once a volcanic crater. Pumakos is approximately 6,500 feet above sea level. I felt fortunate to be here at Pumakos, Wapenamanda District, Enga Province. The Mercy community had been pioneered by the North Sydney Mercies in 1965.

The community during those years was often a combination of Mercies, St Therese Sisters, and Rosary Sisters (National PNG Sisters). A married couple, Marta and Robert Hochgruber, from the Austrian Volunteers Group, with their three small children also lived on the mission station at that time. They often joined us for the evening meal. The parish priest, an SVD, Father Joe Krettek, joined us for all our meals; so you could say that it was often like open house. People from the diocese and other areas often visited. There was a Catechetical Training Centre at Pumakos and catechists from all over the Highlands came to live there with their families each year. A health centre and a primary school were also part of the Pumakos mission station.

Many of the PNG Mercy Sisters who lived at Pumakos were in their early formation years. This was such an enriching time for me as we shared community life together. Life was earthy and real. I enjoyed the challenge of a new language and culture, and also the mixture of cultures that we became as a whole community. I learnt a lot from this special time. I believe that I learnt to listen to the earth, to myself, to my God and hopefully, to people more fully, during this time.

The experience of working within a community health centre and eventually managing the health centre is something I will never forget. My capacity as a nurse was stretched and challenged on a daily basis. The local people whom I interacted with taught me so much about the essence of life in all its richness. I was fortunate to be the Catholic Health Secretary for some years, and therefore met a number of people of different cultures and religions within the national health scene.¹²⁵

'Joys and sorrows mingled' as the sisters stand in solidarity with the people

The clans of the Tsak Valley, particularly those around Pumakos, resisted the trend towards violence for some years, devoting themselves fervently to charismatic prayer,¹²⁶ Clare commented on their spiritual resolve while other clans were engaging in fighting:¹²⁷

¹²⁴ This was written before the wide scale deterioration of law and order, escalating in 1991.

¹²⁵ An except taken from a copy of the impressions of the ex-PNG Sisters of Mercy and kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

¹²⁶ A movement which the people themselves had introduced at grass roots level in 1983.

¹²⁷ Information gathered from Sr Clare Gilchrist based on her personal experience and observation.

During this time, the people broke spears and promised not to fight and maintain peace. This involved all the Catholic clans of the Tsak Valley. Despite other fights occurring in this period of time, the Yabatani Pausa at Pumakos remained steadfast to their promise to refrain from fighting, despite much outside pressure being put on them.

The sisters, together with priests and pastoral workers, were attempting to stand by the people in their struggles. Bishop Raich requested Rita Hassett to join the pastoral team at the diocesan headquarters in Sangurap.¹²⁸ With her usual vigour, versatility and cultural sensitivity, Rita organised small gatherings in an attempt to help women explore changing needs within the context of family life. Men, in their changing roles, were included in her outreach. This new ministry to people beyond defined church boundaries was not always understood by missionaries with a more traditional approach. Rita often had to face criticism and sometimes antagonism from those who suspected the cultural male domination was being undermined, or who insisted on a more traditional approach to religion.

Fierce fighting eventually broke out in the valley in 1989 and the police seemed unable to address so much widespread lawlessness. When female nurses, teachers and other church workers were attacked and assaulted while serving the community, the Union of Women Religious of the diocese, with Rita Hassett as Chairperson and four other Sisters of Mercy taking part (Gabrielle Flood, Sue Smith, Helen Law and Jennifer Bailey), as well as other women religious, held a meeting to see what more they could do. Their decision was to send a letter to the Honourable Prime Minister, with copies to *The Post Courier* newspaper, *The Times* newspaper, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.¹²⁹

Honourable Sir,

We, the Catholic Women Religious of Enga Province, would like to address to you our concern over the apparent decline in Law and Order in the Province/Nation especially in the manner in which it affects the safety and well-being of women.

The fifteen Catholic Women Religious presently residing in the Enga Province met together last Saturday and discussed recent experiences of abuse and harassment encountered while offering services to the community. In many instances these were personal experiences but some were experiences of women church workers in other Provinces. The recent upheavals in the Tsak Pumakos Valley have had extremely frightening elements for the women giving services through the Community School and the Health Centre, as well as the sisters who live at the mission Station...

¹²⁸ Rita was an experienced missionary from the Goroka and Kundiawa Dioceses and Master's Degree graduate from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila.

¹²⁹ Letter dated 12 February 1989 to *The Post Courier* newspaper, *The Times* newspaper, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Other sisters have had experiences of being assaulted by men in such manners as them grasping clothing and shaking the sisters, being held at knife point, men physically punching or pushing the sister roughly to show displeasure. In the latter half of last year, one sister had the tyre of her car shot at whilst she was returning from Hagen. The sisters' comment that they are now experiencing the helplessness that many of the women of the Highlands live with daily is a sad comment on a disturbing element of our society. That any woman should live in fear of her life while performing her ordinary duties is a situation that cannot be approved by any social structure....

The sisters are anxious to be of service to the people of this country but with the decline in Law and Order they are becoming unsure of where energies can effectively be utilised without undue risk of physical or psychological harm.

We ask you to give some consideration to this concern of ours; not only for the sake of the Women Religious of the Catholic Church but even more so for the sake of the women of the Nation. We firmly believe that the violence that we are personally experiencing is an extension of the domestic violence that is prevalent in the country.

Signed: *Sister Rita Hassett RSM, Chairperson, on behalf of:*

Sisters Henrilena, Miriam, Anne, Wigbertia SSpS

Sisters Gabrielle, Sue, Helen, Jenny RSM

Sisters Thomasina, Margaret CSN

Sisters Christofilda, Ursula, Augusta, Aloisia RS

Catholic Women Religious of Enga Province

Unfortunately, as the situation deteriorated further, services were forced to close.¹³⁰ The land on which Pumakos station stood was close to the border of two related but rival clans and when the Pumakos clan that had held out for so long against fighting, was drawn into the conflict, the mission station inevitably offered an avenue for cross-fire enemy attacks. The mission authorities and the sisters, particularly Clare, questioned the warring clan leaders and the people about their intentions towards the mission.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the sisters continued to be wakened each morning by the sound of sub-machine gunfire.

The sisters, under the guidance of Christa Murphy SSpS, gathered together in 1989 to discern whether to stay or leave. Helen Law decided to stay until December 1990 when she was due for home leave, while others chose to remain indefinitely. She had been on the staff of the Catechist Training Centre for four years and had guided Helen Kiponge and Elizabeth Pepom through their

¹³⁰ The following account of the tribal fighting and destruction of Pumakos mission station is based on the personal experiences of Srs Clare Gilchrist and Jennifer Bailey, and the research carried out by Clare through their contact with the people.

¹³¹ When the mission authorities, particularly Clare tried to find out if the warring clans intended any harm to the mission, or if religious factors were involved, they were assured that the missionaries would be safe and there was no animosity between the Lutherans and Catholics as an underlying cause.

postulancy there. Helen Pili heroically taught alongside the teachers, but in the tense situation, the parents eventually refused to allow their children to pass through enemy territory and the school was forced to close.¹³²

Meanwhile, the fighting in the Tsak Valley intensified as more and more clans were drawn into the web of conflict and Enga was declared a state of emergency.¹³³ Two clans offered to protect the sisters, first the Keps and then the Kwias.¹³⁴ The Kwias, in particular, acting as bodyguards, risked their lives in defence of the sisters in the long months of fighting to come. Having been caught in between this network of tribal fighting, Jennifer explained the sisters' relationship with the people:

We personally were neutral, favouring neither side, and both lains (clans) at that stage were caring for us and our safety. For example, if we were out on the road in the course of ministry they would always tell us to wait until fighting ceased and the danger was over. Another example of this care was that sometimes we would have been out and fighting would start again only when we got back safely. It was as if they knew we were out and wanted us to get back before they started again.

The sisters continued health care at the hospital until it was forced to close. The forced closure of the Catechist Training Centre soon followed and the catechists returned to their home villages. With intermittent fighting going on around them in the form of bullets and flying arrows, and warriors advancing across the property, it was a terrifying time for the sisters. Yet, they refused the request of the anxious and concerned Bishop for them to leave the station as they wanted eventually to continue their ministry and meanwhile to stand by the women and children and the majority of ordinary people, badly affected by the fighting. Jennifer reported on their reasons:¹³⁵

After careful consideration and prayer we sisters, Jenny, Clare and Helen Pili, decided that if we served the people in good times we should also support them in their bad times. We decided to stay on and carry on with the health services and the CTC. The tense situation strengthened our sense of community and mission. We always made sure that there was no one left alone on the station and spent a lot of time together to keep our spirits up. We could never have survived this ordeal without each other's support. We were also supported by others who were thinking of us, like Tess's Easter parcel, or Father Laurence's letter telling us he appreciated our staying. He reinforced our own convictions that, having been with the people in good times, we should not run away in the hard times.

Sometimes the bullets would be flying over our house and one afternoon the only place where we could sit was the laundry, because the kitchen was in the crossfire and it would be dangerous to stay there. So here we were, Helen Pili, Leonie (Sister St Therese) and myself, sitting on the mats listening to music and doing a bit of craft work – they were making bilums and I was making some kind of a mat out of

¹³² Sr Helen Pili taught for a short time at a neighbouring Catholic School.

¹³³ The carrying of arms was prohibited, and anyone found carrying weapons, even a garden bush knife, was immediately arrested, with the burden of proving innocence placed upon the suspect.

¹³⁴ As noted above, these details were provided by Sr Jennifer Bailey in a recorded interview some time later.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

long stitch using wool. While we were sitting there a group of young women came to see us and brought us some *kaukau* (sweet potato) because the *lapun mamas* (old ladies) were worried about us. Other afternoons the old women would wait for the fighting to finish for the day and they would come around the back way through the bush and bring us little bundles of kumul, potatoes or a little something from their garden, because at that stage there was no one actually living round the station – we had no close neighbours. They would sit down with us and talk to us and when the time came they would say: “We had better go now. We want to get home before dark”. I felt loved by those old ladies for their thoughtfulness and concern for our safety.

The sisters eventually made the inevitable decision to evacuate, with the hope that with their absence, the fighting would cease. The Bishop was notified and he came to talk to the people, supported by the Enga religious, for example, Mona Marie SND, Sr Bernadette SSStT and Father Laurence. The people protested that they wanted the sisters to stay, but the Bishop urged them to be at peace, and to take responsibility for the protection of the property, which they said they would do. Then some men stood up to speak, like John Pulip the councillor and Leader of the Yabatani Pausa, and his father, Iki. They asked the people what they were doing. They had given the land and supported the mission and now all this trouble had come up. After this, Iki walked away sadly and his son said he died of a broken heart a few weeks later. The mission personnel left on 25 April 1991.

Jennifer reflected on subsequent events:¹³⁶

Once the mission personnel left the station, there was no further fighting for a time. We had hoped this would be the result and that there would be a breathing space for the people to consider their actions and the results it had brought about – e.g. the closure of all health services, the two schools, Lutheran and Catholic, and the Catechist Training Centre, the destruction of homes, stores, gardens and the massive loss of life. However, turmoil was stirred up again due to political rivalry among the clans in a provincial government by-election, and from April to August 1991 there was no effort by the government to work to bring about peace to the people The impression was to leave them alone to destroy themselves.

The destruction of Pumakos mission and the sisters’ refuge at Wanepap

On Friday 27 September 1991 the priests’ house, store, garages and some parts of the Catechist Training Centre were destroyed by fire. The same night, the sisters’ convent was burnt down. Within a week the church was destroyed. Some time later some of the classrooms were burnt down. Almost everything was destroyed – the rest of the Catechist Centre, staff houses, school buildings and the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

health centre. The only seven buildings left standing were destroyed the following night. The entire station of more than a hundred buildings was burnt to the ground!

Charred metal, darkened concrete foundations and blackened patches of ground mapped the original places. Nothing was left of the large church for community worship, a primary school for hundreds of children, a large health centre open to all in the area, the combined training centre for catechists and their families from the Wabag, Simbu and Goroka Dioceses and the home of the sisters for twenty-six years, including all their belongings and professional and ministry records!

Despite their devastation, Clare and Jennifer began again at Wanepap, Clare working in a small bush clinic and Jennifer completing the catechist training program. For a time in 1993, Jennifer was the only Sister of Mercy left in Enga as she travelled throughout the diocese doing supervisory work with the catechists in their parishes. The following year, she was asked by Bishop Raich to commence a Bible School at Wanepap to introduce the new Bible apostolate at grass roots level. Clare returned and the two sisters were joined by young Melanesian sisters who participated in the Bible sessions and retreats. First, Elizabeth Pepom, then Schola Fakiwi, followed by Catherine Jambet, a qualified pastoral worker, took part in this ministry.

In turn, Claudia Apalenda, Sebastina Yangan and Sophie Samiak came to assist Clare in the clinic and in the bush patrols. As younger women, they recognised their need to gain the experience required to take over responsibilities in health care. Maryanne Kolkia joined the community as a postulant and later as a Junior Professed sister, teaching in the primary school. These transition years were a time of preparation for the Papua New Guinean sisters to take full responsibility as a Mercy community.

When Clare and Jennifer left at the end of 1996 and 1997, respectively, to return to Australia, the Papua New Guinean sisters were ready to manage on their own. This marked a truly significant crossing of community and ministry in the history of the Sisters of Mercy. Making up the Mercy community at Wanepap in 1998 were three Melanesian sisters – Sophie Samiak, Catherine Hopil and Maryanne Kolkia.

Unfortunately, the location of the clinic at Wanepap was not supported by the province, and was eventually forced to close.¹³⁷ Sophie, who had had the sad task of closing the convent at Dreikir some years earlier, then found herself once again packing up the convent belongings, removing the tabernacle and locking the front door. One door was closing for the Sisters of Mercy who had been in

¹³⁷ Although there was some possibility of establishing a health clinic further out at Kepelam, this did not eventuate.

Enga for thirty-five years, and another was opening, beckoning this small band of sisters to make the winding journey along the Highlands Highway to the rural parish of Neragaima in the Simbu in 1999.

Peace, reconciliation and rebuilding at Pumakos

For the entire period, whether during peace or war, Fr Cassie Niezgoda SVD, who was parish priest of neighbouring Pompabus and caring for Maramuni and Pumakos, continued to come for Mass and to give pastoral care to the people of the area.¹³⁸ To do this he had to pass through the fighting area wherever he went, often forced to lie down in the *baret* (ditch) waiting for the fighting to cease so he could go on. He was often afraid and, looking down over the valley from the hilltops, felt he could not go on. But he was encouraged by the community at Londe, urging him to go on and supporting him with their prayers. When there was looting from the station at Pumakos, he encouraged the outstation communities to come and collect the material so that they could build small chapels where they could pray and he could offer Mass with them.

Two heart-lifting events of the people celebrating their faith in pilgrimage up and down the mountains and valleys of Enga occurred during these years. The first was that of the *Bokis Kontrak* (Ark of the Covenant) in 1996.¹³⁹ The Bible, encased in a transparent box, as a replica of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, was carried on poles from parish to parish, accompanied by large crowds from the surrounding villages. Sophie Samiak joined as a health carer on the journey. Jennifer, who along with some of the sisters, had helped the people to prepare for this spiritual event by giving Bible retreats beforehand, was delightfully surprised that her own well-thumbed Bible was the one chosen to be in the *Bokis Kontrak*. The second event was the celebration of 50 years of the Church in Enga in 1997. The people decided to have a pilgrimage following the same track that Fathers Willie Ross and Gerry Bus had followed. When the pilgrims arrived at Pompabus, on their way to Pina, Sangurap and Sari (the original mission centre in 1947), they rejoiced to find the pioneer, Father Gerry Bus, there. They considered him the founding father of the Catholic Church in Enga and showed him great respect and appreciation for returning from Holland to be with them for this momentous occasion.

