



Australian Pilgrimage

Facilitator Handbook and Resources

Preamble

This pilgrimage is intended to provide the pilgrim with an opportunity to come to a closer understanding of the story of the earliest years of the foundation of the Sisters of Charity in Australia. It aims to assist the pilgrim to:

- connect with the five women who made that first journey, took those first steps on this soil and commenced those works of charity which would grow into our ministries today, and;
- encourage the pilgrim to consider how their heart and mind is responding to the call to continue these great works in new and contemporary contexts.

The pilgrimage draws its spirituality from the faith and vision of Mary Aikenhead herself, and considers how the lived experience of this group of five women of varying ages, background and personality transplanted and nurtured this original spirituality for a new foundation, listening for where they might be called and seeking where they would be 'extensively useful'.

It recognises that which Mary Aikenhead always knew, that the very humanity of each Sister could be her greatest strength or her keenest challenge, but that ultimately they had but the divine providence of the Lord to guide and support their work.

And it calls on each pilgrim who traces these footsteps to recognise their unique humanity, to understand their individual journey of faith, and to discern their place in this continuing story, to honour those who have walked before them, and to walk the path that they will create for those who will follow them.

The Australian Pilgrimage experience aims to:

- build awareness of the foundation story through a focus on 'people in place'
- develop an understanding of the humanity and personality of the five founding Sisters
- reflect on the call to ministry and the response of these early Sisters
- facilitate personal reflection and discernment around our own call to ministry and the connection to our 'place'
- encourage personal action in contemporary ministry

Australian Pilgrimage Structure

Phase 1:	Perspective	immersion in the story we hear
Phase 2:	Participation	immersion in the places we stand, immersed with the people we follow
Phase 3:	Response	reflection from our heart

Australian Pilgrimage Materials

1. Australian Pilgrimage: Sydney and Parramatta

This booklet is the first resource for the pilgrims. It outlines the setting and expectations for the pilgrimage and is designed to establish context as each participant undertakes initial engagement with the pilgrimage itself.

It contains the:

- formation framework within which the pilgrimage is conducted
- aims of the pilgrimage experience
- pilgrimage structure
- phases of the pilgrimage

2. What is Pilgrimage?

This resource provides background material on the notion of pilgrimage both as a physical and religious or spiritual journey. It is intended to allow the pilgrim to explore why they are undertaking the pilgrimage, and what they will expect to gain from this experience.

Notions of pilgrimage within the Christian faith tradition are explained as well as approaches to pilgrimage from other faith perspectives. The final section of this resource contains some reflective material drawn from Catholic Church and other sources which prompt the pilgrim to consider nature of the journey they are about to undertake.

3. Pre-pilgrimage Booklet

This resource sets the historical context for the pilgrim and brings them into an understanding of the lived experience of the first five sisters from their arrival through to the establishment of St Vincent's Hospital and St Vincent's College.

It contains material which tells the story of each of the first Sisters, as well as the religious and social influences on their fledgling ministry. The use of questions help guide the pilgrim to a fuller understanding of the personality and nature of each of the first five sisters, with the aim of them connecting with one through whose eyes they will interpret the stages of the pilgrimage. The questions also ask them to consider how issue of authority and religion might have impacted upon the Sisters not only as they undertook their work, but also as individuals with very human capabilities and fallibilities.

4. The steps we take

This resource accompanies the pilgrim on their journey through the sites and places that are significant to the story of the first five sisters. It focuses not only on what took place at each site, but also on who was involved, how they reacted and what this might have meant not only for that individual, but for the group of sisters as a community. At each site one of the sisters, through the voice of a pilgrim speaks about their response to the ministry at this site, what they are feeling and how they see their companions.

Outline of Pilgrimage

1. Initial Meeting

At the initial meeting pilgrims are given a copy of the first two resources; *Australian Pilgrimage: Sydney and Parramatta* and *What is Pilgrimage?*

The focus of this meeting is to develop a clear understanding amongst the pilgrim of the process and expectations associated with the pilgrimage, and for them to develop a personal sense of why they are undertaking it. It is hoped that at this session some deeper exploration of the notion of pilgrimage will take place and that each pilgrim will come to view the pilgrimage as a journey of spiritual renewal undertaken to increase their commitment to the mission of the Sisters of Charity, carried forward by the vision and mission of Mary Aikenhead Ministries and finding expression in their work within their own ministry.

2. Pre Pilgrimage Activity

Pilgrims are given this booklet to prepare for their active involvement and engagement with the pilgrimage. It is an opportunity for them to scaffold their understanding of the early years of the ministry of the Sisters of Charity in Australia. It is intended that they would use these materials to prepare themselves for undertaking the pilgrimage, for identifying and connecting with one of the first five sisters and for reflecting upon how that sister's experience would have shaped her role in this ministry. Working on their own they read the materials, answer the questions and come to empathise with one of the sisters, so that they can reflectively and genuinely draw inspiration from her while on the pilgrimage, and as they return to their own ministry.

3. Pilgrimage: Sydney and Parramatta

The pilgrimage covers five significant sites for the early ministry of the Sisters of Charity in Australia. At each site we learn about the conditions and constraints which existed and we come to understand the response of the early sisters. We are encouraged to see through their eyes and hear from their voices what impelled them on in each case, and how they remained committed to their ministry despite sometimes encountering great resistance. At the completion of each visit to a site the pilgrims gather in prayer.

4. Post Pilgrimage Discussion

Upon completion of the pilgrimage, and after some time, the pilgrims gather again to reflect on where this journey has taken them and what they have learnt about not only the story they belong to, but how they will take that story into its next stage. The emphasis here is on building renewed understanding for their work within their ministry. The pilgrim commits to bringing to life the spirit of the sisters in new contexts and for new times.