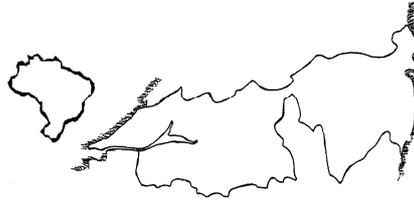


Health Care



Care

Friendship

Community

Well Being

Wholeness

Health

Story

Healing



Mercy through the Years

The Story of Health Care

in the

South Central Province

of the

Sisters of Mercy

Published March 2007

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Introduction

It is a very happy task for me to introduce this very interesting and encouraging outline 'story' of the involvement of sisters in South Central province in the ministry of Healthcare and service to those who are sick or dying since the 1830s.

As Mercy Sisters, the urgent practicalities of being with those who needed immediate medical attention often led us to pay little memory attention to the total picture, the many beginnings, the developments and achievements which happened in this service over the years, a service so dear to Christ Jesus and especially to our Foundress Catherine McAuley.

In this overview we touch into a great variety of stories, in many different contexts, and get a glimpse of the numerous Mercy women who gave such quiet compassionate and competent care to those who were sick and suffering across the decades. Working in the voluntary sector, the private sector, and the State sector, much experience and many skills were acquired. Whether in the setting of the busy hospital floor, in the small kitchen of a sick neighbour, or in the nursing home ward of the elderly infirm, sisters have played their part in bringing comfort and healing to people at their most vulnerable and dependent times in life. Hospitals were built at great cost, specialities were initiated and nurtured to stability, training was valued and expected, standards were devised and maintained, and an atmosphere of gentle dignified attention to the sick person was paramount in all the settings where Mercy sisters had responsibility.

This story brings great joy to us. It is a timely story at a time of major change for us. It is a service in remembrance – where we recognise and give thanks for the footsteps of Christ and Catherine in the deeds and achievements of the Sisters who have gone before us in this ministry.

Our thanks go to all who took part in the diligent work of compiling this story. May it serve to remind us of our call as Christian and Mercy women to bring 'healing' to those who are sick wherever we meet them.

In gratitude

*Helena O'Donoghue RSM
Naas, Co. Kildare
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Healthcare Commission, South Central Province



Sheila Cronin



Mary Corry



Joan Duddy



Helen Hannan



Enda Hayes



Maura O'Connor



Rena Ryan



Josephine Shanahan



Fionnuala Glynn (PLT Link)

Chapter One

Early Days

When Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831 care of the sick became one of the principal characteristics of the congregation. Catherine understood that the care of the sick poor of her time was a practical Christian exercise which sought to relieve the suffering and hardship they endured. This was achieved by personal attendance of the Sisters in their homes and in the overcrowded Hospitals. From the outbreak of cholera in Dublin in 1832, through the famine years, to the setting up of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the establishment of County Hospitals, the Sisters of Mercy cared for the sick and dying in almost every town throughout the country. They carried out faithfully the injunctions of their early Rule and Constitutions: “Let those whom Jesus Christ has graciously permitted to assist Him in the persons of His suffering poor, have their hearts animated with gratitude and love, and placing all their confidence in Him, ever keep His unwearied patience and humility present in their minds”

As the Sisters of Mercy became established in more and more towns, each foundation was deemed autonomous and allowed to pursue the aims of Mercy more by adherence to the spirit of the Rule than by administrative ties. It is hardly surprising then that the response to the needs of the times bears a marked similarity in each town in which the Sisters ministered. This is true of the beginnings of the Health Care story in the five Dioceses of Cashel and Emly, Dublin, Kildare and Leighlin, Killaloe and Limerick which form the South Central Province of the Sisters of Mercy. The story is an inspirational one of which Sisters of Mercy everywhere can be proud. Reading it may lead one to believe that much of the glory belongs to the past, but history paints another picture and this is one of dedicated women responding in a practical, human way, over a period of more than one hundred and seventy years, to Christ’s dictum “I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me.” (Matt. 25; 35 – 36). Elsewhere in St. Matthew we read “Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice.” However there is nothing to say that others may not praise the work done then and which continues to be done in people’s homes and in Hospitals. The Health Care Sisters over the years are the valiant women who took practical steps to alleviate human suffering and by so doing enriched our congregational heritage.

Chapter Two

Times Past - Establishment of the Work House

Almost all foundations began their nursing service in the Workhouse and before relating the story of Health Care in the South Central Province of the Sisters of Mercy, we must delve a little into the social history of the time and place the service within its historical context. In the early nineteenth century poverty was widespread in Ireland. This was due to several factors. The terms of the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland in 1800 established Free Trade between the two countries. Irish industries were unable to compete and this failure resulted in high unemployment. There was an unprecedented increase in the Irish population at the time from about five million in 1800 to over eight million in the mid-1840's. There was a high dependency on agriculture and the many failures of the potato crop in the first half of the century caused great hardship among the rural poorer classes. A cholera epidemic wreaked havoc in the cities. The Great Famine of 1847 and its attendant hardships brought even more death and desolation. To relieve these ills the Workhouse was established.

In 1833 a Royal Commission was set up to enquire into the conditions of the Irish poor. Following their report and proposals for relief, a Poor Law for Ireland Bill was passed in Parliament in 1838. According to this Bill, Ireland should be divided into 130 Unions and each Union should have a Workhouse for the care of the poor. Soon these institutions were built in many Irish towns. Specific rules and regulations were laid down for the running of the Workhouses. They were administered in each Union by a Board of Guardians. Masters and Matrons were appointed for each Workhouse. However sometimes day to day management left much to be desired. Some Masters and Matrons proved incompetent; staffs were dishonest and good order was jeopardised. The Sisters of Mercy, who had already established themselves in many Irish towns and who had earned a reputation for order and good practice, were often asked to take charge of the Workhouse or at least to provide nursing care there.

Chapter Three

Dublin's Story

Townsend Street Hospital

Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin on 12th December 1931. In 1932 there was a devastating outbreak of cholera in the city. Catherine responded by offering the services of the newly founded congregation to the Board of Health. The Sisters were assigned to Townsend Street Depot, a temporary Hospital on the south side of the River Liffey. With little knowledge of how cholera was spread they cared for its victims and reassured them of their dedicated care until patients were claimed by death. Such was the dread of cholera that people feared being confined alive. Patients were brought to the Hospital under the cover of darkness so that neighbours would not know of their affliction. Catherine and her Sisters were given full control of the Townsend Street Hospital. It had fewer deaths than any other cholera Hospital. When the outbreak was over, the Sisters were commended and thanked by the Board of Health Authorities

St Kevin's Hospital (now St. James Hospital)

The first Workhouse was built in Dublin in 1703 on the south side of the city. This was the South Dublin Union and it included an infirmary for sick paupers. In 1839, Catherine McAuley requested permission for the Sisters from Baggot Street to visit the Hospital and the Sisters were allowed to visit patients of their own persuasion. As in many of the other Workhouses, administration was poor and often the sick inmates were neglected. Ten Sisters took up duty as nurses on the 11th November 1880, the anniversary of Catherine McAuley's death. The Board of Guardians of the Union Workhouse decided to "confide this duty to her children". The Sisters received an agreed rate of £30 per person per annum; accommodation was provided but no rations. Of this occasion, the London *Tablet* June 4th 1881 says, "On Monday morning at half past eight, ten nuns of the order of Mercy were installed as nurses in the South Union Workhouse by His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin. The occasion was one of very great interest, inaugurating a new era in the history of Workhouse management, and commencing a system that has been found universally productive of the happiest and most beneficial results".

People from all walks of life availed of the services of the South Dublin Union Workhouse. Emily, sister of Charles Steward Parnell, ended her days there. In 1916 the Infirmary was occupied by the Irish Volunteers under Commandant Eamonn Ceannt and Cathal Brugha. William T. Cosgrave was an adjutant. Fighting took place in the grounds during which a nurse and three inmates were shot dead. Cathal Brugha received twenty five gunshot wounds from which he survived only to be killed later in the Civil War.

In the early 1940's administration of the South Dublin Union was changed and the newly appointed Commissioners set about modernising the Hospital which was now known as St. Kevin's Hospital. Patients were transferred to other Hospitals and the work of re-construction was begun. Staffing too, was updated. However, there was a gradual reduction of the number of Sisters at St. Kevin's Hospital. Some were recalled to assist in staffing Cluain Mhuire, the psychiatric unit opened in Blackrock, and others were sent to several Dublin Hospitals. Some too were assigned to the Mater Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. The Sisters of Mercy remained at St. Kevin's until 1963 when their contribution was ended by the Superior General and her Council and the Sisters there were returned to St. Michael's Hospital in Dun Laoghaire. In 1971 ownership of St. Kevin's was transferred to a new Board of twenty members. This new body was named St. James's Hospital Board and the Hospital became known under its new name, St. James's Hospital.

The Charitable Infirmary Jervis Street Hospital 1718 - 1987



In 1854 the Sisters of Mercy were asked to take over responsibility for nursing care at Jervis Street Hospital. Between 1850 and 1860 public concern for the sick in Hospitals was being awakened. Standards of care were low and the Managing Committee were anxious to put a reputable team in charge of nursing. The Sisters were known for their care of the sick poor in Dublin, for their French training and for their successful fundraising efforts. A proposal to acquire the services of the Sisters of Mercy, stating these considerations, was put to the Management Committee of Jervis Street Hospital in 1854. The Sisters would be entrusted with the administration and staffing of the Hospital. In consideration of their services they would receive the remuneration being paid at that time to the Matron and her servants and would be provided with living

accommodation which they would furnish themselves. The Sisters in Baggot Street were happy to accept the terms put forward by the Management Committee. On the 15th August 1854 two carriages with members of the Management Committee escorted the Sisters to the Charitable Infirmary in Jervis Street where they were formally welcomed by Committee and Medical Staff and an address read. The address recognised and admired “the disinterested and heroic charity” which led the Sisters “to wait on the sick beds of the afflicted”.

When the formalities were over the Sisters faced the difficult task of cleaning up the Hospital and running it according to acceptable standards. When writing the life of Catherine McAuley in 1866, Mother Austin Carroll says that after the Sisters’ arrival “cleanliness and order reigned throughout the place - patients were made comfortable and the doctors found their orders were carried out.... and all that careful nursing could do to alleviate suffering was performed. An atmosphere of peace and tranquillity prevailed which results from good organisation and devoted attention to its welfare in any institution.” The Sisters helped to improve the financial situation of the Hospital since the public showed appreciation of their work and contributed generously.

While the Hospital was always clean and well ventilated it had low roofs and small wards. Conscious of its inadequacy, the Management Committee decided in 1877 to rebuild. They purchased the adjoining premises of the Dublin Carriage Company and an interest in five houses in Jervis Street. A contract was signed for the new building on 3rd September 1877 at a cost of £29,700. Work began the following year when the Committee purchased a Protestant Mission Church and School on Jervis Street for £2,250. Patients who could not be discharged were temporarily accommodated in these buildings. By the time the new Hospital was finished in 1886 the cost was £55,160-16-1.

The Hospital was staffed from the beginning by surgeons. The first physician was appointed in 1738 and for 184 years the staff was described in three categories, physician, surgeon and apothecary. Specialists appear in 1902 – gynaecologist, ophthalmic surgeon, pathologist and bacteriologist.

In 1891 the School of Nursing was established in Jervis Street. It was the first to be opened in Dublin by a Religious Order. The School was modelled on the Nightingale School of Nursing at St. Thomas’ Hospital in London. A nurse trained in the Nightingale philosophy of nursing at Dr. Steeven’s Hospital, Dublin was employed in Jervis Street with a remit to establish the Nurses’ Training School initiated by the Sisters there. After two years she returned to Dr. Steeven’s Hospital as Superintendent of Nursing there. The Sisters continued responsibility for the School until 1899 when Alice Mary Kelly, a former trainee at Jervis Street, was appointed Matron. When Miss Kelly took up her position a struggle was in process in England and Ireland to have nurses recognised as professionals. In 1919 the Nurses Act was passed recognising nursing as a profession. When the General Nursing Council was set up in 1921 Miss Kelly was first to register. Later she was asked to draw up a syllabus of training for nurses in Ireland and in 1925 was appointed an examiner by the General Nursing Council, a post she held until her retirement in 1945 when she left a thriving School of Nursing with high standards of excellence in patient care.

The School of Nursing began with ten students and the number grew until it reached two hundred in the 1980’s. Each student nurse was obliged to buy her own

uniform and books and to pay a small tuition fee. During training student nurses were all resident and it became necessary to provide further accommodation. With funds from the Irish Hospital's Sweepstakes a new Nurses residence was opened in 1934. It accommodated seventy two nurses and was deemed the most modern faculty in Ireland.

Over the years the Sisters of Mercy in Jervis Street were held in high esteem and their work much admired as was evident in tributes paid to them on the occasion of the 250th anniversary in 1968 of the opening of the Hospital. Some of the Sisters there were supporters of the Republican cause but in 1916 there was no discrimination in ministering to the wounded on both sides. The staff so impressed a young British officer, later to become Lord Dunsaney, that he became a Life Governor of the Hospital. There are many stories told of the Sisters' expertise in the art of disguise as wounded Republican soldiers were hidden from the searching eyes of British officers. Some were disguised as travellers and provided with a supply of pot menders. Others, less ambulant, donned nuns' wimples and were installed in the sick Sisters' wards. British officers failed to notice the big feet of wards maids who went about their duties cleaning and polishing. The mouth of a tunnel dug out from the General Post Office to the Hospital by the Insurgents was concealed with screens.

Being a city centre Hospital many demands were made on the Accident and Emergency Department at Jervis Street. Not only during the 1916 Rising but also after the Dublin Bombings of 1974 and the Stardust fire disaster in 1981. Only the heroic services of the Dublin Fire Brigade aided by men and apparatus from Power's Distillery and Guinness's Brewery saved the Hospital from being burned down during the 1916 Rising.

In 1983 there were three hundred beds at the Hospital and a special outreach unit for dialysis patients had been established at St. Mary's Hospital, Phoenix Park. A Drug/Poisons Unit to serve the city and the country was also flourishing. But in this year a directive was received from the Department of Health forewarning of the imminent closure of the Hospital. The Department planned to close all small Hospitals in Dublin and transfer the patients to more up to date medical facilities. A large new Hospital was built at Beaumont away from the city centre and patients from Jervis Street and the Richmond Hospital were transferred there. The Sisters of Mercy were invited to become part of the staff at Beaumont Hospital but the Superior General of the time declined. After 129 years of service in Jervis Street, the Sisters said goodbye to staff and patients and on 15th August 1983 they departed for Mercy ministries elsewhere.

The site at Jervis Street was sold to property developers. The buildings were demolished except for the red brick façade of the Hospital on which a Preservation order had been placed. The Jervis Street Shopping Centre now occupies the site where once stood the Charitable Infirmary of Jervis Street.

Chapter Four

Mater Misericordiae Hospital Dublin



Unlike many of the Hospitals served by the Sisters of Mercy round the country, the Mater Misericordiae Hospital did not begin life as a Workhouse. According to the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy the idea of building a Hospital in Dublin originated with Mother McAuley herself "who was anxious that the Sisters should have a Hospital of their own, in which the spiritual and temporal wants of the poor could be perfectly ministered to, and from which patients should not be compelled to go until their health was completely re-established." She saw with grief that many poor convalescents were obliged to leave the public Hospitals and resume work before their health was sufficiently restored.

In 1851 Mr John Bourke, Architect, designed the building much as we know it now. It was to be built in sections to allow for fund raising in between. In 1861 the Sisters of Mercy had the great joy of seeing the first patients admitted.

The building of the Mater at that particular time needs to be viewed against the political and economical climate in Ireland at the end of the 1840's. An intimation of the difficulties experienced by the poor of Dublin trying to access treatment in public Hospitals at this time was outlined in the account of the laying of the foundation stone of the Hospital in 1855 in the National Newspapers. It runs as follows: "It is a painful fact, bitterly experienced by the sick, the maimed and the suffering poor of Dublin, and not less regretfully witnessed by our benevolent and humane gentry and citizens, that, owing to the ill advised and most pernicious measure of withdrawing the government grants from our public Hospitals, the resources of these institutions have been getting year after year more insufficient and unequal to the demands made upon them This serious evil has been partially met and in several instances most effectively, by the enthusiastic zeal and devoted benevolence of that glorious Sisterhood of the Order of Mercy"

The Sisters were supported in their courageous decision by the Archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Paul Cullen. Replying to criticism of the grandeur of the Hospital structure, he gave his famous reply: "*We have palaces for guilt, we have palaces for force*"

- we have palaces for legalised want, in which what is called pauperism is dealt with according to the principles of an unfeeling political economy. Why, then, should we not have at least one palace for the poor, in which poverty would be relieved in a true spirit of charity and according to the dictates of the Gospel?"

