

Josephite Foundations in Aotearoa-New Zealand: A Comparative Analysis of Diocesan and Central¹ Josephites' Early founding Experiences 1880 – 1908

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In 1877 the New Zealand government passed an Education Act establishing a national education system for the colony. Primary education was to be free, supported from the general revenue of the colony; compulsory, although local committees had some discretionary power; and secular. The secular clause of the Education Act meant that schools, which wished to retain religious education, were ineligible for any form of government assistance. The New Zealand Catholic bishops, in common with their Australian counterparts, were vehemently opposed to secular education provided by the state, and immediately set about establishing a parallel Catholic education system based on parish primary schools. They placed strong pressure on Catholics to support the nascent parochial school system, by forbidding Catholic parents to send their children to government schools under pain of refusal of the Sacraments and Christian burial (Simmons 1978: 63). The Catholic community not only had to ensure sufficient pupils for Catholic schools but also provide the finance to build schools and pay for their teachers.

¹ The two congregations of Sisters of St Joseph, which are the subject of this paper, shared common founders and a common charism. The original congregation split in 1876 over the issue of governance. During the years 1880 – 1908 the communities which belonged to the diocesan Josephites (Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth in Aotearoa-New Zealand) were under the authority of their local bishop. The central Josephites (Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand) had a centralised form of government under the leadership of the Mother General and her four Councillors, and were ultimately responsible to the Holy See.

A small number of Catholic primary schools had been established prior to 1877, predominantly staffed by lay teachers. From 1887 every parish priest was anxious to establish a Catholic primary school in his parish, preferably staffed by Religious. Not only would they ensure “that Catholic tone, that particular training imparted by members of a religious community” (Power 1997: 102), but they were also less mobile and less expensive to employ than their lay counterparts.

The first women’s religious congregation to travel to Aotearoa-New Zealand were the Sisters of Mercy, who arrived in Auckland in 1850, at the invitation of Bishop Pompallier, first Catholic bishop of this country.² The same community, at the request of Bishop of Wellington, Philippe Viard SM³, provided a group of Sisters to start a second Mercy congregation in his diocese in 1861. The Sisters of the Mission were established in Napier in 1864, and in Christchurch in 1868. Bishop Patrick Moran arrived in Dunedin in 1871 with ten Dominicans, who subsequently founded convents in Invercargill and Oamaru in 1881, and a third in Queenstown in 1883. This pattern of importing Religious to staff Catholic parish schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand was well established by the 1880s, when the two groups of Sisters of St Joseph arrived in the country.

The first Sisters of St Joseph arrive in Aotearoa-New Zealand

The first four Josephites, who landed in Wanganui (Diocese of Wellington) in 1880, were members of the “diocesan” Josephites, who had separated from the central

² Bishop Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier, Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania 1836 – 48; Apostolic Administrator 1848 – 60; Bishop of Auckland 1860 – 69.

³ Bishop Philippe Viard SM, Administrator 1848 – 60; Bishop of Wellington 1860 – 72.

Josephites in 1876. Fr Charles Kirk SM, parish priest of Wanganui (1875–1904), had spent three years in Sydney, where he had met Julian Tenison Woods, through the latter's friendship with the Marist Fathers. Kirk had heard from Woods about the nature of the work and spirit of the Sisters of St Joseph, and had also seen the sisters' contribution to Catholic education when he visited one of their schools in Bathurst (Hepburn 1979: 197). They seemed ideally suited to his educational plans for the Catholics of Wanganui, so he set about persuading Bishop Francis Redwood SM⁴ to invite the Sisters to establish a foundation in New Zealand.

While Kirk was welcoming the diocesan Josephites to Wanganui, Fr Louis Fauvel SM, parish priest of Temuka (1876–1904) in the southern part of the Diocese of Wellington, was writing to Mary MacKillop, Mother General of the central Josephites, imploring her,

for St Joseph's sake and good pleasure and also for the love of Jesus and Mary, please arrange all things with your council that 4 Sisters may be here at about Christmas or New Year's Day.⁵

He too knew something of the educational work of the Josephites from the time he had spent in Sydney, convalescing from an illness. While there he had met Bishop Christopher Reynolds⁶ and heard about the Josephites' willingness to teach in small rural areas. It was to be three years before Fauvel's request was granted. Not only were the Sisters in great demand for parish schools in Australia, but Mary's steadily

⁴ Francis Redwood, Bishop of Wellington 1874 – 1935, Archbishop 1887.

