

Short Histories

Use this fact sheet to learn more about St Mary's Cathedral after your visit.

Community Services

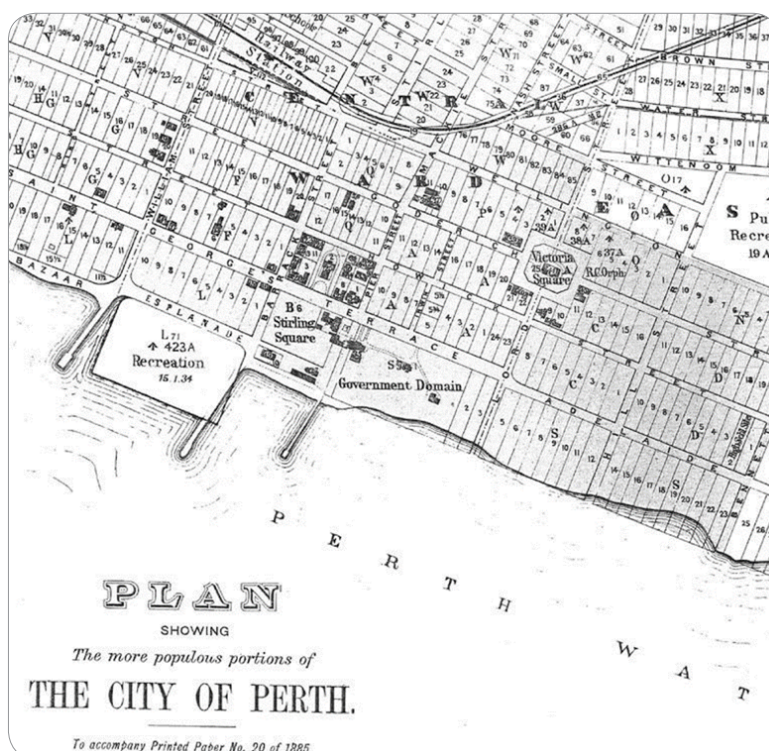
In the 1840s, from the church and convent at Victoria Square, Bishop John Brady (1845-1871) and the Sisters of Mercy began Catholic community services to assist the poor, sick and needy of all religious denominations, which MercyCare and other Catholic organisations have since continued.

In 1847, the Sisters founded St Francis Xavier's Benevolent Institution for school-age children from outer areas, destitute children, and Aboriginal girls. In 1868, at the request of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (est. 1865) the girls from the Poor House transferred to the care of the Sisters of Mercy, attending the school at Victoria Square. Initially known as the Sisters of Mercy's Orphanage, it was the first orphanage in the colony (see fig. 1). In 1872, the Catholic Boys' Orphanage opened at Subiaco. Bishops Martin Griver (1873-1886) and Matthew Gibney (1886-1910) were closely associated with these and later orphanages that continued association with the cathedral by way of attendance at services. From the 1870s, the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society assisted Catholics in Perth in need.

In the 1890s gold boom, when there was rapid population growth and limited health care in Perth and at the goldfields, Bishop Gibney invited the Sisters of St John of God to Western Australia to provide service (see fig. 2). In 1894, they established their hospital in a house he owned in Adelaide Terrace that served until a purpose-built hospital and a convent and church opened at Leederville, in 1898.

Prison visiting, assisting prisoners on release, and assisting their families has been an important service by the clergy and others associated with the cathedral since the 1840s. In the convict transportation era (1850–68) their spiritual care and assistance to convicts, to ticket-of-leave men and to exiles was notable. From 1902, Sisters of the Good Shepherd gave shelter and support to women in need, including female prisoners, initially at Adelaide Terrace, then at Leederville.

Catholic migrants have always been welcomed into the church community. Post-World War II, with increased European migration to Australia, the population grew and services to assist migrants were initiated or expanded, including those provided by Catholic organisations based at Victoria Square. There, cottages were converted to offices for social services in 1972. Community services and pastoral care associated with St Mary's Cathedral continue to this day.



Left: Portion of the Perth town plan, in Votes and Proceedings, 1885. The Catholic orphanage (est. 1868) and convent (1871) are on lot C11, adjacent to Victoria Square. Note: the siting of some buildings on lots A21 and 22 (also adjacent to the square) appears to be inaccurate when compared with late 1890s sewerage drawings.