A plot of four acres was purchased for the Sisters by Dr. David Moriarty, President of All Hallows College, Drumcondra. It cost £800 which was paid for by the Sisters out of their own funds. Shortly after, the land opposite the Hospital was purchased to ensure that the wards would be provided with fresh air. In 1879 a further plot of land to the east of the site was purchased. The Trustees at the time are listed as Sisters of Mercy of Baggot Street, as well as the Assistant Bishop of Dublin, Rev. Edward McCabe P.P. V.G. Kingstown. The official opening took place on September 25th 1861; Cardinal Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin, performed the opening ceremony. The cost of the Eccles Street frontage was £27,000 of which the Sisters of Mercy contributed £10,000 from their own resources

The Sisters designated to work at the Hospital went to France to acquire the skills and experience needed; some went to the famous Hospital in Paris run by the Augustinian Sisters - the Hotel Dieu, to train as nurses. Those who would be involved in the general management went to Amiens in the north of France for training in Hospital administration. The initial Staff of the Hospital consisted of: two Physicians, five Surgeons, nine Sisters of Mercy and nine untrained ward helpers. Forty patients were admitted when it opened. It was hoped that when all sections of the Hospital were built it would hold in excess of 400 patients. To-day the Hospital accommodates in excess of 600 patients.

In 1866 a serious outbreak of Cholera occurred in the City. At the time the cause of these epidemic diseases was not known and there was no treatment available. In addition, people were ashamed of contracting a disease of this nature and so they would not come to the Hospital until after dark, by which time the patient was invariably moribund. Dublin people believed during this outbreak that if a patient went to a Hospital they would be put straight into a coffin before they were dead. The Sisters gave an undertaking that they would care for the patients until they died. This provided great reassurance to the people and regard for the Mater rose dramatically.

In 1868 building commenced on the East wing which was opened in 1872. Part of the top floor was reserved for the care of patients with infectious diseases. In 1871 a serious outbreak of Smallpox disease occurred. The treatment of these patients was difficult and left a lasting memory on those who were running the Hospital. After that the Sisters thought of building a 'stand alone' fever block in the grounds of the Hospital. There were strong objections from the neighbours and so it never was built.

In 1884 the building of the West wing commenced. This wing contained a temporary chapel, a block of wards and a Convent for the Sisters. It was opened in 1886. The building of the North Wing was put on hold because it was feared that it would impede the flow of air to the wards and thus interfere with patient care. By 1935 this fear had largely been forgotten and the space being occupied in the west wing by a chapel was needed. The Sisters built the existing chapel and it was opened in 1937. The vacant

space in the west wing was then quickly converted into two large wards, one of which was to become part of the Intensive Care Unit and the other the Orthopaedic /National Spinal Injuries Unit (St. Agnes Ward).

The School of Nursing

When the Hospital opened it became a teaching Hospital of Newman's Catholic University. All the members of the Medical Board were on the teaching staff of the Catholic University. They set out a programme for the education of Medical Students at the Mater and immediately set standards of excellence which made it in time a very prestigious Hospital with which to be associated.

Up to 1891 the nursing care at the Mater was provided by the Sisters, helped by lay women whom they employed. The Sisters were not remunerated for the work they did, neither were the Consultant Medical Staff. They drew a stipend for the lectures they delivered to the medical students. The money for this came from the fees paid by the medical students for their education in the Hospital.

In 1891 a training school was opened for nurses at 32 Eccles Street. Mature well educated young ladies were considered most suitable. They would be resident, pay a fee and pay for their own uniform. They would undertake a three year training programme, sit an examination set by the Hospital and after they had reached a pre-determined standard of excellence they would be awarded a Hospital Certificate. To complete their experience of patient care they were expected to work for a further year in the Hospital after certification. A lay Matron was employed to look after the education and training of the student nurses. This was a 26 year old lady from Collon, Co. Louth, Miss Mary McGivney, who had trained in the Royal London Hospital. She served in the Mater until 1920. Under her the School of Nursing grew and became well known and admired for the standard of nurse it produced. Ever increasing numbers necessitated the building of a new Nurse's Residence in 1920. Two extensions were made to this within 6 years and eventually overcrowding necessitated building a new Nurse's Residence and College of Nursing which was opened in 1954 by President Sean T.O'Kelly, Uachtaran na hEireann. Student Nurses are now fulltime Students in UCD and they come to the Hospital on 'Clinical Placement'. Presently the Nurses Home building and the child Guidance building are being demolished to make way for the new Hospital development.

Hospital Development Between Two World Wars

With the aid of the Hospital Sweepstake grants, further developments took place at the Mater. Once the Mater became known for its specialists and academic excellence it became a "tertiary referral Hospital". This meant it was receiving patients from all over Ireland for specialist treatment, as it does to this day.

In the 1950's the main developments were in physiotherapy and cardiac surgery. The opening of a Physiotherapy School at the Hospital in 1954 necessitated upgraded facilities in the Hospital itself, and so a Physiotherapy Department and a small

Rehabilitation Centre were organised at Level 1. The Physiotherapy School was run in conjunction with University College Dublin. The School of Physiotherapy is now situated within UCD and the students come to the Mater on placements for experience.

Cardiac Surgery – a National Development

The development of Cardiac Surgery at the Hospital started with few resources but with dedication and enthusiasm. The two main categories it was possible to deal with at the Mater in the 1950s were Mitral Valvotomy in adults and “banding” of the Pulmonary Artery (Patent Ductus Arteriosus) in Children – to alleviate a congenital malformation. As equipment and knowledge increased and dedicated space for the care of these people was made available (Intensive Care facilities) it became possible to do open heart surgery with the aid of a Heart-Lung machine – towards the end of the 1950’s. Procedures such as “Hole in the Heart” surgery and the correction of the Tetralog of Fallot in children (“Blue Babies”) were also undertaken with great success at the Mater. The children were cared for in St. Elizabeth’s Paediatric Ward on Level 1 of the older section of the Hospital. When Crumlin Children’s Hospital opened their Cardiac surgery unit the Mater concentrated on the development of adult cardiac surgery. It progressed to Coronary Artery By-Pass Surgery in 1985 and from that to Heart Transplant surgery. To-date over 100 cases of heart transplantation has been done and at the end of 2005 the first case of Lung transplant was undertaken, very successfully. A double lung transplant was carried out in January 2006 and three further cases have been undertaken successfully since. The Mater now hosts the National Centre for Cardiac Surgery.

Other specialties which have been developed over the years include the first Day Care treatment of Diabetes in this country, the development of a Professorial Ophthalmic Unit, the National Spinal Injuries Unit, Infectious Diseases Unit, Psychiatry, Liver Unit – caring especially for women infected with Hepatitis C. Oncology, Breast Screening /Breast Check, Day Surgery. The most recent developments in 2005/2006 has been the opening by An Tainaiste, Ms Mary Harney, of the PET/CT Scanning Department – the first to be developed in a General Hospital in Ireland at a cost of over € million.

Major Building Projects Undertaken

In 1969 a new wing was added to the Hospital consisting of a large Auditorium, Library space, lecture rooms, a Restaurant and recreation facilities for the Non Consultant Hospital Doctors. A large clinical area and more up to date clinical facilities, such as a Resuscitation area were included. This became available in the early 1970’s. The demand for emergency care soon outgrew the space afforded and it became necessary to either enlarge it further or rebuild on another site. A decision was taken in the end of the 1970’s to largely rebuild the Hospital on the space acquired to the East of the existing building (which would include a new Emergency Department). It was planned to build in Phases. The building of Phase 1A was ready for use by the 1st September 1989. Unfortunately the rest of this plan went ‘on hold’ and was eventually scrapped. The patients from the old part of the Hospital were transferred to the new Ward block in

September 1989 and refurbishment commenced to extend the cardiac facilities on Level 3 (old Hospital), which included additions to Intensive Care, a new High Dependency Unit and some Wards for cardiac surgical patients. On level 2 the Orthopaedic /National Spinal Injuries Unit was refurbished and enlarged. St. Peters Day Care Surgery was developed, Renal and Dialysis was developed and a Pulmonary investigation and treatment unit was also developed.

Space in the older part of the Hospital soon ran out and so new ways had to be devised to accommodate pressing needs. A new HDU was built on 30 meter high stilts on the Courtyard side of the East Wing on a level with Level 3, providing eight further 'high-tech' beds. It was officially opened on March 29th 2004 by An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD. The space underneath this facility has since been utilised to provide a 33 bed unit to relieve the pressure for patients on Trolleys in the Accident & Emergency Department. This Transit Unit is meant to hold patients for 48 hours until they can be placed in Wards. It was ready for use in December 2005. It includes Dialysis facilities, Treatment Decision beds and Isolation Beds. It was officially opened by An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD in February 2006.

A new Hospital building programme was launched on May 10th 2004. This time it included a major redevelopment of the entire Hospital campus to make it a World class medical facility. The plans include the relocation of the University Children's Hospital from Temple Street to the Mater site. By early 2006 the plan to relocate the Children's Hospital to the Mater site was thrown into doubt with the appointment of a new Medical Director of the Health Services Executive.

In between the old Mater Private and the new Mater Private Hospital existed a number of buildings: The Ormsby Hotel, the Dominican School, the Bertrand Russell School and a few domestic dwellings, all on the north side of Eccles Street. These were acquired to make way for the Hospital development plans of 1977. On the far side of the street property was acquired for the development of clinical facilities such as Dermatology, Ophthalmic, Diabetes day facilities, Psychiatry, Cancer Support, Liver disease, together with a large Computer Centre, a place for the Consultant staff, a Crèche and small areas for Research. In more recent years, in conjunction with University College Dublin and the Dublin Molecular Centre (DMMC), the Department of Postgraduate Studies has expanded. A €17 million research development has been completed involving 10 of the Georgian houses on Eccles Street, from numbers 41 to 51. These houses have been beautifully restored and refurbished and the ground at the back has enabled a large amount of building to be added to form a large Research Centre with lecture theatres, research laboratories, and patient areas, all of which now make up the Catherine McAuley Centre for Research. It also includes the Genome Unit run in conjunction with the Dublin Molecular Centre. The main entrance is on Nelson Street and it connects with the Institute for Cancer Research and the Fintan Gunne Lecture theatre. This particular development is an indication of the commitment to research and Education enshrined in the Mission Statement of the Hospital.

Sisters of Mercy and the Mater Hospital

The Sisters of Mercy built the Mater Misericordiae Hospital and have worked in it since the beginning. By November 2005 a new Convent for the Sisters was built and the old Convent in the West Wing has been donated to the Hospital for its ever expanding needs.

Until about 1980 every Ward and Department in the Hospital had a Mercy Sister in charge. Most of the Sisters involved in Nursing trained at the Mater, Jervis Street or St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire. Those who worked in other areas such as Radiography, Physiotherapy, Psychiatric Social Work, Medical Social Work, Speech Therapy, Nurse Teachers etc. went elsewhere at the expense of the Mercy Congregation. The idea from the very beginning was that the Sisters should never become a burden on the Hospital. From the first nine Sisters who commenced work at the Hospital in 1861 the number of Sisters gradually rose until it peaked in the mid 1960s with between 70 and 80 Sisters working and living at the Hospital. After that the numbers began to decline. There is still a small number of Sisters working, both full-time and part-time in the Hospital. In the Convent a number of Sisters are living out their retirement years after a lifetime of dedicated service to the sick.

Landmark Times in the History of the Mater

One of the reasons the Mater was built on Dublin's North side was because those from the country still suffering from famine hunger felt they might do better if they drifted into Dublin arriving by train to the Broadstone Station, a little over a mile from the Mater. Many of them were sick and found their way into the Hospital suffering from all the diseases associated with malnutrition. In 1886 hundreds of cholera victims were treated at the Mater and later in 1871 eight hundred cases of smallpox were cared for there. Queen Victoria paid a visit to the Hospital during her last visit to Ireland. In 1918 during the Influenza Pandemic, large numbers were admitted with complications of the Spanish Influenza which left a trail of serious mortality in Ireland.

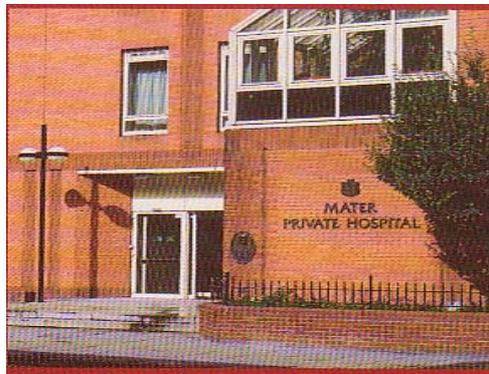
The Mater Hospital played its part in the civil unrest of the early years of the century. During the 1913 Lockout Strike some of the injured from O'Connell Street were brought to the Hospital and casualties from the Easter Rising of 1916 were also treated there. On November 20th 1920 shooting at Croke Park took place during a match between Tipperary and Dublin. Nine people were shot dead and over 50 injured in their attempt to get out of the park. Many with serious injuries were taken to the Mater nearby. On July 3rd 1922 there was civil unrest in the City leaving hundreds injured, mainly due to a massive explosion in the City centre around mid-day. By nightfall all of the city Hospitals were full, including the Mater.

During the Second World War, German bombs were dropped on the North Strand in Dublin only a few miles from the Mater. Thirty people died and over 80 were injured. Many were admitted to the Mater Casualty Department. Throughout the wartime rationing of food, no patient at the Mater went hungry.

On November 26th 1972 a gun battle took place within the Hospital in an attempt by the IRA to rescue a 'hunger striker' from one of the wards where he had been brought from Mountjoy Prison. Two bullets went through the glass over the door on St. Agnes'

corridor. Outside the Hospital a protesting mob were throwing stones, missiles and even a petrol bomb in an attempt to have the prisoner released. The Mater survived it all. In 1974 there were bombs again in Dublin. As a result of the Parnell and Talbot Street bombs the dead and injured arrived to the Mater around 5.30 p.m. in May 1974. Victims of the Stardust fire tragedy in Artane in 1981 arrived in huge numbers to the Accident and Emergency Department in the early morning. Forty eight young people died that night and hundreds were seriously injured. Victims of the “Love Ulster” parade in O’Connell Street were taken to the Accident and Emergency Department for treatment, in 2006.

The Mater Private Hospital



The Mater Private Hospital was opened in 1986 as an acute private Hospital. It originated as the Mater Private Nursing Home, which was located in the old Georgian Houses on Eccles Street, numbers 30 to 38 which the Sisters had purchased in the late nineteenth century to be used for various purposes associated with the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. Number 38 was the first house to be purchased in 1891 and this house was converted as an auxiliary Hospital. Other houses were acquired shortly afterwards and used as a training school and residence for student nurses. Later in the same year two houses further down Eccles Street were rented and a Private Nursing Home for paying patients was fitted up there.

By 1919 the Mater had possession of the houses from number 24 to 38. The houses below number 30 were probably used until a formal Nurses Residence was built in 1926. Number 30 which was used as part of the School of Nursing was then incorporated into the Nursing Home. Each of the houses remained virtually unaltered until the 1940's when all houses except number 38 were linked on every floor by a corridor. The furnishings and décor were in keeping with the Georgian period. There were three separate kitchens but in 1970 these were amalgamated and a Sister of Mercy had responsibility for all the catering.

The standard of patients' rooms differed between the houses and between the different floors of each house. The best rooms were on the first floor of each house with the exception of Number 38 which was kept for Religious Sisters from all over the country.

In the earlier years, it was expected that the Mater Private Nursing Home would be a source of revenue for the General Hospital and these expectations were probably fulfilled initially. But by 1970 poor use of beds and poor administration led to serious debt. By 1975 this situation had been reversed but maintenance/refurbishment difficulties were apparent. In addition, medical technology and the need for specialist and critical care areas became a pressing issue. The patients of the Private Nursing Home were becoming dependent on the technology and critical care areas of the General Hospital. It was unacceptable that the diagnostic services available in the main Hospital should be used by Consultants for their private patients. Gradually the role and thinking concerning the Mater Private Hospital changed.

Following the *Report of the Consultative Council on the General Hospital Services* which recommended the development of six large general Hospitals in the Dublin area, including the development of the Mater, discussions on the future of the Mater Private Hospital, as it stood and where it stood, became an issue. In 1978 the plans for the future Mater revealed that Phase 2 of the development would be located on the ground then occupied by the old Mater Private Hospital. Only Phase 1 of the development was built but plans for the Mater Private went ahead, none the less.

