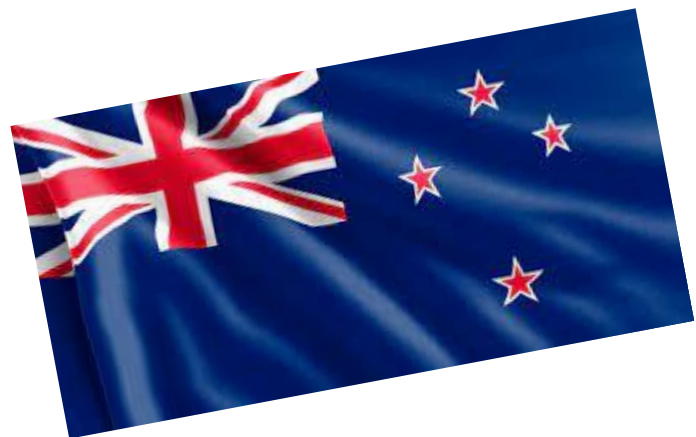




**THE FIRST MARIST COMMUNITY  
IN  
AOTEAROA NEW-ZEALAND  
24-01-1927**



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## *The first Marist Community in Aotearoa New Zealand (1927)*

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*Sr. Dominic, Mother Bernard and Sr Austin  
Outside the cottage*

Mother Bernard (Mary Gorman) born in Country Sligo, Ireland, was educated by the Marist Sisters at Carrick-on-Shannon. She left the new mission at Lautoka, Fiji to come to New Zealand to begin a new foundation.

Sister Austin (Veronica Pearl Woodbury) came from Spencer in the Hawkesbury area of New South Wales, Australia, made her First Profession at Woolwich and then went with Mother Bernard in 1924 to the new mission of Lautoka, Fiji.

Fr Gondringer SM, the new parish priest from Luxembourg, wrote to Mother Marie Joseph inviting the Marist Sisters to come to the new parish of Mt Albert and to staff the new parish school.

On the afternoon of January 24th, 1927, the first Marist Sisters berthed at Princes Wharf and went to begin a new foundation in New Zealand. They arrived from Fiji on the “Tofua”. The two Sisters were met by the Marist Fathers – Fr Gondringer, Marist Brothers,



Brother Borgia, the Mercy Sisters who initially took them to St Mary’s until their cottage was habitable, and some parishioners waving blue and white ribbons!

The two Sisters were to live in a 4-roomed cottage. However, as the community grew, the convent was replaced by a larger house and the little 4-bedroom cottage was uplifted to the Primary School where it was converted into a small classroom.

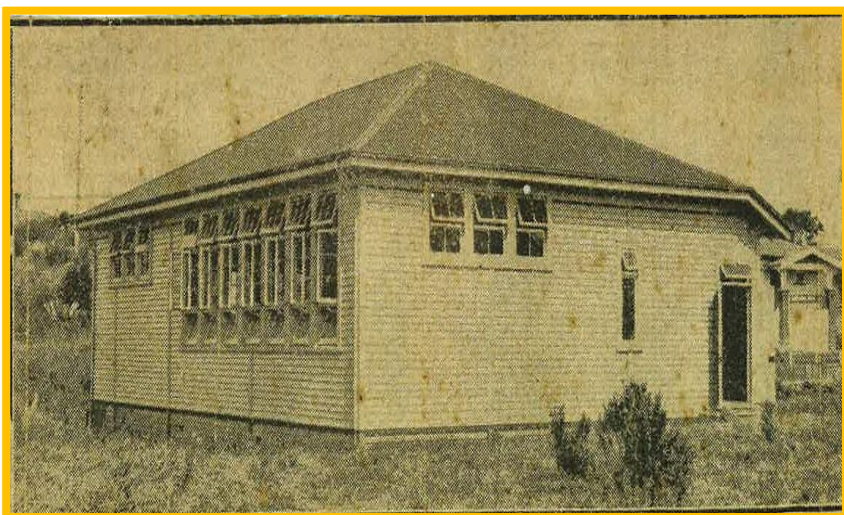
Sr Austin describes the cottage being “hidden in a bush and undergrowth so dense that neither sun nor sky could be seen from its weird precincts. There were no paths and the main entrance from the street had never been made... it was surrounded by trees of every description several of which were soon dealt their death blow to allow the sunlight to peer in ... When one looks at the lovely lawn in front now, no-one would have guessed what lies beneath them - rubbish dumps, a disused well. Which according to the amount of soil and stones it took to fill it, must have been twenty feet deep and even a creek needed to be filled in!”

By January 30th the new convent and school were officially blessed by Bishop Cleary.



30-01-1927: Fr. Gondringer, Bishop Cleary, Sr. Austin, Mother Bernard

Mother Bernard asked that the Sisters occupy the convent by February 2nd. Fr. Gondringer invited them to breakfast the next day. They had brought a tin of biscuits from Lautoka which helped towards supper but had no running water except what they could carry from the school. The stove was temporarily unusable, so they ate at the presbytery where a local parishioner had supplied a duck!



The next days were devoted to preparation for the school and by February 7th they were ready for 90 pupils for the 80 places available! Some had to be turned away. Because the classes ranged from Standard 1 to Standard 6 a further teacher, Jessie Nicholl was engaged to look after Standards 1 and 2 enabling the other classes to be taught.

Finance was a problem! Mother Bernard notes that the Marist Sisters had failed to make any arrangements about finance with Fr Gondringer. Bishop Cleary has promised them £53 per week but school fees brought barely £1 per a week. They had to look elsewhere for finance. A few music lessons were given on a piano purchased by the sisters with the few pounds they had and some sewing was taken in, thanks to a widow in the parish who provided a sewing machine. Each day, their Irish milkman, Mr Corcoran, gave them milk, butter, cheese and eggs; on Sundays he added meat.

Fr. Gondringer encouraged the Sisters to open a boarding school as soon as possible. A small accommodation block was added to the convent for the girls. In 1928 only two girls were accepted as borders because the overall building was not finished.

On 29th January 1928, the first New Zealand postulant arrived, Kathleen Mullen who became Sr Ursula and later, Sr Mary Mullen.



*Sr. Austin and Fr. Gondringer*