

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1981, the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, a community of women religious in the Roman Catholic Church, formally adopted a national structure of governance for their Congregation. This structure replaced two existing bodies, the Australian Union of Sisters of Mercy and the Federation of the Australian Sisters of Mercy, by one body, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, Australia.

For several reasons, the adoption of this structure of governance was noteworthy. First, it provided a new form of governance for the largest group of women religious in Australia. Second, this Australian group were the first Sisters of Mercy in any country to adopt a national structure of governance. Third, when Church authorities studied details of the new structure in Rome, they found that it was unique in Church law (Gaudry, 1981:25).

When the new structure of governance was to be adopted formally by the Australian Sisters of Mercy in 1981, this researcher decided to carry out exploratory work on the change process which led to that adoption. She took this decision for the following reasons. First, as a member of the Mercy community, she had been closely involved in events leading to adoption of the new structure of governance. In the light of that experience, she decided it was important to attempt an analysis of the process of change leading to that adoption. Personal motivation, then, was the initial reason for undertaking the research. Further, other members of the religious community expressed the need for a written record of this significant happening in the life of their Congregation.

There were also academic reasons for conducting the research. First, change in structure of governance does not occur very often in communities of religious in the Roman Catholic Church. This study would serve to document such a change. Second, there was the opportunity to collect the perceptions of Sisters who had been members of the religious community during the period of change. A valuable body of primary data on a religious organisation could be preserved and analysed. Third, communities of religious have not often been examined as organisations; this study could help explain, at least partially, how analysis of one community of religious could make a contribution to the understanding of other communities of religious.

As the focus of the research was on the process of change in a particular religious community, the background to change in religious communities in the Roman Catholic Church is now discussed.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Until recent years, many outsiders knew very little about life within communities of women religious in the Roman Catholic Church. In the past decade, however, both popular and scholarly writings have taken away a great deal of the mystery and misconceptions about what it is like to live as a member of a religious community (SanGiovanni, 1978:13).

Many writings (Aronson, 1971; Cada et al., 1977; Chittister et al., 1977; Ebaugh, 1977; Griffin, 1975; Leavey, 1978; Neal, 1984) dealt specifically with the way in which members of religious communities had experienced extraordinary changes in life-style and work since the Second Vatican Council (1963-65). This focus of attention was to be expected in the light of the emphasis the Council placed on the significant role it believed communities of religious could play in the contemporary world. In a series of conciliar and

post-conciliar documents, the Council made it mandatory for all religious institutes to undertake radical personal and community renewal and adaptation. Two broad principles were prescribed to guide the process: first, a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of a given community of religious, and second, an adjustment to the changed conditions of the times (Abbott, 1966:468).

In view of the nature of this mandate, it was understandable that communities of religious embarked upon various programmes of rigorous self-study. Initially, changes closely affecting individual and community living were the subject of analysis and criticism (Moloney, 1980; Murphy-O'Connor, 1977; Tillard, 1977). While the essence of these changes was the same in almost every religious community, the emphasis on any particular change differed from community to community.

Some changes, such as the dress worn by women religious, were clearly evident to people who were not members of religious communities. Other changes were less obvious and less well understood. In particular, little was known about the way in which communities of religious were governed and about the alterations occurring in structure and process of the governance.

The Second Vatican Council had made specific reference to the question of governance; it stated that the way communities of religious were governed should be re-examined in the light of the same standards that were to guide the process of other renewal (Abbott, 1966:469). In the years after the Council, comments were made in most studies of religious life on the way in which governance in religious communities was changing. At the same time, description and analysis of the process of change leading to new structures of governance were

noticeably lacking.

This description of the history of change in religious communities provides a necessary background to the present research: a case study of the process of change leading to a new structure of governance for a particular religious community, the Sisters of Mercy (Australia).

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The following purposes were seen as important:

1. to explore the characteristics of the Mercy Order as a religious community in order to develop a greater understanding of it as an organisation;
2. to examine the process of change leading to a new governance structure in the Mercy Order with a view to contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature of change in a religious organisation;
3. to draw conclusions on the introduction of change in a religious order -- conclusions which could be applied to the systematic study of change in similar types of religious organisations.