The choices for the Mater Private Hospital were to refurbish, replace or close it down. The Mater Misericordiae Hospital acquired property around this time on the lower part of Eccles Street and also acquired the old Mater Private Nursing Home. Mater Misericordiae agreed that the new Mater Private Hospital should be built on the land at the end of Eccles Street.

Building was completed in May 1986. It was a state of the art acute Hospital with facilities for Medical, Surgical, Oncology, Radiotherapy, Cardiology and Cardiac surgery treatment and a capacity to keep pace with scientific advances and not be dependent on the General Hospital. It had a bed capacity of 120 including Intensive Care and Coronary Care beds. A Sister of Mercy was appointed as its first Chief Executive and she retained this position until 1996 when she retired. The vision for the project was for a flagship Hospital of its kind and this vision succeeded, and happily it will live on into the future generating standards of excellence in patients care. From the beginning it thrived serving the modern Ireland in a way which was never anticipated by the Sisters when they embarked on this venture.

However the financial success of the project and the money which it generated caused concern among the wider Mercy Congregation. Concern was expressed about its position among our works of Mercy. When serious financial demands were made on the Congregation to enable further development towards the end of the 1990's it was decided to end our involvement in this particular work. In October 2000 the Sisters of Mercy announced that they had severed ties with the Mater Private Hospital and that they had sold it to a Management buyout team of the Chairman, the Chief Executive, the Financial Controller and Board Members. The deal included a 15% shareholding for staff and consultants.

The withdrawal from such a successful venture came as a shock to those associated with the Hospital. But under the new management it continues to go from strength to strength.

Chapter Five

Dublin's other Hospitals

St. Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire



Soon after the opening of the first Mercy Convent in Baggot Street, Catherine was advised to acquire a house at a distance from the city where Sisters could rest and recuperate after periods of illness. Such a house was found and purchased at Sussex Place, Kingstown, now known as Dun Laoghaire. On 24th March 1835 Sisters from Baggot Street took up residence in what was the first foundation from the parent house. Duties there were restricted to the visitation of the sick and poor but the plight of poor girls led Catherine to open a school for their instruction. Building premises for this venture left the Sisters in financial difficulties. Circumstances forced them to return to Baggot Street and to sell the house at Sussex Place. However their loss was felt so greatly in Kingstown that Archbishop Murray of Dublin invited them to return. In April 1840 they began again to serve the sick and poor of the area.

When a Hospital was needed in Kingstown it seemed natural to turn to the Sisters of Mercy to provide it. They were given a site by General Sir Michael Galway. The architect designed a 40 bed Hospital, which was built at a cost of £6,000. It was formally opened by Archbishop Cullen on 12th June 1876. He predicted that “within its walls would be received persons of all creeds”. The following morning St. Michael's Hospital opened its doors to its first patients.

St. Michael's was a Voluntary Hospital, supported by voluntary contributions, and the Medical Staff gave their services free. Patients were admitted free of charge and nursing care was carried out by the Sisters of Mercy. Over the years, despite the charity of the townspeople of Dun Laoghaire, debts began to accumulate and as a result little progress was made in modernising the Hospital.

In the 1930's the straightened circumstances were relieved by the opportunity to participate in the benefits of the Irish Hospitals Sweepstake. A Medical Board was established following agreement between Dr. J.P. Brennan and the Sisters of Mercy. The first meeting was held on 29th September 1930, the feast of St. Michael, Archangel and when the first Annual Meeting of the Board was held in 1931 hope was expressed that all present would live to see the Hospital enlarged. The planners commenced work in 1933 and official sanction was given by the Minister for Local Government, Mr. Sean T. O'Kelly in 1936. A contract was signed on 27th May 1938 and building commenced the following month. The Architects were O'Connor and Alyward and the Building Contractors T. and J. Macken. The new building was completed early in 1940 and renovation of the old building commenced in June of the same year and was reopened in April 1941. The modern Hospital contained an X-ray department, laboratories, Out Patients Department, offices, lift, accommodation for the trained lay nurses now employed, adequate systems of heating and lighting, additional wards, private rooms for patients, a Medical Board room, reception room and an impressive entrance.

Six students were accepted for general training in 1941 and the following year An Bord Altranais (Nursing Board) gave its official recognition to the School of Nursing. Problems of accommodation for the increasing number of nurses were solved by building a six storey Nurses Home in 1951. The area within the Hospital complex vacated by the nurses were converted into semi-private wards bringing the total number of beds to 145. In October 1972 a combined General/Psychiatric Training course was commenced in conjunction with St. John of God Hospital in Stillorgan and the first male students were admitted to the School of Nursing.

The centenary of the Hospital was celebrated in 1976 with Mass in the Parish Church celebrated by His Grace Archbishop Dermot Ryan and attended by the Taoiseach, Mr Liam Cosgrave. The music was provided by the Mercy Choir with Sisters of Mercy as conductor and organist.

In 1977 the Superior General of the Sisters of Mercy in the Dublin Diocese established a Board of Management to manage St. Michael's Hospital on behalf of the Sisters. Constitutions were drawn up and a Secretary/Manager and an Accountant were appointed in 1978.

St. Patrick's Refuge for Women which was attached to St. Michael's Convent since 1880 was closed in 1963 and converted into a private Hospital for Surgical, Medical and Obstetric patients. Reconstruction work began immediately and a four storey, 60 bed unit with operating theatres and delivery suites was opened in November 1963 and blessed by Archbishop McQuaid on the 4th February 1964. In March 1999 the Provincial of the South Central Province of the Sisters of Mercy decided to close St. Michael's Private Hospital because the financial position was not sustainable. On 30th July 1999, following a farewell garden party for the staff, the Private Hospital was closed and was later donated to the Board of Management of the Public Hospital. It now caters for 5 day and 1 day patients, a Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit, and offices. The theatre is still in use.

In 1878 soon after the opening of St. Michael's Hospital, work was begun by the same Architect on the building of a Convent. This Convent was designed in the same idiom as the Hospital. It was a three storey structure with a two storey annex. The

Chapel served the Staff and Patients of the Hospital and the Residents of St. Patrick's Refuge as well as the increasing number of Sisters who served in St. Michael's Hospital.

However as the twentieth century drew to a close, due to increasing age the Sisters of Mercy were gradually retiring from active service in the Hospital. Sadly the last Sister of Mercy retired as Ward Sister in 2003. The position of Director of Nursing has been held by a lay person since 1999.

Following long negotiations an agreement was reached between the Sisters of Mercy and the Irish Sisters of Charity, which resulted in the trusteeship of St. Michael's Hospital being transferred to the Irish Sisters of Charity in exchange for the trusteeship of Temple St. Children's Hospital. The Sisters of Mercy retained ownership of the car park off Crofton Road as well as the Nurses Home now called Mercy House. A Sister of Charity acts as Pastoral Care Sister in the Hospital and is the only Religious there. However the present senior staff maintain the Catholic ethos and it is our hope and prayer that it will remain so for many years to come.

In common with many other large building in the South Central Province the future of St. Michael's has been under consideration for some time. Since the Nurses Home was vacated by nurses it has been used as accommodation for Sisters from St. Michael's Convent and also by Sisters from the Province working in Dublin. In September 2006, the Provincial Leadership Team took a decision to demolish the building and replace it with apartments, a unit for six Sisters, a Conference room and office space. Apartments will also be built with underground parking on the present car park.

The National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dunlaoghaire

(Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital – “The Cedars”)



The National Rehabilitation Hospital is situated on Rochestown Avenue, on the outskirts of Dublin between Kill of the Grange and Killiney, South of Dunlaoghaire. It is a bustling busy Hospital providing a service which is different to all other Hospitals in Ireland. It was founded in 1961 and now has 123 inpatient beds for specialist rehabilitation. It provides comprehensive inpatient services to patients who require rehabilitation as part of the management of a variety of diseases and injuries. The Hospital incorporates the National Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Service, the National Prosthetic Service and the National Head Injury Rehabilitation Service. The Spinal Injuries service is run in conjunction with the Acute Spinal Injuries Unit at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital and the Air Corps, who provide special Helicopter transport for these seriously injured patients. The Mater deals with these cases in the early stage of the trauma and carries out any surgery or specialist diagnostic techniques that may be necessary. The National Rehabilitation Hospital, in their dedicated unit provides acute rehabilitation and life-long follow up for patients with spinal injury. The service is under the direction of a very dedicated team of experts, including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, speech therapists, neurologists, urologists, pastoral care workers and many others – all of whom contribute to the excellence of care for these patients, unique to this centre and to the country.

The location of the Hospital – on a prime site in South-East Dublin, and the high standard of excellence achieved and maintained since it opened in 1961 owes much to the Sisters of Mercy and their willingness to meet the most pressing needs of the sick and the poor of Ireland, whatever it might be, at a particular time in history. The National Rehabilitation Hospital belongs to the Sisters of Mercy. There is still a small Community of Sisters located at a Convent on the grounds of the Hospital (the original Nurses Residence) and they continue to be a ‘presence’ in the place. Those who are still active in the Hospital serve mainly in the pastoral care ministry, of which there is a great need,

particularly for the long-term patient. The good that they do and contribution they make and have made to the care of patients over the years could never be estimated.

“The Cedars” ~ Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital

The work of the Sisters, caring for sick people at Rochestown Ave did not begin in 1961. Instead, it goes back to 1914, before the First World War, when the scourge of Ireland was Tuberculosis. The need of that time was to build and open Sanatoria for the care and (particularly) the isolation of people who were suffering from this highly infectious disease. The disease was spreading very rapidly in Ireland and there was no effective treatment available. This was to come many years later with the development of Streptomycin and PAS in the 1940's. After it began to be used widely, a gradual decline in the incidence of the disease took place. It was recognised, and is still true today, that the disease is largely seen in malnourished people and in its untreated state is a highly infectious (airborne) disease. Consequently, it tended to be seen as a disease of whole families, particularly those who were living in overcrowded conditions or in close proximity to each other e.g. where large family beds were in use, as was common before the War. People '*ran scared*' from those who were infected and those with it were totally helpless.

The Sisters of Mercy in Carysfort Park, Blackrock did not sit idly by and witness the distress seen among those they were ministering to. Early in 1914 a large house in the Dunlaoghaire area of Co. Dublin called “The Cedars” standing on 60 acres of land came on the property market. It was the home of the Plunkett-Green family and was located on the South side of Rochestown Avenue, then a windy country road. The Sisters decided to purchase it and after discussing it first with the Archbishop, they invited Sir Christopher Nixon, senior Consultant Physician at the Mater Hospital to visit it and advise as to whether or not it would be suitable for development as a Sanitorium. Dr. Nixon visited it in due course and wrote to the Rev. Mother in Carysfort as follows:

July 2nd 1914

My dear Rev. Mother,

On Tuesday last I visited “The Cedars” and I am very glad indeed to report that I find it eminently suitable for your purpose, viz: to provide a Hospital for the treatment of consumptive cases, especially those approaching the terminal stages of the disease.

It is beautifully situated, having a southern aspect, and a magnificent open view of the mountains, and when completely overhauled and repaired, it promises to be an ideal spot for weakly patients requiring rest and good hygienic surroundings, which are so indispensable for those who are suffering from the terrible scourge of tuberculosis.

The water supply is excellent, and the sewerage can easily be made perfect, as the main drainage passes the gate. It has abundance of pure air and sunshine, and the place is well isolated, so that there would be no risk or danger of infection or contagion to the people of the locality.

From my heart I wish you every success in the foundation of this new Institution, which will be the means of affording comfort and consolation to thousands of poor sufferers.

Yours very sincerely,

C. Nixon

The Dublin Sisters of Mercy acquired the house and extensive alterations were made to it. Large additions were added on to three of the four sides of it, to make it into a Hospital suitable for the treatment of patients with an advanced form of Tuberculosis. This included four nice airy wards and a chapel, surrounded by extensive gardens. The original house remained the focal point of the building from the road. A row of luxuriant Conifers – Cedar trees – sheltered it from the road. Some of the Reception rooms near the hall door remained and formed part of the Convent for many years. The kitchen of the original building was renovated to become the Hospital kitchen. The Hospital was officially opened and named “Our Lady of Lourdes” on February 11th 1918. It had a bed capacity for sixty patients; male and female. Sr. M Xaveria O’Reilly was the first Mother Superior to be appointed as Administrator in charge of the place. She came with a team of other Sisters and very soon they employed a number of nurses and other paramedical staff and household staff to get the work underway. All the Consultant Medical staff came from the Mater Hospital which ensured a standard of excellence right from the beginning. The land around the place did not remain static, it was developed as a small urban farm with a herd of milking cows, kept to supply fresh milk to the Hospital twice a day. They grew all their own vegetables and a poultry farm kept the place supplied with eggs and chicken.

Because the Convent was located within the old house, it was small and so the numbers who could reside there were limited. In 1932 an extension was added, but it remained small until eventually in more recent times, when the Nurses Residence was vacated, the Sisters moved into it and it was turned into a nice spacious convent which is still in use. The Nurses Residence was built in 1953 when all Hospitals were expected to provide nurses with accommodation and especially if they were dealing with student nurses, which Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital was at that time.

1949 - A Large Extension is added

The continuing anxiety around the spread of TB in Ireland and the need for more beds in Sanitoria put enormous pressure on the 60 beds which existed in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. It was obvious that more wards were needed. In 1947 the Department of Health was set up as a separate entity and their first challenge was to get the problem of Sanitoria beds solved. It was the ambition of the DOH to provide 12,000 new beds and they intended to do this with the aid of money made available by the Hospital's Sweepstakes funds. As part of that scheme it was decided to build another floor above the existing wards and to include an operating theatre for the surgical treatment of chronic tuberculosis at the Hospital. This was opened in 1949 and the accommodation now amounted to 94 patients, with thirteen single rooms, two dining rooms, treatment rooms for wound dressings and bathrooms. Each ward had its own kitchenette in addition to the main kitchen, which had largely been rebuilt, and was located on the lower floor. A lift was added to facilitate all floors. A special "service lift" was also constructed to convey clinical and household waste out of the Hospital in as hygienic a fashion as possible – mindful always of the risk of infection. A few years later some further building took place. This time it included a laboratory and pharmacy together with "rest parlours" and verandas.

A Training School for Nurses

By the mid 1930's the number of beds and the "throughput" of patients at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital meant that it was possible for the Sisters to set up a Training School for Nurses. The GNC (Ireland) did not have, at that time, a Supplementary Register for those trained in the management of Tuberculosis Patients. The agreement reached was that the Hospital could have a training school for nurses up to the Prelim. Level (equivalent to 1st year General Training) after that the students could apply to continue their training in a General Training School. There was an agreement made between the Mater and Our Lady of Lourdes to accept those who chose to continue their training after successfully passing the Prelim. Exam. Every year the Irish Red Cross made available a number of Scholarships to pay for the training of student nurses from Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in the Mater. This continued until the end of the 1950s when it was obvious that TB was in decline. The function of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital changed and the National Rehabilitation Hospital was born.

Chapter Six

Dublin's Story Continues

Beaumont Convalescent Home and Catherine McAuley Centre

Beaumont Convalescent Home was originally the country home of the Guinness family. It was built in 1794 by Arthur Guinness, owner of Guinness brewery. The house stood on 120 acres. One record says that the site was chosen because the altitude of the area would benefit a delicate member of the family. Another account tells us that having married into the nobility, he wished Beaumont House to be a fitting residence for his wife. When Arthur died in 1803 he was succeeded by his son Oscar, a Minister of the Church of Ireland. Oscar was not interested in the brewery and the property passed on to another son whose descendants lived there until Beaumont House was sold to a Mr. Edward O'Malley in 1884. On Edward O'Malley's death, Fr. John Edward O'Malley became a trustee of the property. Fr. O'Malley was known to Fr. Columba Marmion who was then a lecturer in Clonliffe College, the Seminary for the Dublin Diocese. At this time Mother Gabriel Gill, a Dominican Sister, was searching for a suitable site for a Novitiate to train candidates for their foundation in the Diocese of Dunedin in New Zealand. She met Fr. Marmion who introduced her to Fr. O'Malley and it was arranged that the Dominican Sisters should have Beaumont House rent free for two years to establish a Novitiate. However, due to many difficulties reminiscent of Catherine McAuley's early problems in Baggot Street, the idea of an Irish Dominican Novitiate had to be abandoned and Mother Gabriel returned to New Zealand. There is a holy-water font in the dining room at Beaumont, evidence that the Sisters of Mercy were not the first Sisters to take up residence there.

