

THE IRISH FOUNDATIONS OF CATHERINE MCAULEY

**Adapted from the 2006 article "From Coolock to Baggot Street and Beyond" by Sr. Margarita Cunningham, Sr. Angela Moroney, and Marian Kennedy (Associate), and The Path of Mercy, a book by Sr. Mary Sullivan.*

1. Kingstown:

- The first foundation was established on March 24, 1835, the first Sisters of Mercy came to live in Kingstown, now known as Dun Laoghaire.

- Catherine opened the Convent for the benefit of the health of the Sisters.
- She became alarmed by the many deaths among the first Sisters.
- Tuberculosis was rampant at that time and many of the early Sisters fell ill.
- The idea of a change of air for the sick Sisters occurred to her or was put to her by the doctors who had

to be called on so frequently at Baggot Street.

- A roomy house was purchased and the first foundation from Baggot Street was made.
- The Sisters set out to establish a school there for the poor children of the area and later a hospital.

2. Tullamore:

- The first foundation made outside of Dublin was in Tullamore on April 21, 1836.
- A wealthy charitable lady named Miss Petony of Dublin had come to Tullamore around 1824 to live in

retirement and to devote herself to works of charity. Miss Petony decided to associate some young persons who might assist her in instructing the youth of the area in the principles of Religion, and in working with and comforting the dying poor.

- Sister Mary Ann Doyle, companion of Mother Catherine, and a novice, Sister Teresa Purcell, joined her and made the first foundation in 1836.

- However, Miss Petony's health failed and she died on September 7, 1831 having bequeathed her house, garden and whatever property remained for a convent.

- Tullamore was chosen as it suffered severe poverty. "If we don't take Tullamore, no other community will," Catherine declared, relying as usual on her Provident God to prosper the work and provide for the Sisters.

- Catherine would in all cases remain with the new foundation for its first month, assisting in the establishment of the ministry and leading the thirty days of prayer. Amazingly, she established this foundation with only one professed Sister and a novice.
- Another custom begun in Tullamore was the holding of a public profession ceremony to introduce the public to the work and vocation of the order, and to inspire other young women to join them in their efforts.
- Unfortunately, there is nothing left of the original Convent in Tullamore. However, one can stand on the exact spot on the Royal Canal where Catherine disembarked with her small group of Sisters.

3. Charleville:

- On October 29, 1836 Catherine arrived in Charleville with Sisters Angela Dunne, Joseph Delaney and Elizabeth Hynes.
- In pre-famine times, the people of Charleville, suffered great poverty.
- Some of the more prosperous wished to improve their situation and among them was Miss Mary

Clanchy.

- One of the ways of improving life in the area was to invite a religious congregation to the town.
- The Bishop of the Diocese of Cloyne, Dr. Crotty, made a formal request of Catherine to send some of

her Sisters and she agreed to establish a foundation.

- As with all early foundations of Catherine, Charleville had Mary Clanchy as a local benefactress who

was willing to give a house and £500.00 towards the foundation.

- The house proved very damp and Sister Angela Dunne, fearing for the health of the Sisters, asked

Catherine to close the foundation. However one day while the Sisters visited the very poor in the laneways a woman stood at her door and said that it was "God himself that drove ye in among us". This convinced Catherine of the need for the Sisters to remain in Charleville.

- A new Convent was opened in 1839. Catherine wrote: "Charleville has hitherto been a sick branch, but it will be a strong one yet."

- The Sisters became involved in education and gave religious instruction in a local national school. Visits were made to the sick and the poor in their homes, while others came to the Convent for help.
- Today, Sisters continue their work in education, health care and parish work.

4. Carlow:

- In 1837, the first purpose-built convent of Mercy was established. It became the birthplace of numerous foundations in subsequent years*.
- Here Catherine showed her breadth of vision by establishing a pension or second level school for the children of middle classes whose parents could not afford to send them to boarding schools.
- These schools would also ensure a supply of vocations to the congregations.
- Sister Francis Ward was the first Superior of the convent. She would go from here in 1843 to found the

first Mercy convent in the United States...in Pittsburgh.

- *On the December 8, 1840 four Sisters - Mary Teresa Kelly, Mary Gertrude Kinsella, Mary Aloysius

Redmond and Mary Brigid Hacket - set out from the Carlow foundation to go to Wexford at the request

of the Parish Priest.

- Fr. James Lucey, Parish Priest, wanted to establish a Convent in the town to offer education to the poor

and to provide care for the many sick and dying. He provided a house for the Sisters, but the winter was very severe, with water freezing and with very little heat. However, as in so many other places, local help saw them through. The main ministry of the Sisters was caring for the orphans, education and visitation. The Sisters are still present in the town today carrying on the work of mercy. Nothing remains of the original Convent but the spirit lives on. A new Convent was opened in 1986.