After some time, Bishop Raich, who had continually mediated with the clan leaders, insisted that it was time to bring about peace and begin the task of restoration. This they finally set about doing, and services resumed when some school and health buildings were constructed. Within ten years a large wooden framework for the church, which was intentionally larger than the original one, was erected.

¹³⁸ Personal conversation as Fr Cassie took me on a walking tour of the destroyed property.

¹³⁹ The Ark of the Covenant, which housed the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament. This event is also related in A Krol SVD and F Mihalic, *Enga Jubili*, (Madang: DWU Press, 2000).

It was in a clearing near this imposing but incomplete structure, that a special Mass of celebration took place.

Bishop Hermann Raich, his vicar, Fr Arnold Orowae and many mission personnel came to rejoice with the people in this sign of peace and regeneration.¹⁴⁰ Sisters of Mercy were prominent among them, including the early pioneers, Clare Gilchrist, Helen McDonell, Margaret Shakeshaft and Jennifer Bailey, and the first Engan Sister of Mercy, Veronica Lokalyo. After the previous tragedy, the small clusters of buildings seemed like green shoots sprouting from the ashes.

The Mass was celebrated outdoors with the altar near the priests' former presbytery. Church representatives, many of them women, stood in line with blue, red and white uniform clothing and decoration, to form an enclosure. When the writer questioned them about this, they explained the symbolism: "A church has walls, but as ours as yet, has none: we have made the wall ourselves."

The pioneer sisters were among mutual friends who had stood by one another in different circumstances of life and death over the years! Many were the spontaneous Engan hugs of love and joy! There were tears too, in the realisation that age had replaced the youth of past years, and with oceans separating them now, there was little chance of meeting one another again in this life. Also present were former Sisters of Mercy from Enga, Helen Pili and Elizabeth Pepom, who had received their teaching qualifications with the sisters and were then teaching at nearby primary schools. Helen Kiponge, who had received her qualifications as a registered nurse with the sisters, saw herself as carrying on the work of Clare in the Pumakos area.¹⁴¹

After the communal worship in the liturgical celebration in true Engan style, there was lavish hospitality in the sharing of the *mumu* feast¹⁴² accompanied by speeches of welcome, presentation of gifts and joyous clan *singsings*. During the proceedings, a young woman, Scholastica Koiam, approached her fellow Engan, Veronica Lokalyo, presenting her with a letter for the sisters.¹⁴³ Scholastica had written this on behalf of a group of widows who were staying in a house nearby to protect the convent land.

¹⁴⁰ Fr Arnold Orowae succeeded Herman Raich as Bishop of Wabag.

¹⁴¹ It was a time to remember absent friends and co-workers, such as the Sisters of St Therese who had been with the Mercy Sisters in community and ministry at Pumakos and later at Wanepap – Sisters Laurentia, Leonie, Heriberta, Bernadette, Petra and Maria Goretti.

¹⁴² Traditional cooking using hot stones in a pit dug in the bare earth to cook the pieces of meat and vegetables, wrapped in banana leaves.

¹⁴³ Sr Veronica Lokalyo brought this letter to the National Leader, and it has since been kept in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

Dear Mercy Sisters,

We are taking care of your convent land here, and the others won't build anything there.

We built a house to protect your convent. The foundation is there. It will always be yours...

Signed: Scholastica Koiam, Katrina Nandiam, Scholastika Sokon, Anna Lombo, Maria Mandai, Marata Kata, Elizabeth Alocos, Lainia Erem, Teresia Tunala, Patricia, Maria Wapilam

Rebuilding the Pumakos Church and public expressions of faith by the people of Enga

This eye witness account of the completion of the rebuilding of the Pumakos Church on 18 January 2007 was provided by Beradette Serao SND.¹⁴⁴

The Pumakos church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Heart is now referred to among the people of Enga as the 'penance' church. This signifies the spirit of reconciliation, which has motivated each clan to unite to complete the house of God. Selected from each clan, thirty to forty men carried the vast tree lengths of timber from the mountains for the church structure. Others ground rocks from the river and caves into coarse sand for cement for the square metre flooring assigned to them. Local carpenters, using the walkabout sawmill, cut wood for the benches and the women cooked food for the workers.

The Indonesian parish priest, Father Joe Mesa SVD co-ordinated the project. Despite setbacks with the breakdown of the sawmill, the people pressed on to complete their Pumakos 'penance' church'.

Part 4. The Diocese of Aitape – St Mary's Hospital, Raihu¹⁴⁵

At Aitape the sisters worked in collaboration with the successive Australian Bishops – William Rowell OFM and Brian Barnes OFM – and the Franciscan missionaries of the diocese – priests, brothers, sisters and lay workers. The institutes of religious women from Australia – the Presentations, Franciscans (FMIC), Poor Clare (a contemplative community), Josephites (from the Diocesan Josephite Federation) and the Mercies, as well as the indigenous sisters from Port Moresby, Handmaids of the Lord (AD) – formed part of the diocesan family. Like the other missionaries, the Sisters of Mercy received warm hospitality from prominent townspeople and parishioners, Rob and Margaret Parer. Many lasting friendships were made, particularly among those – both overseas and national – who worked side-by-side bringing Christ's healing touch to relieve the suffering of others.

¹⁴⁴ This was in a spontaneous response in June 2007.

¹⁴⁵ The nursing Mercy community as a Task-Force to the Diocese of Aitape under the auspices of the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy, their support from the Melbourne Congregation, and finally their incorporation into the Sisters of Mercy PNG in 1981 has been described (Chapter Four).

Developments at St Mary's, Raihu

An important goal of localisation for the School of Nursing was to include young national religious in the training and the Aitape Mercy community became a home to many of them during their formation: for community experience, nurse training, or for secondary studies by correspondence. Their presence was seen as an asset in cross-cultural community living. Each came with her distinctive and versatile language skills, cultural values and traditions. This individuality provided a fertile ground for understanding each other's culture and learning to appreciate differences in an effort to achieve the Christian ideal of love and unity, a particular emphasis of the Mercy rule of Catherine McAuley.

Terry Gongi, Sophie Samiak and Helen Kiponge graduated with their Diploma of Community Health Work (CHW). Margaret Roni, a young woman from Warapu in the Aitape Diocese, gained her qualifications and later joined the Sisters of Mercy in Kaindi. As well as the Sisters of Mercy, they encouraged the Sisters of St Therese, Rosary Sisters and Franciscan Sisters.

In the attempt of the Mercy group to reach beyond regional boundaries and grow in unity as a total group, Clare Gilchrist (Pumakos) and Joan Adams (Neragaima) crossed from the Highlands and worked in the health services at Aitape. Although both found the climate debilitating and suffered severely from malaria, they contributed through their vast experience in significant ways until they moved back to the Highlands. Margaret Wilson, previously in Simbu and Mount Hagen, spent some time in the School of Nursing at Aitape.

'Joys and sorrows mingled'

There were times when the provincial government, whose headquarters were at Vanimo, delayed the renewal of the health contract or did not release the funds for salaries.¹⁴⁶ Circumstances suggest that there was a degree of competition perceived by the government health services at Vanimo in regard to the progressively run rural hospital at Aitape. When the provincial government made allegations of misappropriation of funds against the Matron, Julie Anne Ryan, the incident was reported in the media.

¹⁴⁶ Considering the urgent needs for funding from the national government for infrastructure and services like education and health, inconsistencies in the allocation of funds within the provinces were not uncommon.

Julie Anne's innocence was eventually proclaimed and a full apology was later printed in one of the national newspapers.¹⁴⁷ During those months of public disgrace and humiliation, Julie Anne was supported by the mission and hospital staff. The Church was unable to mount a court case because of lack of funds. At times, other sisters were victims of assault in the carrying out of their duties but the perpetrators received no penalty at all, or what may be regarded as petty sentences.

The Decision to leave Aitape

The decision for the Sisters of Mercy to leave Aitape was communicated by letter to the sisters by Joan MacGinley, the national Leader on 13 May 1991.

Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea,
PO Box 265,
Mount Hagen WHP.
Papua New Guinea.
13th May, 1991.

Dear Sisters,

At our recent Council Meeting at Kaindi we took the decision by unanimous vote "That in December 1991 there will no longer be Sisters of Mercy in the Raihu Health Centre or in the Diocese of Aitape."

The decision was inevitable as our Council has been struggling to provide staff for the Raihu and the Nursing School for some time now. There are many of us who will feel a sense of loss as 1991 draws to a close.

I thank God for the dedication and generosity of the pioneer sisters, not forgetting those who followed to carry on the Work of Mercy begun at the request of the Bishop in the name of the Church in her concern for the poor, sick and under-privileged.

The Sisters of Mercy can feel a sense of achievement as Catherine Harris has localised her position as Matron. The terms of her contract states:

"Sister Catherine (or her replacement) will provide this service (Matron of Raihu Health Centre, Aitape) until a point in time that is mutually agreed upon by the National person in training and the Sisters of Mercy in consultation with the Executive of the Raihu Health Centre. When the position of Matron is localised, Sister Catherine (or her replacement) agrees to assume the position of Deputy Matron to support the National Matron for a period of time agreed upon by the National Matron and Sister Catherine (or her replacement) in consultation with the Executive of the Raihu Health Centre."

The terms are being fulfilled this year as Lena Miroi assumed the responsibilities of Matron of the Raihu Health Centre on 6 April 1991.

I would like you all to join in prayer and thanksgiving for all the Mercy Sisters who have ministered in

¹⁴⁷ A record of these documents is kept in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen.

Aitape. They have made a great contribution to Mercy PNG. “Glory be to Him whose power, working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to Him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

May the Holy Spirit shower many gifts upon us all during this week.

Your loving Sister,

Joan MacGinley RSM,

National Superior.

Thus at the beginning of 1992, the final packing and departure from the Sisters’ house was done by Catherine Harris and Sophie Samiak. A chapter of the extended involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in the health services of the Aitape Diocese for fifteen years thus sadly came to an end.¹⁴⁸

The Tsunami tragedy of 1998¹⁴⁹

First on the scene was the Catholic Diocese of Aitape and the management and staff at St Mary’s Hospital Raihu. Virtually overnight, one of their former Mercy mentors, Julie Anne Ryan, and students who had completed their nursing training in Aitape – Sophie Samiak and Margaret Roni – made their way to help out, nursing in the wards in this unspeakable medical emergency. Thanh Thuy Thi Nguyen, a pastoral counsellor at Yarapos, joined the trauma-counselling team of Father Tom Ritchie OFM to help young and old to recover and rebuild their lives. For a few weeks Victorina Sant carried out a ministry of counselling with those who had been medically evacuated to Wewak Hospital.

Part 5. Sisters missioned to other dioceses¹⁵⁰

It is not surprising that Mercy Sisters, experienced in their various ministries, were invited to forge new beginnings beyond their own dioceses in Port Moresby, Madang, Rabaul, Kavieng, Daru-Kiunga, and the trouble torn province of Bougainville.

¹⁴⁸ The St John of God Brothers who did their training here found themselves in the mid-1990s in the original convent building, vacated by the Sisters of Mercy some years earlier. The brothers took over the responsibility of providing a religious community presence at the hospital.

¹⁴⁹ The role of the Church has been outlined in the Introduction to this Chapter.

¹⁵⁰ The sisters were engaged in ministry in several dioceses of the Catholic Church giving support to the growth of the local church and the formation of indigenous women religious. They also held influential roles with the provincial and national Departments of Education and Health.

Archdiocese of Port Moresby

Xavier Institute of Missiology

Christine Watt's response to move from Yarapos in the Wewak Diocese to Xavier Institute in the Port Moresby Diocese was the first of many sisters' crossings beyond diocesan boundaries where the Mercy Sisters were established (CR). Cheryl Camp (from Negrie and Yangoru) was asked by the President of the Conference of Major Superiors, Sister Cecily Daot AD, to take the position of Directress of Xavier Institute in 1982, a responsibility which she carried out to the end of 1984.¹⁵¹ She was joined in 1983 by Sister Helen White from St Benedict's Teacher Training College in Wewak, who managed the roles of bursar of Xavier and lecturer at Holy Spirit Seminary. Helen recalled that while it was a challenge managing in two working environments, she appreciated the collaboration of the seminary staff with those of Xavier Institute. There was also a vibrant atmosphere influenced by the *wantok* system (cohesion of extended family and clan members) among the seminarians and religious women participants at Xavier. At times, Helen sought spiritual solace, heartily welcomed by the Carmelite Sisters nearby, for days of quiet retreat.

Christine Watt returned a second time to Xavier Institute as co-ordinator in 1994 and stayed on to help in the preparation to celebrate the occasion of the Silver Jubilee in 1995. Her recollections reveal the beginning and the vast influence of Xavier on religious women and men over this period.¹⁵²

I had the unique privilege of working with Mother Flavia and sharing in her vision for formation of religious sisters in PNG ...Classes began before the building was completed, and, since the complex was only a walking distance from the Holy Spirit Seminary, some of the first lecturers were from the seminary.

When Xavier Institute was proposed in 1969, twenty-eight religious institutes responded to Mother Flavia's invitation to meet in Port Moresby. That included the indigenous diocesan congregations of PNG. Within a few years this number had grown to forty-four. In the years that followed over 700 women from PNG, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Kiribati gathered at Xavier "to study and re-energise themselves for their pastoral duties". The institute was opened to clergy and male religious students from 1989.

Bishop Copas gave the seminary and ourselves a mandate to try and indigenize liturgy. So I tried to encourage the sisters to try and do things that meant something to them in their culture, but staying within the framework of the liturgical constitution. I always thought that was important – to know the rules and

¹⁵¹ From an interview with Cheryl Camp. During that time, as well as the usual formation courses, a special leadership course for superiors was introduced, dealing with topics such as leadership qualities and skills, conducting community meetings, communication skills, the exercise of authority, psychological development, religious life, and the place of religious life in the Church and world.

¹⁵² The proposed site consisted of a conical hill top, and some eighteen months later it had been levelled and Xavier Institute was being constructed there. Responsibility for orientation courses for new missionaries which were originally included in Mother Flavia's vision, was taken over by the Melanesian Institute which opened in Goroka in 1972.

then be able to flesh them out. Having experienced that with the various nationalities at EAPI in Manila I found it quite exciting to be able to do it with the indigenous sisters. I did encourage some of the sisters to write hymns and Masses in their own local musical idiom, which was good too.

The aims for the religious renewal and on-going formation for both national and expatriate sisters have been kept in focus. Courses have been offered for spiritual renewal, formation personnel, vowed life, final vows, leadership, spiritual and academic studies. Decisions about these courses, and joint responsibility for them, has increasingly been in the hands of the indigenous sisters themselves.