The Mater Hospital received a bequest for £7,000 from a Mr. Moran and had considered building a fever Hospital on their property. A local protest against such a Hospital caused the idea to be abandoned. However the Sisters there had another project in mind. Many of the patients from the Mater needed a period of convalescence after illness. It is related that a driver taking some Sisters to search for a suitable premises in Finglas lost his way. Passing through Drumcondra his passengers noticed a For Sale sign on Beaumont House. Their search had ended, for the altitude, country air and the open fields and woodlands as well as a farm to provide nourishing food made it a very suitable place. On 26th November 1900 Beaumont House and lands was purchased from Mr. O'Malley for £6,000 for the Mater Hospital by the then Superior of the Sisters of Mercy. In 1913 the names of Archbishop Wm. Walshe and five Sisters of Mercy appear on the document as joint tenants upon trust to permit the property to be used as a Convalescent Home by the Mater Misericordiae Hospital.

The house was reconstructed and necessary additions made to fit the building for the purposes of convalescent nursing. The total cost of purchase, renovation and extension was £16,000. There was accommodation for 15 private and 40 public patients. From the 2nd July 1904 the following arrangements for financial management were put in place:

The Local superior was to pay 2.5% of the £16,000 spent on purchasing and setting up the Home each year until all was paid;
The local Superior to pay the ground rent;
All poor patients sent by the Mater to be paid for by the Mater at the rate of 7/- per week;
The profits of farmland, etc together with private patient's fees ought to be more than ample to do above;

£100 per year to be paid by Carysfort Convent for support of the Beaumont community.

An original document dated 1905 states that in lieu of paying the annual levy of 2.5% Beaumont would maintain, free of charge, a daily average of 21 patients from the Mater Misericordiae Hospital; the annual interest of £16,000 @2.5% being £400 and the cost of maintaining a daily average of 21 patients @ 7/6 per week for each patient being £409-410. There were further agreements made between the Mater and Beaumont over the years mostly concerning the number of patients to be taken from the Mater. Towards the end 7 patients, 3 women and 4 men, were to be taken from the Mater. Though the original payment of £16,000 would have been paid off by the 1940's, financial difficulties continued to exist. At some stage no more patients were taken from the Mater and the Health Board agreed to provide subventions. Financial difficulties continued mainly due to upgrading of the premises, the necessity for trained paid staff, overstaffing at times and the impossibility of collecting total fees due.

Over the years there were many improvements to the Convalescent Home. A new Chapel, designed by Mr. Ralph Byrne and built by Mr. Clarke was blessed by Most Rev. Dr. Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin in 1926. That same year the building was wired for electricity and a generator acquired. The Convent, designed again by Mr. Byrne and built by Mr. Flynn was opened on 8th December 1927. The part of the old building vacated by the sisters was remodelled and furnished for private patients. A new wing was added for female patients. There were 26 cubicles, two dining rooms and two sitting rooms in this wing, giving accommodation to 14 extra patients and 14 semi-private patients.

In the 1930's the Home and some farm buildings were connected to the main electricity supply and a poultry run, a hay barn and green houses were added. In 1939 a new building was added for the male domestic staff and in 1940 two fire escapes were built, one for the old building and one for the new female wing. "This latter, as well as being necessary, is also quite an ornament for the building", says the record.

Concern was growing over the years for older Sisters in need of continuous care. It was felt that they should have the advantage of this care while, as far as possible, living in Community. In 1997 a Nursing Home for Sisters was built at the western extremity of the Convalescent Home buildings. Initially this Home was administered by a Sister but since 2002 it is run by a lay Director of Nursing who is accountable to a Board of Management.



Sisters at McAuley, Beaumont

Gradually, over the years the demand for convalescent beds declined and the Convalescent Home became a Home for the Elderly. In the 1990's a Special Function Room was built as well as a Mortuary Chapel.

Over the years, too, much of the land surrounding Beaumont House was disposed of. A site for a Convent and school was sold to the St. John of God Sisters in 1967. The lands on which the Church of the Nativity and St. Fiacra's Primary school stand once formed part of the Beaumont Estate. The proceeds from the sale of further land was donated to the Parish. In the 1980's the State acquired the extensive property on which Beaumont Hospital now stands from the Sisters of Mercy. Later still the remaining lands, with the exception of the gardens surrounding the Homes and the Convent, were sold to developers. Beaumont could no longer boast of green fields and invigorating air. It has become part of the ever growing Dublin city.

Negotiations leading to the closing of Beaumont Convalescent Home in May 2005, were necessitated by financial and health and safety considerations. At present these negotiations are ongoing.

Before closing the Beaumont story mention must be made of the number of historical figures who ended their days there. John Joyce, father of James Joyce, died there as did James Stephens, the writer and Dermot Tuohy, the actor. Michael O'Hehir, that legendary commentator on Gaelic Games and Michael Breathnach, a great Gaelic scholar and friend of Eamonn de Valera, were also cared for there in their final days. Many of the women were members of Cumann na mBan and delighted in telling stories of how they carried messages during the 1916 Rising and the troubled times that followed.

St. Pauls Beaumont

St. Paul's Beaumont, a unit of Mater Misericordiae Hospital, continues the tradition of health care and education established by Catherine McAuley. St. Paul's Hospital was opened on September 24th 1970 by Mr Erskine Childers, Minister for Health, as a residential treatment centre for autistic and seriously emotionally disturbed children.

The Special School was opened on May 4th 1974 to cater for the educational needs of these children. The unit is an outreach of the Mater Child Guidance Clinic.

By the 1960's there was a recognised need for residential treatment for autistic and emotionally disturbed children from all over the country. The Irish Society for Autistic Children made representation to the Department of Health. Approaches were made to several Religious Orders for their help. Following discussions with the Department of Health and the Sisters of Mercy in 1967 it was decided to give approval for the planning and development of St. Paul's Hospital. For the next three years a series of discussions took place between the Department of Health, the Mater Hospital and the Sisters of Mercy which resulted in the Sisters of Mercy's involvement in the new unit on the basis of their close association with the Child Guidance Clinic at the Mater Hospital. The grounds for the new St. Paul's were provided by the Sisters of Mercy.

The importance of education and the need for care were fully recognised by the Sisters of Mercy who believed that these services would provide the children with self

respect, dignity and confidence in their own abilities. This philosophy forms the basis of the work of the Sisters of Mercy which continues in St. Paul's Hospital and Special School. A multidisciplinary team approach is adopted towards the care and education of the children at St. Paul's. It is a therapeutic campus for children aged four to eighteen. They attend class on a sessional basis and a complimentary programme is run by the nursing/care staff for outside classroom activities. Each child has an Individual Educational Programme appropriate to developmental ability. Children's progress is reviewed at weekly meetings when staff liaise, exchange views and make adjustments to the programme to promote development. The rights of children and their families are protected by ethical considerations and principles of best practice.

In 1999, at celebrations to commemorate the twentieth fifth anniversary of St. Paul's, tribute was paid to Dr. Paul McQuaid, Medical Director, and his team of specialists who began pioneering work in the field of autism. Appreciation was also expressed to the dedicated, loyal and caring staff which had provided such dedicated service over the years.

Cluan Mhuire, Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

In the early 1960's Dr. John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, asked the Sisters of Mercy to provide a private psychiatric Hospital for females. There was a need for this facility since the St. John of God's Hospital in the area catered only for males. Two houses on Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, "Rockfield" and "Garrymore" were acquired by the Sisters of Mercy in 1961. These houses were adjacent to each other but alterations had to be made. A difficulty with the Sisters of Charity concerning a right of way had to be resolved. By 1963 the problem was solved and the Sisters took up residence and began work there on 4th July 1963. The facility could accommodate 34 patients the first of which was admitted in January 1964. Four Sisters worked there and over the short span of its existence others joined them from time to time.

In 1970 a Female Unit was opened in the nearby St. John of God's (Private) Psychiatric Hospital. Gradually the number of patients in Cluan Mhuire decreased because Consultants no longer referred them to it. By the end of 1970 Cluan Mhuire was empty and had to be closed. The Eastern Health Board took over the premises for a time. It now forms part of the St. John of God Brothers' network of Psychiatric Services.

St. Mary's Preventorium, Ballyroan, Rathfarnham

St. Mary's, Ballyroan, was a large house built in the late nineteenth century in the foothills of the Dublin Mountains for a Protestant Clergyman. It stood on approximately 65 acres of rich farm land. Some years after it was built it was bought by the McCabe family who had three daughters, Mona, Annette and Rita. The eldest daughter, Mona, became a Dublin Sister of Mercy in 1919 and trained as a General Nurse.

In 1930 Annette and Rita McCabe put the property up for sale but could not find a satisfactory buyer. Encouraged by their sister they handed over all the property to the Sisters of Mercy to be used for some good purpose. In 1932 six Sisters took up residence there and provided a facility for business girls working in the city and in need of fresh air and a rest. The out-offices were rebuilt and with finance from the farm a Holiday Home was established which lasted until 1942.

By 1943 the spread of Tuberculosis was causing grave concern in Ireland. The Irish Red Cross were anxious to set up a “Preventorium” for children threatened with TB. Following an approach by the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, to the Sisters of Mercy, Ballyroan, with its idyllic location, was chosen as a perfect place for a small Hospital for children threatened with TB. New buildings were erected and equipped and the Hospital was opened on September 12th 1943. Most of the children admitted had Primary Tuberculosis and its treatment recommended fresh air, a healthy diet and first class medical and nursing care. Such was the success of the work that an extension was built in 1944 and a further one in 1945. Some of the children were discharged after a short period; others remained in Ballyroan for two years or more. A small school was opened to cater for the needs of the children.

After nearly twenty years Tuberculosis in children waned and there were no more patients for the Hospital and it closed down. The premises were used as a Boarding School and later on as a Primary and Secondary School. The farm ceased working in 1976 and most of the land was sold for development. The original house at Ballyroan was occupied by the Sisters until the late 1990’s.

The Children’s University Hospital – Temple Street Dublin 1

And Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital



The Children’s University Hospital, Temple Street and Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, are two relatively ‘new arrivals’ to the Mercy Ministry of Health Care in the Dublin area. Both are on the north side of the city and both are associated with Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, being subsidiaries of the Limited Company set up in 2001 known as the *Mater Misericordiae and Children’s University Hospital*. Both of the Hospitals were founded by the Irish Sisters of Charity many years ago and they come with well-defined traditions and a rich tapestry of history.

The Children’s University Hospital, Temple Street

The relationship between the Children’s Hospital, Temple Street (Sisters of Charity) and the Mater goes back many years. In the early 1970’s when the clinical activities of the Paediatric Ward in the old part of the Mater were beginning to change, at first to caring for children with specialist needs only, such as cardiac surgery, and later when the ward was closed altogether and a few paediatric beds and cots transferred to the new ward block in 1989, arrangements were made that no children would be admitted to the Mater by any routes including the A. & E. Department. The arrangement put in place was that

all children would be referred to CUH Temple Street (the Hospital being only a few meters down the road from the Mater) and the ambulance service was informed of this decision too.

This was not the only time the two Congregations would find themselves negotiating together around the delivery of healthcare in Dublin. In 1991, after three years of negotiations the Mercy/Charity Healthcare initiative involving six Catholic Dublin Hospitals, including the Children's Hospital Temple Street and Cappagh Hospital came into being. A company was set up by the two Congregations but unfortunately due to unforeseen difficulties it never thrived and went into liquidation in January 1995. The "spin off" from this venture was probably the experience the two Congregations developed of working together in the furtherance of the ministry of healthcare. This was to come to fruition in 1998 when the two Congregations agreed to a very innovative plan to "swap" two of the Dublin Hospitals. The Sisters of Mercy swapped their trusteeship of St. Michael's Hospital Dunlaoghaire (on the Southside of the City near St. Vincent's University Hospital) for the trusteeship of the Children's Hospital, Temple Street on the North side. By this time the Board of the Children's Hospital were in search of a suitable location within the inner-city area to rebuild the Hospital. The Mater was also about to embark on a rebuilding programme and so it was decided, more from expediency than anything else, to include the new children's Hospital into the overall plan for the Mater campus redevelopment.

The Children's University Hospital (better known as Temple St. Hospital) is an amazing place, held in very high esteem by the people of Dublin, particularly north Dublin and the inner city. Its history goes back to the 11th November 1872 when the doors of number 9 Buckingham Street (about 1 Km South-East of Temple St) opened its doors as The Infirmary for Children. A group of charitable people led by Mrs Ellen Woodcock, seeing that the largest tenement area in all Europe (as was the north inner city area designated at the time) was bereft of any place to care for sick children, leased a house in Buckingham Street. It was opened as a Children's Hospital with 12 beds for inpatients and a dispensary to serve the outpatients. The first patient to be admitted was "Little Willie" who came suffering from spinal disease. He spent nearly two years in the "Big House" as it had come to be known. The Hospital soon reached its full capacity and had to expand, giving rise to an increased work load and demands upon the time of those who had set it up. In 1876 the Irish Sisters of Charity were invited to take over the running of it, which they did. They arrived on July the 2nd 1876 and renamed it St. Joseph's Children's Hospital. In May 1879 the lease of the place ran out and the Sisters were left searching for new premises. After a long search they eventually purchased, with the aid of a bequest from a Mrs. Simpson, 15 Upper Temple Street in the vicinity of Buckingham Street. The house cost £2500 and they took up residence on April 22nd 1879. The Sisters immediately set to work to organise it to make it suitable for the care of sick children. It was ready for opening as a Hospital on June 17th 1879 with 21 beds. As the reputation of the Hospital grew, more space was needed. In 1885 number 14 was purchased. This house was unusual in that the family of Charles Stuart Parnell originally owned it. Further houses were purchased as they became available and by 1900 the Hospital had 90 beds. In 1908 a convalescent home was bequeathed to the Hospital in Cappagh to allow

the children to recover from their illnesses in the fresh air of the country. This only lasted until 1924 when an Orthopaedic Hospital was planned, but the relationship between the two Hospitals continued and many children were transferred for treatment and long-term care to Cappagh over the years.

When the Hospital opened in Temple Street only minor structural changes were undertaken to make it suitable for the children. At that time, and for many years after, those admitted spent long periods of time in the Hospital being nursed back to health. Many of them suffered from Tuberculosis and the different manifestations of it in untreated children such as bone disease, T.B. Meningitis and a condition known as 'Scrofula'. It is obvious that they presented to the Hospital with all the consequences and manifestations of poverty and overcrowded living, chief of which was malnutrition. The Sisters and the staff bravely faced the challenge of it all. Fundraising had to be undertaken to meet the ongoing maintenance of the building and the cost of care. It is sad to think that except for a small grant from the Corporation, the State contributed nothing to the care of its sick children admitted to the Hospital in these early days.

In the early stages of development of the Hospital, the Sisters recognised the need to formally train young girls to nurse the children. This eventually evolved into a recognised training programme in 1885. A training school for sick children's nurses was subsequently opened in 1893. The work of educating young nurses has grown over the years and has significantly changed to meet both national and international standards of best practice. In 2006 important links with University College Dublin and Dublin City University were established and now the BSc (Nursing) Integrated Children's/General Programme is in progress in both Universities. The first cohort of Graduates from this programme will be available for employment in January 2011.

As advances in medicine pushed out the frontiers of paediatric care the structure of the Hospital was constantly being rearranged to meet the needs of more and more patients, shorter lengths of stay, new surgery and medical treatments, new theories and practices in the prevention of spread of infectious diseases and much else. There is only so much that can be done to old houses converted into a Hospital. The place was constrained by structure, space, funding and ultimately by its location on Temple Street. Most of all '*the march of time*' began to make it all look different and much more complex. The latter part of the 20th Century saw the advent of high tech. equipment, better diagnostic and treatment possibilities, higher patient/staff ratios and very sophisticated staff training and education. Many national diagnostic and treatment centres were (and still are) located at Temple Street Hospital, the best known are probably the national new-born screening programme for a number of inherited disorders, and the National Meningococcal Reference Laboratory. In 1959 the Hospital opened St. Francis' Clinic dealing with the whole area of child psychiatry and psychology. These important developments do not happen in a vacuum but presuppose, what amounts to a virtual litany of other developments taking place as well over the years at the Hospital.

The dream of redeveloping the Hospital in total commenced in the 1960s. It changed direction in 1998 when the suggestion was made that it be relocated to the Mater Campus and become co-located with the Mater as a tertiary referral Paediatric Hospital. Plans were agreed in 1998 and launched in 2000. By the end of January the future plans for the Temple Street relocation were changed. It was decided that one National Children's Hospital should be built, incorporating Tallaght, Crumlin and Temple Street.