5. Cork:

- Catherine McAuley along with five companions - Sisters Mary Clare Moore, Josephine Ward, Vincent Deasy, Teresa White and Anastasia McGawley - arrived in Cork City on the steamer "Hercules" on July 6, 1837 to make a foundation.

- They were escorted to Rutland Street by Father O'Connor, where they were to live and work for the next fifteen years. A plaque now marks the spot where Catherine and her Sisters began their Mercy Mission.
- Once a fashionable quarter, Rutland Street in 1837, had little of its former elegance. The house itself was a gloomy, somber building. However, the Sisters began immediately to visit the poor of the parish and soon they became known as the "sick poor order".
- They also began a Pension School in a large room in the house in 1838.
- On December 2, 1850, Bishop William Delaney laid the foundation stone of a new Convent named "St.

Maries of the Isle."

- A generous contribution was made by a Ms. Barbara Gould towards the building and the plans included

a House of Mercy, a National School and an Orphanage. Gothic in style, the new Convent was

described as "one of the most beautiful ornaments of the ancient city of Cork".

- The Sisters moved to their new Convent on October 2, 1852. Today, Sisters are engaged in a variety of

different ministries in the city.

6. Booterstown:

- St Anne's, Booterstown, opened on July, 26 1838.
- A committee of wealthy gentlemen, set up to help the poor of the area, invited Catherine to take over

this work, especially as a typhus epidemic had left several orphans in need of care.

- Land and money were donated by the Hon Sidney Herbert for the building of a Convent, school and

orphanage.

- Sick Sisters from Baggot Street also convalesced in Booterstown.
- Catherine herself often stayed there and novices were brought there for outings, availing of the new

steam train.

7. Limerick:

- On September 24, 1838, Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, Catherine at the request of Most Reverend John Ryan, Bishop of Limerick, arrived in Limerick to establish the congregation in St Mary's Parish, in the old end of the city.
- Since 1812 The Poor Clare Sisters had been serving the people in their need but due to deaths and difficulties only two now remained.
- At their request, these Sisters were affiliated to the Mercy Congregation and the Convent formerly used by them was available for the new foundation.
- The gate to the original Convent in Limerick is the only relic of the past.
- A painting depicts Catherine and her Sisters coming through the gate and being met by The Poor Clare

Sisters carrying lighted candles.

8. Galway:

- On May 6, 1840 Catherine herself accompanied two Sisters – Sisters Teresa White and Catherine Leahy - to establish a foundation in Galway.
- They travelled by canal to Tullamore and next day proceeded to Ballinasloe along the canal and from there to Loughrea by long car. They passed the night at the Carmelite Convent and next day arrived in Galway.
- Initially they occupied a house in Lombard Street and immediately found scope for their work of mercy. Cholera and typhus were rampant.
- The Sisters were invited to Galway to care for the poor, the orphans and the uneducated.
- According to the census of 1841 there were 8,267 adults who could neither read nor write in Galway,

and Fr. Daly described his parish thus: "The houses in my parish are going to decay, for want of trade and commerce in the town... There is a change for the worse in the clothing, feeding and habitations of the people."

- There had been a famine in the 1820s and it was to come again in the 1840s.
- That was the city that the Sisters of Mercy came to in 1840. A number of postulants soon joined them

and as well as tending the sick in their homes and hospitals, they visited the jail, taught adults in

Sunday School and set up schools for children.

- In 1842 the Convent was transferred to St. Vincent's, where with major renovations and rebuilding it

still survives today.

- In 1851 they took charge of a Widows' and Orphans' asylum, and on the death of Miss Lynch, who had

founded the Magdalen Asylum, they took charge of the Magdalen Home. ○ The Sisters continue their apostolic works to the people of today.

9. Birr:

- The Parish Priest, Fr John Spain, invited Catherine to make a foundation in Birr.
- He hoped that the Sisters would be a healing presence in the parish, which was in the throes of the

Crotty Schism.

- The Crotty Schism" was begun by two cousins (the Crotty cousins) who broke off from the Roman

Catholic Church and began their own church in Birr. They were recruiting members from the Catholic

church in Birr, so the Catholic parish was very concerned.

- On the December 26, 1840 Catherine and four companions set out for Birr.
- They travelled to Tullamore by canal and spent the night there. The next day, they journeyed by coach

to Birr, where they were met by Father Spain.

- On New Year's Day, the Sisters attended Mass in the local church.
- They renewed their vows and were presented to the Congregation by Fr Spain in the following words:

"My dear people, I have a present to make to you ... I present to you the Sisters of Mercy, who by their example and pious instruction will draw upon our town the blessing of heaven."

- The Convent in Birr was Catherine's last Irish foundation and Catherine often referred to it as her last grandchild.