

FOUNDATIONS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Loreto Sisters



The first wing of Loreto Nedlands built in 1930 – photo courtesy Kath O'Hara.



Blessing and laying of the foundation stone of Loreto Nedlands on 21st November 1930. Pictured are Archbishop Clune and Father O'Brien with members of the IBVM communities at Adelaide Terrace and Osborne.



The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), or the Loreto Sisters as they are more widely known, was founded in 1609 by Englishwoman, Mary Ward. The Order, known in 17th Century Europe as the 'English Ladies', was founded for the purpose of educating girls.

In the following, Sr Margaret Finlay IBVM, a former Principal of Loreto Nedlands and current Community Leader, outlines the Sisters' arrival in Australia and their pioneering work in the WA Catholic education system. Sr Margaret attributes much of the information to the book 'Beyond All Telling – A History of Loreto in Western Australia 1897-1997' by Sr Anne Carter IBVM.



Mary Ward, foundress of the Loreto Sisters.



Mother de Sales Field (front) established Loreto in Western Australia. Behind her are Sr Monica and Sr Alhonsai.

The Loreto Sisters in Australia

The arrival of the Loreto Sisters in Australia dates back to 1875 when the settlement of Ballarat welcomed the arrival, from Ireland, of Mother Gonzaga Barry and her first group of Sisters. Their first house – Mary's Mount – was transformed over time into a College for girls, located on the picturesque shores of Lake Wendouree.

Twenty years after their arrival in Australia the Sisters were visited by Perth's Bishop Matthew Gibney who invited Mother Gonzaga Barry to establish a presence in the Perth Archdiocese by opening a school for girls.

Following an 11 month delay whilst seeking permission from the Mother General in Ireland, Mother Gonzaga Barry visited Perth in 1896 and procured land between Mary and Langford Streets in Claremont.

Arrival in Western Australia

The following year (1897) the first group of Loreto Sisters set sail from Melbourne across the Southern Ocean, eventually berthing in Albany where they were met by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition with whom they stayed overnight. The next day the Sisters boarded a train for Perth where, again, they were warmly received, this time by the Sisters of St John of God.

By early February, the Sisters were housed in a rental property located in Adelaide Terrace and were publicly welcomed to Perth by Bishop Gibney at a Mass held on 7 February 1897 in St Mary's Cathedral. A week later, the first pupils arrived at the new school in Adelaide Terrace. By the end of the term, enrolments had grown to 37 girls.

In order to accommodate this growth the Sisters procured a house called *The Bracken* that was also located along Adelaide Terrace. Larger and more suited to schooling and the provision of dormitories that were required at the time, the grounds of the first Loreto Ladies College stretched from the Terrace to the banks of the Swan River, allowing for the provision of playing fields.

By 1898 enrolments had increased significantly to 129 girls, among the first of whom included the grand daughters of John

Henry Monger. Having converted to Catholicism, Violet Monger later joined the Order, as did fellow students Joan Weidenbach and Violet Xaviera Grave.

After five years at their Adelaide Terrace site, the Loreto Sisters purchased the eight acre Osborne Hotel site in Claremont as it was deemed a more suitable school site than the Mary Street land.

In May 1901, Mother de Sales Fields took possession of the property that was subsequently named Loreto Osborne and operated as a boarding facility to complement the Adelaide Terrace day school.

New foundation

The relocation of the University of Western Australia to its present site in 1929 brought with it a new chapter of development for the Loreto Sisters who, on the request of Archbishop Clune, procured land in Webster Street, Nedlands, with the intention of establishing a university college of residence.

However, the land was eventually deemed to be too far from the university and there were also increasing requests for the establishment of a parish school.

The foundation stone of Loreto Nedlands was laid and blessed by Archbishop Clune in 1930. By the following year the north wing had been built, the school was opened and the community was in residence.

Challenges and consolidation

These new beginnings were not without their challenges, however, as persistence from the parish priest of the time resulted in the opening of the St Theresa's parish school in the same year.

Needless to say there was quite a tussle for students in the schools, both of which were managed by the Sisters – St Theresa's catering to boys and girls and Loreto Nedlands to girls only. On 25 November 1944 Loreto Adelaide Terrace was sold and the community was relocated to Nedlands.

The 1940s were a time of consolidation for the three remaining Loreto schools – Osborne, Nedlands and St Theresa's. By 1962, decreasing student numbers at Nedlands saw the senior secondary students ('leaving' and 'matriculation') relocated to Osborne/Claremont, much to the disappointment of the Nedlands community. Similar circumstances in 1970 resulted in the relocation of the remaining secondary classes.

At the same time, Archbishop Goody, in looking to the future of education, decided there was a need to cluster the educational ministry of the Religious Orders. As a result, the Loreto Sisters spent the next 20 years staffing a number of the parish primary



Sr Margaret Finlay (right) and the Loreto Sisters at their farewell function in 2003.

schools in the southern suburbs including Sacred Heart School in Thornlie, Xavier Catholic School in Armadale, Good Shepherd Primary in Kelmscott and Orana Catholic Primary in Willetton.

The Sisters were also invited to visit the Broome Diocese where they played a major role in the educational development of St Mary's College in Broome and Djarindjin Lombadina Catholic School.

Mary Ward Centre

A particular facility of which both Loreto Nedlands and John XXIII College are very proud is the Mary Ward Centre for children with intellectual disabilities that was opened at Loreto Nedlands in 1984.

The aim of the centre is to provide its students with the opportunity to take their place in a mainstream learning environment under the invaluable guidance of the dedicated Mary Ward Centre staff.

In 1994 the Mary Ward Centre was transferred to John XXIII College, providing the students with access to a K-12 education. At that time eight students were enrolled. Today the number stands at 45.

Needless to say, their presence continues to enrich the lives of the broader school community and all those with whom they come into contact.

Sisters relocate

After 72 years of living and working in Nedlands, a number of the Loreto Sisters gave a fond farewell to their Webster Street Convent in 2003 as they relocated to a new residence in the southern suburb of Success. Other Sisters continue to live in the Nedlands area.

While the relocation of the Sisters has not severed their close ties with Loreto Nedlands, it has provided the school with extra space. At the time of their departure, Sr Margaret said the Sisters were relocating in the knowledge that the school would continue to honour the tradition and spirituality of Loreto and Mary Ward – the qualities of freedom, justice, sincerity, verity and felicity that characterise the Loreto educational philosophy.

JOHN XXIII COLLEGE



Back in Perth, the mid 1970s brought with it a decision by the Loreto Sisters and Jesuit Priests to amalgamate their two schools – Loreto Claremont and St Louis School – the result of which was John XXIII College.

Built on the Ignation tradition of St Ignatius and Mary Ward, the College took the name of Pope John XXIII as additional inspiration. The foundation Principal was Fr Daven Day SJ; his successor was Sr Denise Desmarchelier IBVM. Today the College continues to have representatives from both Orders on the College council and on staff.

At Loreto Nedlands, the last IBVM Principal was Sr Margaret Finlay who concluded her term at the end of 1986. Since then the school has operated under lay Principals, however, it has remained Order-owned.