⁵ Fr L. Fauvel SM, Temuka to Reverend Mother, Adelaide, 2 July 1880, JANZ.

⁶ Christopher Reynolds, Bishop of Adelaide 1872 – 1893.

worsening relationship with Reynolds made him unwilling to release any Sisters from his own diocese to go to Aotearoa-New Zealand. However there was a third reason why Mary was initially reluctant to establish a Josephite community across the Tasman. She had heard that a community of diocesan Josephites was already teaching in the Wellington Diocese. In a letter to Redwood she explained her misgivings.

Difficulties might arise later on through being in the same diocese with a branch of those who separated from us in Bathurst. We cannot uphold them in what they have done nor recognize their right to be called Sisters of St Joseph. Have you, my Lord, considered any of these possible difficulties? We have and we dread them.⁷

Letters from both Redwood and Fauvel assured her that any contact between the two groups was most unlikely as the Wanganui Josephites were “300 miles distant from us and in another island, [and] are to us like if they were living in Hobart Town or Melbourne”.⁸ These assurances allayed Mary’s fears and in 1883 a group of three central Josephites arrived in Temuka to staff Fauvel’s parish school.

The news that a community of central Josephites was also teaching in the Wellington diocese reached Sr Hyacinth Quinlan, Mother General⁹ of the Wanganui community, and she was not pleased. Although the diocesan Josephites were too few in number to staff all the proposed schools in the Wellington area, Hyacinth felt that Redwood had

⁷ Mother Mary, Adelaide, to Bishop Redwood, New Zealand, 2 January 1882, JANZ.

⁸ Fr Fauvel, Temuka, to Revd. Mother, Adelaide, 9 March 1882, JANZ.

⁹ Mother General of the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth 1880 – 1886.

behaved in a duplicitous manner in securing the services of the congregation from which her sisters had split in 1876, and placing them in the same diocese. It would appear that although they were well separated geographically, there was gossip circulating about their differences. In a letter to Redwood concerning the situation of her sisters at the Wanganui River Mission, Hyacinth revealed her annoyance about this gossip and, interestingly, that the differences between the two congregations appeared to be a forbidden topic of conversation within her community.

I also wish, My Lord, that those who go up the river and who may know something about the division between the two branches of the Srs of St Joseph would keep it quiet and not talk freely about it amongst themselves. It is never mentioned in the community here, and I do not think it would edify others to hear it.¹⁰

This was not the end of the matter. Redwood, a frequent visitor to Rome, was aware that the Vatican had confirmed the principle of central government for the central Josephites and placed the Institute under the care of a “Cardinal Protector” based in Rome (Foale 1989: 131). He realised that problems would arise if there were two different congregations in his diocese with the same name and habit, and knew enough of church law to know that the group under pontifical protection would be allowed to keep their original name and habit. In February 1885 he wrote to Hyacinth, requesting her "to make a slight change in your name and habit. I wish your sisters henceforth to go by the name

¹⁰ Sr Hyacinth, Wanganui, to Bp Redwood, Wellington, 10 July 1884, HD2, MAW.

of Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth", and change the colour of the habit from brown to black.¹¹

Hyacinth was furious and made her feelings known in a penciled note to Kirk.

And first of all, I can not help saying that I feel very indignant and that I do not intend to be made a fool of, in future, by any Bp. I have had quite enough of this. Through being too simple I have lost both my time and my talents, & have gained nothing instead. The Bishop finds himself in a fix with the other Srs and us, and to get out of the difficulty he comes to me & wants me to decide upon changing our Title. Otherwise why did he not think of doing so before. He did not ask my opinion about things that would be of more importance to the good of our community. I do not wish for any change in the Title unless something permanent is to be gained by it & the same will also be adopted by the other houses of our Branch in Bathurst and elsewhere.¹²

It is most unlikely that Kirk allowed Hyacinth to send a letter on this subject to the bishop, for in a note appended to another of Hyacinth's letters written around the same time Kirk writes:

Don't say what **you wish** about the other branch. The Bishop has appointed me his agent with you and this can be done by me if Bp. wishes anything in the matter.¹³

¹¹ Redwood, Christchurch, to Sr Hyacinth, Wanganui, 18 February 1885, WA.

