

Venerable
Catherine McAuley
Founded Order
Dublin, Ireland 1831



— Celebrating —
180 Years
Sisters of Mercy
in Australia



Mother
Ursula Frayne
Led arrival
Perth, Australia 1846



Sisters of Mercy 180th Anniversary Celebration

Wednesday, 14th January 2026

Mercy Place Ballarat – Residential Aged Care

Mass celebrated by:

Bishop Paul Bird – *Apostolic Administrator, Diocese of Ballarat*

Fr Mark Freeman – *Bishop-elect, Diocese of Ballarat*

Fr Justin Driscoll – *Parish Priest and Co-Pastor of Ballarat East*



L to R: Fr Justin Driscoll, Bishop-elect Fr Mark Freeman, & Bishop Paul Bird.

A joyful and reflective Mass was held at Mercy Place Ballarat on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, to celebrate the 180th Anniversary of the Sisters of Mercy arrival in Australia on January 8, 1846.

Just five years after the death of Venerable Catherine McAuley, founder of the order in 1831 in Dublin, a faith-filled and courageous group of seven Sisters disembarked on the shores of Fremantle, Perth, Western Australia. Led by Mother Ursula Frayne, her companions were Sisters Catherine Gogarty, Anne Xavier Dillon, Ignatia de la Hoyde, Aloysius Kelly, Baptist O'Connell and Evangelista O'Reilly. Known as 'the walking sisters' these pioneering women created positive bonds with the local indigenous people and reached out to settlers in need of assistance for health, education, food and social welfare concerns. Challenges and frustrations were often encountered but they persevered with tenacity and integrity. Their legacy continues to inspire and guide today.

In 1857, Mother Ursula Frayne again led the first foundation of Sisters of Mercy to establish a base in Victoria, located in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Along with other Mercy foundations that ventured from Ireland, England and Argentina, over time there grew to be fifty-two autonomous Mercy congregations in Australia – this included the former Ballarat East Congregation of Sisters of Mercy. Today, our local Sisters are now members of the *Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea* (ISMAPNG) and we are incredibly grateful to have twenty-three Sisters in our community. The current Pastoral Leader for this group is Sr Barbara Broad.

Excitingly, Mercy Place was host to Bishop Paul Bird, Fr Justin Driscoll, and our newly announced Bishop-elect Fr Mark Freeman, who concelebrated the Mass and led a magnificent celebration for the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates and the residents of Mercy Place. Welcome Fr Mark, we are delighted to meet you! The gathering also provided the opportunity to offer our deep gratitude and affection to Bishop Paul Bird who has led our faith community for nearly fourteen years. Thankyou Bishop Paul, may you enjoy a healthy and well-deserved retirement!

In true Mercy style, the hospitality and kitchen staff provided a delicious selection of savoury and sweet offerings to accompany 'a comfortable cuppa'. With fortuitous circumstances in play, it was a truly wonderful celebration that ended up acknowledging several significant milestones. Thankyou to all who attended and contributed!

Lucille O'Beirne, Pastoral Carer, Mercy Place Ballarat



Readers

Top L: Sr Chris Coghlan RSM

Top R: Sr Noreen Ryan RSM

Bottom L: Mrs Jo Rix, Mercy Associate

Bottom R: Fr Justin Driscoll – gospel & homily















Above L-R: Michael Taffe, Sr Berenice Kerr RSM, and Bishop-elect Fr Mark Freeman

Below L-R: Bishop Paul Bird, Sr Chris Coghlan RSM, and resident, Bobby.





Above L-R: Sr Geraldine Mugavin RSM, Sr Marie Davey RSM, Lucy O'Beirne (Pastoral Carer MPB & Mercy Associate), Anne-Marie English (Mercy Associate), Fr Justin Driscoll PP, Jo Rix (Mercy Associate), Alan McKinnon (Ballarat East Parishioner)



Above L-R: Apostolic Administrator Bishop Paul Bird, Lucy O'Beirne (Pastoral Carer MPB & Mercy Associate), Bishop-elect Fr Mark Freeman