

# FOUNDATIONS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

## *Sisters of the Good Shepherd*



*The Sisters of the Good Shepherd was founded by Mother Mary of St Euphrasia in 1835 at Angers, France, as the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. It was born out of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge founded by St John Eudes in 1641.*

*Mother Mary of St Euphrasia*

### **Arrival in WA**

The year is 1895 and Bishop Matthew Gibney of Perth approaches the Victorian Provincial House of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd with a request that the Sisters establish a Convent in his diocese (the first Sisters of the Good Shepherd arrived in Australia in 1863).

Having learned of their successful record in the field of social work, Bishop Gibney offers them acreage at Subiaco or Highgate Hill, should they agree to the request. A host of influencing factors, however, meant the Sisters did not 'officially' arrive in Western Australia until 10 September 1902.

Given the lapse in time, a new offer of land was made at Leederville – the current location of the Catholic Education Centre. In the interim between their arrival and the Convent being built (the foundation stone was laid on 15 November 1903) the Sisters conducted their work out of two houses in Adelaide Terrace.

### **Origins of St Clare's**

Unlike the majority of the Orders that arrived in Perth, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were not 'commissioned' for the purpose of education, but rather that of supporting the social needs of women and girls. Indeed, it was not until 1956, some 54 years after the Order's arrival in Western Australia, that St Clare's School was established.

Constructed adjoining the Convent, the early St Clare's was a residential school. The main reason for its establishment was to cater for the educational and social needs of the girls being referred to the care of the Sisters – girls who were within the compulsory school age.

St Clare's continues to reflect the charism of the Order by assisting those girls who have difficulty integrating into the mainstream classroom environment for a variety of reasons.

This charism reflects the spirit of Jesus, the good shepherd who leaves the 99 lambs to search for the one that has lost its way. It's about seeking out those in need, no matter what, and recognising that every person is precious and has a right to an education suited to their needs.

### **Built on community**

In its 'heyday', the Leederville home of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd resembled something of a small 'enclave' where disadvantaged women and children were provided with accommodation, schooling and work in the onsite commercial laundry that serviced the surrounding businesses and the St John of God Hospital. The revenue generated by the laundry, together with the poultry farm and cows that were kept within the grounds, provided the community with a degree of self-sufficiency.

By the early 1960s, the ever increasing number of referrals to the Convent resulted in the onsite establishment of the *Maryville* residential hostel for young women. Later renamed *Rosmunde*, the hostel provided a safe refuge for up to 40 girls.

### **Winds of change**

The late 60s brought with it a change in the social environment and the Sisters sought to address the needs of the day, moving outside of the group living quarters offered within the Convent, to also provide more individualised living environments.

In order to address this shift five houses were purchased by the Sisters in the local Leederville area, three catering for the needs of the women and two for the girls.

Working in collaboration with *The Knights of the Southern Cross*, the Sisters also established the *Villa Pelletier Hostel* to house the older women who worked in the laundry. The Villa is still in operation today (2005) under the management of Southern Cross Homes.

Meanwhile, the supportive learning environment offered at St Clare's resulted in the request for the school to accept day students as well as its residential quota. The request was accepted and by the end of the 1970s the school population consisted entirely of day students.

A major re-evaluation of their ministry in 1978 saw the Sisters change focus to, once again, meet the needs of the community at the time. The result of this re-evaluation was a move into the northern suburbs and the commencement of prison ministry. For St Clare's, the re-evaluation brought with it a reduction in student numbers to approximately 15 girls and a combination of teaching and social work.

### **End of an era**

On 29 May 1986 the 84-year association with 50 Ruislip Street, Leederville, came to an end with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd leaving the Convent in the hands of the Catholic Education Commission, to whom it had been sold.

The sale brought with it the need to relocate St Clare's School, an ongoing challenge which was finally resolved in 2003 as the community celebrated the official blessing and opening of its new permanent facilities at Lathlain.



*The Good Shepherd Convent 1912 (top) and 2004 (above)*



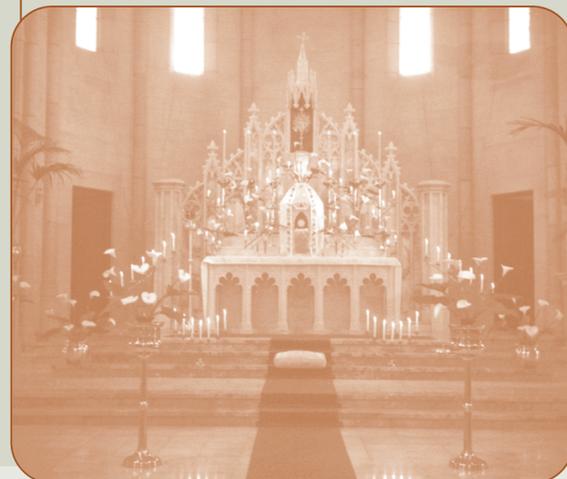
*Good Shepherd stained glass window*



*Educational and social needs were provided by the Sisters for girls referred to the Convent*



*The Good Shepherd community in 1912*



*The Chapel of St Michael the Archangel – officially opened on 1 October 1939*



*Sr Geraldine Mitchell, Principal, St Clare's School, Lathlain in 2005*

### **THE SISTERS TODAY**

*In addition to the ongoing education ministry, the Sisters remain actively involved in the area of social justice. A good example of this is the No Interest Loans Program (NILS) developed by Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services in Melbourne for low income families to purchase essential items for the home. This is a nationwide model which has the support of welfare services and government.*

*The Sisters in Australia and New Zealand are also engaged in a fair trade (non profit) initiative that enables women from Third World countries to trade their way out of poverty by marketing products and supporting the development of projects with small grants for equipment and materials. It is also a consciousness raising activity to inform the community of the situations in which the women and their families live and the differences brought about by these opportunities.*

*The Sisters of the Good Shepherd celebrated the centenary of their foundation in Western Australia on 24 June 2004.*