

BOOK LAUNCH 3<sup>RD</sup> December, 2019

## **MOTHER XAVIER MAGUIRE - A WOMAN OF FAITH AND VISION**

In St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he says

...I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he called you.....

These words could have been said to Mother Xavier Maguire as she left Ireland, to begin her passage to Geelong, Victoria and as she searched for "the hope to which God called her".

Elizabeth Maguire, known affectionately as Eliza, grew up in a large family, which was considered to be well-to-do and all the children were well educated. It is uncertain how many brothers and sisters Eliza had, but two boys became Jesuit priests and four girls became Sisters of Mercy.

Eliza entered the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin at the age of 24, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1843, which was 18 months after the death of the Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley. Eliza was formally received into the Sisters of Mercy on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1834 and on that occasion, was given the name of Sister Mary Cecilia Xavier.

Sister Xavier's leadership qualities were evident from the beginning and she held positions of responsibility within the community. Within 12 years of entering, she was elected Mother Superior of the Community at Baggot Street.

Following a request from Bishop Goold, the Bishop of Melbourne, in June 1859, Mother Xavier agreed to lead a foundation to Geelong.

Accompanied by five sisters, she left Dublin on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1859 to sail for this unknown and far away land, Australia.

The Sisters docked in Melbourne on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1859 and after a brief stay with the Sisters in Fitzroy, arrived in Geelong on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1859 – the feast of St. Francis Xavier – 160 years ago today.

On arrival in Geelong, the Sisters were in temporary accommodation at St. Augustine's Orphanage in Newtown. It was from there that they immediately began their ministries – caring for the orphans, visitation of the sick and giving religious instructions.

During this time Mother Xavier, who was the appointed leader, was also establishing the religious community, modelled on their life and religious practices, as they were observed in Ireland.

Mother Xavier was a complex person, seeking “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” as St. Paul says, as she navigated this new land, new community and all of its challenges.

She was said to be warm and affectionate with the Sisters and at other times, critical and harsh in her judgements.

Mother Xavier had great talent for management, for leadership, and what we would call now, networking, as she and her sisters became part of the Catholic Community and the wider community in Geelong.

While the foundation was independent and autonomous, she valued the connections with the Dublin Mother House. She needed the support, a kind word and she also petitioned Dublin for loans, sisters to join her community and support for furnishings. She raised funds locally, had an eye to business, to the next Pound which would assist to sustain the foundation.

Mother Xavier was always grateful for the generosity of the people of Geelong, who assisted her in the sharing of the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy. Many offered their services and donated food, goods and even a horse and gig!

She had a huge capacity for ministry and demonstrated the hospitality of God in the many ministries offered on this site – the Orphanage, three schools, music classes and in addition, visited homes, the hospital and the jail. And at the same time, negotiated with the Bishop, priests, architects, builders, bankers and the like.

Mother Xavier's legacy, this magnificent site and College is a tribute to her vision, her hard work, her leadership and her sacrifices, all for the Glory of God, in whom she placed her trust.

Sister Helen Delaney, the author of this book, has a deep respect for history, a love for the Sisters of Mercy and for secondary education.

In this work, Helen has not only told the story of Mother Xavier Maguire, but she has also given a social commentary of the times and hardships of Ireland in the 1800s.

Helen has paid tribute to the many pioneering Mercy women who led foundations throughout the world. She has linked these founders and their endeavours to Mother Xavier, in direct relationships, or by influence and example.

Helen has also outlined the story of the foundation of Sacred Heart College then and progression to today, as we celebrate the life of Mother Xavier and remind ourselves that we do indeed "stand on the shoulders of those who go before us".

Thank you Helen, for presenting this legacy to us. Here in the grounds of the Sacred Heart College that Mother Xavier founded, I commend this book to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to launch this book.....Mother Xavier  
Maguire – A woman of Faith and Vision.

Kathleen Tierney rsm