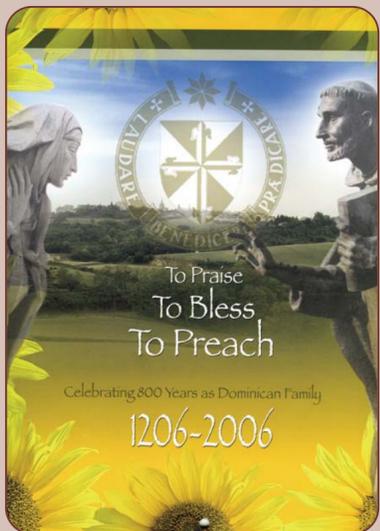


FOUNDATIONS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Dominican Sisters



*Mother Gabriel Gill,
Foundress of the
Dominican Sisters in
Western Australia.*



*The Year 2006
commemorated the
800th anniversary
of the International
Congregations of
Dominican Sisters.
The Sisters'
foundation in Western
Australia at
Greenough, south of
Geraldton, dates back
to 1899.*

Order Origins

The original Dominican Convent, Our Lady of Prouille, was founded in 1206 by Dominic de Guzman (later St Dominic) under the mission of the motto, *Veritas* or *Truth*.

European foundations

From this original group of women, foundations spread throughout Europe with the first known foundation of Dominican nuns in Ireland established in Galway in 1644. Two other Irish foundations were eventually formed at Drogheda and Sion Hill, in Dublin, and it was from Sion Hill that Mother Mary Gabriel Gill led a mission to Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1870.

Twenty-nine years later, a small group of Sisters travelled to Western Australia's Goldfields after Bishop William Kelly, the newly appointed Bishop of Geraldton, invited them to establish a foundation in the recently formed Geraldton Diocese.

In March 1899, Mother Gabriel, together with Sisters di Ricci Kirby, Gonzales Wall, Dominica Murphy, Di Pazzi Miscall, Bonaventure McEntyre and postulant Kate Murphy, were named as the Western Australian founding members. On 7 June 1899 the group arrived in Greenough to form the first foundation of Dominican Sisters in Western Australia.

Goldfields and the Midwest

It was from this small beginning that the Sisters spread to other rural centres. Three months after their arrival in Greenough, the Sisters agreed to found a second mission in Cue, an early gold mining town situated in a harsh environment. Other foundations to follow included Dongara (1901), Leonora and Gwalia (1903), Day Dawn (1905), Meekatharra (1911), Three Springs (1917), Yalgoo (1922), Mingenew (1932), Reedy (1941) and Morawa (1955).

The Dongara Convent was established as the head house and novitiate in the hope that a significant college would develop. Over the next 70 years, the Dominican Priory became well known for its high standard of education and its well-equipped, attractive building (post 1928), the Dominican Ladies' College.

Challenges of nature

As early as 1917, the Sisters experienced the traumas and difficulties associated with living close to a river that periodically burst its banks. The flooding associated with Cyclone Mavis (1971) was the catalyst that finally saw the closure of the Dominican Priory and Ladies' College. The ongoing association between ex-students and the Sisters is the treasured result of a happy past.

Perth foundations – Bedford Park

The possibility of establishing a Dominican foundation in the Perth Archdiocese was raised as early as 1933, but it was not until August 1940 that the new Prioress, Mother Vincent Colgan, received an invitation to open a school at Bedford Park in February 1941. With the permission of Geraldton's Bishop O'Collins, the foundation group of Sisters Laurence Prendiville, Marie Thérèse Sharman, Albertus Bain and Rose McCusker commenced their mission at St Peter's School in Wood Street.

Subsequent growth resulted in the establishment of a secondary school for girls that was named after the Dominican theologian, St Thomas Aquinas. The school was opened in 1955.

Winds of change

Progress during the 1970s brought with it significant changes and the question of forming a co-educational college in conjunction with the Christian Brothers was discussed. During this period the first lay Principals were also appointed at St Thomas Aquinas School (Graham Cooney) and St Peter's School (Laurie Mayne).