THE PROBLEM AND SUBPROBLEMS

This study investigated the relationship between selected organisational characteristics and the change process which led to the adoption of a new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981. While a description of the development of the Mercy community from its beginnings was undertaken in order to provide a context for the study, this research study was restricted to the period which marked the transition from one form of Mercy governance to another, that is, to the period of time between the establishment of the Federation of the Australian Sisters of Mercy in 1957 and the formal adoption of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of

Australia in 1981.

Taking into account the context of the research problem, and as a consequence of the literature review, the following subproblems were generated:

1. What do the Sisters of Mercy perceive as the distinctive characteristics of their organisation?
2. What was the change process that led to the adoption of the new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981?
3. What was the relationship between the distinctive organisational characteristics and the process of change which led to the adoption of the new structure of governance?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant for the following reasons:

1. In the extensive literature on different kinds of organisations, little has been written about the way in which communities of religious function as organisations. Three reasons may account for this. First, members of religious communities do not readily see their groups as organisations, and initiate very little analysis in that regard. Second, research workers who are not members of such communities but who wish to study them as organisations have not always been granted permission to do so. Third, just as many people question whether or not the Roman Catholic Church can be analysed as an organisation (Leavey, 1978:13), they raise the same objection in regard to religious communities. Their concern is related to the need to take into account the theological dimension which they see as an essential element in any religious group. They do not understand how this dimension can achieve central recognition in a study which draws heavily on organisational theory for its conceptual framework. The

present research is of value in dispelling some of these objections, because it examines the Mercy Order as an organisation and shows how it differs from other types of organisations.

2. As a result of the publication of national surveys of religious carried out in many countries in the past decade, a great amount of information has been collected about the kinds of change which have taken place in communities of religious. Little is known, however, of the use which communities made of this information to assist them in the study of change in their own groups. Leavey (1978:1) warned Australian religious communities that they should examine with care the information found in the National Survey of Personnel: Australia, 1975. This study demonstrated how information about a religious community could be used to understand change processes in such an organisation.

3. In the literature on organisations, models of change reflect the diversity of organisations found in modern society. The process of change described and analysed in this study provided insights into the way in which a religious community, as an organisation, dealt with change.

4. This study of the process of change leading to a new structure of governance comes at an opportune time for many religious communities. After the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Church authorities in Rome had envisaged an extended period of time (possibly 12 to 15 years) for the process of revising constitutions of religious communities. From all accounts, it will still be some time before many communities are ready to present final texts (Fagan, 1981:315-316). The description and analysis of the process of change undertaken in this study may benefit other communities who are searching for a new structure of governance as

part of their revised constitutions.

5. The approach taken in this study can contribute to research into the change process in religious communities, and also provide useful guidelines for introducing change into these communities. The study is significant for research in that it provides a different conceptual framework for analysing the process of change. It is different from other frameworks in two respects. First, it takes account of characteristics which were found to be crucial to religious communities as organisations. Previous research into change in religious communities, while referring to the importance of studying one or more of these characteristics, had not produced a conceptual framework which clearly established the way in which one characteristic related to another in the process of change. Second, findings from use of the conceptual framework in this study were presented in the form of conclusions about change. Further research using this framework could be carried out under similar conditions to discover if the same conclusions about change would apply in other religious communities of a similar type.

A major justification for this study is the contribution which theory may make in informing practice. Some time in the future, the religious community which is the subject of this study may wish to engage in change leading to another type of innovation for the total group. Access to the present study may give members of the religious community information on strengths and weaknesses of the way in which they went about the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance. Members of other religious communities who are looking for a way to approach the introduction of a new structure of governance may find useful guidelines in this study.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The following limitations and delimitations were recognised:

1. The study was limited to an investigation of the process of change as it led to a particular innovation, that is, a new structure of governance in the Mercy Order. No attempt was made to analyse processes of change leading to other developments in this religious community.

2. Research was limited in time to the period from the establishment of the Federation (1975) to the adoption of the new structure of governance, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981. The researcher chose this period because the process of change to be analysed occurred between these two events. She considered that the period of time chosen would yield the most appropriate data about change and the new structure of governance.

3. The study was limited to particular kinds of data -- experiences and perceptions of the change process reported by members of the religious community, including those of the researcher as participant observer, and written records of matters relating to the changes of structure found in archives of the Mercy community. Perceptions of individuals or groups outside the religious community were not investigated.