From 1984 to 1989 Julie Anne Ryan was Directress of Xavier, a role which involved planning programs and selecting personnel to conduct and facilitate courses. She recalled some impressions of developments:¹⁵³

... the leaders of the religious congregations throughout PNG were very concerned about the formation and welfare of the religious and courses concentrated on personal development of sisters, priests and brothers. The very first vowed life course consisted of 16, half of them men and half women, and it was a real learning process for men and women of different cultures to adapt to working together. Those years were also a time of localisation in the sense of the PNG congregations taking more responsibility for the continuation and development of Xavier.¹⁵⁴

The Mercy Sisters on the staff, who brought with them a wide and varied experience of mission, developed their knowledge through personally visiting the expatriate and indigenous sisters to familiarise themselves with their lives in community and ministry in their home dioceses. Moreover, the Union of Women Religious, which evolved into the Conference of Women Religious, operated in all the dioceses and was held together by the executive in Port Moresby. Marie Murphy performed a valuable role as Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors for six years from 1983 to 1989. For a time, Helen O'Brien was National President of the Union of Women Religious (1985). In this role, and also as Executive Secretary of the Conference of Women Religious and Federation of Religious from 1990 to 1997, Helen was significant in articulating the rights of indigenous women and giving them a 'voice'.¹⁵⁵ Sisters of Mercy also held administrative positions in the dioceses and, together with Marie and Helen and the many expatriate and national executives, had a tremendous influence on raising the status of religious women in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

¹⁵³ After long and valuable years of nursing and administrative experience at Aitape and Kunjingini, Julia Anne Ryan was requested to become Directress of Xavier.

¹⁵⁴ Xavier was part of the Bomana community. The priests used to come up and say Mass for us, and a lot of the Xavier brothers and sisters knew many of the seminarians. Before the house for the male participants was acquired, so they could form their own community together, there was regular contact with their base communities – Diocesan, Sacred Heart Brothers, Marists, Divine Word Missionaries and Dominican.

¹⁵⁵ Fr Kevin Hennessy CP, a former President of the Federation of Religious of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, emphasized Sr Helen's influence in this regard in a conversation, May 2006.

Young Melanesian Mercy Sisters attended courses at Xavier related to vowed life, formation, pastoral ministry and spiritual renewal. While being enriched and strengthened by the spiritual traditions of the various religious congregations, they were also challenged in their practical expression of the Mercy charism, their flexible life-style and simple dressing which no longer included the wearing of the veil.

Sisters of Mercy shared in the times of difficulty – times of drought, nearby threatening fires, attacks by criminal gangs on the property – and on the routine road trips to Moresby for supplies and mail and to meet or farewell their many visitors and resource persons. Life in the nation's capital was fraught with the same dangers their sisters were facing in the provincial areas. They, too, depended on prayer for their safety and security but they were also women of resourcefulness and courage, securing the Xavier building with window bars and a high boundary fence.

Passing through Moresby to other destinations, the Sisters of Mercy were often accommodated, sometimes at short notice, by the religious orders there: the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, the Brigidine Sisters, sisters of Xavier Institute, and in former times, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. The resident SVDs, particularly Father Mike Hughes, Brother Fridolin and Brother Anthony Hollenstein, showed remarkable patience and perseverance in acquiring work permits and visas. The sisters could never have managed air travel arrangements in Papua New Guinea without the amazing service offered by Brother John McGeachie and his reliable staff of Dove Travel, Boroko.

Other ministries in Education and Health

Joan O'Toole was appointed Senior Staff Development Officer in the staff section of the National Department of Education (NDOE) in Port Moresby.¹⁵⁶ Joan's particular role was to help implement the five-year Education II Project, a fundamental part of which was the improvement of primary teacher training and its localisation within ten years. Joan's expertise was directed towards the organisation, implementation and evaluation of the program, the recruitment and training of new associate lecturers, which included short-term overseas training in Australian teacher training institutions and postgraduate overseas study.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Joan had completed her term as Deputy Principal of St Benedict's Teachers College in 1985.

¹⁵⁷ Based in Port Moresby Joan did extensive field work in the nine teachers colleges – two run by the Administration (PNG Institute of Education, formerly Port Moresby In-service College and Madang Teachers College), three by the Catholic Church – Kabaleo Rabaul, St Benedict's Wewak, Holy Trinity Mount Hagen, and three of religious denominations Gaulim (United Church) Rabaul, Balob (Lutheran) Lae, and Dauli (Evangelical Alliance) Tari.

In the largely male establishment of the National Department of Education, Joan provided a professional role model for women aspiring to more active roles in policy and management at the upper levels of education. She was a mentor to young Papua New Guinean sisters, including Sisters of Mercy, in their professional development and tertiary studies. With Joan's guidance and encouragement, Petronia Gawi completed her Bachelor of Education.

With Joan experiencing the usual uncertainty about not knowing whether or not a renewal of contract would be offered for the following year, the five years extended to eleven years (1985-1996), by which time Joan not only saw the widespread localisation effected in the teachers colleges but also in regard to her own position as principal staff development officer. With these vital tasks fulfilled, Joan returned to Australia in 1996.

Moirá Cleary, who succeeded Joan as Deputy of St Benedict's Teachers College (1984-1989), was employed in 1990 with the Curriculum Unit of the National Department of Education to write a Religious Education curriculum for use in the teachers colleges and schools. Moirá was on the Mercy leadership team at the time, and though in poor health, continued for as long as she could with both tasks until, with the onset of a terminal illness, she bravely, resolutely and quietly returned to Goulburn, Australia, where in 1991 she died peacefully among her sisters.

Theresia Gongi left the Sepik to serve as a clinic nurse at Marianville Girl's High School.¹⁵⁸ While there, the position of nurse at Port Moresby General Hospital was advertised. Terry wished to apply but did not feel confident enough to do so. However, a friend, with a more realistic appraisal of Terry's competence, went ahead and lodged the application on her behalf! Soon a letter from the hospital with the invitation to begin work in mid December 1998 arrived by post!

After several years in the nursing ministry at Port Moresby General Hospital in outpatients, intensive care and post-operative care sections, Terry offered her reflections:¹⁵⁹

I reflected on it ... God led me here to do His work and look after His people. This is Jesus lying here, and I work for Him. I never applied for the job, and He led me here – to really do the job for Him... I'm happy where I am – with all these lovely people I am working with – these lay people – so they are my sisters.

Thus, Sisters of Mercy were intermittently involved in various ministries in the Archdiocese of Port Moresby from 1971.

¹⁵⁸ Prior to this Theresia had acquired her qualifications in Community Health at St. Mary's Raihu and had taught for some years at Kunjingini Health Sub-Centre.

¹⁵⁹ Sr Theresia Gongi offered these reflections on her ministry in May 2005.

The Archdiocese of Madang¹⁶⁰

Madang – a place of welcome and hospitality

From the 1956 beginnings in Goroka, the Sisters of Mercy felt a special bond with the Madang Archdiocese through the Alexishafen Mission and were welcomed there for retreats, workshops and holidays, travelling via Divine Word Airways. Retreats were periodically conducted by world renowned SVD scholars and theologians. Occasionally visits were required for urgent dental treatment by the kindly Brother Gonzaga SVD or the sisters' worn-out shoes were air-lifted to and from Alexishafen for the meticulous attention of Brother Venantius.¹⁶¹

When the only transport was by air, the SVD pilots, Father Henry Hoff, Father Joseph Wallachy, Brother Ben Seng (also aircraft engineer) and Brother Larry Camilleri were ever obliging to the sisters in their ventures to and from Alexishafen.¹⁶² After Father Harry McGee, first Fr Hoff, and then Fr Walachy sadly lost their lives in accidents flying in the Highlands, Br Ben Seng, the cheerful and helpful 'Aussie' handyman, welcomed on many an isolated mission station, also suffered a fatal air crash while on a commercial plane in the Highlands.

Pastoral ministry training and spiritual renewal with the Sisters of St Therese¹⁶³

Soon after Archbishop Adolf Noser, co-founder of the Sisters of St Therese, died on 15 April 1981, the new archbishop, Leo Arkfeld from Wewak, recognized their need to establish their own identity as a religious congregation. As Mercy Sisters had previously assisted the Rosary Sisters with their renewal and growth towards autonomy, Bishop Arkfeld negotiated a similar collaboration with the Sisters of St Therese. Two Sisters of Mercy, Margaret Bubb,¹⁶⁴ as co-ordinator, and RoseMary Baker,¹⁶⁵ together with one Rosary Sister, Madeleine Gumaure, the former Leader of the Rosary Sisters, agreed to comprise the co-ordinating team. Gail Colquhoun SMSM was chosen to provide input on personal development and spirituality, and for her gentle and affable nature.

¹⁶⁰ It was here that the pioneer sisters first met their Bishop, Adolf Noser SVD, and stepped on to the ground of the vicariate to which they then belonged. The sisters witnessed some of the post-war evidence of what the historian Father Frank Mihalic SVD termed the 'resurrection of Alexishafen'. It was from here that Bishop Noser accompanied the sisters by plane to Goroka.

¹⁶¹ The musician shoe-maker who had survived the strafed 'Yorishime Maru' and for the rest of his life carried a piece of shrapnel in his hip as a memento.

¹⁶² This service was more frequent before the construction of the Highlands Highway and road links with Madang and Lae, but continued intermittently until the Divine Word Airways went out of operation in Madang in late 1990, after 55 years of mission flying.

¹⁶³ In 1976 RoseMary Baker was engaged in full time ministry there with the Sisters of St Therese (cf. Chapter Four).

¹⁶⁴ Margaret was an experienced educator who had made the change from teacher to vocation centre director, religious education co-ordinator and pastoral/catechetics staff member in the Highlands, and was highly qualified in personal and spiritual development (PRH).

¹⁶⁵ RoseMary was well known and respected by the indigenous Sisters of St. Therese.

The renewal year was in 1985 and all the sisters congregated on the remote Catholic mission station at Bundi on the border between Madang and Simbu, to allow a peaceful atmosphere and space for the serious task ahead.

Sr Martha Lonai's reflections

Sr Martha, the former Leader of the Sisters of St Therese, explained that in the crisis faced by the sisters after the death of their founder, Archbishop Noser, Margaret was sensitive to the sisters' need to learn to discern and come to own their identity as a viable group. With this in mind, she encouraged the sisters to maintain a sense and knowledge of their own history and to be prepared to write their own constitutions. As co-ordinator she also managed the tasks of arranging resource personnel and facilitating the courses and helping with the financial records.

Martha reflected on the process that led to their re-founding as a congregation:¹⁶⁶

The co-ordinating team were more or less being and standing with us. If there was tension, they did not say much but were with us by their presence. ... They were open to the movement of the Spirit and would allow us time and space to reflect on what was happening. They were also able to respond and communicate with the Archbishop. Towards the end of the renewal year, Margaret was convinced – with utter conviction – that the sisters had come to and faced the turning point that the members of our Congregation of the Sisters of St Therese were able to live their own life, be responsible for their own actions, and committed to their own ministries. She helped us set the goal and plan for the congregation to follow through, and she followed up what was happening with examples in her own congregation.

In 1995, Margaret travelled to Madang ... and spent some time with the sisters. She has kept in touch by letters and by visiting us. Her presence with the young sisters made a big impact. Her presence has made a really big difference to us as a congregation.

Lecturer and Dean of Studies at Good Shepherd Seminary

In the late 1980s there was a movement among the clergy of the Highlands to provide a new model of regional seminary training¹⁶⁷ which would provide a more balanced program to help future priests to be more effective in ministry in their home places. With Archbishop Brian Barnes as the head of the Commission for Seminarians and Priestly Formation, it was decided that a new seminary for the Madang, Highlands and Wewak Dioceses would begin at Maiwara in the Madang Diocese, with Fr Peter van Adrikam SVD, an experienced and highly regarded missionary, as Rector.

¹⁶⁶ This account was given by Sr Martha Lonai in Adelaide in July 2006.

¹⁶⁷ They proposed that courses combining theory, practice and spirituality would be taught before the seminarians would proceed to Bomana Major Seminary in Port Moresby to complete their final years.

Rita Hassett was the person recommended to the Bishop's Committee by Bishop Hermann Raich of Wabag as Dean of Studies.¹⁶⁸ Rita explained their difficult beginnings in 1990 with thirty-three students at Maiwara, some twenty kilometres from Madang.

It started from nothing, or next to nothing. It was unbelievable. It was the old catechists' school. We started the concept of a much more grassroots type of training program where it was self-sufficiency as much as possible. We had no regular teaching staff, and we had to do the cooking, the seminarians had to make their beds, and make gardens, they had to do the most basic things.

Rita explained further that building up an ethos of study and research was very challenging in the first year and that teachers of Philosophy in particular were hard to find. Marist Brothers from Divine Word Institute assisted until a Jesuit, who was a specialist in Philosophy, came from Australia. Two Melanesian priests on the staff were Fathers Matthew Landu¹⁶⁹ and Arnold Orowae.¹⁷⁰

Gradually the routines were established and the foundations laid for an alternative model in priestly formation. In the years ahead, this institution of Good Shepherd Seminary continued at Banz serving future diocesan clergy in the vast region of the Highlands (Goroka, Simbu, Enga, Mount Hagen, Mendi, Lae, Madang, Wewak and Aitape).

Divine Word University, Madang¹⁷¹

The first Sister of Mercy on the staff of Divine Word University was Petronia Gawi. With Father Jan Czuba SVD as President, Petronia combined academic duties with those of Dean of Women Students until being elected the second Melanesian Leader of the Sisters of Mercy. For a short time, Agnes Murphy served as Registrar in 2000, before responding to the sisters' request to apply for the position of Principal of Yarapos.¹⁷² Catherine Jambet completed a Diploma in PNG Studies as a full time student there. Petronia Gawi and Angeline Singiat, while continuing their commitment to tertiary education, completed the Masters in Educational Leadership by the mixed mode of residential and distance education.

¹⁶⁸ Rita Hassett was highly experienced and qualified in the training and formation of catechists and teachers (Goroka and Simbu) and in pastoral ministry (Enga).

¹⁶⁹ Matthew Landu was a former student of Faniufa Primary School, Goroka, and Arnold Orowae, as previously mentioned, later became Bishop of Wabag.

¹⁷⁰ According to Rita, the moral support of priests involved in seminary training offered Father Peter, in particular, the opportunity in the growing stages, to discuss and refine the theological and pastoral foundations that guided his vision.

¹⁷¹ The Divine Word Institute, Madang, which was a joint venture of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Holy Spirit Sisters, was granted University status in 1996.

¹⁷² Agnes was highly experienced in tertiary teaching and administration as Head of Department of Mathematics and Science at Aiyura National High School, and as Deputy Principal at Holy Trinity Teachers College.

Andrew Simpson CFC, Vice President, DWU and Chair of the Catholic Higher Education Association (CHEA), explained the background to an important initiative the Sisters of Mercy had taken in the teaching of Religious Education in the Catholic teachers colleges (2001-2005).¹⁷³

When the five-year AusAid funded PASTEP (Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project) for curriculum upgrading in the teachers colleges, was introduced, it soon became evident that the Religious Education component did not answer the needs of Catholic Teacher Education. Brother Andrew lost no time in arranging for a parallel program for upgrading of Religious Education to be devised and for funding for it from Missio in Aachen and Munich.