In February 1989, the co-educational college became a reality with the establishment of Chisholm Catholic College.

The Bedford Park foundation was also associated with St Therese's School, Gwelup; Santa Clara School, Bentley; Infant Jesus School, Morley; and Our Lady's Assumption School, Dianella.

Scarborough/Doubleview

Almost 10 years after the foundation was made at Bedford Park, the Dominican Sisters were invited to staff St John's School, Scarborough. The new foundation was made in August 1950, with Sisters Albertus Bain, Anthony Sachse and Francis Huntsman.

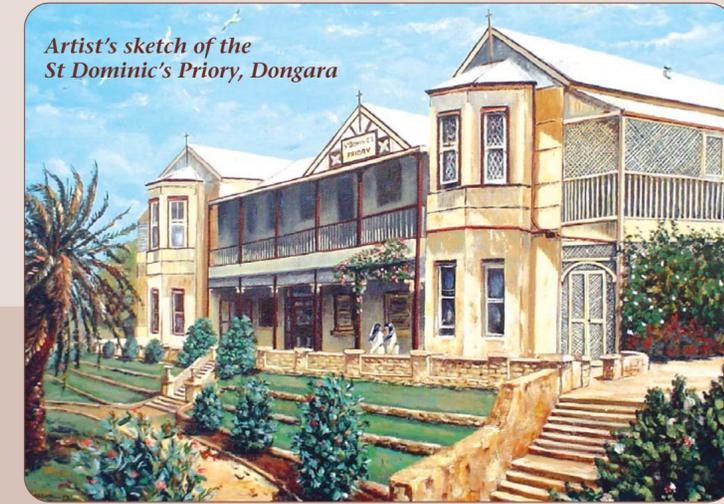
The 1950s and 1960s was a time of expansion in the Scarborough area during which time St John's added secondary classes to the original primary school. St Dominic's, Innaloo; Holy Rosary, Doubleview; and Holy Spirit, Wembley Downs were all opened and staffed by Dominican Sisters. In addition, the Siena Dominican Girls' High School was built in Doubleview in 1962.

Change was the dominant characteristic of the 1970s. The severe and destructive flood in Dongara in 1971 resulted in the relocation of the head house to St Catherine's Convent in Doubleview in 1972, while a shortage of Sisters saw the gradual withdrawal from both country and city schools.

The Sisters then focused their attention on the two Doubleview schools adjacent to St Catherine's Convent where they retained the Principalship and some teaching posts – Holy Rosary School and Newman Siena College.



Group of Meekatharra pupils 1911



*Artist's sketch of the
St Dominic's Priory, Dongara*



*Sisters on the Heritage Pilgrimage to
their former school site at Day Dawn*

Further changes were brought about following discussions with the Marist Brothers and Brigidine Sisters. The Year 11 and 12 classes from the three Order schools were combined at the Marist College in Churchlands, while Siena became a Year 8–10 girls' school that operated autonomously, but under the umbrella name of Newman College.

In 1983, the two colleges became co-educational, but continued to be administered separately. In 1995, when they were amalgamated under one Principal, Brother Stephen Bugg, they were renamed Newman College. The Sisters' association with the College concluded in 1997. In 2006, Holy Rosary School continued under the Principalship of Sr Marlene Laracy.

Centenary celebrations

Nineteen ninety-nine marked the Centenary of the Dominican Sisters in Western Australia. One of the highlights of the year was the Heritage Pilgrimage to the sites of the original 16 foundations and their associated schools where the Sisters had served during the hundred years.

THE DOMINICAN FUTURE

The Dominican Sisters in Western Australia are now a small group of women who belong to a very large family across the world. While support for students with special learning needs has held prominence in Dominican schools for many years, this focus has now been extended to post-school development.

The Sisters see that their call now is to relinquish primary responsibilities for institutions and continue their work wherever they are called in the spirit of their founder, Dominic. Sisters still in active service are involved in ministries such as counselling, retreats, justice and peace, catechesis, pastoral care and social welfare.

The Western Australian Sisters also continue to support their fellow Sisters in oppressed and less fortunate parts of the world.