The Mater Children's Hospital Development (MCHD) made their submission on the specified date. On June the 9th 2006 the Government decided that the Hospital was to be located on the Mater site. It inevitably changes what the future for the Children's University Hospital Temple Street was planned to look like. Wherever the Hospital is located - CUH Temple Street now faces amalgamation with Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children (Crumlin) and the National Children's Hospital (Tallaght - formerly Harcourt St. Hospital) in a single multi-denominational Hospital facility with a national ethos and ethical standard. The development is still at a very early stage.

Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital



On the north/west side of Dublin County near the intersection of the N2 and the M50 Motorway is situated Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, a very famous Hospital in Dublin and known throughout Ireland and beyond. It lies some miles to the west of the Finglas area and is 'tucked in' off the road on a large expanse of land. It has been there for many years rendering a valuable service in the whole field of orthopaedics under the dedicated care of the Sisters of Charity, who were founded by Mother Mary Aikenhead in 1815.

Cappagh House was the residence of Lady Martin, widow of Sir Richard Martin and daughter of Sir Dominic Corrigan – a famous Jervis Street Hospital Physician, known internationally for his contribution to understanding heart disease. Lady Martin in her old age made a will in which she bequeathed Cappagh House and lands to the Religious

Sisters of Charity ‘to provide a school for poor children in the neighbourhood’. She died on the 15th September 1907 and the Sisters took over the ownership of the place after that. It amounted to about 700 acres of land in addition to the residence, but it was miles out in the country on the Dublin/Meath border. Having given some thought to it the Sisters decided that it was not practical to try and open a school in this very sparse area. Besides, the children in Temple Street Hospital were in need of a place in the country where they could spend time convalescing from long-term illnesses such as Tuberculosis, Polio, general debility and malnutrition. So it was set up as a convalescent home and a training school for nursery nurses. It opened in 1908 and had accommodation for 20 cots.

After World War 1 serious work on the building of the Hospital commenced, initially old army huts were used to subsidise the existing ward accommodation. Cappagh became what was known as an ‘open air’ Hospital in 1921 for the surgical treatment of T.B. Most of the children spent, on average, about 18 months there enjoying the best of fresh air and good food. Shortly after this the incidence of T.B. began to decline in Ireland and other needs were becoming apparent – for instance, some of the consequences of T.B. on the skeletal structure of the body. It was decided to turn the place into an Orthopaedic Hospital (called St. Mary’s) and to discontinue the agreement with Temple Street Hospital to provide formal convalescence for children. There was a growing niche in the care of children for orthopaedic treatment and so the Sisters of Charity felt the need to respond to this. Between 1921 and the mid 1950s the building of the Hospital continued and the number of beds and cots increased from 60 to 260. A modern operating suite, X-Ray Department and Physiotherapy Department were added and a huge enthusiasm for “Orthopaedics” was in evidence among the Medics. Cappagh Hospital was set to grow and expand.

With the change over to Orthopaedics came the need to train nurses in the care of orthopaedic patients, and also to facilitate medics looking for ‘visiting rights’ and the use of an orthopaedic operating theatre. Many of the Physicians and Surgeons who came to work in Cappagh Hospital were from the Mater or Temple Street Hospitals. Initially most of the surgery carried out was on children but as the years wore on and the need became more pressing, adults needing orthopaedic surgery were also admitted. Today the Hospital has the services of 21 Orthopaedic Surgeons, each with a major sub-specialty, 4 Rheumatologists, 10 consultant Anaesthetists, 2 Consultant Radiologists, a Consultant Histopathologist, a Consultant Haematologist and a Consultant Microbiologist

The demands for orthopaedics pushed the frontiers of this specialty Hospital out on many fronts: more Hospital accommodation/beds, updated operating theatre facilities, specialisation in nurse training, more staff overall was needed and in more recent years affiliation with the Royal College of Surgeons for the purpose of medical education and research was requested. Cappagh has always had a very strong link with the Mater and so when it was decided to include this medical facility as another subsidiary company of the MCHD Company, it did not come as a huge surprise.

The Sisters of Charity built the place up and established standards of excellence of international repute. By 2003 they felt that their work at the Hospital was done, it needed

to be linked with a large academic teaching Hospital on the north side of Dublin city. The most obvious place to link it with had to be the Mater, as their 'sister' Hospital (The Children's Hospital) in North Dublin had already done. This move is a strategic one from the point of view of 'strengthening' the position of Catholic Health Care facilities in the Ireland of today. It was a brave move on the part of the Sisters who moved in faith and with dignity to commence negotiations with the Sisters of Mercy in August 2003. The request (between the Provincial Leader of the Sisters of Charity and the Provincial Leader [SCP] of the Sisters of Mercy) was that the Sisters of Mercy would undertake the future trusteeship of the National Orthopaedic Hospital Cappagh. On January 1st 2006 the transfer of this trusteeship took place. Sr. Helena O'Donoghue and Mr. Des Lamont formally ratified it at a meeting of the new Subsidiary Company on January 24th 2006.

On July 22nd 2006 the Irish Sisters of Charity celebrated their last day in the Hospital Convent and have moved out of it after a presence there since 1908. They may have gone from the Hospital but after 98 years of generous service to sick and disabled children of Dublin City and to adults in need of orthopaedic treatment can they ever be forgotten?

Chapter Seven

Enter the Sisters of Mercy into the Provinces



St. Camillus Hospital, Limerick

Limerick was the first of Catherine McAuley's foundations to be asked in 1860 for Sisters to provide nursing care in the Workhouse. Founded from Baggot Street in 1838, by the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a flourishing community at St. Mary's, Old Dominic Street, Limerick caring for the sick, the poor and the uneducated. Extracts from the Limerick Annals of the time give a lively account of those early days and the difficulties

encountered by the Sisters before taking charge of the Workhouse and moving into the adjoining little Convent dedicated to St. Camillus on June 25th 1861. The proposal to have Sisters of Mercy taking charge of the Workhouse came from a Mr. Monsell, later to become Lord Emily. When this proposition was put to the Board of Guardians it met with considerable opposition not only from the Protestant members of the Board but also from the Poor Law Commissioners who had the quaint idea that ecclesiastics should not be appointed to situations of that nature. Having established that the Sisters were not ecclesiastics and following a protracted debate, the proposal was carried in favour of the Sisters by what the Annalist calls "a fair majority of votes." In a rare glimpse into the social history of the times, the Annalist tells us that the appointment of the Sisters to the Workhouse was the subject of many a street ballad rendered in the public streets of Limerick.

As soon as the Sisters took charge improvements were initiated. Better medical care was provided with the number of doctors increasing from one in 1861 to four in 1873. Night nurses and ward men were appointed. The Sisters insisted on comfort and cleanliness in the wards. Great care was given to the spiritual wellbeing of the patients. Some Sisters worked in the Fever Hospital close to St. Camillus' and in 1876 three sisters were officially appointed to service there, one as matron and two as nurses.

After the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922 the Workhouse unions were abolished and the County became the unit of administration. Workhouses became County Homes or County Hospitals. St Camillus' Hospital was now the City Home. In the following years many improvements were made and in 1933 a new Hospital for the treatment of acute medical and surgical cases was built. In 1934 an ophthalmic section was added.

However by 1998 the wheels of change had turned full circle. The Sisters relocated from the convent in the Hospital grounds to community residences in the city as part of the planned withdrawal from the Hospital site. On 16th November 1998 a plaque

was unveiled commemorating 137 years association of the Sisters of Mercy with health care in the area. On this occasion Councillor Jack Bourke, Chairman of the Mid-Western Health Board, paid tribute to the generations of Mercy women who had helped to keep the health service running long before the State had acknowledged its responsibility in this field.

Regional Hospital Limerick



The building of Limerick Regional Hospital arose from needs outlined by a Hospitals' Commission Report published in the early 1930's. A site was purchased in Dooradoyle and the first sod for the building was turned by Mr. P. J. Rutledge, Minister for Local Government, in the early 1940's. However World War Two intervened and building work did not commence until 1951, when the Foundation Stone was laid by Dr. James Ryan, Minister for Health, on 17th October in that year. Rubble and stones from the demolished House of Mercy at St. Mary's in Limerick were used in the foundations. The Hospital was officially opened by Mr. T. F. O'Higgins, Minister for Health in April 1955 and following the furnishing and equipment of the Hospital staff was recruited and the first patient admitted on 22nd of September 1955. The building of the Hospital was financed by the Irish Hospitals Trust. Lourdes Convent, built for the Sisters who administered and staffed the Hospital was opened on 11th February 1955 and blessed by Rev. Canon Punch, P.P. Prior to taking up duty on the staff, many of the Sisters engaged in training courses which better qualified them for the responsible positions to be undertaken. Over the years they ministered there with their usual expertise and dedication. The Hospital had an original complement of 276 beds. During the following years a series of extensions were provided for Paediatric and Psychiatric care and further facilities for laboratories and for staff. In 1955 approval was granted for the redevelopment of the existing Hospital into a modern facility with full range of treatment, diagnostic, medical, social and general services and staff facilities to serve the out-patient and in-patient needs

In addition to providing an extensive range of medical, surgical and related services, Limerick Regional Hospital also established a School of Nursing in which Sisters and lay people were trained as nurses. In the early 1990's An Bord Altranais published A Review of Nursing Education in Ireland. This review recommended that Schools of Nursing link with a Third Level College so that

undergraduate nursing could be upgraded from a Certificate to a Diploma/Degree. The Regional Hospital took up the challenge and with support from the Mid-Western Health Board a proposition for establishing a suitable faculty was put to the University of Limerick. The University was pleased to establish a Faculty of Nursing. Following consultation with tutors, supervisors from clinical staff and members of the University of Limerick a curriculum was drawn up which was approved by the Department of Health and by An Bord Altranais.

County Hospital in Croom



In 1926 the Sisters of Mercy from St. Mary's in Limerick were invited to take charge of the County Hospital in Croom. Like so many others, this Hospital had been a Workhouse run by secular staff. Six Sisters began work there on 30th June 1926 and they lived in improvised accommodation there until St. Joseph's Convent was built in 1929. Many Sisters served in the Hospital and convent in various ministries from 1926 to 2004, some short term, others for most of their working lives. The convent, situated at a distance from the city, also served as a place where Sisters could recuperate after illness, relax for short periods or study for examinations.

In the seventies there were up to ten Sisters with ministries in Croom but gradually their numbers began to decline and by 1987 only three remained. In 1988 the Sisters withdrew from the Croom convent amid many tributes to their dedicated service there. One Sister continued to work there until her retirement in 2004.

St. Ita's, Newcastle West



Like so many of the Hospitals in our story, St. Ita's in Newcastle West was first a Workhouse, built in 1841 to serve 550 inmates. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Sisters were asked to come and work there. At first the Sisters came from St. Catherine's Convent daily to nurse in the wards, to cater and to work in the laundry and

general stores. A Sister was appointed as Matron to supervise the service of the sick poor. In 1892 a newly built Convent was opened in the grounds of the Hospital.

When the Free State took over administration the Workhouse became a General Hospital and the nursing Sisters continued to minister there. In the early years

appointments were made by the Superior and sanctioned by the civic authority but from 1972 onwards all posts were advertised and Sisters applied like their lay colleagues. The Matron's position was filled by open competition and was held by a Sister until 1996. By July 1996 the Community was reduced to two Sisters and a decision was taken to withdraw from the Convent. It was with much sadness that the key was turned in the lock for the last time, bringing to an end 104 years of occupation and of a home from which Sisters provided compassionate service and healing.

Two Sisters continue to work in the Hospital and have been active in the development of a short stay Assessment/Rehabilitation Unit. Since 2002 the Rehabilitation multidisciplinary team have worked towards accreditation in Practice Development and have been linked with Leeds University. In 2004 St. Ita's Hospital was awarded accreditation with merit.

Chapter Eight

The West – Ennis, Kilrush and Corofin

St. Joseph's Hospital, Ennis



The Convent of 1885, St. Joseph's Hospital.

Soon after their arrival in Ennis the Sisters of Mercy undertook the visitation of the Workhouse in that town. As with so many other Workhouses throughout the country, management and nursing care were poor and the Board of Guardians soon felt it advisable to seek the help of the Sisters of Mercy as nurses. The Superior of the time consulted with the Sisters in Limerick and, following their advice, two Sisters applied for positions as nurses and their

applications were formally accepted. Part of the Workhouse buildings were made suitable for the Sisters. On 18th April 1885 the two Sisters appointed as nurses took up residence there and were joined by three others to form a community. A Sister also worked in the fever Hospital.

The buildings which had been erected in 1841 were in use until the 1960's. They were in poor condition and had become inadequate. Accordingly four units for patients and a Convent for the Sisters were built and opened in 1967. This was phase one of the building scheme. Phase two was opened in 1972 and it incorporated three further units plus staff rooms, a large dining room and kitchen. St. Joseph's Church was opened in 1974 to cater for the Hospital patients and the local community. The remaining Workhouse buildings were demolished, much to the regret of people who valued the beauty of the cut stone used in their construction.

St. Joseph's Hospital is now a modern Geriatric Hospital with a full time Geriatrician, Physiotherapy and Occupational therapy services. In 2005 an Alzheimer's Unit was opened. However, the number of Sisters working there has gradually decreased over the years until there is only one Sister of Mercy working at present. The Convent built in 1967 was no longer required for nursing Sisters and was vacated. It now houses psychiatric patients.

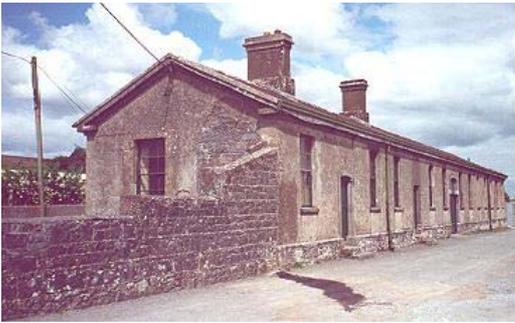
The old Fever Hospital, St. Senan's, in the grounds of St. Joseph's was renovated. In April 1968 Dr. Michael Hearty, Bishop of Killaloe, opened a Unit there for severely handicapped children. This Unit was run by one of the nursing Sisters who had taken a special course of training for the purpose. She was assisted by trained nurses. There was accommodation for 24 children and very soon the centre was filled up. There are many touching accounts of the kindness with which the young patients were treated. Ambulance drivers came on their time off to take them on drives into the countryside and to the sea at places like White Strand and Invar. They went on



A GROUP IN ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL IN THE 1920s.
Standing: Srs. M. Aidan Kennedy, Brendan Sheehan.
Seated: Srs. Anthony Conlon, Agnes O'Brien.

pilgrimages to Knock and to Lourdes. Children were cared for in St. Senan's until 1989 when they were transferred to new purpose built accommodation in Bandore.

Sisters of Mercy in Corofin



There were difficulties also in the administration of the Workhouse in Corofin. The suggestion to appoint two Sisters to nursing duties came from the Local Government Board Inspector. There was much discussion among the Guardians as to the value in service of the extra expense caused by providing living quarters for the Sisters, but finally being assured that the economy and satisfactory work practices of the Sisters would more than outweigh the expense, two Sisters from Ennis were appointed, one as Matron and one as her assistant. They took up duty on the 15th December 1902 and were joined by two others. Corofin was a small institution. In February 1903 there were only 86 residents and this number decreased to 44 in 1921. On 5th July 1921 the Workhouse was taken over by the Auxiliary division of the R.I.C. Some patients were transferred to Ennistymon and the remaining patients and two nursing Sisters moved to Ennis.

Kilrush Hospital



St. Joseph's District Hospital, Kilrush

The Board of Guardians of the Kilrush Union Workhouse were soon to follow the example of their colleagues in Limerick. The Sisters from the Convent in Kilrush were invited first to visit the Workhouse and later their services were requested to provide infirmary nursing care. The Sisters took up residence in newly refurbished apartments on the 6th May 1875. Immediately on their appointment they set about making recommendations for improvements to the lot of the inmates and succeeded in having as much comfort as possible provided.