4. In collecting and analysing data, the researcher took into account her own role as a member of the Mercy community and, in particular, her participation in the formal proceedings leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance. She tried to minimise personal bias in the study by emphasising the Sisters' perceptions and archival material, without discounting the value of her own experience. More detailed discussion of this point is presented in Chapter 4.

5. The organisational characteristics of the religious community as categorised in this study were restricted to mission, membership, leadership, and ethos. Although they are characteristics not usually related conceptually in organisational studies, they were chosen for this study for reasons which will be discussed in some detail in the literature review in Chapter 3. Generalisations, then, were not made about characteristics outside this selection.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of key terms used in this research are more appropriately dealt with later in this study. Terms such as "governance" and "religious" are defined in Chapter 2, while others, for example, "servant leadership", come up in the literature review in Chapter 3.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This first chapter provided an introduction to the present study of a process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance in a community of women religious. In Chapter 2, a description of the context of the study emphasises the place of religious communities in the Roman Catholic Church, the question of governance in those communities, and the evolution of governance in the Mercy community. In Chapter 3, a review of literature related to the study is presented, and a conceptual framework for the study is formulated. A detailed account of the research plan and methodology is given in Chapter 4. The findings on the four selected organisational characteristics are presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 findings on the process of change are discussed. A summary of the study and implications drawn for practice and research in relation to the process of change in religious organisations are presented in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, a description of the context of the study emphasises the particular nature of the Mercy community and establishes a frame of reference for the research problem. As the Sisters of Mercy are a religious community within the Roman Catholic Church, it is necessary to describe the nexus between the two bodies in order to understand how the organisational nature of the religious community is influenced by its relationship to the Church.

The description takes the following form. First, a study is made of the place of religious communities in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. Second, the question of governance in these communities is discussed. Third, the ways in which changes in governance have occurred will be studied as a background to change in governance in the Mercy community.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

The Catholic notion of religious life is highly diversified and can only be understood in the light of its historical development (Rahner, 1975:1425). Since earliest times, the life of the Roman Catholic Church has been enriched by the appearance of groups of men and women generally referred to as "religious communities". The unique position of these communities in relation to the Roman Catholic Church was clearly explained by Orsy (1978:118) when he stated that

. . . religious communities do not have any life of their own. All life that is in them originates in the Church. It is, indeed, the life of the Church.

It is, however, a particular type of life. Leavey (1978:28) described it this way:

The religious order exists wholly within the Catholic Church, not as part of its hierarchical structure, but as part of its charismatic structure. From ancient times religious orders have existed in the Church, keeping alive for the Christian community the Gospel value of love of God, through a vowed life in community and by service in accord with the particular charism of the founder.

According to George (1977:40) and Lozano (1978:223), the term "charism" is used in the Church to describe a calling received by some Christians for the good of the whole Church, a calling which involves a certain kind of existence and the exercise of certain ministries. The history of most religious communities begins with a personal calling which later develops into the vocation of a group. In other words, the charism of a community coincides with the object of the inspiration granted to the founder. People enter various religious communities because they realise that their own vocation coincides, in its essential elements, with the purpose of a given religious group.

Cada et al. (1979:169-170) described the relationship between the call of the Gospel and the foundation of religious orders in the following way:

The spontaneity of nature and grace brings about a certain dynamism in the life of the Church which produces, especially at times of crisis, prophetic persons who are able to disentangle the gospel from the institutional maze which prevents it from being heard. Very often this prophetic vision is implemented in the establishment of a religious order.

Each religious order, then, may be said to have a specific and recognisable charism. For example, Burns (1981:721) spoke of the special charism of the Sisters of Mercy, that is, the exercise of the spirit of mercy in the face of need.

If religious life itself is also termed a charism, Doyle (1975:17) claimed that it must be "a life of service to the community, a visible witness of the role of the servant Church to all mankind". Molinari (1968:800-801) and Murphy (1979:77-78) held the opinion that, on occasions of renewal of religious life, there is a tendency to identify the spirit of the founders with their works. As time passes, a work, begun with an intention largely determined by the needs and circumstances of the age and place in which the founder lived, may have changed. While the particular Gospel values remain the same, the norms for living out these values will change in a changing world. For this reasons, McCarty (1972:203) stressed that, within a particular religious community, contact with the charism of the founder allows the group to measure itself against its past to challenge its present vitality.

