

ADDRESS BY
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING QC
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ON THE OCCASION OF
DAUGHTERS OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART
NORTHERN TERRITORY CENTENARY

Government House, Darwin

27 May 2008

As Administrator it gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today and, in doing so, I acknowledge the Larrakia people and their ancestors, traditional owners of the land on which this house stands.

A special welcome to Dr Ella Stack, Darwin's first Lord Mayor.

This occasion is in honour of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart – in honour of you and your predecessors – and celebrates your dedication to the spiritual and social wellbeing of Territorians through your tireless work in the Northern Territory during the past century.

Your founder Father Jules Chevalier gave you the title of *Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart* to honour Mary – the woman closest to the Heart of Jesus.

We refer to you affectionately as the OLSH Sisters, although I note that your latin name is *Filii Domina Nostra Sacro Corde* ... a bit more of a tongue twister than OLSH Sisters. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart has occupied a substantial part of your lives and you wear your medal with pride and honour.

This year marks 100 years since the OLSH Sisters began their work in the Territory.

During that era the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart worked together to accomplish a shared vision of establishing mission communities and schools in the Territory.

In 1908 Father Francis Xavier Gsell, the Administrator Apostolic of the Northern Territory, saw the need for a Catholic school and asked for and received from the Australian Provincial House the *first* Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to the Territory.

A pioneering party of five OLSH Sisters sailed up Australia's eastern coast. Their ship rounded the northern tip and coasted through Torres Strait, passing through Thursday Island where a handful of OLSH Sisters had been working since 1886.

On it went westward through the Arafura Sea until it turned into Port Darwin.

Port Darwin in July 1908 was a trading port for a cosmopolitan mixture of traders: Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese and Malays who worked on the pearling luggers. The people of Port Darwin could be likened to a 'box of liquorice allsorts' – if I could use such a twee description.

This was the Darwin which was to become home to Sisters Eustille Sayers, Dominica O'Sullivan, Bertrand McSweeney, Kieran Doyle and Hyacinth Lenehan.

On their arrival to the shores of Port Darwin little did they know that they would be ensconced in the Territory's rich and vibrant history as pioneers in Catholic education.

As I visualise their revered journey, I wonder at how these Sisters were feeling on their arrival in Port Darwin to work in one of the most inhospitable and remote corners of Australia.

The emotions of excitement, trepidation and euphoria come to mind.

There is no doubt that these Sisters were strong in faith, had tremendous courage and were dedicated to helping others ... qualities that are inherent in all OLSH Sisters.

The Sisters' first home was a convent that Father Gsell had built for them, which served as lodgings for over sixty years. The building was a six-roomed structure more like a horse stable than a house with separate rooms.

Electric fans were a rarity in those days and the Sisters would have tolerated stifling and relentless heat, dust, creepy crawlies and snakes.

The Sisters endured incredible hardship and isolation. They were in uncharted waters, an unfamiliar lifestyle that was so very different to what they were accustomed to. They were certainly not dressed for the climate as the picture of Sister Annunciata on page thirty-one of *The Flame in the North* shows. Sister Anne dressed the same on the Tiwi Islands.

Yet they rose to the challenge.

They were special individuals – catalysts for change and pioneers in Catholic education – and their work continues through the OLSH Sisters.

Their legacy to the Northern Territory is the 15 Catholic schools that deliver education to urban, rural and remote locations of the Territory, and the connectedness and shared vision that OLSH Sisters enjoy today.

The history of the OLSH Sisters in the Territory is simply fascinating.

Mrs Pauling and I have had much pleasure in reading *The Flame in the North* – a potted history of the Daughters from 1908 to 2008 – written by our very own and much cherished Sister Anne Gardiner.

Incidentally, Sister Anne Gardiner was a guest of His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, at a dinner at Government House last Monday evening.

Sister Anne has given a lifetime of service – over 50 years – to the people of the Tiwi Islands. I am pleased that Sister Anne is able to join us today.

I also had the pleasure of awarding Orders of Australia on behalf of the Governor-General to Sister Helen Little and Sister Elizabeth Little – who you all know – at an Investiture at Government House on 15 May.

Sisters in name as well as in faith. They have worked together within the same Catholic order for the past 40 years.

They both trained as teachers working in South Australia and New South Wales before their missions led them to the Territory.

It is for their commitment to education that they were awarded an Order of Australia.

The timing of the award couldn't have been any better with it coinciding with the centenary of the OLSH Sisters.

The OLSH Sisters are an inspiration to all and greatly respected.

Tessa and I are honoured to be in your company and give our thanks to you on behalf of Territorians.