While Andrew himself took on a facilitating, supporting and a financial accounting role, Mercy Sisters, Carmel Martin, followed by Helen White, took on the co-ordination and implementation of the program. Brother Gerry Buzolic CFC was also involved in curriculum writing and editorial work. Seminars and workshops on staff development, methodology and curriculum writing and delivery were held in St Benedict's, Kaindi and Holy Trinity, Mount Hagen, Kabaleo in Rabaul and Divine Word University in Madang. By the completion of the five-year program in 2005, the national staff of the teachers colleges had gained in knowledge and methodology, and upgraded curriculum materials were put in place.¹⁷⁴

The Holy Spirit Sisters at Madang – many of whom worked in the same highlands and coastal areas and shared similar diocesan and national visions for mission in primary education, health, vocational education and pastoral work – offered friendly and welcome hospitality to Mercy Sisters in transit.¹⁷⁵ Strong bonds of friendship were forged with the Sisters of St Therese who were ministering nearby or with the Mercy Sisters in Simbu and Enga, and the group of qualified 'auxiliaries' led by Genevieve Bühler, including Denise Verhecken who brightened the day of many a Sister of Mercy, otherwise stranded at Madang Airport, as she offered refreshments and/or accommodation at the diocesan headquarters.

¹⁷³ The need for overall upgrading and developing a common Religious Education syllabus in the Catholic Teachers College was first expressed by Sister Bernadette O'Dwyer at St. Benedict's Teachers College.

¹⁷⁴ Peta Goldburg RSM from the Brisbane congregation offered an essential component of the program when she visited PNG and conducted workshops in praxis method, in writing of Religious Education units and in demonstrating appropriate methodologies. Peta, Head of the National School of Religious Education and the inaugural Chair of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University, offered a wealth of experience gained from working with pre-service and in-service teachers in the area of religious education.

¹⁷⁵ The bravery of the Holy Spirit Sisters, who originally made a life-long commitment to open up the tropical mission fields in the Wewak and Madang Dioceses, some of whom were World War II survivors, was an enduring source of inspiration to the newcomers from Australia. Genevieve was well-known and respected for her work in the primary curriculum for Religious Education.

When Leo Arkfeld was appointed Archbishop of Madang, the occasional presence of Wewak Mercy Sisters was noticeable as they interrupted their Wewak to Port Moresby flight connections to touch down at Madang. There they renewed their friendships with the much-loved flying Bishop who had instigated such a flowering of Mercy mission involvement in his former Diocese. They also experienced the hospitality of the succeeding Archbishops - Benedict To Varpin and William Kurtz SVD.¹⁷⁶ On occasion, Mercy Sisters gathered together for their assemblies at the Conference Centre, hosted by Brother Walter Fuchs SVD.

This short overview would not be complete without recognition and appreciation of the support given by so many former colleagues and mentors now at Divine Word University, led by Vice Chancellor, Father Jan Czuba, but whose names are too many to mention. The Sisters of Mercy hold dear the memories of these life-long friends of the Madang Diocese.

The Archdiocese of Rabaul – Keravat National High School¹⁷⁷

When Cynthia Griffin volunteered from Adelaide to teach in the education system in 1983, the national education authorities appointed her to Keravat on the Rabaul peninsula, which they considered as the place of the greatest need. The Principals of Passam (Brother Pat Howley FMS) and Keravat (Lionel Melville), having seen the non-threatening and mediating role Bernadette Marks had played at Aiyura, and aware of the feminine and professional influence of the other Sisters of Mercy in the education field, recommended that Cynthia be appointed there to teach English and Social Science and be Dean of Women Students.

During the first weeks, Cynthia stayed with the Principal, Lionel Melville and his wife, while a house was renovated and painted and the holes in the floor repaired to clear the dwelling of the families of rats that had settled there. Cynthia explained that the arduous work routines carried out by the staff included large teaching loads, supervision of school service and boarding school duties. In addition, as Head of Department (English), Cynthia was also responsible for the encouragement and training of national staff and for planning their further studies and training courses.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Archbishop William Kurtz, friend and co-worker for the sisters in the Simbu in the sixties and seventies, and the first Bishop of Kundiawa.

¹⁷⁷ National High Schools were set up in four main regions at Sogeri, Aiyura, Keravat and Passam – to offer matriculation studies to prepare students selected on merit for entry to tertiary levels of education. The purpose was not only to achieve high academic standards, but also to build a national consciousness and identity. Consequently, students were selected from the different provinces reflecting the national context and encouraged to live and work in unity and harmony through a respect for the diverse cultures. The particular ministries of Sisters of Mercy in the National High School system were carried out in dioceses where the Sisters of Mercy were well established (at Aiyura in Goroka (1978-1989) beginning with Sr Bernadette Marks, and at Passam in Wewak (1980-1992) beginning with Sr Fran Hanrahan.

¹⁷⁸ The contract obligations for expatriate staff were similar in all the National High Schools and the drive for localisation was an integral part of the system.

There were more than 200 Catholic students and Mass was held in the school hall on Sunday evenings. John Golding was the parish priest and chaplain at the school. I saw it important that the students' religious education grow with their academic knowledge in order to bridge the gap between the childhood and adult faith, which is always a dilemma for adolescents.

When Cynthia was transferred to Passam National High School in 1987, Josette McDonell from Holy Trinity Teachers College succeeded her, as Dean of Women, with English as her subject specialisation. In her letter seeking a replacement for 1988, she explained how she saw her ministry:

There are only four National High Schools in PNG. These accommodate Years 11 and 12, so to these come a very small percentage of candidates from Provincial High Schools. About twelve thousand sit for the Grade 10 examination; of these only about nine hundred can obtain a place in National High Schools. These are the top ten per cent of the country in ability. The Bishops see these young people as the possible and potential leaders of this quickly-developing country whose Constitutions pledge to 'uphold Christian principles'.

... There are warm, welcoming MSC fathers and OLSH Sisters who open their doors and hearts simultaneously. There are Catholic families – the best. Other Mercies? No. you must hold them in your heart... they are all far away, but our group of PNG sisters is very special and supportive from a distance.¹⁷⁹

Josette's plea for more sisters for this ministry, augmented by an appeal by the Archbishop, Albert Bundervoet MSC, were of no avail as, with the overall decrease in the number of sisters, none was available.¹⁸⁰

National Mercy nursing trainees in the Islands Region - Rabaul and Lemakot

Some young Melanesian Sisters of Mercy completed their professional nursing qualifications in the Islands region. Helen Kiponge completed her Diploma as a registered nurse at St Mary's School of Nursing, Vunapope, in Rabaul, while Sebastina Yangen and Philomena Waira completed their qualifications at Lemakot School of Nursing in New Ireland.

Diocese of Bougainville: the Bougainville Conflict¹⁸¹

From Australia, the Mercy Refugee Service in conjunction with the Jesuit Refugee Service responded to the request of the United Nations, and proposed Teresa Flaherty as an education consultant for the first United Nations Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Mission there.

¹⁷⁹ For a time, Margaret Wilson (formerly Simbu, Mount Hagen, Aitape and Guyana in South America) was Lecturer in Nurse Education at Lemakot, while the MSC Principal, Sister Arnolde Saulhaber, was on leave in Europe.

¹⁸⁰ In the early 1990s, the sisters had to face the closures of Kairiru (1970-1993), Kondiu (1974-1990), Dreikir (1979-1992), Pumakos (1965-1992), and Aitape (1977-1992). A further consideration was that the national institutions were beginning to be replaced by the Secondary Schools in the provinces (cf. Introduction).

¹⁸¹ Cf. Introduction to the Chapter.

The writer's consultancy experience

Subsequently I was part of two crucial UN missions for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-torn island, and conducted several follow-up educational visits related to the original reported findings and recommendations.¹⁸²

I witnessed instances of heroism – putting one's life in danger for another's safety, in particular the mothers going beyond restricted boundaries to forage for food for their families, for reconciliation and peace, and, in the face of violence, coming to exercise forgiveness. During my visits I saw some of the horror and devastation and witnessed some step-by-step efforts towards peace, eventually culminating in joyous hope of family and clan reunions in the remote areas of Bougainville as clans, choosing peace, surrendered their weapons. Sadly, the work of rehabilitation and reconstruction were prolonged processes, and the trauma tended to linger on, particularly in the case of the children.

The effectiveness of many of the recommendations suggested by the United Nations Mission, and endorsed by Bougainville and the PNG Government, were tempered by financial and material constraints. However, there was evidence from follow-up visits that significant educational benefits filtered through to give hope to the many whose education had been disrupted or discontinued.¹⁸³

The Sisters of Nazareth (CSN), an indigenous diocesan congregation on Bougainville, stayed throughout the crisis, enduring the hardships and undergoing detention along with their people. Some suffered because of their care and protection of the overseas missionaries.¹⁸⁴ When it was possible to do so, Marie Murphy, who had returned to Bathurst after her secretarial role with the Conference of Major Superiors, visited the sisters on a short-term basis, to be with them, offering sisterly support in their time of trial. The CSN Sisters put a request through Teresa Flaherty to the sisters on the mainland of Papua New Guinea for support in ministry. The MSC Sisters from Rabaul responded, assigning Stephanie Toka MSC, a qualified secondary teacher and former student of Goroka Teachers College, to spend two years at the Asitavi High School, a girls' school founded by the Marist Sisters (SMSM), and since carried on by the CSN Sisters.

¹⁸² The first visit occurred in 1995 when tentative attempts at peace were being made, and the second was in 1997 after the peace settlement, known as the 'Lincoln Agreement' had been agreed to by all parties at a special gathering in New Zealand.

¹⁸³ For example, the commitment of University of Goroka staff to teacher upgrading through academic and practical programs conducted on the island, the improvement of materials and facilities for distance education (CODE), in the most disadvantaged areas, and the upgrading of school resources and facilities, managed by the dedicated education personnel on Bougainville.

¹⁸⁴ Personal interview with, and Email communication from, Br Brian Leak FMS.

Maura O'Shaughnessy, keen to assist the recovering and autonomous Province, spent some time on Bougainville conducting HIV/AIDS prevention, awareness and education courses. Earlier mention was made of the assistance given to male and female teacher education students at St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi.

Diocese of Daru-Kiunga - West Papuan refugees¹⁸⁵

Realising the need for a more continuous on the ground approach, the Director of Mercy Refugee Service (later structured within Mercy Works Incorporated) Margaret Moore, proposed a Mercy Refugee Project based on the first-hand reports of Fathers Mark Raper SJ and Frank Brennan SJ. Responding to this, the Bishop of Kiunga, Gilles Côté, invited two sisters to be involved in community development work. Maureen Sexton arrived in May 2003 to work at diocesan level, and Catherine Corbett came in May 2004 to be involved at parish level. Both sisters came with wide experience in development work among refugees in other countries.

Maureen Sexton wrote of her Papua New Guinean experiences:¹⁸⁶

I have a liaison role between parents and schools which involves updating or compiling an accurate picture of the number of refugee children in schools in the North Fly Region of the Western Province each year....

The border refugee children are really not meant to be able to access the education system in the sense that the government does not provide teachers for schools in the settlements they come from and they are not supposed to move freely into other areas. It is a tricky and complex situation but I feel myself erring on the side that every child has a right to education. I find both despair at the situation of education in the settlements along the river and admiration of the effort by parents who have found a way to educate one if not two or three of their children. As in many developing countries this is usually boys in preference to girls As with many other societies young women here are given the opportunities to study after the boys/young men in the family.

I am also involved in assisting the Catholic Health Agency provide basic services to the refugee settlements, for example, supporting the monitoring and aid post workers in eight refugee settlements and assisting with two Maternal and Child Health patrols each year. During these past few weeks I have met parents and village leaders from many of the border settlements in the North Fly Region of the Western Province.

Catherine Corbett conducted various meetings with the local women, listening to their concern related to the pastoral, spiritual and physical areas of their lives. She worked closely with the

¹⁸⁵ This is continued from contextual information given at the beginning of the chapter.

¹⁸⁶ The accounts of Maureen and Catherine are taken from email communications found in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne, and a Mercy Works publication of Autumn 2006.

Refugee Women's Co-ordinator, travelling with her to the three corners of the diocese to encourage women to participate in their respective Women's Centres. Catherine, in her role as an advocate for the women, also co-facilitated the 'Help Peace Increase' workshop. Through these workshops women learned their rights in relation to domestic violence and strategies to combat domestic violence.

Away from between eight to twelve days at a time, Catherine made regular border patrols with the parish team to eight border camps and seven local villages to take the sacraments to the people, spend time with them and take any news or materials that the women had requested.

While their mission perspectives reflected those of the diocese, and indeed the sisters contributed in the planning of such, the implementation of their goals encompassed collaboration and close working relationships with the relevant government departments and NGOs. Moving with such flexibility and open-heartedness tended to belie the great skill, experience and patience – and willingness to learn – required in the circumstances.

Part 6. Towards an autonomous Region of the Sisters of Mercy, Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, Australia

According to the structure approved by Rome in 1981, the Institute (ISMA) exercised an overall animating and guiding role in regard to the evolution of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea. Over the fifty-year period (1956–2006), 178 sisters came from Australia, although there were never more than 50 in the whole country at any one time, with the majority of these being in the Wewak Diocese. An analysis of the composition of the total Australian group shows that 114 sisters served for a period of 1 to 9 years, 34 from 10 to 19 years, 22 from 20 to 29 years, and 8 for a period of 30 to 39 years.¹⁸⁷

Expatriate numbers markedly decreased during the period, but the foundation grew in strength through a small, but steady, flow of professed Papua New Guinean members. To the extent that they were able, expatriate sisters made long-term commitments to serve as 'core' members, and the spirit of this collective will offered stability and continuity. This ensured that experienced personnel were

¹⁸⁷ In general, the sisters' return to Australia was related to a variety of circumstances: personal, such as tropical illness, cultural trauma, accidents, violent assault or decision to leave religious life; vocational/ministry, exemplified as lack of ministry engagement opportunities; political, such as the conviction that it was expedient for expatriates to leave the Papua New Guineans to govern themselves, and religious, such as the missionary was a 'guest' not a permanent resident in the country. The sisters variously returned to lives of community/ministry/leadership in Australia or Ireland, retirement and care of aged parents.

available for leadership, formation and training and development in these areas, as well as in ministries that were evolving according to the changing 'signs of the times'. Sisters from Australia were also encouraged to come for short-term contracts in ministry.

Towards a Melanesian future

Creative internal structures to suit Melanesian religious life and ministry were developed by the leadership teams of Helen O'Brien (1981–84, 1985–87), Joan MacGinley (1988-1992), Maura O'Shaughnessy (1993-1997) Helen O'Brien (1998-2002) and the first Melanesian Leader, Mariska Kua (2003–2007). Examples of these structures were the elective and mid-term Assemblies,¹⁸⁸ consultation through appropriate committees, development of 'interim statutes' and policies, including principles and practices for formation, finance and administration. A practice of 'shared leadership' was developed which involved the Leader and team making decisions on issues through consultation with the sisters concerned and collective participation in periodic team meetings that were open to all the sisters.

The intention of growth towards Melanesian autonomy was firmly held by the sisters in Papua New Guinea and shared by the Australian Institute Leaders who encouraged new recruits and approved requested financial assistance in a supportive and informative way. Their expertise and guidance were particularly essential as the canonical requirements of an 'autonomous region' were explored and negotiated. In addition, there was a growing consciousness of multi-cultural living – within PNG itself with the Australian sisters and the Papua New Guineans from their diverse clans.

