



*Religious
Sisters of Charity*

Religious and Educational Philosophy



The Religious Sisters of Charity

The Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity was founded by Mary Aikenhead in 1815 to respond to the needs of the time, specifically the needs of those who were poor and underprivileged.

Mary Aikenhead was born in Cork in 1787. Her father Dr. David Aikenhead was a Protestant doctor and apothecary and was a very kind man. He had great respect for the poor. Her mother Mary Stacpole was a Catholic. There were four children in the family, three girls and one boy. Being a delicate baby, Mary was fostered out to the Rorke family to improve her health. When she was six she returned to her own home. Mammy Rorke, as Mary called her, was a devout Catholic and left a lasting impression on Mary, with whom she shared her deep and simple faith. Mary's father Dr. Aikenhead became a Catholic on his deathbed in 1801 and the following year at the age of fifteen, Mary also became a Catholic.

For a number of years following this, Mary moved in a circle of better-off middle-class Catholics who were religious, sociable and hospitable. Around this time she developed a deep compassion for the poor and a consciousness of their need for education. When she was twenty-five, Mary and her first companion, Alicia Walsh travelled to York to begin their training for religious life. They were accompanied on the journey by Archbishop Murray. Having completed their noviciate, they returned to Dublin in 1815 and set up the first community of Religious Sisters of Charity. Thousands of dedicated women have since followed in their footsteps, inspired by their example.

What has Mary Aikenhead to say to us who are involved in education today?

Her motto: "Caritas Christi Urget Nos" ("The love of Christ urges us on"), leaves us a rich legacy to follow. She desired to give to the poor what the rich could buy for money. She invites us to reach out to all those in any kind of need - material, spiritual or intellectual.

Mary reached out to all, regardless of religion. She invites us to embrace the diversity of our world today in all its complexity. Mary pioneered all the many and diverse works of the Congregation under the ever-watchful eye of Providence. She believed it was all God's work and that He would bring it to completion in His own way and in His own time. She was never

disappointed. Even when she needed funds to open hospitals and to serve the starving poor, gracious benefactors helped her in most unexpected ways. She often said “God’s Sweet Providence is a rich bank”. She invites us to trust in God today in spite of all our difficulties.

Mary valued education in its broadest sense. She encouraged the young girls who had to work in factories by day to go to school in the evening. She got her sisters to organise classes for them. She believed we should learn from each other and benefit from those more experienced. For example, when she set up the first school in Gardiner Street she advised the sister in charge who was finding it difficult to control the pupils, to seek advice from the Christian Brothers.

She was always conscious of the bigger picture and had a universal vision for all. The first women religious on Australian soil were Sisters of Charity, sent by Mary in 1838 to work with women convicts.

Mary was a gifted letter writer and many of her inspiring letters to her sisters written when, through illness, she was confined to a wheelchair, are now to be viewed at our Heritage Centre in Harold’s Cross. She invites our young people to value literacy. Mary loved young people and had a great sense of humour. Even when she was invalided she was often seen surrounded by small children from the local schools.

Mary was a true visionary but without the help and the wise advice of her sisters in the congregation and of others who guided her, as well as the support of all those kind benefactors and those on whom she depended when in poor health, her vision could have not evoked such a lasting response. No doubt Mary believed passionately in the seanfhocal and all it implied “Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine”. Mary invites us today to build good relationships so that we can be true partners in education.

During her prolonged illness, nature was one of Mary’s greatest consolations. As she watched the evening sunset from her bedroom in Harold’s Cross, God’s signature on the day past, she was fully assured that the love of God would rise before the sun. Her message to us today is to treat with respect and reverence all that God has created.

Finally, Mary speaks to us as a woman of enormous vision, undaunted courage, unshakable faith in God’s Providence and joyous hope for the future. She was a woman of deep compassion for all humanity but especially she will be remembered for her tireless efforts on behalf of the poor. Mary Aikenhead died in 1858.



Religious Sisters of Charity Schools

The Religious Sisters of Charity are committed to the education of young people in a way which reflects the vision of our foundress, Mary Aikenhead.

In the tradition of Mary Aikenhead, we find our meaning and inspiration in Christ the teacher who sends us as He was sent, to enter into the struggle of our times.

We firmly believe that the richness of our schools lies in each student, each teacher, each parent, each member of the Board of Management, each staff member, and in each person who contributes to the life and work of the school community.

We want to see our schools as:

- Catholic schools, embodying a living-faith community expressed in life, prayer and liturgy
- Centres of learning aimed at excellence in education and in the development of students to their fullest potential
- Places of welcome; well maintained and attractively decorated
- Providing a happy, caring and supportive environment
- Reaching out to all, and especially to those in greatest need
- Examples of a true partnership, based on equity

Our Religious and Educational Philosophy

Our religious and educational philosophy promotes Gospel values by:

- Our commitment to the principles and practices of the Catholic faith and the Catholic ethos
- Having a holistic approach to education: focusing on the development of the whole person - religious, moral, social, physical, cultural, intellectual, emotional
- Developing the full potential of each student: encouraging excellence, building self-worth, and fostering self esteem
- Responding to children and young people with particular needs
- Accommodating diversity: having an open and inclusive approach to all students, irrespective of culture or religion
- Creating a safe, hospitable and caring environment in the school
- Developing positive relationships with local and wider communities
- Working in partnership with all who contribute to the life of the school
- Promoting respect for, and care of, the earth

Our Students

The central purpose of the school community is to develop our students to their fullest potential: to encourage them to work independently and collaboratively, and to awaken in them a sense of the presence of God, in themselves, in others and in all of creation.

To this end, we educate our students for:

- Justice
- Compassion
- Responsible citizenship
- Taking initiative
- Taking responsibility
- Having a realistic sense of self
- Growth in freedom and maturity
- Being alive to wonder

Our Staff

School staff are encouraged to embody the school philosophy by:

- Supporting the school ethos
- Their commitment to high standards of education
- Treating students with justice, care and compassion
- Placing their expertise at the service of students
- Recognising and developing the individual and unique talents of students
- Fostering good relationships within the school community
- Participating in the varied aspects of school life
- Availing of suitable opportunities to further their professional and personal development

Our Parents

Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in the life of the school by:

- Being committed to the education of their children
- Fulfilling their role as partners in education
- Taking responsibility for their child's education and supporting the work and characteristic spirit of the school
- Fostering home-school co-operation

Our Boards of Management

Board members take their responsibility by:

- Managing the school on behalf of the Trustees
- Having an awareness and understanding of their role as Board members
- Realising the philosophy and educational policy of the school
- Having a knowledge of statutory, legal and financial responsibilities
- Working in collaboration at the service of the vision and mission of the school
- Being initiators of new ideas which respond to the needs of the time
- Being loyal and committed to their task



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