With the establishment of the Irish Free State, the Boards of Guardians were replaced by County Boards of Health. It was decided to close down the Kilrush Workhouse and transfer the inmates to Ennis. The former infirmary and fever Hospital and the Sisters' apartments were re-constituted and functioned as St. Joseph's District Hospital from 1924 onwards. This Hospital provided medical, surgical and maternity services for the West Clare region. However, advanced services were more easily provided by the larger Hospitals in Ennis and Limerick and so Kilrush Hospital gradually became a place for geriatric care. In 1987 the Hospital closed completely due to cut-backs by the Mid-Western Health Board and the patients resident there were relocated in Carrigoran Nursing Home. Since then a Committee from the area have re-opened the Hospital as Kilrush Community Hospital. Regina House, situated close to St. Joseph's provided care for the mobile elderly and was administered by a nursing Sister. This Hospital has recently been renamed Catherine Eivers House to honour its devoted first Matron.

Raheen Hospital

Others have taken up positions side-by-side with lay colleagues in Hospitals run by the Health Boards. For years Mercy maintained a presence in Raheen, Cottage Hospital, Co. Clare. This Hospital has an interesting history. William McLysaght gave his hunting lodge to Clare Co. Council to house the sick who became homeless when the Scarrif Workhouse was burned down in 1921. The Hospital was under lay administration but in 1978 a Sister of Mercy took up a staff nurse's position there following a Health Board interview. She served there over the next twenty years and co-operated with the lay staff in bringing Raheen from a rundown place, badly in need of refurbishment and new equipment. to a modern Community Hospital with a first class Care Centre, a Day Centre with Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Departments and accommodation for two Hospice patients. The Mercy presence ended in Raheen when the Sister serving there retired in November 1998 having acted as Assistant Matron for the last ten years of her service.

Chapter Nine

The Carlow / Kilkenny Experience

The Carlow experience next takes up the now familiar story. From the Minute Book of the Board of Guardians of the Workhouse we learn that there were many internal difficulties with incompetent staff, indiscipline of staff and inmates and lack of humanity on the part of the Matron. After an enquiry by the board of Guardians the unsatisfactory staff was dismissed and the path was open for suggestions that the Sisters of Mercy should be invited to take over the service of the sick poor in the Workhouse. Having followed due process three Sisters were appointed and commenced duty as infirmary nurses on 21st November 1881. In 1888 one of the Sisters died from typhoid fever. The board of Guardians passed a vote of sympathy with the Community and acknowledged that she died of illness contracted in the performance of her duties and they paid tribute to the good work being done by the Sisters. As well as caring for the sick and dying many improvements were made to the buildings, especially the provision of bathrooms and toilets. In 1907 a Sister was appointed as Matron.

Life in the Carlow Workhouse was becoming comfortable. The list of provisions allowed to each patient per week included two and a half lbs of meat, four lbs of bread and three quarters lb of butter. The Sisters quarters also profited from the general improvements receiving a new range in the kitchen and a stove in the common room.

But here the Carlow story takes a direction not experienced in other parts of the province. In 1922 following the withdrawal of the British administration and the establishment of the Irish Free State, the Union Workhouse was taken over by the Free State Army as a military barracks. Despite remonstrations and protests by all concerned with the welfare of the patients, the Workhouse had to be evacuated and accommodation taken up in the old military barracks deemed unsuitable for the army. A suspected outbreak of diphtheria among troops already stationed in the Workhouse delayed the evacuation until the end of January 1923. The patients were transported to what was considered very substandard accommodation. The Commanding Officer took over the Sisters' quarters for himself and his newly married wife. However, the spirit of Catherine McAuley prevailed among the nursing Sisters and they set to work to transform the old military barracks into comfortable accommodation for the sick and elderly. When it was suggested in 1925 that the Army take over their old military quarters and return the Workhouse to the Board of Health, the exchange was emphatically refused. Once was enough to make the place habitable after the army.

Care of the sick and elderly and, until 1933, for unmarried mothers and babies continued at the County Home as the Workhouses were now termed. But the buildings were unsuitable for the purpose. And after two fires the top floors were vacated and the able bodied were transferred to Bethany House, a welfare home built on the grounds. On the 25th April 1988 a new home was opened called Sacred Heart Hospital

and the residents once more were transferred to new quarters. The first person to be transferred was the oldest resident Judy O'Brien, who had also been moved from the Union Workhouse to the home in Barrack Street in 1923.

By 1999 there were no more Sisters available for nursing duty. A dedicated lay staff now runs Bethany House and Sacred Heart Hospital.

St. Fiacc's House

But Carlow's Health Care story continues. St. Fiacc's Home for the local elderly was opened in Graiguecullen in 1982 as a joint venture between local organisations and the Midland and South Eastern Health Boards. The initial impetus came from a donation of £10,000.00 to the Carlow Sisters of Mercy from Michael Wall, Clongrennane, to be used for the poor of his native Graiguecullen. The Sisters from Carlow were assigned the running of St. Fiacc's Residential Home. By 1985 there were four Sisters in Community there, three of whom were working in the Home. Their involvement there ended in 2006.

In 1992, a Sister from St. Fiacc's Home together with the St. Vincent de Paul Society opened a shelter for the homeless in the vacant Christian Brothers House.

St. Lazerian's House

The District Hospital in Bagnalstown closed in 1987 due to cut-backs in the allocation of funds to the Health Boards. However the people of Bagnalstown formed a Management Committee which successfully approached the Government to provide care for the elderly. Three Sisters of Mercy were appointed to run the home. The District Hospital was reopened in 1988 as a home for the elderly and was called St. Lazerian's House. The Board of Management raised £121,000 to provide an extension. The government supplemented this with £40,000 from the National Lottery. This extension provided 10 single and 5 double rooms and was officially opened on the 25th May 1990. A further grant of £40,000 enabled another extension to be built in September 1992.

A service of Meals on Wheels was initiated in St. Lazerian's House in October 1995 and volunteers with cars were organised to deliver hot meals to people in their homes.

Sadly the Sisters of Mercy could not continue to staff St. Lazerian's House and so the last Sisters had to withdraw in early 2006.

Gahan House, Graiguenamanagh

The story of Gahan House in Graiguenamanagh is similar to that of St. Lazerian's in Bagnalstown. Michael Gahan from Graiguenamanagh donated a site on which to build a home for the elderly. Local fundraising, Kilkenny Co. Council and the South Eastern Health Board provided funds for the building which opened on the 9th November 1989. Two Sisters of Mercy were appointed to run the home consisting of twelve beds and the eight chalets. It was fittingly called Gahan House. The residents there are mobile and do not need nursing care. The chalet occupants cope mostly on their own with necessary support provided by the staff. Where it is practicable all residents help out by undertaking light responsibilities.

Chapter Ten

Early Days in Kildare

St. Vincent's Hospital, Athy

On October 24th 1893 Sisters of Mercy took charge of the Workhouse in Athy. The Athy Annals from this period state that it had been “the earnest desire for a long time of the Guardians of the Workhouse to place the Hospital under the charge of the Sisters.” For some years they had been visiting the wards on Sundays and holydays and bringing the solace of Religion to the patients. However, the Annals tell us, that both Guardians and patients were anxious to extend the consolation of the Sisters ministrations to bodily as well as spiritual needs. Archbishop Cullen gave permission to the Sisters to take up duty on condition that they would have daily Mass and perform all their spiritual duties as at the Convent. A suitable residence would also have to be provided. These conditions were strictly adhered to and three Sisters took up residence and assumed charge of the Hospital which they placed under the patronage of St. Vincent. They received much help from the Matron of the Union, Ms. Lindsay, who saw to it that their temporal needs were adequately provided for. Ms. Costello, who gave up charge of the Infirmary on the arrival of the Sisters, was also most helpful.



In 1922 the Athy Workhouse was the only one in Co. Kildare to be retained as a County Home for the sick and aged. The Sisters were entrusted with its care. In time this Home became known as St. Vincent's Hospital.

Following recommendations from an interdepartmental commission set up by Government in 1949, St. Vincent's Hospital was improved to provide more adequate facilities. The new Hospital opened in 1966 and when the Eastern Health Board took over from the Co. Council in 1971, a new Convent, Nurses Home and a Mortuary were added. The Community Care Programme was further extended in 1982 by the provision of a Day Care Facility which allowed people living in the neighbourhood to receive a wide range of services, both medical and social, while retaining their independence in their own homes. Some time later the Gate lodge and the Nurses Home were adapted as group homes for men and women. October 1983 saw the establishment of St. Joseph's, an Assessment/Rehabilitation Unit to provide services for the elderly in part of the maternity wing. In 1986 the maternity unit was closed much to the dismay of the local community and further space was thereby provided for the Assessment/Rehabilitation Unit.

The need for Sheltered Housing led to the construction of ten units in the grounds of St. Vincent's Hospital. This development was opened in 1991. It was called McAuley Court “in recognition of the role played by the local Sisters of Mercy in the provision of Geriatric Care in the Workhouse, County Home and the present St. Vincent's Hospital” (Frank Taaffe in 150 years of Caring). The last Sister of Mercy retired as Matron in 1996. By 2005 there was only one Sister on the staff of St. Vincent's and there was little need for the purpose built Convent. This was vacated at

end of 2005 and with the untimely death of the last Sister working there, the association of the Sisters of Mercy with the Hospital came to an end. However their compassion and devoted attention to the needs of the sick when there were few others to care is not forgotten. True to the spirit of Catherine McAuley they took up the challenge of their times and laid a secure foundation for the excellent health service that continues to flourish in Athy.

Cuan Mhuire

In 1965, Sr Consilio, a Sister of Mercy from Athy founded Cuan Mhuire as a haven for people suffering from alcoholism, drug abuse and other addictions. Alcoholism has been a problem in Irish society over the generations but in 1965 there were very few places where its victims could be treated. There was need for specialised nursing care. Cuan Mhuire endeavoured to address this need and from early beginnings in a disused dairy, it developed into a purpose built facility where clients could receive treatment programmes in a caring, family atmosphere. The programmes there are based on a philosophy of the intrinsic worth of each individual. They strive to restore the confidence, self respect and sense of responsibility of the participants. Cuan Mhuire recognises the importance of the family dimension in the treatment and family members are welcome there to participate in the healing process.



Over the years a network of treatment and aftercare centres has been established throughout the country. There is in-service training for staff and courses are provided in counselling theory and practice. Though Cuan Mhuire is recognised by the Department of Health as a treatment centre and is provided with some funding, there is still need for private donations and fundraising. The Sisters of Mercy encourage Sr. Consilio's dream and provide support and funding.

Cuan Mhuire has sister treatment centres in Bruree, Co. Limerick, Coolarne, Co. Galway, Newry, Co. Down, Ballycarron, Co. Tipperary and Farnanes, Co. Cork. These centres are run on the same philosophy and practice as the original centre in Athy and they serve clients in the surrounding areas.

Naas

Like so many others in Ireland the Hospital in Naas was first established as a Workhouse. It was run by a Board of Guardians and lay nurses were employed. The Sisters of Mercy came to Naas on the 24th September 1839 and began a ministry of care to the sick and hungry poor. Part of this ministry involved visitation of the Workhouse. It is not certain when exactly they began work there as nurses, but they were nursing there in the early years of the twentieth century. There are few written records of the Sisters ministry in the Naas Workhouse but judging from the accounts of other establishments we can be sure that their service was dedicated and generous.

In 1921 the Free State government changed the status of the Workhouse to that of a County Home. About this time the Sisters were withdrawn from nursing duty because, the Annals tell us, they were needed in the Schools, where the teaching Sisters were overworked. The Sisters of St. John of God took over from them.

Chapter Eleven

Tipperary's Story

St. Patrick's Hospital, Cashel



Cashel and Thurles were next after Limerick to welcome the Sisters of Mercy into the Workhouse. On February 1st 1877 following a proposal from a Mr. Guiry, the Workhouse Guardians unanimously adopted a motion inviting the Sisters to take up duty as nurses in the Union Infirmary. Dean Quirke, Parish Priest of Cashel sent a letter to the Sisters of Mercy in Tipperary Town inviting them to take on this duty. On 28th August 1877

three Sisters from Tipperary took up duty in St. Patrick's Hospital, Cashel, two at a salary of £25 and one at £10 per annum. They immediately set about bringing what improvements they could to the grim regime at the Workhouse and continued their endeavours there until a change of administration was made in the initial years of the Irish Government. In February 1924, following reorganisation by the newly formed Department of Local Government, Clonmel County Home was closed and the inmates were transferred to the central County Home in Cashel. In October of that same year, a Sister of Mercy was appointed Matron and Sisters continued to fill this role until the last Sister retired in 1989.

As in the other County Homes many improvements were carried out over the years. A successful project was initiated in 1979 to set up an Assessment/Rehabilitation Unit. Another major advance in the care of the elderly was taken in 1985 by the provision of Day Hospital facilities in St. Patrick's which facilitated the treatment of more patients without actually admitting them to Hospital. Today, St. Patrick's offers a comprehensive geriatric service with the emphasis on short-term in-patient treatment. With Day Hospital services and respite care beds also available, no effort is spared to ensure that the elderly are maintained in the community for as long as possible.

The long association of the Sisters of Mercy with St. Patrick's ended in February 2001. The community was reduced to three Sisters and a decision was taken to withdraw from the convent attached to St. Patrick's. However, two Sisters continue to work in the Hospital. At the Centenary Mass in 1977, celebrated to mark the coming of the Sisters to St. Patrick's Hospital in 1877, Monsignor Lee spoke of the "ray of sunshine" that came into people's lives when the Sisters of Mercy took up nursing duty in the Workhouse. His tribute was a fitting one to generations of Sisters who served in St. Patrick's Hospital. The Eastern Health Board also paid tribute to the service given by the Sisters of Mercy to healthcare in St. Patrick's. In 2001 a plaque was unveiled in the Chapel as the Health Board's acknowledgment of the Sisters generous contribution over the years.

Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel

The building of Our Lady's Hospital in Cashel began in 1935 though it was not formally opened until 24th July 1940. Dean Ryan celebrated Mass to mark the occasion and the Tipperary Annals tell us that breakfast on a grand scale was partaken of by all before the key was handed over. This was a Health



Board Hospital and was partly funded by the Irish Hospitals' Sweepstake. The Sisters of Mercy's offer to send trained nursing Sisters to Our Lady's was accepted and the Hospital opened in 1940 with four Sisters being appointed to the staff, one of whom was Matron and one a Sister from Limerick who worked in the x-ray department. Later an additional Sister was appointed as Superintendent Cook in the Hospital kitchen.

In 1952 the Medical Services were transferred to Clonmel and in 1980 the Maternity Services were also transferred there. Surgery was the main procedure carried out in Our Lady's. Bed numbers increased, a second theatre and a second x-ray room were provided. Laboratory and Physiotherapy services were developed and an Accident and Emergency Department service was provided.

Team work was very important at the Hospital with every grade of staff involved in the Care of the patient. Emphasis was placed on the comfort of the patient making sure that suitable nourishment and assistance was available at all times. Hygiene and cleanliness held pride of place. The Hospital Chaplain was always present for patients, relatives and staff. The staff worked on a weekly rota from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and carried out their duties with that generous spirit which still prevails today.

In 1955 the Surgical Services were centralised in Clonmel. It was planned that Our Lady's Hospital Cashel would be developed into a Community Hospital, catering for Rehabilitation, Palliative Care, Alzheimer's patients and Convalescent Services for people with Physical Disabilities, Day Care, Independent Living units and Out Patient Clinic Services. Negotiations are ongoing concerning these services.

Over the years the number of Sisters working in Our Lady's decreased due to the fall in vocations to the Religious life. At present one Sister works in the Nursing Administration Department.

Hospital of the Assumption, Thurles



In February 1877 Dean Quirke of Cashel invited the Sisters from Doon to nurse the sick in the Cashel Workhouse. However Archbishop Croke suggested that Thurles would be more suitable for Doon than Cashel. The Sisters agreed to this change of plan and six Sisters were appointed to this first branch house of Doon. Their coming to Thurles was a joyous occasion. The Doon Annalist tells us “On November 5th 1877, accompanied by Rev. Mother Catherine Ryan and Fr. P. O’Donnell C.C. of Doon, who paid their fare, the Sisters set out for Thurles. On their arrival they were met by the priests of Thurles and a local band and were driven through the town amidst cheers and hand-clapping. They were met at the Workhouse by the Doctors and some of the Guardians but not by the Master and Matron who did not approve of the coming of the Sisters. For a time the Sisters duties were rendered unpleasant but this hostile attitude was eventually overcome by the patience and good will of the Sisters. They tried to improve the wards and the diet of the inmates, often sharing their own food with the sick. A Protestant Inspector was so impressed with the improvements in the Sisters’ wards that he asked that a nun be appointed to take charge of the male and female wards in what was termed ‘the body of the house.’

