Foundations in Catholic Education

Presentation Sisters

The beginning

In 2003, the Irish Newspaper The Sunday Tribune conducted a Public Opinion Poll, which named Nano Nagle, Foundress of the Presentation Sisters, as the greatest Irish person of all time.

Nano Nagle was a woman of faith and integrity, who devoted her life and fortune to the education of poor children and the relief of those bowed down by oppression and poverty at a time when legislation in Ireland proscribed education and aid for Catholics.

A stroll around Cork City reveals many monu-
ments, even a bridge, erected in her honour. For could be of service in saving souls in any part of the globe, I would willingly do all in my power to be of service in saving souls in any part of the globe, I would willingly do all in my power.

If I were there in Cork, on Christmas Eve 1775, that Nano Nagle and three women who shared her vision came together as the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart, later renamed the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Nano Nagle told her Sisters, “we must teach the schools to all others”. She recognised the importance of education and so trained the children to be witnesses to the faith so that whenever they went they would proclaim the Good News.

“Love one another as you have hitherto done.”

“Our hearts were sad indeed when we saw the fields of our labours.” However, by the end of 1906, 100 children were enrolled in the school and a good beginning had been made. A postulant joined them there and they remained until 1984 with some moving to the mining town of Collie in 1902.

New horizons - Geraldton

More than a century later, Mother Joseph O’Connell wrote the following words in her diary: “21st May 1891, left Cork for Geraldton, Western Australia.”

At the invitation of Bishop Matthew Gibney, nine Sisters embarked on the SS Orient to realise Nano’s dream in a vast and distant land. The Sisters landed at Albany and travelled 55 weary hours by train to Perth.

The Congregation of the Presentation Sisters of Western Australia.

From 1984, the Sisters also responded to the needs of people in Papua New Guinea and Thailand. The scope of work was widening as foundations were established at Lockridge, Lesmurdie and Yangebup. New ministries were also taken up in parish, social work, chaplaincy and catechesis.

New initiatives

Following Vatican II and the Union of the Perth and Geraldton Congregations, there were many challenges to be faced. The number of vocations started to decline while the needs continued to be great.

The Sisters worked to provide schooling for newly arrived refugees and displaced persons from East Timor, Europe and the children of the fishing fleet based at Lancelin.

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A new millennium

Today a number of Sisters remain in their Order-owned schools, Iona Presentation College and Iona Presentation Primary School, both in Mosman Park. They are also involved in a number of systemic schools in the Diocese of Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome.

A variety of other ministries are also being undertaken by the Sisters in order to meet needs in the community. The ministries include tertiary and adult education, pastoral care in schools, community mental health, support for the physically impaired and disadvantaged and care and support for the frail, aged and terminally ill.

Over the last 114 years, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary have been, and continue to be, a significant and faith-filled presence in both the State of Western Australia and Thailand, maintaining their work and prayer in the tradition of Nano Nagle.