¹² Sr Hyacinth, Wanganui, to Fr Kirk, Wanganui, [19 March 1885], MAW.

¹³ Kirk, Wanganui, to Sr Hyacinth, Wanganui, n.d., HD2, MAW.

The Sisters had little option but to make the requested changes, as they were subject to the authority of their bishop. Sr Claire Rubie, writing some years later, noted that "when the Sisters appeared in Church clothed in black ... the people burst into tears thinking the nuns must be in some great grief to dress in black" (Huscott 1947: 4) and another Sister wrote "... some of the parishioners thought the Holy Father must have died" (Memoirs 2 n.d.: 14). In May 1887 the new Diocese of Christchurch was created and as a consequence the two congregations of Sisters of St Joseph found themselves in separate dioceses.

Josephite schools founded in the first twenty-five years

All foundations made by the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth in their first twenty-five years were located in the Diocese of Wellington because they were under the jurisdiction of their local bishop. By 1904 sixty-two Sisters were staffing eight primary schools and one secondary school. Two of the primary schools – St Joseph's (1883) and Holy Infancy (1899) were in Wanganui, as was the girls' secondary school, Sacred Heart College. The other six primary schools were in Hawera (1885), Hastings (1888), Otaki (1894), Waipawa (1896), Manaia (1902) and Patea (1904). There was a short-lived initiative on the Wanganui River at Hiruharama, which lasted for fourteen months until Suzanne Aubert and postulants of the Third Order of Mary Regular took over the care of the mission school. The central Josephites, under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, were more widely spread over the North and South Islands. By 1908 sixty-five Josephites were responsible for fourteen primary schools¹⁴, five of which were located in the South Island. Three were in the Christchurch Diocese: Temuka (1883), Kerrytown (1884) and Waimate

¹⁴ This number does not include the primary schools in Rangiora (1887 – 1897) and Palmerston North (1892 – 1893) where the respective parish priests decided to replace the Josephites with different religious congregations.

(1891). A further two were in Dunedin Diocese: Arrowtown (1897) and Port Chalmers (1898). The remaining nine were in the Diocese of Auckland: three were in Auckland city and suburbs: Newton (1884), Grey Lynn (1886) and Remuera (1889). The other six were scattered in rural areas south and north of Auckland city: Meeanee (1886), Matata (1891), Paeroa (1900), Rotorua (1903), Tokaanu (1905) and Whangarei (1906). Once the Diocese of Christchurch was created from the southern section of Wellington Diocese, no further central Josephite foundations were made in the Diocese of Wellington.¹⁵

The establishment of new foundations followed a similar pattern for both congregations. A parish priest would write to the Mother General, extolling the benefits of his area and warning the Sisters of the dire consequences for the faith of local Catholics if their children were not able to attend a Catholic school. Occasionally the initiative came from a local lay person, and in rare instances from the Sisters themselves. There is some evidence to suggest that Mary MacKillop made arrangements to start a school in Rotorua (Power 1997: 143) and that the diocesan Josephites were active in setting up a Catholic school in Patea (Stevens 2001: 53). Not all the schools staffed by the Sisters during these first twenty-five years were new foundations. Lay teachers were already working in a number of schools before the arrival of the Josephites. However in the climate of the perceived threat of compulsory secular education, even Protestant parents, preferred their children to be taught by Religious (at least in the opinion of some parish priests).

¹⁵ The first central Josephite foundation made in the re-constituted Wellington Diocese was at Eastbourne in 1950. The first diocesan Josephite foundation made outside the Diocese was at Mairangi Bay in 1961.