In 1922 when Ireland became self-governing the Workhouse was administered by the County Council. A Sister was appointed Matron of what was renamed the County Home. In 1924 plans were afoot to close the County Home in Thurles and house the inmates in a County Home in Roscrea. However history intervened when the Workhouse in Nenagh was burned down by the Sinn Feiners and the inmates of that establishment had to be accommodated in Thurles. There was no more talk about closing down the Thurles County Home.

Improvements were made to the buildings over the years. In 1954 the name was changed to Hospital of the Assumption. When the Health Board took over in the 1960’s the Hospital was further updated; walls were brightly painted, floors were covered, and running water and central heating was installed.

On February 4th 2006 the new Community Hospital of the Assumption was opened with a bed capacity of 72. This is a far cry from the early years when up to 400 patients had to be accommodated. Now the state of the art Hospital is all on the ground level, making the outside world more accessible to patients and no climbing of stairs for staff.

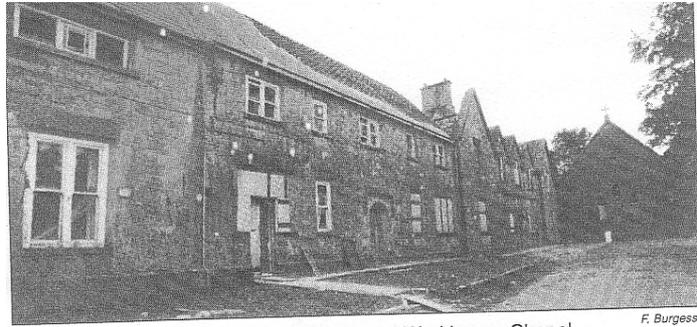
Inside the buildings, the atmosphere is now bright and warm and people find solace for body and soul in their last hours. The works of Mercy continue there as in the early pioneering days. Only one Sister of Mercy still works there but the spirit of Catherine McAuley prevails there as it did in the early days.

Sisters celebrating centenary in Thurles



Tipperary

The Sisters of Mercy came from St. Mary's Convent in Limerick to Tipperary Town in 1864. Shortly after their arrival they began visitation of the sick and poor in their homes. Visits to the Workhouse were carried out each Sunday and gradually the Sisters acquired knowledge of the needs of the inmates of this cheerless institution.



The Tipperary Workhouse and Workhouse Chapel

F. Burgess

In 1872, one of the Board of Guardians, Arthur Moore of Mooresfort, proposed that the Sisters be invited to take charge of the Hospital section of the Workhouse. This proposal was seconded by John O'Dwyer of Barronstown. While the Catholic Guardians supported the proposal there was some reluctance among the Protestant members of the Board to having Sisters of Mercy in charge of the Workhouse. After some delays agreement was reached and the appointment of the Sisters was ratified on 14th October 1873. The townspeople were very much in favour of having Sisters as paid nurses in the Workhouse and showed their support by presenting a petition for their employment to the Guardians signed by one hundred and twenty ratepayers. Later a formal resolution of thanks was presented to Arthur Moore who was credited with the success of the venture.

Early in October that year, two Sisters with experience of working in the Workhouse Infirmary in Limerick came to Tipperary to help prepare the Sisters there for their nursing duties. On the 15th October the Sisters took up duties in the Workhouse under the supervision of an experienced Limerick Sister who stayed in Tipperary until March 1874. About this time the infirmary became known as St. Vincent's and the Sisters accommodation there was known as St. Vincent's Convent.

An entry in the Tipperary Annals for 27th March 1877 states that one of the Sisters took charge of the Fever Hospital. This building accommodated fifty patients. The two lower storeys were occupied by surgical and medical patients while the top floor was left for infectious cases. In his book "A Lamp Kindled" Denis G. Murnane quotes a Dr. Dowling as saying that the operating room was heated by an open fireplace and lit by oil lamps. Ether was used and despite the open flames no accident occurred. Dr. Dowling attributes this immunity to the prayers of the Sisters of Mercy who had charge of the Hospital and one of whom assisted at all operations.

The Workhouse System was abolished in 1923 and in 1924 the Irish Free State established a District Hospital in Tipperary. Aware that nurses would need professional training for a post in the District Hospital, three Sisters were sent to train in Cork in 1922. The Tipperary Annals for 1924 tell of the anxiety caused by the change of administration. Their chief concern was, in the words of the annalist, "that the care of the sick poor would pass from our hands". This concern motivated the sending of Sisters to train as certified nurses.

St. Joseph's Hospital, Nenagh



Circumstances were much the same in the Nenagh Workhouse as elsewhere in Co. Tipperary. The Sisters of Mercy had come to Nenagh from Birr in 1854 and had undertaken the visitation of the sick in their homes. James O'Meara, a member of the Board of Guardians proposed the appointment of two Sisters to act as nurses in the female infirmary. He spoke of experience in the Limerick, Thurles and Kilrush Workhouses where the Sisters were looked on by the inmates as "ministering angels". The Guardians agreed to the appointments and following the usual procedure of application and sanction by the Local Government Board, two Sisters came from Birr to take up duty in the female infirmary in April 1882, having first learned as much as possible from the Sisters working in the Workhouse in Tipperary town. Comfortable apartments were prepared for the new community and the first two Sisters were joined by two others. Soon the Sisters assumed responsibility for the male infirmary and eventually took charge of the whole institution. Again reports in the Minute Book of the Guardians' meetings tell of improvements in nursing care, diet, ward equipment and staff discipline when the Sisters became established.

Early in 1923, during the Civil War, the main buildings of the Workhouse were destroyed by fire and the inmates transferred to Thurles. Under the newly appointed North Tipperary Board of Health, the Workhouse was upgraded and surgical, medical and maternity services were provided. In 1927 a theatre was built beside the infirmary building and a new County Hospital was opened in 1936. A Chapel, nurses' home and convent were added some time later. A County Clinic was built in 1956 which provided accommodation for the various clinics operating elsewhere in the town. This building proved inadequate for the purpose and in 1986 another building was erected to provide more space for clinics and for administrative staff.

The Sisters continued to take charge of the Hospital in Nenagh until 1985 when a lay matron was appointed. Other Sisters remained in staff positions but gradually the numbers decreased until at the present time only one Sister still works there.



Two former matrons - Sr. Stephanie Murphy and Sr. Bernard Quigley

Roscrea

Roscrea was one of the last parishes to request the Sisters to assume duties in a Workhouse. An approach had been made to the Ennis Community in 1899 but it was not until 1915 that negotiations were entered into with the Board of Guardians. As was usual with other appointments, two salaried Sisters were engaged, one as Matron and one as nurse while two other Sisters came to form community and help with nursing at Rosary Hospital as the Workhouse was called.

The Sisters of Mercy's sojourn in Roscrea was short. In 1924 difficulties arose concerning the appointment of a Sister as Matron. The Sisters resigned their posts there and the Convent was closed that year. Their departure was much regretted by the Roscrea people. However the original Workhouse chapel continued in use by the parishioners nearby and Mass was celebrated there each Sunday until the 1950's.

Chapter Twelve

Offaly's Contribution

Birr

The experience of the nursing Sisters in Thurles and Cashel was shared with Sisters from Birr in Co. Offaly, who were soon to take up duties in the Workhouse in that town. As in most Workhouses of the time there was considerable dissatisfaction with the management of the institution. Ever alert to finding ways of serving Christ in His poor, the Sisters in Birr, through their great friend, Fr. M. Bugler, P.P. offered their services to the Board of Guardians. Initially there was some hesitation on the part of the local authorities but when three Sisters responded to an advertisement for nurses, they were unanimously appointed and suitable apartments were made ready for them. On June 17th 1881 three Sisters took up duty in the Workhouse.



The annals speak of "incessant labour for months" to bring order and cleanliness to the sick poor. However in the folklore of the convent in Birr, the Workhouse is portrayed as a happy place where humanity and good humour transcended the harshness of the era. Improvement of the food provided was a constant concern and change for the better was often met with disbelief. One old lady is reported to have exclaimed when given an egg for breakfast, "Did the wan die that that was boiled for!"

Change came with the establishment of the Irish Free State and in 1921 the Birr Workhouse was closed and its inmates transferred to Tullamore. The Sisters returned to St. John's Convent in Birr and continued their service of the sick poor by visiting and supporting the sick and destitute in their homes in the town.

Chapter Thirteen

Other Forms of Nursing Care

All through the years there have been Sisters whose nursing ministry, though hidden, must not be forgotten. Up to present times in every large convent the Sister Infirmarian played a very important part in the life of the community. For many young Sisters caring for the sick, aged and infirm in their own communities was an introduction to the nursing ministry. Care of our Sisters continues in Catherine McAuley Unit, Beaumont, Dublin and in McAuley House, Limerick where, with the help of lay colleagues, Sisters in the evening of life are cared for in purpose built facilities suitable to their needs. McAuley House in Beaumont was built in 1994 and McAuley House in Limerick opened in 1993. For a time there was a Unit for Care of the Elderly in New Inn Convent but this closed in 2004 and the invalid Sisters were accommodated in McAuley House, Limerick. Nursing Sisters were appointed also to care for pupils in the boarding schools throughout the Province. In Thurles this ministry extended to the Seminarians in St. Patrick's College.

We are now into the beginning of the twenty first century and, though service of the sick in general has improved from the early days of crowded wards and insufficient resources, the need for compassionate care is still with us. Many Sisters, who have withdrawn from General nursing, continue health care in other areas.



Sisters in McAuley, Dublin and Limerick

Public Health Nursing

The Sisters of Mercy became involved in Public Health Nursing in 1975. In changed circumstances Catherine McAuley's "walking nuns" still minister to the needs of the sick in their homes, promote child health and intervene when children's health deviates from the norm. Public Health Nursing Sisters work as members of Health Board Teams and, in some cases, as organisers of services. Every opportunity is taken to influence policy so that the needs of the Community are served by well planned

strategies. Sisters in this service are qualified to assess, plan, implement and evaluate nursing care. They provide a wide range of personal health and social services to individuals and to families. Equity, accountability and quality of care are strictly observed so that health and social gain are achieved. Education and health care are provided in the community so that Hospital admissions are reduced.

Many of the Sisters still serving as nurses are working in the Public Health sector and by their dedicated service pay tribute to the old tradition of Visitation so dear to the Sisters of Mercy of earlier generations.

Pastoral Care

Catherine McAuley's constant concern was for the consolation of the seriously ill and dying. Following in her footsteps, Sisters in latter years have qualified in Clinical Pastoral Care. Courses were offered in the Mater Hospital, Dublin and in the Regional Hospital, Cork. Limerick Regional Hospital had no such facility but when a Sister qualified in Buffalo, New York State, her voluntary services were welcomed there. This ministry is mainly to the terminally ill and dying. The Pastoral Carer helps the terminally ill through a process which may range from initial denial to a resigned acceptance of serious illness and death. The grieving relatives are also included in the ministry and are helped and encouraged to relieve the loneliness and pain of patients by word and gesture. Pastoral care is also extended to parents of children in Paediatric Units. Despite falling numbers, Sisters still continue to provide this service, sometimes on a part time basis, wherever possible.

Hospice Care

The Sisters of Mercy became involved in the provision of Palliative Care and Bereavement Counselling in 1991 when a Sister, a qualified Social worker, was appointed to the Multidisciplinary Team at Milford Hospice, Limerick. This Hospice is run by the Little Company of Mary. She set up support for patients suffering terminal illness and for their families. This work extended beyond Milford to patients in Limerick Regional Hospital. Facilitators were trained to direct Bereavement Groups and these groups were set up in various parishes in the Mid West Region. Sisters of Mercy continue to minister in Milford Care Centre in co-operation with the Little Company of Mary on both nursing and social work capacities. At present a Sister works in Our Lady's, Harold's Cross, Dublin, a hospice run by the Irish Sisters of Charity. The experience of working in hospices has been a challenging but rewarding one. Counselling and bereavement support to adults and children, together with nursing care provides a holistic experience which refers back to Mercy roots in earlier days when Catherine's Sisters nursed, consoled and counselled the sick poor of Dublin.

Other Ministries

Complementary medicines and therapies deal with the person as a whole and not just with physical symptoms. Catherine McAuley took advantage of the advances in medical science of her time but she was interested, too, in remedies from nature. During the cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832 this is evidenced by a well thumbed book she possessed on Homeopathy. In the search for wholeness, there are practitioners among us in the field of Complementary Therapies - Aromatherapy, Chiropody, Massage, Reiki, Reflexology, Art Therapy and Bio Resonance. The benefits of these therapies are shared not just with local communities of Sisters, but with lay clients as well.



Sr. Maura O'Connor, Limerick,
(working at the Family Resource Centre, Southill,
where she practices various complementary therapies)

Health Care in our Communities

The Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy direct us to show special care for those who are sick among us and this directive has been taken to heart by many of our active retired nurses. There are nursing Sisters who travel to Convents which need their help and who bring support and comfort to invalided, and elderly Sisters. Others minister in the communities in which they live. Sometimes crisis situations arise and calls for help are answered by what has become known as the Mobile Nurse. Very often, as well as care for the visible ailments, there is need for psychological and spiritual support, and the Nurse Sister is privileged to journey with the sick towards curative peace. Advice is given concerning the best use of existing environments and how they can be improved to assist healing and comfort. Best practice is ensured by recommending use of whatever Public Health Services are available and because of her professional knowledge, the Sister Nurse can encourage use of the expertise on hand in the wider community.

Visitation

The spirit of Catherine McAuley lives on also in the Sisters who devote their time and attention to the related ministries of Hospital and Nursing Home visitation. The consolations of our Faith are passed on in Hospices and Funeral Homes to the sick and dying and to the bereaved.

Mountjoy Women's' Prison

Nursing care in Mountjoy Prison would have been dear to Catherine's heart. In 1998 the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform advertised for Nurses for Prison Service. A Sister of Mercy from the Dublin Diocese was one of the successful candidates. Following induction training in March 1999 she was appointed to work in that part of Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, which was set apart for women prisoners. Later that year this section of the prison moved into a purpose built Women's Prison called the Dochas Centre, a place of hope. For the next three years, the Sister was part of a team providing a fulltime nursing service to between eighty and a hundred women. The work was both challenging and rewarding. Most of the women were from deprived backgrounds. Some had mental health problems. The majority were young heroin addicts and on committal were often malnourished and in very poor health. A significant number had been homeless or living in squats before being sent to prison. Often women were committed to prison by the courts so that they would have access to good health care and nutrition.

However, after three years, ill health intervened and with much regret, the Sister had to withdraw from nursing service in the prison. Falling numbers among Nursing Sisters did not permit another Sister to apply for the position.

Chapter Fourteen

Day Care Centres

In answer to a growing need, Day Care Centres were opened or staffed by Sisters of Mercy in many towns of the South Central Province in the 1980's and 1990's. The aim of each Day Care Centre is to provide a warm, friendly, caring environment so that those who attend will look forward to a relaxed and refreshing day. The daily schedule is organised so that there is plenty of time to chat, to listen and to have a good laugh. Entertainment, art and craft and other activities like bingo are provided and all are encouraged to participate. Mass is celebrated and there are Scripture Readings, recitation of the Rosary and distribution of Holy Communion in most Centres. Doctors' appointments are arranged. One centre provides a shopping service and collection of prescriptions for clients. Birthdays are celebrated and each Centre has Summer and Christmas outings. In addition to enriching the quality of life of the elderly who attend, a well earned respite is provided for family members who are the main carers. At many Centres there is provision of information on Benefits, Entitlements and Social Services including Counselling.

Initially transport was provided by family and friends, but later St. John's Ambulance Brigade, Order of Malta and Red Cross Society provided the transport on different days with the Health Board paying an annual amount to each service to defray costs. However Centres needed their own minibuses and these were purchased with the help of grants, donations and fundraising. In many of the Day Care Centres fundraising is necessary to supplement the Health Service Executive grants.

Day Care Services are considered an integral part of development in community care services for Older People. The National Council on Aging and Older People maintain that day care services can confer both health and social gains on older people and they recommend that adequate funding and legislation be provided so that all older people are entitled to them as of right.

The people who attend the Centres are mostly referred by Public Health nurses. Most of the clients live alone, some with family members. The majority suffer from age-related illnesses and disabilities, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease. Some have had strokes, hip or knee replacements. Others suffer from Parkinson's disease, slight confusion and forgetfulness.