As a direct result of a resolution of the 1987 National Assembly of Mercy Sisters, a dual task force was set up in Australia and Papua New Guinea to explore the needs of the emerging congregation. Deirdre Jordan RSM was requested to consult all the sisters and to carry out extensive research in the light of diminishing recruitment of Australian sisters and the expressed needs of the national sisters in community and ministry. The final report on the viability of the congregation and possible future directions was considered by the sisters in Papua New Guinea and a select committee in Australia prior to presentation at the sisters' mid-term PNG Assembly in 1990.¹⁸⁹

Among the important findings were that the national sisters expressed their need for help and encouragement to 'discover and articulate their own insight into Mercy and its appropriate expression

¹⁸⁸ Assemblies were presided over by the Institute President. Beginning as three-year terms, these were changed by Assembly decisions to four-year terms from 1988. They were presided over by the Institute Leader and attended by specialists on the leadership team who was there for consultation, particularly of canonical matters.

¹⁸⁹ With the noted expertise of Kath Burke, Pauline Smith, Marie Gaudry and Dorothy Campion.

in keeping with the needs of their own culture and the Papua New Guinea Church.¹⁹⁰ Recognising a ‘strong natural tie’ between Papua New Guinea and the Institute, the Task Force affirmed the continuing facilitation by the Institute President, Nerida Tinkler, of Papua New Guinea sisters ‘in surfacing vital issues and developing strategies’ to respond to them. Furthermore it was recommended that there be openness to ‘future developments in association with New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa as part of the Pacific region’.

These recommendations were followed by resolutions taken at the mid-term Assembly later that year and show a clear determination to work towards a multi-cultural autonomous congregation.

Being an autonomous congregation will enable us to be, and to be recognised as a more authentic part of the local Church of Papua New Guinea. This recognition of a distinct identity is merely the formalising of the reality, a development that has already taken place.

In view of the rapid localisation in Papua New Guinea, the time is ripe for the formation of an autonomous congregation. The national sisters feel strongly the need to be prepared in the event of the political situation calling for the withdrawal of all expatriates. Papua New Guinea is following a bureaucratic mold, a western mold, so our congregation cannot be separated from this thrust within the nation. Therefore we feel that it is expedient to become an autonomous congregation now. The desire of the national sisters to establish a multicultural congregation can be seen as a countersign, transcending national barriers and giving witness to the universality of the Church.¹⁹¹

A crucial dimension to this was the Melanesian sisters’ preparedness for the future. Reflecting on her interviews with each of the sisters, Deirdre Jordan recalled that the national sisters felt that they should be responsible for the Mercy Congregation, but expressed a strong fear that the expatriate sisters might be forced by political pressure to leave before they were ready for this task. To prepare for this eventuality they saw an urgent need for a Papua New Guinea sister to represent them on the Council, and a recommendation to this effect was passed by the 1990 Assembly.¹⁹²

These resolutions were followed up at the 1992 elective Assembly, when the evolving model of a ‘multicultural’ autonomous congregation was adopted. This reflected the composition of the group of national sisters from their different clans and the expatriate sisters from different homelands and ethnic backgrounds – Australia, Ireland, and one each from New Zealand and Vietnam.

¹⁹⁰ Report of Papua New Guinea Task Force (dated 22 October 1990) to Kath Burke, Stancia Cawte, Dorothy Campion, Nerida Tinkler, Pauline Smith. This was also presented to the National Plenary Council, with Joan MacGinley (PNG Leader) as delegate, prior to presentation at the 1990 PNG Assembly.

¹⁹¹ An excerpt taken from the 1990 Assembly report in the Archives Sisters of Mercy PNG in Mount Hagen.

¹⁹² This was related by Sr Deirdre Jordan in a brief conversation, 30 January 2007.

With a view to initiating the formal process, as well as demonstrating genuine intent, of preparing Melanesians for future responsibility, Theresia Nakankwien was elected to the leadership team. This offered the opportunity for on-the-job training and learning by experience. Recently professed, and feeling the burden of being the first national person nominated, Theresia was encouraged by one of her national sisters in her ability and the contribution she would make to their group. Theresia commented on her experience.¹⁹³

I appreciated being on the team, and when they looked at the cultural point of view, I would speak out; I would not sit back. I would see the side of our own PNG culture, and also keep in mind the Mercy culture and the gospel culture. I felt I was contributing by speaking out against anything that was not in line with these values. There were other things I had to learn – that we can all contribute and in that way we all learn things.

An important dimension in preparation of Melanesian sisters for future responsibility was that of recruitment and initial and ongoing formation. After a period of training and accompaniment by expatriate formators, Theresia Nakankwien was appointed the first Formation Director. PNG sisters took on the task of communicating with young women interested in religious life, through vocations promotion, accompanying postulants in their first steps towards religious life, and taking joint responsibility for the junior professed program. At times expatriate sisters replaced national sisters, who were in short supply. For example in 2002, the small number of two Mercy novices joined the Presentation novitiate at Aitape with Theresa Boyek (Mercy) as assistant.¹⁹⁴ Within a few years, the sisters' recently acquired second property at Coolock, finalised in Goroka in 2003, became the new house of formation.

Towards a multi-cultural autonomous region

Sr Kath Burke recaptured some of the history in working towards an independent congregation.¹⁹⁵

In 1980, history had been made with the entrance of the first postulants, Petronia, Veronica and Theresia. One of my greatest joys was to attend Petronia's first profession at Kaindi and her unforgettable final profession in her village church on the Sepik River. A truly Melanesian experience! During my 12 years as Brisbane Leader and ISMA President, there were many such occasions as well as special gatherings and Assemblies. These gave me great heart for the future of our PNG Mercy family.

¹⁹³ Theresia offered these reflections in an interview in May 2005.

¹⁹⁴ This was seen as a move reminiscent of Catherine herself and the early founders being formed in religious life in the Presentation Convent at George's Hill. Sadly, this move meant that the long established practice of collaboration in initial formation with the Rosary Sisters was to come to an end.

¹⁹⁵ Selected excerpts from Kath Burke's personal reflections in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane. Sr Kath Bourke had twelve years experience as former Leader of the authorizing congregation, Brisbane, and Institute Leader. Kath Burke's report encapsulates the tenor of the unknown and the gravity of responsibilities undertaken in discerning these movements of the Spirit.

With a National Superior and local PNG women as Councillors and Formation Personnel, it was clear that Mercy had taken root in PNG and was developing its unique Melanesian/Australian character....

The big issue, especially in my years as President of the Institute, was the move towards an independent Congregation. Deirdre Jordan generously visited PNG, interviewed every sister, wrote a splendid report on the viability of a PNG Mercy Congregation allaying fears and off-setting factional differences. Meantime, Rome made their position clear: a minimum of 40 members, local and/or expatriate, was required. Whilst greatly disappointed with the intransigent Roman position, I admired the down-to-earth spirit of acceptance. PNG women got on with their lives of service, expanded into creative Mercy ministries. The flow of new members continued.

My dream for the future is that Mercy Pacific continues to foster friendship and cultural exchange between PNG, Tonga, Samoa, Australia, New Zealand, Guam and the Philippines. One day, we may be able to rejoice in Mercy Pacific becoming a region of World Mercy.

The movement towards a multi-cultural autonomous region was not taken in a theoretical or idealistic sense, but was based on an emerging vision for the role of the Sisters of Mercy in the Church in Papua New Guinea. This occurred within the lived uncertainties and insecurities of a fluctuating context in which violence in daily life featured strongly.

The sisters' consciousness of the reality of the deteriorating social situation was counterbalanced by the fundamental Melanesian strengths, richness and cohesion (cf. Introduction to this chapter). In a spirit of courage and generosity the sisters committed themselves to a stance of non-violence.¹⁹⁶ This common purpose was expressed in a Mission Statement, accepted at the 1997 Assembly in Alexishafen:

We Sisters of Mercy recognise and respond to our call to empower women and to witness to non-violence personally, in community and in ministry.

We stand beside the women of Papua New Guinea, particularly those who suffer from injustice, oppression and violence. We seek to build up their self-confidence and to help them value and appreciate themselves. We are concerned for the mutual development of women and men in families, Church and society.

We need to develop the skills required to help us to witness to Mercy that does Gospel justice. We therefore seek opportunities to develop personal skills of learning to cope, counseling, management and conflict resolution. These skills will enable us to take more positive steps to develop non-violent ways of living, to empathise with others, to stand in solidarity with women, the oppressed and victims in society, to raise consciousness in our ministries and to take public action against oppression and violence.

¹⁹⁶ This statement is in the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Hagen. Many expatriates, particularly those under contract in government positions during the late eighties and nineties, felt an underlying resentment, spoken and unspoken, for allegedly depriving Papua New Guineans of what they saw as their proper rights.

This Assembly Mission Statement emphasised a spiritual individual and communal stance that had grown out of the collective experience of the sisters in their ministry.

Meanwhile this multi-cultural consciousness was purposefully strengthened and broadened. On separate occasions, novices from Melbourne and Cairns, led by Kaye Evans, and those from Adelaide, led by Patricia Pak Poy, shared part of the formation program with their Melanesian sisters. International links were strengthened through combined formation meetings and, in particular, through the formalising of the Institute's Formation Policy for Australian, Papua New Guinean and Pakistani New Members in 2003.

Links with the Mercy Sisters in the Pacific Islands were fostered through the Mercy Pacific programs, which were instigated and financed by the Institute. These programs exposed sisters to the richness of the diversity of cultures within the region, but also to the threats of unequal modernisation, global warming and advancing globalisation influenced by external and internal economic and political forces. Sisters of Mercy from Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Guam, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia took part in these Mercy Pacific programs.

Election of the first Papua New Guinean Leader: Sr Mariska Kua

In 2003 the leadership responsibility was accepted by Mariska Kua, the first indigenous national Leader, assisted by two Papua New Guinean and two expatriate team members. At the time, the total community group comprised seventeen professed indigenous sisters and six expatriate sisters. Melanesian leadership had been achieved, the multi-cultural value recognised and the place of the Sisters of Mercy in mission in Papua New Guinea strengthened.

Approval of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea Region, 2006

In 2004 the Institute Leader, Nerida Tinkler, encouraged by the vibrancy of the total community and their efforts in meeting the Church's guidelines for an autonomous region, and in consultation with the Papua New Guinean leadership, made formal application to Rome. Thus, the final stage of the request for recognition of the status of autonomous region of Papua New Guinea within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia was reached. This request was granted in 2006 with the region comprising twelve finally professed sisters and six in temporary vows from Papua New Guinea, together with six professed sisters from Australia. One candidate (novice) and one enquirer (postulant) prepared to follow in their footsteps.



**Srs Nerida Tinkler and Mariska Kua proclaim
the Inauguration of the Sisters of Mercy PNG Region, 2006**

The Mercy Jubilee Project – meeting needs of urban and rural women

In 2005, the then Executive Director of Mercy Works, Maryanne Loughrey proposed, and got planning approval in place for, a Mercy Jubilee Project utilising the expertise and experience of an Australian and a PNG Sister of Mercy.¹⁹⁷ As Project Manager, Gaye Lennon of Gunnedah was competent in the areas of project management, educational training and development work with women.¹⁹⁸ Maryanne Kolkia of Goglime came as an experienced and gifted teacher with cultural knowledge and skills.¹⁹⁹ The Mercy Works project continued to be implemented, supported by Rosemary Carroll, Maryanne's successor. The Bishop of Goroka, Francesco Sarego, offered collaborative support in providing initial accommodation and an office and work base for the sisters in Goroka.

The Mercy Works PNG Project began with a 'Needs Assessment' to identify root causes of common problems faced by women in the Goroka area - in the towns, in settlements on the outskirts of town and the surrounding villages. The results showed there were serious problems of unemployment, *sanguma* (sorcery), STD's and HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, violence, crime and gender inequality. As

¹⁹⁷ Mercy Works is an arm of the Institute providing financial and resource support for ministries of the Institute both in Australia and in other countries.

¹⁹⁸ Gaye Lennon came with ten years of valuable experience working with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the refugee camps of Pakistan and on the Thai/Burma border.

¹⁹⁹ Mary Anne had risen to the rank of Senior Teacher came as an experienced and gifted teacher with cultural knowledge and skills.

these problems had deep social and cultural roots, Gaye and Maryanne decided to include men in some of the proposed programs and activities.

The centre was set up near the diocesan administration complex, near the ever-popular town market and within easy walking distance of the town and highway bus routes. Experienced Melanesian sisters with particular specialisations were assigned to the project. These included Theresa Boyek (prison ministry, advocacy), Veronica Localyo (HIV/AIDS education and emotional support, budgeting), and Robina Einde (receptionist and vocational training). The Mercy Works team conducted courses (for example, human rights, budgeting, management), provided emotional support and wrote referrals for sick and mentally ill patients, offered skills training, accompanied juveniles to court, and made on site visits to the women prisoners and communities in the settlements and villages.

The sisters brought their unique specialisations and applied their cultural experience and knowledge as they also learnt skills through their interaction with staff and clients and through participation in further training opportunities made available to them under Gaye's direction and supervision.

The philosophy of the Mercy Works is to work in collaboration with other organizations with similar goals of service, skills training and empowerment, and to avoid duplication of programs. Examples of related organizations in various fields in Goroka were: Diocesan HIV/AIDS Office, Centre of Hope, YWCA, Family Voice PNG, Family Health Association, Save the Children in PNG, Family Life, UNICEF, St. Mary's Catholic Women's Association.

In very practical ways, women, men, young people, even members of *raskol* [criminal] youth gangs were helped to make the changes to live and work with dignity. Needless to say, like so many other previous initiatives of the Sisters of Mercy in PNG, the sisters began this work under difficult situations and with minimal resources. These Mercy pioneers went forward in trust that they were being called to a new ministry, as Catherine was called to the poor of Dublin over 150 years before.

At the request of Archbishop Douglas Young, a similar Mercy Works Project was introduced in Mount Hagen in 2007. Directed by Sr Gaye Lennon, the project began with Mrs Louise Parinjo, a former teacher, as co-ordinator, and Sr Claudia Apalenda (of Callan Services) on the staff.

A Season of Jubilee: 2006-2007

The Sisters of Mercy chose to celebrate the fifty-year period of God's blessings, to encompass the beginning of the two original foundations in the Highlands at Goroka in 1956 and on the Coast in Wewak in 1957. Pioneers and early missionary sisters were invited by the Papua New Guinea Leader, Mariska Kua, to travel northwards to celebrate with the sisters and with the people of PNG. They were given an outstanding welcome in the best cultural traditions in liturgy, ritual, music, singsings, feasting and words of appreciation. In a spirit of pilgrimage, the visitors went to many places of former ministry and experienced their unique reception by the people wherever they went. Former friendships were renewed, and hearts swelled in praise of God's loving mercy across the lands of Papua New Guinea and Australia.

Reflective Observations

Theresia Tina offered her analysis of the contemporary experience of the sisters. Her words express the pulse of energy, enthusiasm and courage shown by the present generation of sisters in active and vibrant ministry.²⁰⁰

Today the world has changed and systems of society have changed. Modern technology is largely responsible for much of the change to people's lives. More and more problems are arising for young people as they try to cope with these changes. The sisters are not removed from the world and so are facing the same problems associated with the rapid changes in society. In ministry they are standing alongside of people supporting and encouraging them in their daily lives. A good example of this is budget training that is offered through Mercy Works PNG. Managing money is relatively new to Papua New Guineans and the training that is offered assists people in managing what little money they have in order to care for the needs of their family.