I am convinced that young ladies, however able they may be, will not succeed well by themselves alone. ... They have not the prestige of the religious habit, and many families, even Protestants, who send their children to our school, would be disappointed if that school were conducted by **seculars**. They want nuns, and to nuns alone they will give all their confidence ...(Power 1997: 68).

The central Josephites were quite willing to use lay teachers to plug the gaps until sufficient Religious arrived to staff a school. The first Sisters to come to Auckland were accompanied by two lay teachers, and two lay teachers taught at St Joseph's, Meeanee for seven months until the remainder of the community arrived from Australia. There are records of lay music teachers at both Meeanee and Waimate and "the legendary Miss Bell" (Power 1997: 46) taught in the Infant Department at St Joseph's, Grey Lynn for many years. The diocesan Josephites did not have to wait for Sisters to come from Australia to make up their teaching complement, so were less likely to use lay teachers. However Miss M. Barrie joined the convent staff at Otaki, where she remained as a music teacher from 1905 until her retirement in the early 1950s. Curricula at both congregations' schools were similar, with the exception of Sacred Heart College. The four founding diocesan Josephites arrived in 1880, to be met with a *fait accompli* by Kirk. St Joseph's was to continue to function as a parish school, but the newly created Sacred Heart College was to be a select school, which took boarders. The prospectus for the secondary school offered:

the usual branches of a good English education; together with Vocal and Instrumental music, Drawing, Flower-making, and Plain and Ornamental Needle-work. . . . Boarders – of whom only a few will be taken . . .¹⁶

Dismay spread through the small community. Taking boarders and teaching accomplishments had never been part of the original vision. Hyacinth protested to Redwood and wrote to Julian Tenison Woods for advice. Neither was prepared to take up their cause, so they had to cope as best they could.

Four simple Sisters had a problem to face. The Superioress, Mother Hyacinth, was dismayed as she had only come to see the three Sisters settled and she intended to return to Perthville. [She apparently put her concerns before Redwood but the archbishop was in favour of the proposed boarding school (Memoirs 2).] She consulted Fr Woods and he advised her to try and carry out Fr Kirk's plan. He said Obedience to the Bishop's authority would bring a blessing and help. [His reply left the Sisters to cope as best they could.] Ah those early days! The enormity of the work, all so new to them, left humanly speaking heavy hearts, with four women determined to carry on. Trust in God alone was needed. Nobody could understand the difficulties to be overcome (Huscott 1927: 2).

Boarders continued to be problematic for both congregations in these early years. From the very beginning of the Institute boarders were only taken if they would otherwise be deprived of a Catholic education. In his “Rules for the Institute of St Joseph”, Julian had cautioned:

¹⁶ The first prospectus for Sacred Heart Convent School, WA.

Boarders may not be taken except in the rarest and most exceptional cases.

They must be the children of poor parents who have no other means of educating them ...they must pay no more than is sufficient for their maintenance (Archives August 1984: 44).

He recognized the difficulty communities would have in maintaining their “regular observance” with boarders in the house. Foale, writing about Australian Josephite communities, notes that “the taking of boarders was another bone of contention with the sisters who complained that the presence of young children in their convents disrupted community living” (1989: 165). Although distances in Aotearoa-New Zealand were not as great as those in Australia, there were still children who needed to be at least weekly boarders if they were to attend a Catholic school, and greater or lesser numbers¹⁷ of boarders were taken in almost every Josephite convent, diocesan and central, in these early years.

Music teaching became the financial mainstay for both congregations. Initially Mary MacKillop had been strongly opposed to the teaching of music (MacKillop January 1980: 44-45) but in 1889 the General Chapter of the Sisters of St Joseph decided “That music may be taught by the sisters where necessary or advisable (Foale 1989: 129, Footnote 2)”. This permission was gratefully received by the Sisters in New Zealand because of the income it provided.

¹⁷ Apart from Sacred Heart Convent School, which was coping with twenty-eight boarders in 1892 (and numbers continued to increase), the largest number of boarders in any diocesan Josephite convent was Otaki, with twenty boarders in 1904. Numbers of boarders in central Josephite convents tended to be fewer, although a 1920 photo of Matata boarders shows eight young pupils. Most rural convents took between one and three boarders.

