

Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart: 100 Years in Queensland

June 2017

Sr Rita Clancy OLSH

(As no text was available, the paper was summarised for publication by Sr Rosa MacGinley PBVM)

Our speaker for the June meeting was Sister Rita Clancy whose paper commemorated the centenary of the coming of her congregation, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, to Brisbane in 1917. They had been founded at Issoudun in France in 1874 by founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Father Jules Chevalier, as a companion congregation in his evangelising mission of religious renewal in rural areas, where he saw their role in education as a necessary complement. When the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were requested by the Vatican in 1881 to undertake foreign missionary work among the Melanesian people in the Pacific, this added a second similar dimension to the Sisters' commitment. Fr Chevalier in 1882 appointed Mother Marie Louise Hartzler as the first superior general of their congregation and in 1884 arranged for the first group of Sisters to travel the following year to Australia, where Cardinal Moran of Sydney had offered a base for them at Botany. With their one English-speaking Sister, they were able to begin a

school while the community settled into their new environment. In 1886 three Sisters were sent to Thursday Island, a base for the New Guinea mission, to begin teaching and nursing there. From these beginnings, the Sisters spread further in Australia and in their chosen mission field.

A call to Brisbane came in 1916 from Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane who was anxious to attract further congregations of Sisters as the city's suburbs developed and expanded. In January 1917, a group of five Sisters, under the leadership of Sr Chanel Bergin, arrived at Corinda - still part of the Goodna parish - to staff St Joseph's newly established parochial school. A large 'Queenslander' home near the church in Clewley Street was provided for them, to which the Sisters were welcomed by a generous and supportive body of local parishioners, as they were also to prove over the coming years. This building (added to over the years) was to serve the Sisters until 1976 when a purpose-built convent was erected on the opposite side of Clewley Street.

The school began with 47 pupils, with numbers growing steadily in the 1920s. In 1919, an additional need was met - the provision of a boarding school for country boys up to thirteen years of age, who could then attend St Joseph's for their schooling. In 1923, Corinda became a separate parish from Goodna and more incorporated within Brisbane. With the growing school and the need for further building, both for the convent and the school, the boy boarders, numbering over forty in 1928, were transferred that year to a property with a double-storey house and spacious grounds available at Whinstanes,

where their schooling was continued by the Sisters. A few however still remained boarding at Corinda until about 1940.

The 1930s appear to have been uneventful, with St Joseph's school firmly established and the Sisters also providing music teaching for local pupils. By the close of the decade a new need arose: the provision of nearby secondary schooling for girls in the Corinda area. The former boys' boarding premises, now available, came into service as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, which opened in 1940, with provision for classrooms for both day and boarding students. During the war years (1939-1945), a number of girls attending were from Papua New Guinea and Pacific islands sent south for safety reasons. Several of the Sisters who taught at the College in the later 1940s had been repatriated following some years as prisoners of war in New Guinea. OLSH College developed an excellent reputation scholastically and, with the growth in students, the boarding section was closed in 1960 to make way for extra classrooms.

The war was also to affect the boys' boarding school at Whinstanes. In 1941, because of its proximity to a petrol storage depot, and with the growing concern of boarding school authorities for their students in coastal areas, the boys and the Sisters were re-located to Toowoomba where their boarding school was to establish itself as Freneau Park (named after the OLSH superior-general, Florence Freneau). Meanwhile, the military took over the Whinstanes property. Freneau Park was closed in 1969. Again, there was a changing climate with the Vatican Council in the 1960s and its call to religious institutes to

renew commitment to their essential charism. In 1972, the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart administration took the decision to close the OLSH College to free up Sisters for missionary work, the primary aim of the congregation. The high school had remained relatively small, with two hundred its highest enrolment. The school spirit, however, was to live on in the memories of ex-students who still meet regularly.

Over the years from 1917, the OLSH Sisters at Corinda had regularly gone each weekend to Darra, then also a part of the Goodna parish, to give religious instruction to the children there. They were, however, reaching only a small proportion of the Catholic school-age children and the parish priest was keen to have a school established at Darra. A generous donation from the mother of one of the Sisters enabled the project to begin, with a primary school being opened in 1937 with Sr M Benignus as the first principal. For the next seventeen years, the Sisters travelled daily from Corinda to Darra as there was no funding to build a convent. In 1953, the OLSH Sisters handed over the school to the Sisters of Mercy. However, they still have a presence in the Darra parish through the ministry of Sr Margaret Mary Danaher as a pastoral worker. Because of her visits to parishioners in the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Sr Margaret Mary was invited to join the pastoral care team at the PA hospital, a ministry she was to carry out for nearly twenty years.

Although Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Sisters no longer staff St Joseph's in Corinda, five Sisters still live in the convent there and are engaged in a variety of ministries both within and outside the parish. There is also a vibrant

group of OLSH Associates who share the charism and spirit of the Sisters. It would be true to say that the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart have been involved in every aspect of the life of the Corinda parish during the past one hundred years, with over 150 of their Sisters having ministered there over that time.