The sisters are well aware that they cannot meet all the needs of our people but there is an eagerness to do what we can, mindful of Catherine's words: 'There are things that the poor prize more highly than gold, though they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind words, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows'. They do what they can, knowing that sometimes reaching out to people is a risk because in traditional Melanesian society women do not speak out publicly or move around in clans other than of their own.

A report (c. 1982) in the Mount Hagen Archives shows how the Australian sisters generally saw their call to mission. On reflecting on their experience and understanding of the context of mission, they

²⁰⁰ Third national Leader of the Papua New Guinea region.

express the privilege they have found this to be spiritually and culturally as they have stood together with the people of Melanesia.

We rejoice that we have been able, through our cross-cultural ministry, to grow in appreciation of the wonder of God's creation revealed in the diversity of mutual understanding and respect across cultures. We rejoice also that we have been able to be channels of the Spirit's creativity in bringing to life and shaping the local Church in PNG. This has given us a deeper appreciation of the mystery of Christ's continuing incarnation among peoples, and has also challenged us to reflect on its meaning within our own culture and our home Church.

Of special importance in shaping our identity as Sisters of Mercy in PNG, has been the opportunity to be with people in their movement from colonial administration to independent nationhood. We recognise that we have been privileged to be able to stand together with the people of this country as they struggle to set new directions for their own future.

Being called to exercise our Mercy ministry among people in a situation of rapid, and sometimes disruptive, cultural, social and political change, has involved for us a challenge to great openness and flexibility in our response. It has meant, too, the development of an attitude of working 'with' rather than 'for' people, of 'calling forth' rather than 'handing down'.

But this response and this attitude have not developed among us as signs of life without experiences of weakness, vulnerability and passages through death, and the deeper knowledge of our own need for mercy that these bring. Our efforts to communicate the gospel cross-culturally and to work for people's integral human development have often been accompanied by experiences of conflict, misunderstanding, and a sense of frustration and even failure with regard to our well-intentioned plans and projects. But we realise that, in passing through these experiences in the spirit of the Paschal Mystery, we have been enabled to face more honestly our preconceived ideas and inevitable cultural prejudices, and to face more creatively the challenge to respond to people's real needs and aspirations, sometimes in the face of misunderstanding on the part of clergy and other Church workers.

As expatriates in PNG during the years of movement from a colonial to an independent status, we have known the pain of being identified with the agents of colonial domination. To live with this pain without a hasty response of self-justification continues to be a humbling and purifying experience. At the same time, it has challenged us to a 'letting go' of our own styles and models of leadership and to a sensitivity to Papua New Guineans' aspirations to develop their own styles and models of leadership. It has called us, too, to be able to respond with flexibility in the atmosphere of uncertainty that surrounds the future role of expatriates in PNG.

Jubilee words of Mercy by Bishop Francesco Sarego

In the homily of the Eucharistic celebration in Goroka (2006) Bishop Sarego offered his reflections on the contemporary challenges facing the Sisters of Mercy.²⁰¹

The image of the mercy of God is reflected in those who practise mercy. As Sisters of Mercy the essence of your spirituality is dwelling and ministering within a dynamic circle of God's mercy. This calls for the grateful receiving and the gracious giving of mercy to those in need. As we come to this Jubilee celebration we remember with thanksgiving the pioneer and early sisters, who, clad in their long religious habits, responded to the situations of the past, especially in education, health and pastoral concerns. The situation today and into the future calls upon new responses to help people, especially women and children facing injustice, violence, sickness, including HIV/AIDS, and abandoned street children.

National sisters of today, you can learn from your 'elders' as you continue what they have started and handed over to you. Now that this responsibility and commitment is in your hands, do not be afraid. There are always difficulties, but have courage; God who has been present in the past will always be with you.

Bishop's Francesco's words resonated well with the ideal of the Sisters of Mercy to foster the love and compassion of Christ Jesus through the mission of Mercy to all God's people.

²⁰¹ From the Homily of the Eucharistic Celebration of the Fifty Years Jubilee at Goroka, 29 April 2006.

Chapter Six

Review of the Australian and Melanesian Sisters of Mercy in mission in Papua New Guinea: in the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission (1956–2006)

Introduction

This chapter comprises three interlocking themes which underlie the missionary history of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956–2006). Part 1 presents an outline of contemporary Trinitarian theology of mission in a vastly changed world, the diversity of which requires appropriate spiritual orientations. With this context as fundamental, a summary is provided of the factual and historical missionary contribution of the Sisters of Mercy in various parts of the country in three stages during the fifty-year period. An analysis of this, offered in Part 3, suggests aspects of the spiritual orientation evinced by the Sisters of Mercy in mission which enabled them to meet the ongoing changes in various stages of the development of Church and nation in Papua New Guinea.

The final section brings the reader to a departure point for contemplating contemporary challenges by offering reflective observations on further research, the sisters' social consciousness underlying their agency in mission and the broad challenge of Mercy mission in Papua New Guinea within a Melanesian context.

Part 1. Spiritual dimensions deriving from a Trinitarian theology of mission

The Vatican II documents and subsequent guidelines and developments in mission understanding and practice spring from a renewed theology of mission – one that meets the challenges of the pluralistic, globalised and technological world of the post-modern era.

Contemporary theology understands mission as God's self-revelation to, and love relationship with, humankind. The classical doctrine of the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, is deepened to include a movement of love and communion of the Trinity toward the community of humankind and earth creation.¹ *Ad Gentes* defined this Trinitarian movement as 'the manifestation of God's plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history'.²

¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389.

² *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, ed. Austin Flannery, Vatican Council II, 1.9, 453.

As Holy Mystery, God has always been present and active in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit and calls humankind through Jesus to participate in God's life - in 'divine communion-in-mission'.³ The power of the Spirit continues this gracious mission in the Church in extending the 'reign of God'. 'The Spirit of God, who, with wondrous providence, directs the course of time and renews the faith of the earth, assists at this development toward service to the common good'.⁴

God's mission of the reign of God in the world has been entrusted to the Church. Jesus, in his vision of offering salvation to all, saw his mission as initiating God's reign. Bevans traces the origin of the Church to Jesus' preaching, serving and witnessing to the reign of God.⁵ Pope John Paul confirmed that 'Christ is the revelation and incarnation of the Father's mercy' and that the reign of God is fulfilled and proclaimed in the risen Christ.⁶ The reign of God is neither concept nor doctrine, but above all 'a *person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God'.⁷ Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God.⁸ The goal of mission was 'God's reign in the world' and it is Christ, not the Church, who is 'light of the World'.⁹

Paul VI drew the threads of the divine mystery together when he wrote *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (his *magna carta* on mission ten years after the Vatican Council in 1975), in which he encapsulated the major articulations of the bishops at the Synod.¹⁰ He stated that the reign of God became the central theological focus of the theology of mission.

The responsibility for mission and evangelisation, including 'foreign mission' in non-Christian lands (which had previously been administered by the missionary institutes), was placed within the context of the local Church under the diocesan bishop. Peter Phan, while acknowledging that differences in missionary contexts were not clearly definable, offered insights into three changing contexts of mission as suggested by Pope John Paul in *Redemptoris Missio*.¹¹ He outlined that the approach of the Church was one of 'pastoral care' in the case of established Christian communities with solid ecclesiastical structures, sacramental practices and commitment to mission. An approach of 'new

³ Stephen Bevans SVD, "Partnering with the Missionary God: A vision of mission today" (paper presented at the Australian Mission Conference entitled 'Mission One Heart, Many Voices', Sydney, 29 April 2013).

⁴ *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Flannery, Vatican Council II, No.26. 192.

⁵ Stephen Bevans SVD, "Ecclesiology since Vatican II: From a Church with a mission to a missionary Church", *Verbum SVD* 46:1 (2005): 30.

⁶ Pope John Paul, *Redemptoris Missio*, No 16.Ch V 36-51.

⁷ *Ibid.* 18.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, ed. Austin Flannery, 5, 58.

⁹ Gerard Hall, "Christian Mission Today", *Compass*, 41, 3, Spring (2007): 3-10.

¹⁰ Stephen Bevans SVD, "Witness to the Gospel in Modern Australia: Celebrating Thirty Years of 'Evangelii Nuntiandi'." (paper presented as Guest Lecturer, Adelaide College of Divinity, Adelaide, 2005).

¹¹ Peter Phan, "Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church: What for, to whom, by whom, with whom, and how?" Circulated published article, 1.

evangelisation' or 're-evangelisation' was being called for in the case of Christian communities that had lost a 'living sense of faith' and whose lives were contrary to the Gospel. The third situation was made up of peoples and groups in particular socio-cultural contexts that were deprived of knowledge of Christ and his Gospel and would be identified as 'mission ad gentes' or 'missionary activity proper'. The local Church, which was 'missionary by its very nature', was responsible for mission and evangelisation within these three interlocking contexts.¹²

The very purpose of the Church's missionary activity, previously emphasised in terms of salvation and planting the Church in missionary lands, is expanded to reflect humanity's 'participation in the mission of God' and to witness to the fullness of the promise of the reign of God in today's fractured and globalised world.¹³ Participation in the missionary call demands relating sensitively with one's fellow human beings in regard to difference, espousing goals and strategies for dignity, freedom and justice for all, and living a life of witness and service as disciples of Jesus.

This paradigm shift from an ambivalent attitude towards the modern world,¹⁴ significantly introduced in the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, described the Church's newly-stated role in the modern world.¹⁵ New approaches were required: principles of respect for the uniqueness of cultures and languages, and trust in the 'seeds of the Word' or the salvific elements of truth in other Christian faiths and world religions;¹⁶ and adherence to freedom of conscience and religious liberty - an approach which could be described as sensitive dialogue or a reciprocal sharing and enrichment of faith.¹⁷

Some writers have delved into the foundations of mission spirituality and suggested specific approaches to mission to cater for the diverse situations. For example, the Divine Word Missionaries see this as 'prophetic dialogue'¹⁸ and Schreiter proposes 'reconciliation'.¹⁹

In the development of this thesis I have shown, in exploring the spiritual and theological foundation for universal mission in Chapter One, that the liberative and transformative model was typical of the Church's missionary role. In addition to the call to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission, the spiritual approach to mission of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea was based within the

¹² This was most noticeable in PNG with the creation of the new dioceses in 1982, in particular Wabag and Kundiawa.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.

¹⁴ As described by many writers e.g. Cardinal Walter Kasper, "The Future of Christianity – Truth and Dialogue in a Post-Modern Era." Paper presented at the Bonython Hall, Adelaide University Adelaide, 4 July 2003.

¹⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. 'The joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the peoples of the world are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.' 1.163.

¹⁶ Gerard Hall, "Christian Mission Today", *Compass*, 41, 3, Spring 2007, 3-10.

¹⁷ Lumen Gentium 1, in Vatican Council II, ed. Austin Flannery, 163.

¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 59.

¹⁹ Robert J. Schreiter CPPS, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 14.

founding traditions of Catherine McAuley and the founding Sisters of Mercy, as well as through traditions and practices within Australia, as shown in Chapter Two. How these were further developed in Papua New Guinea has been shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five. I proceed to offer a summary of the development of the thesis in Part 2 before suggesting some of the analytical spiritual threads derived from the findings, using a deeper spiritual lens, in Part 3.

Part 2. Revisiting the development and findings of the thesis from Chapters One to Five

Chapter One introduced the scriptural and theological foundations of universal salvation with a particular focus on the God of Mercy in the Old Testament. The New Testament showed how universal salvation came through Jesus, the Messiah, who inaugurated the reign of God. Jesus' inclusive communal call to discipleship and a share in his mission to men and women, slaves and free, Jews and non-Jews was validated through the Paschal mystery and the witness of the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Modern biblical scholarship has shown that, although women featured as disciples in the Gospels and in the early Church, patriarchal interpretations, largely due to early Greek and Roman influences, have resulted in the misrepresentation or obliteration of women's authentic roles in canonical and historical writings.

In depicting missionary developments throughout history, Bevans & Schroeder emphasised the essential dynamic between the 'constants' of church teaching and the immediate historical and cultural settings. They identified (with reservation) three mission models as generally applicable to particular cultural and historical contexts - mission as 'saving souls and extending the Church', as the 'discovery of the truth' and as 'commitment to liberation and transformation'. It was the latter model, typified in the New Testament and since re-emphasised in Vatican II, which Pope John Paul II claimed portrayed the missionary model of the Church. Factors, such as the role of women in mission and the Gospel being incorporated in different historical contexts and cultures, suggested a conceptual framework and the division of the thesis into distinct time-frames, pursued in Chapters Three (1956-69), Four (1970-81) and Five (1982-2006).

Chapter Two offered a preliminary exploration by means of a selective overview, tracing the traditions in the history of the Church, based on the liberating model, particularly in regard to women in universal mission. These ranged from early Christianity to the evangelisation of Europe; the early and later modern periods during the age of colonialism to the emergence of new ministerial models of women religious in post-revolutionary France. These apostolic institutes were significant as the precursors of those that arose in nineteenth century Ireland, including Catherine McAuley's Sisters of Mercy. The sisters' founding traditions were examined in relation to Ireland and adaptations negotiated in their expansion and consolidation in Australia.

New Guinea, the early missionary field of the Divine Word missionaries, was introduced. Twentieth century papal initiatives, particularly of Pius XII, encouraged institutes that were not specifically dedicated to foreign missions to be co-workers in mission. The Australian Sisters of Mercy, who had recently, in response to papal directives, reorganised their various congregations into Union and Federation canonical structures, readily responded and were prepared for foreign mission in New Guinea.

Chapter Three presented findings on the first phase (1956-69). In this phase the sisters carried out their missionary purpose in foundations for reasons of education, health and social alleviation in Goroka and Wewak, in accord with the plans of the bishop of the diocese. Subsequently the sisters spread from Goroka in small communities of twos and threes to the more populous Simbu. Larger communities in the Wewak Diocese made foundations in the poorest and most remote areas at Kunjingini and Torembi, eventually expanding, by reducing the numbers in local communities, to Mercy College, Yarpas and to St Benedict's Teachers College, Kaindi. This era saw Australian Federation foundations from North Sydney in the remote area of Pumakos in Enga and Holy Trinity Teachers College in Mount Hagen. In the Wewak Diocese foundations were made to Yangoru from Rockhampton and to Negrie from Townsville. The scope of these foundations showed that the Australian leaders planned for a long-term commitment to New Guinea.

While this missionary phase contained elements more typical of the orthodoxy of Type A theology, the sisters, working mainly within the colonial mission context under the administrations of experienced Divine Word Missionaries, were influenced by their charism of the discovery of truth within a people's cultural, religious and historical contexts, typical of Type B. The sisters, within their Mercy traditions, showed remarkable adjustment and adaptation in addressing the needs according to the vision of the dioceses, including a significant focus on raising the standards of women and girls. Themes that emerged were those of 'building up the local church', 'hospitality', 'cultural respect and sensitivity', 'support for indigenous women religious' and 'joys and sorrows mingled' – suffering through sickness, in enduring the isolation and tropical conditions and, for some, through being recalled unexpectedly to Australia.