Relationship between Josephites and Maori

The relationship between Josephites and the tangata whenua – Maori people – reflected the attitude of the local Catholic Church at this time. The prevailing view of the nineteenth century Catholic Church was that Maori spirituality was heathen and their culture inferior to western culture.¹⁸

the aim of the early missionaries was to “civilise” as well as to Christianise the natives, and this wise policy was pursued with marked success by all the early Missionaries in the colony. (Marist Fathers 1927).

Redwood, “appears to have been more concerned with the needs of the growing pakeha settler communities in his diocese than with a missionary outreach to the Maori race, which he considered was heading for extinction” (Bergin 1989: 30). The Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth and St Joseph of the Sacred Heart had been invited to New Zealand to teach the children of the settler church. Given the spread of Maori people in many of the rural areas in which they worked, they were often in contact with Maori children and families, but this was accidental rather than intentional. Interviews with older diocesan Josephites have confirmed that until the 1970s, Maori children in their schools, were expected to become brown-skinned European Catholics. There was little attempt to learn about or appreciate a Maori cultural perspective. This did not mean that many Sisters did not have a deep personal concern for Maori people. In their catechetical work outside school hours they often assisted the Maori Missioners to prepare children

¹⁸ Suzanne Aubert was an exception in her appreciation of Maori herbal medicine. Bishop Pompallier also instructed his missioners to discern between Maori cultural practices which were in opposition to Christian teaching, and those which were not.

for the First Sacraments. In Otaki in particular, a number of Sisters formed a special relationship with the local Maori, so much so that when these Sisters died, the local Maori asked permission for them to be buried in the urupa (cemetery) on Pukekaraka Hill.

The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart were brought more directly into relationship with Maori when the Mill Hill Fathers invited them to teach in schools in their Maori missions of Matata (1891) and Tokaanu (1905). Both these missions were fairly isolated from European settlers, and in Tokaanu in particular, the school roll was entirely Maori children. Regardless of the situation, the central Josephites, like the diocesan Sisters, ran traditional Catholic schools. At Matata and Tokaanu lessons were taught in English, although prayers and catechism were taught in Maori. There was no attempt to inculturate lessons in either Catholic or state schools, and given the attitude behind the establishment of Native Schools,¹⁹ it was clear that the state authorities believed Maori would be better off if they assimilated European values. Despite this belief, the work of some Sisters among the Maori became legendary. They learnt the language²⁰, were sympathetic to Maori culture and in true Josephite spirit shared the

¹⁹ The Native Schools Act of 1867 was a major shift in government policy. Rather than helping churches rebuild mission schools after the wars, the government offered secular, state-controlled primary schools to Maori communities who petitioned for them. In return for providing a suitable site, the government provided a school, teacher, books and materials. The use of Maori language for education was prohibited by the Act. . . The primary mission was to assimilate the Maori into European culture . . . Throughout the 1900s the numbers of Native Schools decreased and Maori increasingly attended Board of Education schools. The Native Schools remained distinct from other New Zealand schools until 1969, when the last one hundred and eight Native Schools were transferred to the control of education boards.
<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Nativeschools>. Downloaded 30 September 2004.

²⁰ Sr Basil O'Driscoll, who spent many years at both Matata and Panguru, spoke fluent

spartan living conditions of these isolated settlements, accepting what came along with practical good humour. It was not until the post-Vatican Two years that the diocesan Josephites in particular, recognized the implications of partnership in the Treaty of Waitangi and the inherent potential of Maori culture and spirituality as a gift to the church.

