

Mother Gonzaga Barry

Mary Barry
(1834 -1915)

Mary was a much loved child of a middle class family, well educated in Loreto schools and capable and successful in her vocation.

She was born in Wexford on 24th July 1834 the eldest of seven children and grew up in Enniscorthy where her father was the first manager of the National Bank of Ireland.

Mary chose a vocation with her teachers, the Loreto Sisters, and in 1853 at 19 years old she went to Rathfarnham as a postulant and was received as a novice in February 1854.

Whilst still a novice, Mother Gonzaga Barry became Mistress of the Day School at Rathfarnham and at 25 years old she was appointed Mistress of Novices at Gorey.

In 1867 she was appointed Superior of Gorey and in 1872 founded the Loreto Convent in Enniscorthy.

Only two years after founding Enniscorthy, the newly appointed Bishop of Ballarat, Bishop Michael O'Connor, invited the Loreto sisters to establish a school for Catholic girls in his new diocese.

Chosen because of her experience and success in strong leadership roles and her charismatic personality, Mother Gonzaga was asked if she would go to Australia.

Mother Gonzaga Barry arrived in Ballarat in 1875 with nine companions to begin a school for girls. Loreto Convent Mary's Mount (Loreto College) was founded in the first year as well as Loretto Dawson St, a day school for girls.

In December 1890, Mother Gonzaga Barry wrote an essay for the school magazine, *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, entitled 'A Sensible School for Girls', in which she defined the education of the whole child as follows:-

First of all, some person or persons having ample means should endow a college that would be a kind of university for the education of women ... Side by side with this, and on an equal footing with it, should stand a domestic college where all kinds of manual work suitable for women would be taught ... Within the walls of this woman's university, room might be found for a school of art, a school of music, an astronomical observatory, a chemical laboratory, a library, museum and gymnasium. The college grounds laid out in lawns and gardens would afford scope for the study of botany; whilst a small dairy and poultry farm would be an excellent practising school for the students of domestic economy. Thus our



sensible school would eventually develop into a truly comprehensive university worthy of a great country and its women.

By the time of her death in 1915, Mother Gonzaga Barry had established Loreto convents and schools in Portland, Hamilton, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, as well as parish schools, kindergartens and teachers' training colleges.