Arus Mhuire, Nenagh

Care of the aged and infirm is established in the Arus Mhuire Day Care Centre on Ashe Road, Nenagh. Nenagh Lion's Club and the Mid Western Health Board co-operated to fund the building of a Day Care Centre for the aged and disabled of the area. The Centre was opened in 1987 and a Sister of Mercy was invited to act as Manager. As in Carlow and Kilkenny services and facilities are provided to improve the comfort and quality of life of elderly citizens by providing not only medical care but also recreational and cultural activities. So beneficial did the Centre prove for its clients that extensions

were necessary in 1991 and again in 1994. Due to lack of personnel the running of the centre passed over to lay management when the last Sister retired in 2004.

Templemore

The need for a Day Care Centre in Templemore was identified as early as 1979 at the first AGM of Templemore Community Services. A Management committee was formed and a Sister of Mercy appointed as Social Worker. However, it was not until the Christian Brothers' premises reverted to the Parish in 1986-1987 that it was possible to provide the Day Care Centre for Older People in Templemore and surrounding areas. The Mid Western Health Board provided funding and this was augmented by local fund raising. The Centre was officially opened in 1988 and was managed by a succession of Sisters of Mercy until 2002 when through lack of personnel the Sisters were forced to withdraw. The Centre is now administered by a lay person.

Newport

Fundraising for a Day Care Centre was begun in Newport, Co. Tipperary in 1986 and over the next five years £17,000 was collected. This, together with a matching grant from the Mid Western Health Board and allocations from the Lotto fund, enabled a site to be bought and the Centre to get under way in 1991. A Sister of Mercy acts as Manager. The Centre belongs to the Parish of Newport, Birdhill and Toor and Newport Social Services act as Trustees. Clients from Newport area are welcome every day and those of neighbouring parishes are collected on appointed days. In 1995 an extension was built which provided a Therapy Room, Jacuzzi Bathroom and Hair Salon. A stained glass door from the Convent which closed in Borrisoleigh was donated to the Centre and provides a link with the past.

Bagnalstown

A Day Care Centre was opened at St. Lazerian's House, Bagnalstown, Co. Carlow in 1992, where people from the neighbouring parishes are brought to avail of the facilities. This work is much supported by Community Employment Schemes. Sadly the Sisters of Mercy have had to withdraw from this service recently.

Mount Mercy Day Care Centre, Limerick City

In Limerick the ground floor area of a vacant building owned by the Sisters of Mercy was refurbished and equipped to provide accommodation for a Day Care Centre for elderly people. The Mid-Western Health Board became involved during preparations to equip the Centre, and provided advice, support and assistance of various kinds. Sisters of Mercy acted as Directors. To ensure the excellence of the service, a Sister who already held a diploma in Reflexology, attended a Gerontology Certificate Programme at St. Mary's of the Woods College in Indiana, U.S.A. Mount Mercy Day Care Centre in Limerick opened on July 24th 1990. The clients come from all over Limerick city and on Wednesdays some clients come from the Kildimo area.

At Mount Mercy Day Care Centre clients were received initially on Tuesdays and Wednesdays only but soon the numbers warranted an opening on Mondays also. The Alzheimer's Society later requested a day for their patients so Thursday was made available to them. At the beginning there was one paid staff who provided meals, housekeeping, crafts, driving etc. As well as the Director there were volunteers in attendance. Numbers increased over the years and it became necessary to employ more staff. The Centre became a Sponsor in a Community Employment Scheme which enhanced the service. Through this Scheme the Centre now has a kitchen/dining room assistant, hairdresser, housekeeper and a minibus driver. The Alzheimer's Society eventually got their own premises and the Centre was able to offer services on Thursdays also.

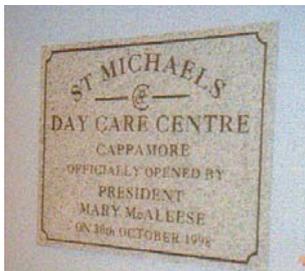
Enjoying Christmas celebration at Mount Mercy Day Centre, Limerick



Abbeyfeale

During the 1990's in Abbeyfeale the Parish Priest, Canon Neville, received a donation from a Mr. Bailey and from the J.P. McManus Fund which enabled him to set up a Care Centre for the elderly. There are 23 sheltered homes, each with two bedrooms, sitting room, kitchen and bathroom. With the assistance of a Fas Scheme, the Sisters of Mercy provide meals five days a week. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays clients are brought in from the surrounding areas and a programme of nutritious meals, health care and entertainment is provided.

Cappamore



About this time too, the Cappamore Development Association asked for a Sister to manage a Day Care Centre in the town. The centre opened in 1999 and since then, thanks to the J.P. McManus Fund, an extension has been built. On four days a week elderly people are brought by bus to the Centre where a programme of care similar to that provided in other centres is available. There is a different day for each locality.

Clarecastle

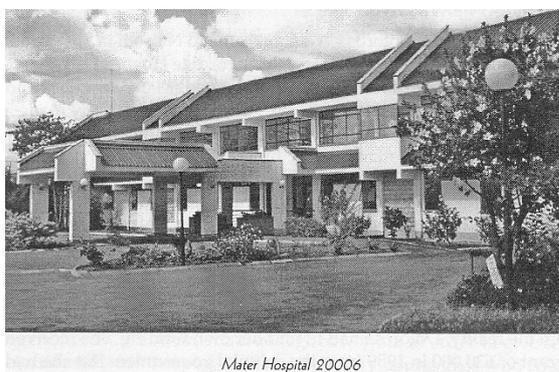
This Day Care centre opened in 1999, fundraising having begun five or six years previously by the local community. It is funded by the HSE and is managed by a Nurse. Three Sisters of Mercy work there on a voluntary basis. It caters for fifty to fifty five clients on each of the five days per week. At the moment a Special Alzheimer's Unit is being built which will give one-to-one attention to the clients with various forms of dementia.

Chapter Fifteen

Nursing Abroad: Africa and Iceland

In her time Catherine McAuley was always determined to reach out to new areas of need. True to her spirit, in the twenty first century we still find Nursing Sisters answering calls for nursing service in Kenya, and Rwanda.

Nairobi



Sisters of Mercy from

Dublin arrived in Nairobi on Holy Saturday, 1st April 1956, following an invitation from Archbishop J.J. McCarthy C.S.Sp. and under his leadership they established five schools. To complete their work of Mercy, Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Nairobi was started in 1961 and completed in 1962, thanks to a substantial grant from Misereor, Germany. His Grace Archbishop McCarthy blessed and opened the Hospital on 5th May 1962, as a Multiracial Mission Hospital.

Going to Kenya involved immunisation against cholera, yellow fever and typhoid, diseases familiar to the Sisters who worked in nineteenth century Dublin slums. Twentieth century Sisters of Mercy were not outdone in generosity as they willingly left the supportive, familiar routine of Irish Hospitals to bring relief to developing countries.

In the rural areas outside Nairobi travel was mostly on murrum roads through arid countryside. There was no running water and lighting was poor. Snakes visited the gardens and big bats banged against the windows at night. Mosquito nets were essential and anti-malarial drugs were of the greatest importance. There were cultural, language, dietary and climatic differences to be coped with and it was difficult to adjust to the slow pace of life. However, our Sisters were equal to the challenge and as well as bringing relief in Hospitals and clinics, they returned to Ireland enriched by the gentleness, patience and forbearance of the African people.

The Hospital in Nairobi began with Medical and Surgical Wards each having 28 beds, an Operating Theatre and an Out Patients Department. Maternity patients were also admitted. In 1963 an Orthopaedic Unit of 14 beds for disabled children was opened. A Maternity wing of 60 beds was added in 1970 with Ante Natal and Post Natal Clinics. This development also contained a Child Welfare clinic, three

Labour Wards, an Operating Theatre, Nursery Special care Unit, Isolation Unit and CSSD together with a small Laboratory, Pharmacy and X-ray facilities.

Thanks to donations from overseas and local benefactors, between 1972 and 1988 other additions were made to The Mater, as it was known. A Midwifery Training School for Kenya Registered Midwives was opened and approved by the Nursing Council of Kenya. Dental equipment and a Generator were purchased from generous grants from the Irish Government. A Consultant's Clinic, a Laundry, a General Hospital Supplies Store and a Dining Hall were added over the years.

Mutomo

In the 1980's requests came from other Mercy Congregations for nurses to serve in Hospitals already established. One such assignment was to Mutomo, a mission Hospital about 130 kilometres south east of Nairobi. There was a 120 bed compliment in Mutomo divided between general, maternity, paediatric and leprosy wards. There were two operating theatres, a pharmacy and laboratory. In addition there was a Midwifery training School for State Enrolled Midwives. The staff included a doctor, four state registered midwives, a clinical officer, a laboratory technician, eight state enrolled midwives and a tutor. Our Irish Sister worked mainly in the Paediatric ward where there were 30 cots for children suffering from malaria, anaemia, measles, dehydration and protein malnutrition deficiency diseases. She worked in the Operating Theatres also, one of which dealt with minor surgery like suturing of animal mauling and ulcers and the main theatre which was reserved for general and gynaecological surgeries.

"Flying Doctors" visited Mutomo twice yearly and this Sight by Wings team, as they were known, carried out eye surgery and extraction of cataracts. Orthopaedic "Flying Doctors" visited every year mainly to treat leprosy cases.

Nuu Kilui

Nuu is a semi-arid area where the rainfall is erratic and causes severe drought and famine through crop failure and loss of animal life. Malaria is endemic in the area and it aggravates the problems of disease and malnutrition due to water shortage. Nuu mission opened in 1980 and Sisters of Mercy from the Killaloe Diocese in Ireland were assigned to lead two medical teams working on two projects, Primary Health Care and Curative Clinics.

The Primary Health Care Project, led by one of the Sisters was a form of Preventative Medicine which aimed to provide Health Education, Immunization of children under five, Ante-natal care of Pregnant women and Curative Treatment which included the care of patients attending the clinic. Health education was given through talks at the clinics and in the local schools. Outreach clinics were held on market days in villages to facilitate people who would otherwise have to travel many miles on foot. Health Clubs too were formed in many schools and pupils did projects related to the diseases from which they suffered.

The Primary Health Care Project was funded initially by U.S. Aid and later in 1988 when this funding was withdrawn, Misereor of Germany provided finance for a time. However, the expense of maintaining a four-wheel drive vehicle proved too expensive to sustain. This led to Community Based Health Care being promoted. The

new emphasis was on training people in each township to diagnose and treat simple diseases and to maintain a fridge in local areas for vaccines. Key people such as Witch Doctors, local mid-wives, Chiefs and other leaders were invited to participate in the training.

The Curative Clinic was run by a Mercy Sister with three local helpers. It was funded by the Sisters of Mercy, Killaloe Diocese, combined with a fee paid by those who could afford it. The clinic is now open six days a week and is run by a Kenyan nurse assisted by nurses aids, since 1994 when the Sisters returned home to Ireland. The Nuu Curative Clinic had outreach clinics until 1983 but they had to be discontinued because of the bad road conditions.

Mutune, Kitui

In 1982 the Sisters of Mercy answered an appeal from the Ursuline Sisters who looked for somebody to run a Clinic in Mutune, Kitui, East Kenya. Before departure for Kenya there was time for fundraising and the clinic profited from Irish concern for developing countries. Nursing duties in Mutune included treatment for tropical diseases. Women would walk for miles in the heat to the clinic, carrying their babies on their backs. The students from the Ursuline School also profited by the clinic nurse's ministrations. In the afternoons nurses went on safari to the out stations laden with medicines and food. Sometimes, with the help of Catechists to interpret, talks were arranged on Sundays and Communion distributed. At night nurses were often called out to women in labour.

But despite the hard work and less than ideal conditions, there was time for enjoyable social gatherings at Christmas, Easter and St. Patrick's Day. African style dances mingled with the odd Irish reel. There were opportunities to rejoice in the glory of flowering Jacaranda and Bougainvillea plants and to experience the glory of the azure blue skies. Sisters returning from Africa have happy memories of their sojourn there and of the people with whom they worked.

Rwanda

In 1996 the Central Leadership Team invited volunteers to spend some time working in Rwanda. Six Sisters answered the call, two of whom were from the South Central Province. They went there to run a Health Centre. Before taking up duty the Sisters went to Belgium to learn French since the native language, Kinywrandu, was taught through French. They spent time learning this language.

On reaching Rwanda the Sisters took over a very run down Clinic and refurbished it. They were aided in this work by grants from Trocaire and from the Irish Government. Tropical diseases especially malaria were treated at the Centre and pneumonia and tuberculosis were common ailments among the native peoples. Accident cases were also treated there. There were twelve beds for patients who needed Hospital care. The doctor lived at a distance from the Health Centre and could only be called on in grave emergencies.

After three years the Sisters of Mercy were able to pass on the running of the Centre to a Community of native Sisters who were experienced nurses and had opened eight Clinics in the area.

Iceland

In 1973 the Bishop of Iceland, Dr. H. Frehan, asked the Federation of Sisters of Mercy (Armagh Province) to assume responsibility for the running of St. Joseph's Hospitals in Reykjavik and Hafnarfjardur. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery (Germany) who were serving there had difficulty in filling vacancies left by aging and sick Sisters. There was a deep concern that strong Christian witness be continued in the midst of an affluent but religiously indifferent Icelandic people.

Volunteers were requested from Irish Sisters of Mercy and in June 1975 the first three Sisters of Mercy went to work as nurses in Hafnarfjardur, Iceland. Later that year they were joined by three other Sisters. A Sister from the Killaloe Diocese joined the group in 1977 and was agreeably surprised to find a modern, well-equipped Hospital which catered for surgical and medical treatments. The day began with Mass at 7.00 a.m. followed by ward duty from 7.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. or from 3.30 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. It was essential to learn the language and the Sisters attended classes two evenings each week for the first two years. The language was difficult but the classes were made enjoyable by a book published by the tutor and his own wonderful sense of humour.

However the little community of Irish Sisters grew smaller each year and by 1984 their presence in Iceland ended. It was with sad hearts that they returned to Ireland but they had been enriched by the experience in Iceland where the people were so honest. Murders and burglaries were unheard of and road accidents were very few. It was felt, perhaps, that Iceland was not Mission territory and the Sisters' services were needed more elsewhere. Having sown the seed they were happy to leave the increase to God.

Chapter Sixteen

Into the Future

CORI Health Care Commission

The Health Care Commission was set up in 1998 by CORI, the Congregation of Religious of Ireland, to influence government policy and planning and to ensure that available health services were meeting people's needs. It surveys and critiques health care issues and has particular concern for the marginalised in our society. It acts as a support to Religious working in health care. The Sisters of Mercy are members of this Commission and a Sister of Mercy SCP was appointed to the Health Care Desk.

Since its establishment the Health Care Commission has become involved in submissions made to government. It has influenced policy on issues like the National Anti-Poverty Strategy which for the first time includes health care in the overall targets. The National Economic and Social Forum also includes the development of a health care policy to promote equality of access to Hospital care and to reduce Hospital waiting lists. Submissions on these concerns have also been made to the Social Partnership Agreement – Sustaining Progress 2003 – 2005. The Public Health Alliance was formed in 2003 to promote equitable health policies and to enable people to participate in improving health.

The long term care of aging Religious is a concern of the Health Care Commission and information dealing with pre-retirement and retirement issues is made available to Religious Congregations. Workshops have been run for Religious with leadership responsibilities on best practice in the promotion of mental health. It has also issued a pamphlet on qualifications and best practice in Complementary Therapies as practised by Religious.

Chapter Seventeen

Conclusion

The involvement of Sisters of Mercy in Health Care has experienced many changes over the past one hundred and seventy years. The early Sisters in Baggot Street, Dublin ministered to the sick poor in their homes and on the streets. Later they were invited to bring their compassionate service to the city's Hospitals. When foundations were made in country towns in which Workhouses were established the Sisters were asked to care for the inmates and to bring good order to these sometimes poorly run establishments. The Irish Free State established in 1921 took over the running of the Workhouses and they were renamed as County Homes and became the responsibility of the County Councils. Later on in April 1971 Regional Health Boards took over administration of Health Care from the County Councils. On January 1st 2005 the Health Service Executive was established with full responsibility for the delivery of personal health and social services in Ireland.

The number of Sisters engaged in Health Care has diminished considerably from the early days when Hospitals were staffed mostly by Religious. However, Sisters of Mercy, continue to devote their personnel and resources to the care and well being of the sick and less fortunate of our society. Sometimes they work alongside lay colleagues as employees of the HSE. Sometimes the service is in a voluntary capacity. Whatever the status, the motivation has not changed since the foundation of Catherine McAuley's first Convent of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin. The Sisters mission was then, and continues to be, compassionate care of the sick person and concern for the healing of body and spirit.