Relationship with parish priests

Relationships with Maori tended to be peripheral for the majority of foundations during these early years, but relationships with clergy certainly impacted on all communities. Naturally local priests took a strong interest in their parish schools and the story of the Josephites in Aotearoa-New Zealand records varying relationships with the clerical church. Between 1880 and 1908 most parishes in the Wellington Diocese (and Christchurch Diocese after 1887) were under the care of the Society of Mary Fathers, who outnumbered secular priests by almost 3:1 (Simmons 1978: 90). These men tended to be supportive and caring, but had definite ideas about how schools should be run and Sisters deployed. The diocesan Josephites who lived and taught in Wanganui certainly had mixed feelings about Kirk, who was parish priest there for their first twenty-five years in Aotearoa-New Zealand. A talented but strong-willed man, he believed there was only one way to run a parish and that was his way. He took an active and detailed interest in every aspect of the Sisters' work and congregational life, and there is evidence of some stormy confrontations with both Hyacinth and Claire.²¹ Stories about Kirk's interference in the day-to-day affairs of the congregation continued to be handed

Maori. A number of others had a smattering of common words and phrases.

²¹ Pencilled, undated notes, HD2, MAW; "Memoirs 2"; Huscott "Memoirs".

on through the generations of Sisters, so that even in the 1990s older Sisters spoke in hushed tones about the problems he had caused for the congregational leadership.²²

The central Josephites had their own problems with Fr Augustine Aubrey, another Marist, who arrived in Rangiora (South Island) as the new parish priest eleven years after the Sisters had started teaching there. He engineered their removal, ostensibly because “the time of their usefulness in this parish is over and that a change of Order is imperiously demanded by the necessities of the place”(Power 1997: 80). In reality it seemed he had ambitions to set up a select school in Rangiora, staffed by the Sisters of the Mission.²³ Mary dealt with the situation in a very charitable and low key manner, preferring her Sisters to “retire as quietly as possible”²⁴ despite the Bishop John Grime’s²⁵ attempts to persuade them to stay. The congregation also experienced some difficulties in their relationship with the Benedictine Fathers in Auckland during this period.

Priests, who were members of Religious Orders, had a common formation and a shared charism, but diocesan priests, given the isolated nature and frequently large area of early parishes, often tended to be “individuals”. This factor, together with the hierarchical nature of the 19th century Catholic church, meant that priests saw themselves as the sole decision makers in parishes, responsible for both spiritual and material decisions.

Sometimes this resulted in legendary priests whose ability to relate to their parishioners

²² Taped interviews with a number of the older Sisters, by the author, Whanganui 1992 – 1994.

²³ The Sisters of Our Lady of the Mission were founded in Lyons, France in 1861. Their first foundation outside France was in Napier, Aotearoa-New Zealand, in 1865.

²⁴ Mary MacKillop, Waimate, to Dr Grimes, Dublin, 31 December 1897, JANZ.

²⁵ Bishop John Grimes SM, Bishop of Christchurch 1887 – 1915.

in practical as well as spiritual matters, often with a sense of humour, meant that they were remembered with affection in these parishes long after they had been transferred to another parish or had died. Others often found themselves in a situation where their responsibilities outran their abilities, or they arrived in a parish with a model of leadership that disregarded the local situation and people. The women who joined the Josephites, whether central or diocesan, tended to be country girls or the daughters of small town tradesmen. Their practical upbringing meant that most of them were able to cope with the idiosyncrasies of local priests with humour and good sense. Apart from a few “horror” stories, there are many stories of supportive and helpful priests who went out of their way to ensure that “their” Sisters had the resources they needed. Perhaps the priests with whom the central Josephites felt the most affinity were the Mill Hill Fathers. Not only were these men from Europe dedicated to St Joseph, but they were hard workers who lived very simply and ministered to the poor – a reflection of the Josephite charism.

Separation and connection

Once the diocesan Josephites had arrived in Wanganui they were separated, to all intents and purposes, from their Australian Sisters. Although a few letters went back and forth and Julian continued to write to some of the Sisters, they were now completely under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Wellington. All decisions around congregational life and the apostolate were made at the local level and within the New Zealand context. The central Josephites were in a very different position as they retained their connection with Australia. The South Island was made a separate province at the

1889 Chapter (Sydney) while the North Island remained part of the Sydney Province. In 1905 both islands were included in the New Zealand Province, and the Provincial House was moved from Temuka to Auckland (St Benedicts). While Provincial Superiors made most day to day decisions, decisions around congregational life and the apostolate were made by the Mother General and her four councilors in Sydney.