Chapter Four presented findings on the second phase (1970-81). This phase showed the sisters enlightened and guided by the revived Trinitarian theology of mission of Vatican II and its implications. This was revealed through the Self Study project, as well as their engaging in the emerging ministries of preparation for, and consolidation of, an independent Papua New Guinea. In these challenges they were also encouraged and validated by inspired interventions of the clergy (e.g. Fr Leo Joerger in Simbu and Fr Kalisz in Wewak) and deeply disturbed and challenged by the rise of the cargo cult in the Yangoru-Negrie area.

With increased numbers from Australia, the sisters branched out from their community life on the mission stations to address new needs outlined within the diocese or approved initiatives made communally by the sisters to other dioceses; e.g. Goroka (Melanesian Institute and Liturgical Catechetical Institute), Port Moresby (Xavier Institute of Missiology), and Madang (Sisters of St. Therese). These responses were made with flexibility, mobility, resourcefulness and collaboration, and included new inter-congregational and ecumenical community living and working. The sisters worked patiently towards the localisation of primary education (Kup, Koge, Goglme, Neragaima, HTTC Demonstration School and Pumakos in the Highlands and Kunjingini, Torembe, Ulupu, Kaindi Demonstration School and Kairiru on the Coast). They continued their commitment to Catholic secondary and teacher education, health and empowerment of the laity. They maintained their institutional works (Kondiu and Holy Trinity Teachers College in the Highlands and Yarpas and Kaindi on the Coast). Furthermore, they undertook and developed ministries in seminary education (Kairiru) and catechist training (Pumakos).

Faithful to the teachers, catechists and laity in the rural areas, they engaged in ministries devoted to their religious formation in Goroka and Simbu, pastoral work in Simbu, Madang and Negrie and establishment and management of vocational centres (Kunjingini and Koge). Teaching was undertaken in government secondary institutions (Muaina, Angoram, Passam and Keravat) and secondary teacher training (Goroka Campus, University of PNG). Sisters continued health commitments at Neragaima, Kunjingini, Kairiru and Pumakos. A new foundation began as a task-force for management of the Raihu Hospital and village health services in the Franciscan Diocese of Aitape.

All the sisters' mission undertakings reflected a time of dramatic religious change brought about by the renewed theology of Vatican II and the challenge, as 'nuns in the modern world', to respond authentically to the 'signs of the times'. They shared this journey with the indigenous Rosary Sisters, the Sisters of St. Therese, the indigenous sisters participating in programs at Xavier Institute, and through educating and encouraging young women aspiring to religious life in rural areas. They were also prompted by Independence and rapid political, socio-economic and cultural changes. As sisters left the country at Independence there were also changes in the composition of the Sisters of Mercy.

Among common themes arising during this period were those of 'adapting to Vatican II theology', 'inculturation' 'empowerment of the laity' 'hospitality', and 'support for indigenous women religious.' Some sisters met the cross in leaving their mission stations, closing their convents, living with misunderstanding in changing times or the pain of leaving the country to re-settle in Australia.

New hope came about, not only through the positive climate of Vatican II, but also through constructive and unifying moves originating with the Conference of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

These had implications for the different foundation groups in Papua New Guinea leading to their forming one combined group within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. The Sisters of Mercy PNG were thus in a position to accept Melanesian women through united formation policies and programs canonically approved by the Brisbane Congregation.

Chapter Five presented findings in the third phase (1982–2006). This phase was marked by the gradual consolidation in governance of the diverse region of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea. The sisters, through the elected Leader, Helen O'Brien, set up a novitiate to support the formation of the indigenous sisters at Kaindi, and a governance structure to determine unifying policies. Eventually a permanent administration centre was established at McAuley House, Mount Hagen. Towards the end of the phase a permanent house of formation was established at Coolock House, Goroka.

Though in diminishing numbers in the four established dioceses, including the new dioceses of Wabag and Kundiawa and archdioceses/dioceses of Port Moresby, Madang, Rabaul, Bougainville and Daru-Kiunga, some of the Australian Sisters were engaged in administration and in the on-going formation and training of the steadily growing indigenous sisters. Several Australian sisters responded to the leadership request to commit themselves as 'core' members to support the development of the Mercy region. Gradually the ministries diversified from those of the institutions for education and health on the mission stations and continued in much smaller Melanesian communities. Significant new ministries in response to diverse emerging needs were undertaken. Some of these were resourced from Australia through Mercy Works, such as 'social and educational ministry with refugees' and 'development work with the poor in urban and rural areas' through the Mercy Works Jubilee Project, which developed in Goroka and Mount Hagen. These ministries attracted more specialised personnel from Australia either for long-term or short-term appointments. Thus, different forms of ministries emerged to meet the needs of the 'signs of the times' in a post-independent Papua New Guinea which bore the undeniable marks of a third-world country.

As the Australian sisters diminished Melanesian sisters grew in responsibility. The movement towards a multi-cultural autonomous region materialised into strategic plans, evolving from policies enunciated at successive Assemblies. These were implemented by the Sisters of Mercy PNG Leaders and their leadership teams and sanctioned by the fostering and nurturing of the Leaders of the Institute from Australia. By dint of such collaboration these developments eventuated in the approval by Rome of the autonomous Papua New Guinea region of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

Themes, previously identified, continued to surface. Living and deepening Vatican II theology', 'inculturation', as Melanesian cultural values were enmeshed with those of the Gospel in community and ministry, 'empowerment of the laity', particularly in the new Diocese of Wabag and the Movement for a Better World in Mount Hagen. 'Hospitality' and liturgical and historic celebrations

featured in the Mercy centres and on parish occasions commemorating the original foundations. ‘Support for indigenous women religious’ continued to be witnessed in various ways in the highlands and coastal dioceses, including formation at Xavier Institute, and active involvement in the Conference of Major Superiors and Union of Women Religious. Solidarity with the people in their trials and suffering occurred in many instances; for example, during the tribal conflict at Pumakos, the support of HIV/AIDS victims through Callan Services and in the peace process on Bougainville. In various situations of the break down of law and order both Australian and Melanesian sisters suffered physical and mental exhaustion, with some Australians forced to leave for critical health reasons.



The Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea 2012 ²⁰

Standing: (From Left). Catherine Corbett, Theresia Nakankwien, Maureen Sexton, Sophie Samiak, Hilda Yangele, Schola Fakiwi, Mariska Kua, Beverly Strong (Community Leader), Catherine Jambet, Margaret Roni, Theresia Boyek, Claudia Apalenda.

Middle Row: Barbara Broad, Maura O’Shaughnessy, Kaye Bolwell, Mary Anne Kolkia, Rachel Waisman.

Front Row: Marianna Kawagle, Meryline Yasaku, Philomena Waira, Janet Wauwia, Doreen Mainick, Emma Awehi, Bernardine Kavi, Doris Kaip.

²⁰ The Papua New Guinea community now form a significant and unique part of the Northern region of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, founded 12 December 2011.

Part 3. Mercy spirituality and practice of mission in Papua New Guinea

The original ‘charism’ given by God to the Founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, was ‘a gift of the Holy Spirit’ entrusted ‘for the good of the Church’. This gift was of ‘seminal graces designed to grow and mature for the good of the Church as a whole’.²¹ Within the dynamic of God being the One who alone carries on the missionary enterprise, the partnership of the Sisters of Mercy in God’s mission in the Church in Papua New Guinea is further expounded.²²

These women maintained and developed their identity as religious women on mission. This was a collective, communal endeavour which the sisters worked at, as in the case of the Union Sisters’ statement on their ‘Call to Mission’ (cf. Chapter Four). Individual sisters and communities were often encouraged and supported in their special calls to ministry by missionary priests with vision. This assistance provided openings for the sisters to respond to changing needs in the diocese and the nation before the general trend (e.g. encouraging girls and women in education and the professions, ministry and management in government educational institutions or in involvement in, and organisation of, pastoral ministry).

In responding to the felt need of restructuring for the sake of mission, the sisters followed the historical path of sisters involved in the amalgamations in early and mid-twentieth century Australia. For example, the agency exercised by the sisters in their movement towards unification within PNG in 1981 and in working towards the autonomous region of PNG within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, granted in 2006. The purposeful nature of their missionary work was retained as they kept to their ‘pilgrim’ and ‘guest’ status in terms of leaving their ministries and the country itself and of being unwilling to burden the Melanesian sisters with their care in their old age.²³ The Assemblies featured scripture scholars and retreat personnel who took a contemporary feminist Mercy position towards women in the bible, the Church and society. Likewise these positive constructions of women emanated from retreats and conventions arranged by the national Conference of Women Religious.

The sisters lived with some degree of underlying criticism which surfaced from time to time when, because of their novel mission response, they seemed not to conform to revered conventions, by a) moving more freely from the mission stations for community and mission, b) adopting modified religious attire, which was eventually simplified to conventional women’s clothing with the emblem of the Mercy cross, and c) travelling and living alone or in secular or ecumenical environments, and

²¹ Francis Hickey CFC, “Charism and Culture in the Religious Life.” In *The Australian Religious and the Church’s Mission*, David Walker, Francis Hickey CFC and Bernard Wallace, eds., (St Paul: Homebush NSW: 1977), 31-48.

²² *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, Para. 2 *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery, 444.

²³ With a strong ethos of being ‘guests’ and ‘pilgrims’ in the country consonant with missionary thinking expounded by Cyril Hally, Sisters of Mercy did not take out Papua New Guinean citizenship.

experiencing wider interpretations of religious community than living 'under the one roof'. Melanesian sisters were similarly subjected to these criticisms as they followed in their Australian counterpart's footsteps.

The sisters responded to the religious, secular and cultural circumstances of the times in pragmatic ways. They showed daring, courage, flexibility and energy in facing the strange and unfamiliar of the cross-cultural situations with respect and a willingness to learn. They met with success and failure, but also the rewards of appreciation of, and deepening relationships with, Melanesians and fellow missionaries. Many of these became close colleagues, companions and life-long friends, no less through sharing in suffering, reconciliation, celebration and beginning again than in the constant day to day challenges.

The sisters learnt to live with joys and sorrows in solidarity with the people. The clan gatherings in villages, markets, and churches, the shared euphoria of Independence in 1975; the achievements of nurses, teachers, students, seminarians, catechists and village people through localisation and empowerment; and the 'voice' found by women in all walks of life - graduates from formal educational institutions and pastoral and catechetical centres, as well as those 'graduates' from the remote rural villages.

The Mercy convents were in significant central parish and diocesan locations where the sisters' hospitality became legendary. For example, in addition to the many instances specifically mentioned in the Mercy centres, such as Kunjingini, Pumakos, Holy Trinity and Kaindi, McAuley House was purchased and significantly extended for this purpose.

The sisters endured the sorrows and sacrifices of standing by the people and being torn by tribal loyalties, as in Pumakos, and at times of poverty, injustice and hardship. They identified with women suffering violence and wrote public letters of protest. Some sisters, seriously assaulted in their ministries, refused to abandon their people. Others stood by those disadvantaged by war and political instability (for example, MercyWorks with refugees, support of Bougainville students at Kaindi and the reconstruction missions and health contribution to Bougainville).

Many sisters experienced the pain of leaving the mission station communities, and of leaving the country itself, even when these decisions were freely made. The realities of the re-entry, though couched in positive terms (cf. the Kunjingini farewell to Margarita and Val), were often followed by prolonged times of grief and loss.

The Papua New Guinean sisters, called to a Mercy way of life as disciples of Jesus, engaged in valiant ministry in deteriorating social conditions, with commitment, energy and passion for the people they loved and served as they stood in solidarity with them. With their particular talents the Melanesian sisters followed a similar pattern of seeking qualifications and experience, being adaptable and flexible in ministry, and standing beside their Australian ‘elders’, who, as their numbers were diminishing, were purposefully relinquishing their role as guides to that of a new form of ‘localisation’ with the rise of the Melanesian sisters and their increasing role in governance.

The sisters developed a realistic social consciousness and acquired skills for new forms of collaborative ministry with church, government or non-government personnel. This seeking for mercy and justice through multi-cultural awareness and diverse experiences enabled Melanesian sisters, in particular, to engage in deep relationships and creative ministries with the peoples of the Pacific nations. Furthermore, their similar ethnicities enabled a sharing and exchange in the richness of culture and a solidarity in common environmental situations.

As the sisters engaged in radical ministries seeking mercy and justice for the disadvantaged their focus on women (e.g. poverty, violence, educational opportunities HIV/AIDS and refugees) brought them into conflict with male dominating forces in the society. Their personal and communal response was to make a commitment to non-violence (cf. Chapter Five). This mission focus on women was also endorsed in the previously mentioned Synod recommendation by Bishop Deschamps that women religious should be given the place they deserve in the Church without discrimination (cf. Chapter Five).

Part 4. Reflective Observations: today’s women in mission in Papua New Guinea

These final comments suggest possibilities for further research in this extensive historical field of women religious and mission, the social consciousness challenging the agency of women in mission and a reminder of the Melanesian cultural context of mission in Papua New Guinea.

Recommendations for further research

This research study has of necessity comprised ‘broad brush strokes’ interpreted through the eyes of a non-Melanesian woman in education. Although the thesis findings were divided into three time frames, the narrative and descriptive style and the vast scope prevented any detailed analysis of changing trends and this may be an area for future research. My research has unearthed the prospect of further research in the lives of the founders, Elizabeth Miller, Frances Regis, Frances Harcombe and Helen O’Brien, together with long-serving Australian and Papua New Guinea Mercy Sisters in

mission. A detailed focus on health and pastoral work and the missionary visions of significant Australian leaders are worthy of further exploration.

Aspects of this history from the perspectives of the Papua New Guinean Sisters of Mercy and the lay people influenced by *Melanesian* roots in Mercy spirituality and practice would be an invaluable contribution to the Church in Australia and Papua New Guinea. Research into the Mercy Works projects has the potential to offer a rich portrayal of new ministerial approaches, combining Melanesian and Australian cultural richness and perspectives.

Contemporary social consciousness

These observations come from the Papua New Guinean Sisters of Mercy as they continued to respond to changing needs. Catherine Jambet, an experienced pastoral worker and formator at Coolock, identified the contemporary issues (2005) as:

...poverty, new sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS, more squatter settlements, youth problems and wandering youths, shortage of job opportunities and unemployment. There is a need for skills training and pastoral care of youth and those in the settlements. Basic skills like sewing and cooking are needed.

Theresia Nakankwien, a former member of the Diocesan Team of Pastoral Animation (2005) referred to the underlying problems ‘making life hard today’ in the seventeen dioceses as: breakdown in family life, drugs, neglect of children, youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS, social unrest and injustice.²⁴

According to Catherine Jambet (2007), the woman’s voice was slowly being expressed, but not being heard. In every culture there was an increase in husbands taking a second wife, and women being treated as an object, not as a subject or a person to be respected with her own dignity. People were confused with the outside influences and were not aware of the importance of education for girls, as well as boys. Women were being treated as second class in a male dominated society – ‘in the family, society and church’ – where all decision-making was done by men. There were a few exceptions, but it would take a long time for women to reach equality with men, and in the meantime ‘men needed to be educated to see that women were equal to them’.

²⁴ Reported in the National Vision and Mission Statement of the National Assembly.

Catherine's conclusion is reminiscent of our founder's action in helping girls and young women to be self-reliant:

It is a big Mercy challenge to help people be aware of possible ways to help themselves, and to provide places that could enable them to be self-reliant. Because of this we appreciate the opportunity given to us to develop skills of the sisters in Kiunga (Srs Maureen Sexton and Cathy Corbett) and those used in the Mercy Works Jubilee project.