This situation meant that the diocesan Josephites had more autonomy in decision making for their congregation, and policies were developed which were relevant to the New Zealand situation, bearing in mind that any decisions were always subject to permission from their local bishop. The central Josephites on the other hand, while subject to Australian control, also had support from their Australian Sisters and a shared sense of direction within the wider group. The founding Sisters were able to share their home-sickness and their new experiences with friends in different Australian Josephite communities. Local Superiors and Provincials could and did write for advice on anything from text-books for schools, to suitable holy pictures for prayer books, and whether it was appropriate for pupils to wear costumes for school concerts (Letters of first Sisters).

Numbers of young women asked to enter the Josephites from the time of the arrival of the founding Sisters of both congregations in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Seventeen years after the first foundations were made, forty-eight diocesan Josephites and thirty-three central Josephites had been professed. By 1893 almost all postulants entering the Wanganui novitiate were New Zealand born. The central Josephite communities in Aotearoa-New Zealand continued to rely on New Zealand postulants augmented by

Australian Sisters, predominantly from New South Wales (Foale 1989: 181). The location of their novitiates affected the two congregations in different ways. The diocesan Josephites' novitiate was in Wanganui – in fact Kirk had three postulants waiting for the arrival of the four founding Sisters in 1880. Their novitiate was located within the convent during these early years, so most postulants and novices, even if they were helping out in rural schools, were within reasonable traveling distance of the Mother House. Although New Zealand vocations to the central Josephites were received as postulants in local convents, they went to Sydney for their novitiate year. Having the novitiate in Sydney posed some staffing problems for the schools. As foundations multiplied in Aotearoa-New Zealand, both congregations experienced a shortage of teaching personnel, but at least the diocesan Josephites could use postulants and novices to fill in for Sisters who were ill. With their novices across the Tasman for a year, this was not an option for the central Josephites. Staff shortages often meant that postulants had to wait a considerable time before they could make the trip across the Tasman to the Sydney novitiate.

We have two postulants here 14 months nos[sic]. They seem to be getting downcas about being put off so often in going to Sydney. After a while we will get a good many more, but we cannot depend on postulants very much. I don't think we will get two more as good as these. If we had a professed Sister, they could go now.²⁶

On the positive side a common novitiate for Australians and New Zealanders gave the New Zealanders a wider experience of what it meant to be Josephite. It also brought

²⁶ Sr Immaculata, Temuka, to Mother Mary, Sydney, 27 January 1895. JANZ.

home to the New Zealanders some marked differences between the cultures of the two countries. While some New Zealand Josephites returned home to teach, others spent a greater or lesser time in Australian Josephite schools.

Living the charism

The original charism handed on by Julian and Mary continued to be lived out by the two New Zealand congregations over these years. The reasons for their foundations and the context in which they were founded remained constant from 1880 – 1908, so there was little reason for adaptation or change in the way they carried out their apostolate. Most Sisters were teaching parish primary schools²⁷ in small rural towns. While Wanganui and Auckland, where a number of the schools were founded, were provincial towns, they could not be classified as cities during this period, and the select boarding school in Wanganui had not been of the Sisters' choosing.

Sisters in both congregations not only taught full time in their schools during the week, but also traveled to outlying districts to prepare children for the First Sacraments during the weekends. In the Wellington Diocese for example, the Hastings Sisters regularly visited Waipawa to take catechism classes and once a convent and school had been established there, the Waipawa Sisters travelled to Waipukurau each week until 1925, to teach catechism classes. Similarly the Manaiia Sisters went to Okaiawa to prepare country children for the Sacraments (memoirs 2 n.d.: 5). As well as taking catechism classes outside school hours, they made a point of trying to visit the parents of all their pupils,

²⁷ A small number of Sisters were designated "House Sisters". While they did not teach, they were still expected to visit those in need.

and in this way were also brought in touch with the poor, the sick, the lonely and the bereaved. Where possible they tried to put into practice Julian's concern, contained in the original Rule, that

the Sisters] duty is to do all the good they can, and never see an evil without trying how they may remedy it . . . to leave nothing untried, no matter how difficult, it may advance the glory of God, the good of souls, and the prevention of sin in the world (Woods January 1980: 23-24).