These observations are further indication of an openness to acquire the skills to respond pro-actively to the changing societal conditions on behalf of mercy and justice – attitudes and practices which are consonant with the liberating tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and mission.

Contemporary Mercy Mission in Melanesia

The concluding comments on contemporary Papua New Guinea also come from within the Church in Papua New Guinea. Gilles Côté SMM Bishop of Daru-Kiunga emphasised that mission is embedded within Melanesian culture.²⁵

The only way to build the Church, Mystery of Communion, in our Melanesian society, is to build it with the participation of all, making sure that the key values of the culture become the key values of our process of evangelisation. The people of Melanesia cannot become Church simply by adopting the Roman or Western way. They need to become Church in the Melanesian way. Our efforts and our methods used for evangelisation need to make it possible for the Catholic faith to immerse itself in our Melanesian culture and to be re-expressed according to the legitimate forms of that culture. Will the institutional Church allow Jesus to walk the way of the people of Melanesia, just like he did in Palestine, challenging the truth of their own religious experiences, purifying and enriching their lives not from outside, or from the top, but from within?

Sr Maryanne Kolkia, using the Melanesian feminine symbol of the bilum, one of the several cultural symbols familiar to the sisters, captured the spirit of this new era of mission.²⁶

I see the Australian Mercies as putting us in a *bilum*, and carrying us along on their heads, up the mountains, and down the hills, in the valleys. Sometimes they put us on their laps, seeing us growing, admiring us. It gave them joy to see us growing. They taught us to walk, to stand up and do things as they once did, and, yes, they let us do it differently.

²⁵ Bishop Gilles Côté SMM, "Papua New Guinean Interventions at the Synod", in *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea 1998-2005*, ed. Philip Gibbs (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 2003), 81.

²⁶ The *bilum*, the patient intricate weaving of different threads to form a fine, strong, beautiful, essential net-bag for women – for her baby, for garden food and firewood – symbol of a mother's enduring love and care for her family. Other symbols were the coconut, symbolizing new birth, the mighty *kwila* tree and the canoe, the collective working together as one. The bilum is considered a feminine symbol used for the most precious and essential things a woman carries for her family.

The same *bilum* will be there, only it will be different in a way. We will take their place, but in a different way. It is we, the PNG Mercies, that continue on with carrying the *bilum* up the mountains, down into the valleys. These are now different times.

In conclusion, this thesis has traced the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission, and has placed the Sisters of Mercy within that tradition. In particular the historical study has shown how the Australian Sisters of Mercy adapted to mission in Papua New Guinea according to their own traditions of Catherine McAuley; how their missionary spirit was reinvigorated in Vatican II and through their participation in mission in Papua New Guinea; how their mission extended in reciprocal ways to so many in the church and nation; and how this missionary spirituality and practice were passed on, in particular, to be developed by eager, energetic, inspired and courageous young Papua New Guineans, carrying on within the tradition of women called to Gospel discipleship and Christian mission.

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS/CONSULTANTS

A. Papua New Guinean Sisters of Mercy

Claudia Apalenda	Catherine Hopil	Sophie Samiak
Emmerentiana Awei	Catherine Jambet	Angeline Singiat
Theresia Boyek	Mary Anne Kolkia	Theresia Tina
Robina Einde	Mariska Kua	Philomena Waira
Schola Fakiwi	Veronica Lokalyo	Hilda Yangele
Petronia Maree Gawi	Theresia Nakankwien	
Theresia Tau Gongi	Margaret Roni	

B. Australian Sisters of Mercy

Joan Adams	Elizabeth Devine	Carmel Martin
Beryl Amedee	Miriam Devine	Josephine Martyn
Winifred Anderton	Romley Dirrmann	Pauline Masters
Jennifer Bailey	Ellen Dunn	Irene Masterson
RoseMary Baker	Bernadette Eckersley	Mavis McBride
Nina (Josephine) Barra	Bridie Fennessy	Carmel McCormick
M Justina Bedford	Valda Finlay	Maria Goretti McKosker
Valerie Birchley	Marlene Fitzgibbons	Helen McDonell
Kaye Bolwell	Wendy Flannery	Josette McDonell
M Loyola Boyle	Clare Flinn	Christin McIntosh
Margaret Bray	Gabrielle Flood	Winifred McManus
M Eamon Brennan	Cecily Geary	Nance Munro
Marie Britza	Mary Geason	Agnes Murphy
Margaret Bubb	Marie Geddes	Deirdre Murphy
Betty Busuttin	Ursula Gilbert	Marie Murphy
M Alberta Busuttin	Clare Gilchrist	Jean Murray
Nell Callaghan	Mary Gleeson	Helen O'Brien
Irene Callanan	Maureen Grant	Ann O'Regan
Cheryl Camp	Cynthia Griffin	Maura O'Shaughnessy
Carmel Carroll	Frances Hanrahan	Patricia O'Shea
Anne Frances Carroll	Catherine Harris	Joan O'Toole
Irene Carroll	Rita Hassett	Rose Pelleri
Patricia Carroll	Coral Hedley	Cephas Philben
Stancia Cawte	Catherine Hefferan	Margaret Powell
Valda Cervetto	Ann Hook	Therese Quinlivan
Veronica Clarke	Margaret Houlihan	Monica Raper
Desma Clarke	Therese (Vincent) Kelly	Frances Readman
Janet Connellan	Carmel King	Julie Rees
Catherine Corbett	Helen Law	Maria Jean Rhule
Marie Dagg	Abina Looney	M Marietta Riedy
M Brendan Daly	Joan MacGinley	Kathleen Robertson
Vicki Dean	Bernadette Marks	Margaret Rush

Elva Russell
Julie Anne Ryan
Margaret Ryan
M Victorina Sant
Maureen Sexton
Margaret Shakeshaft
Margarita Shannon

Susan Smith
Mary Stallard
Jill Stringer
Christine Watt
Helen White
Beverley Whitton
Jacinta Wiedman

M Joseph Wightley
Mary Wildie
Marie Williams
Margaret Wilson
Patricia Wood

C Relevant Consultants - Papua New Guinea and Australia

Australian Leaders Sisters of Mercy

Dorothy Champion
Maria Joseph
Gaye Jennings
Philomena Ryman
Patricia Fox
Bernardine Evans

Research Consultants

Deirdre Jordan
Stancia Cawte

PNG Women Religious Leaders

Marie Bernadette Serao SND
Bosco Taman FMI
Marth Lonai S St T
Madeleine Gumaure RS
Maria Koiae OLSH

Health

Frances Wridgway FMIC
Lena Miroi (Matron) Aitape
Sr Tarcisia (N.C.H B)SSpS
Pius Bobby St Mary's Aitape
Br Matthew Bouten SVD

Education

Graeme Leach CFC (Kaindi)
Andrew Simpson CFC (DWU)
Alfred Tivinarlik CFC (DWU)
Fr Ron Morris (NDOE)
Fr Gerry Theis SVD
Sr Loyola McGrath PBVM

Brigid Yambumpe (HTTC)
John Colwell Principal (Sogeri NHS)
Peter Mays H.M. (Kondiu)
James Wia (HTTC)
William Shaw De La Salle (HTTC)
Aida Jujumo (HTTC)
Raphael Oga (HTTC)

Lay Missionaries

Jan Birmingham (Wangoi)
Anne Flaherty (Koge)
Cathy McMahon (Lae)

PNG Diocesan Bishops

Francesco Sarego SVD Goroka
Douglas Young SVD Mount Hagen
Hermann Raich SVD Wabag
Michael Meyer SVD Mount Hagen
Anthony Burgess, DD Wewak
Austen Crapp (Franciscan) Aitape
William Kurtz SVD Madang
Henk te Maarssen SVD (Kundiawa)

Archbishop/Australia

Leonard Faulkner Townsville, Adelaide

Religious Pastoral Cultural


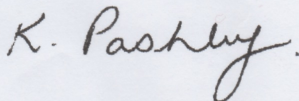
Fr Ennio Mantovani SVD (MI)
Fr Bill Seifert SVD (Goroka)
Fr van der Geest SVD Mount Hagen
Fr Tony Krol SVD Pumakos
Fr Victor Roche SVD Yangoru
Fr Jan Szweda SVD Drekikir
Fr Pat Gesch SVD Negrie
Hermann Jansenn (MI)
Brian Leak FMS Bougainville

APPENDIX 2

Goroka Sisters' Ministry changes in the years preceding and following Independence

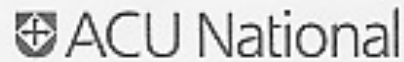
Year	Sisters of Mercy	Area of Ministry	Employment Contract
1970	Teresa Flaherty	Inspector of Simbu Schools	Public Service - PNG
1972	Noreen Collins	Kerowagi High School	National Department of Education NDOE
1972	Margaret Bubb	Koge Vocational School	Catholic Agency NDOE
1972	Winifred Anderton	Muaina Health Centre	Provincial Dept. of Health, Kundiawa
1973	Margaret Wilson	Nursing and MCH Supervisor	Provincial Dept. of Health, Kundiawa
1973	Rita Hassett	Catechetics / Catholic Education Secretary	Goroka Diocese
1974	RoseMary Baker	Village Pastoral Work/Women Church Leaders	Union Sisters of Mercy
1974	Clare Flinn	Koge Vocational Centre	Catholic Agency NDOE
1974	Valda Finlay	Kondiu High School	Catholic Agency NDOE
1974	Teresa Flaherty	Goroka Teachers College	Administration Agency NDOE
1975	Margaret Wilson	Tutor - Nurse Education	Provincial Dept of Health, Mount Hagen
1975	Clare Flinn	Muaina High School, Dean of Women	NDOE
1977	RoseMary Baker	Pastoral Program/Sisters of St Therese	Madang Archdiocese

Approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee

<p>Australian Catholic University Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne</p>	
<p>Human Research Ethics Committee</p> <p><u>Committee Approval Form</u></p>	
<p>Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Rosa MacGinlay and Dr Sophie McGrath Brisbane Campus</p> <p>Co-Investigators: Brisbane Campus</p> <p>Student Researcher: Teresa Flaherty Brisbane Campus</p>	
<p>Ethics approval has been granted for the following project: The History of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956-2006)</p> <p>for the period: 18 July 2005 to 18 July 2007</p> <p>Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: N200405 43</p>	
<p>The following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the <i>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans</i> (1999) apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• security of records• compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation• compliance with special conditions, and(ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• proposed changes to the protocol• unforeseen circumstances or events• adverse effects on participants <p>The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.</p> <p>Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a <i>Final Report Form</i> and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.</p> <p>If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an <i>Annual Progress Report Form</i> and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.</p> <p></p> <p>Signed: Date: 18/07/2005 (Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)</p> <p>(Committee Approval.dot @ 15/10/04)</p> <p>Page 1 of 1</p>	

Information Letter to Participants

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



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INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: The History of the Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea (1956–2006)

STAFF SUPERVISORS: Dr Rosa MacGinley and Dr. Sophie McGrath

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Teresa A. Flaherty

NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: PhD (Theology)

Dear

The Sisters of Mercy of Papua New Guinea Region have requested that a history be written and published to mark the fifty years of the Sisters of Mercy mission and ministry service in PNG (1956-2006). This will be of benefit not only to the sisters now and in the future, but also shed light on mission and church in relation to PNG and Australia. It will contribute to the general history of both countries.

You are invited to contribute towards this recorded history, which will contain information provided by the sisters who came to PNG from the Australian Mercy Congregations and the Papua New Guinea Mercy Sisters. The information (which a group of PNG Sisters have suggested as helpful) consists of

- a) names, dates, places and type of ministry
- b) reasons for ministry/mission
- c) issues, concerns, difficulties and challenges in relation to ministry/mission
- d) events and people of significance
- e) relationship of Australia/Papua New Guinea Sisters of Mercy and Church

Through your lived experience of mission you have participated in ministry and gained insights that are valuable. Would you consider contributing to this written history? An interview for this purpose usually takes about an hour.

Will you agree to talking to me about this in an interview using a tape recorder, or with me taking notes? I will show you the control buttons on this hand-held tape recorder, and if there are any sensitive areas you do not wish to say or record you may simply press the pause button. Similarly if you have agreed to me taking notes, and there is any part you do not want recorded I will stop writing notes. You may choose not to respond to a particular question for any reason, e.g. if the question seems to trigger painful memories. Some participants choose to talk about such things, but without the tape recording or the taking of notes. At any time, you are free to stop the interview, and no other person will know of this choice of yours. You may also ask me any questions you wish at any time before, during, or after the interview.

The questions are about your normal life in ministry, and you are free to explain as much or as little as you wish. Apart from (a) above, i.e. names, dates, places and type of ministry which are generally known, the interview is a confidential one and I am the only person who will hear the tapes and transcribe them or type up the notes. However, the interview is also part of a research project and when I want to combine your ideas with those of others to get a general picture individual names will be deleted in order to safeguard privacy. Individual participants will not be able to be identified in any reports of the study, as only summarised information will be reported. If there is anything about a particular person I will get that person's approval for publication, and it will not be published without approval being given. The tapes and notes will be stored safely in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office in the Adelaide Congregation Offices. These offices have an electronic security system.

If you have any questions about the interview itself or the way it was conducted, you may contact me or any one of my supervisors. Dr Rosa MacGinley or Dr Sophie McGrath. Dr Rosa MacGinley, ACU McAuley Campus, P.O. Box 247 Virginia, Qld. 4014. Australia. Phone 07 3623 7418. Email: rosa.macginley@acu.edu.au

Dr Sophie McGrath, ACU St Mary's Campus, Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield, NSW. 2135. Australia. Phone 02 9876 4609. Email: sophie.mcgrath@acu.edu.au

If you have any complaint(s), you may contact the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University, which is the ACU body that has approved this research project for doctoral studies.

Address your communication to:

Chair, HREC, C/o Research Services, Australian Catholic University, Strathfield Campus, Locked Bag 2002, Strathfield. NSW.2135. Phone 02 9701 4350. Be assured that any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project of the History of the Sisters of Mercy (1956-2006) would you please sign two copies of the Consent Form, one for your records and the other to be returned to me? Your support for the research project will be most appreciated.

Thanking you for your consideration


Yours sincerely,

.....
Teresa A Flaherty RSM

APPENDIX 5

Participants' Consent Form

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

 ACU National

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CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT:
THE HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (1956-2006)

NAME OF RESEARCHER: TERESA A FLAHERTY

I..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this recorded (or noted) interview, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:.....
(BLOCK LETTERS)

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: **DATE:**.....

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER:..... **DATE**

WRITER'S PUBLICATIONS

Teresa A Flaherty RSM. 2008, 2010. Crossings in Mercy: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea 1956–2006. St Mary's S.A.: The Sisters of Mercy Papua New Guinea Region.

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Relevant PNG resources in Adelaide, Ballarat, Bathurst, Brisbane, Cairns, Goulburn, Grafton, Gunnedah Melbourne, North Sydney, Parramatta, Perth (Victoria Square), Rockhampton, Singleton, Townsville, West Perth, Wilcannia Forbes, Mount Hagen.

b) Diocesan/Institutional Archives in Papua New Guinea

The Dioceses of Goroka, Mount Hagen, Wewak
Divine Word University Library, Madang

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