There are records in both congregations of Josephites visiting gaols, hospitals, the sick and elderly, as well as the homes of their pupils.

The diocesan Josephites, with their experience of the separation from the central Josephites, emphasized Julian's role as Father Founder. In the early years of the Bathurst Sisters, Julian was not only retained by Bishop Matthew Quinn²⁸ to frame their Rule, but he also provided inspiration as their visiting spiritual director for some time. The Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth (New Zealand), published in 1886, also contained Julian's original vision of Franciscan piety, although this would be modified in the early 1900s. When Julian and Quinn fell out around 1882, Julian continued to write to some of the Sisters, included the Whanganui Sisters (Press 1979: 169). These letters were printed in a small book entitled *Letters of our founder*, and used frequently for spiritual reflection. Sr Teresa Schmitt, Mother General from 1899 to 1908, was reputedly devoted to the Rule and to Julian – “she was scrupulous in following his directions in all things; nothing was to be changed from the customs the Sisters brought from Perthville” (Memoirs 2 n.d.: 4).

²⁸ Bishop Matthew Quinn, Bishop of Bathurst 1865 – 1885.

Julian died in 1889, but Mary lived until 1909. A prolific letter writer, she retained a strong sense of affection and concern for all her Sisters and remained in contact with the central Josephites in Aotearoa-New Zealand throughout their first twenty-five years. She also visited the New Zealand Sisters four times between 1894 and 1902. While in the country Mary visited schools, checked pupils' levels of achievement, reviewed the state of buildings and equipment, and attended displays of work and concerts. In between these tasks she wrote reports on the condition of convents and their communities, organized retreats for the Sisters with priests, visited benefactors and banks, organized transport to get to the next community and negotiated fare discounts. Whenever she had a spare moment, she wrote letters – letters to Sisters in Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand, to family members, parish priests and friends. While the diocesan Josephites regarded Julian as their Father Founder, the central Josephites stressed Mary's role as Mother Foundress – she was the one who encouraged them and reminded them of what it meant to live as a Sister of St Joseph.

To the outsider the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth and St Joseph of the Sacred Heart may have seemed indistinguishable from the other simple vowed Religious who taught in primary and secondary schools throughout the North and South Islands. Their apostolate had similarities, they were obedient to the same canon law, and like the Mission Sisters and the Mercy Sisters, they struggled to balance the demands of an active apostolate with the requirements of a contemplative lifestyle. However the pattern of their New Zealand stories identifies them as unmistakably Josephite. On the whole, they taught in small, rural centres, following their founder's vision of providing a Catholic education for

ordinary people whose faith seemed threatened by a secular state education system. The poverty and simplicity, which Julian and Mary had seen as identifying characteristics of the congregation they had founded, remained a central feature of the New Zealand Josephite spirit. They lived among the people with whom they worked, in similar houses, often with only the bare necessities. The "simplicity" and "ordinariness" of the congregation was a consistent reason given by older Sisters when asked what had attracted them to join the Sisters of St Joseph, whether central or diocesan. There was, as Woods had always hoped, no "fine ladyism" among these women. Predominantly the daughters of small farmers, tradesmen and rural townspeople, they fitted easily into their local communities. Their willingness to go wherever they were needed reflects the energy and enthusiasm shown by Julian in planning an education system for the whole of the Adelaide Diocese on the guarantee of only two religious.

The experiences of the two Josephite congregations in Aotearoa-New Zealand in their first twenty-five years reveal differences but many similarities. The differences – habit, location, diocesan versus central government, and an enduring legacy of ill-feeling around the 1876 split – were more the result of history than of any deep seated beliefs. When both congregations followed the Vatican II directive to re-visit the original inspiration behind the founding of the Sisters of St Joseph and reflect on the charism of their founders, they discovered that not only did they share the same charism, but there were many facets of congregational life which they had in common. Each came to appreciate how both Julian's and Mary's contribution had made the dream of the Sisters of St Joseph a reality.

Archival Material

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