The struggle to bring a religious community into existence and to keep it alive and flourishing is clearly evidenced in the growth of the Mercy community. At different times in its history, the Mercy community has experienced a tension common to many other religious groups, that is, the tension that can arise between demands of the hierarchical structure of the Church and the dynamic nature of the charism of the particular religious community. While tensions within the Church are sometimes necessary, Metz (1978:18) pointed out that

. . . the levelling down of the religious orders to conform with the institutional Church cannot be in the interest of the Church as a whole. Nor can it be in the interest of the religious orders. They above all will pay for it with a growing loss of meaning.

It is argued, in the next section, that in keeping with their charismatic nature, religious communities have two major roles in the Church and that both have been carried out by the Sisters of

Mercy in the process of change leading to a new structure of governance for their community.

Roles of Religious Communities

Metz (1978) believed that, in the long history of the Roman Catholic Church, religious communities have played two major roles. First, they have an innovatory function inasmuch as they often begin as a movement at the point where social change first becomes noticeable. For example, in the early thirteenth century, under the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi, the Mendicant Orders deliberately divested themselves of landed wealth and provided the Church with a new example of what it could mean to be poor in Gospel terms (Habig, 1973; Hinnebusch, 1975). Without the obligation of living within a monastery, members of these Orders were able to attain an apostolic mobility clearly needed if the Church were to serve the new social demands of medieval society. Later, in the nineteenth century, some six hundred communities of religious were founded. Most of these groups set up schools or hospitals to care for the impoverished masses of the industrialised world seen by the Church to be in need of re-Christianisation (Cada et al., 1979:41). One of the groups founded during this period was the Sisters of Mercy.

Second, according to Metz (1978:11-12), religious communities carry out a corrective role in that

. . . against the dangerous accommodations and questionable compromises that the Church as a large-scale institution can always incline to, they press for the uncompromising nature of the Gospel and of the invitation of Christ.

In different periods of history, the corrective role has taken various forms. For example, Turner (1980:45-47) argued that commitment, education, experience, and widespread respect combine to give religious women considerable reserves of power and influence. The

way in which religious communities use that corporate power should pose a challenge to the exercise of corporate power by the institutional Church. She suggested that religious groups can best discern whether or not that use is in accord with the Gospel if they examine their stance towards the poor of their time. On some occasions, they have found that, because of the strength of their stance in relation to the poor, tension has developed between the institutional Church and the religious community.

While the innovative function and the corrective role receive different emphases at different periods in history, all religious communities hold certain features in common.

Features Held in Common by Religious Communities

Despite a bewildering variety of life-style and of work, certain basic features are found in every community of women religious. The membership is voluntary, and a period of probation is given to all applicants. Each member takes public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; members of the group live in community and are publicly committed to some aspects of ministry in the Church. Each group shares a common membership in the Roman Catholic Church which, either through the Pope or a Bishop for his diocese, approves the name, structure, and aim of a particular group so that without public and official recognition by the Church, a group of people cannot be termed a religious community. All of these features are found in the Mercy Order so that it may be justifiably termed a religious community in the Roman Catholic Church.

Certain terms used in reference to religious life are clearly understood by religious, but are often unknown to other people. As many of these appear in the present study, the more common expressions are discussed in the next section.

Common Terms

Community. "Community" is a collective term widely used to indicate the total membership of a particular religious group. For example, the Mercy "community" in Australia includes all the Sisters of Mercy in this country. It may also refer to the members of a religious house or convent in a certain place, so that we speak of the Mercy community in Armidale, New South Wales. Other terms, such as "order", "congregation", and "institute", designate special kinds of religious communities, although in actual practice these terms are often used interchangeably with "community", as is the case in this study. As well as denoting the total membership of a particular group, the term "community" is also used in reference to the corporate dimension of religious life, that is, the living in common of members of the group (Fleming, 1980:31). The term "institute" used in the new Code of Canon Law to designate all kinds of religious communities (The Canon Law Society, 1983) was not in common use in religious groups at the time the research was undertaken, but was used by the Sisters of Mercy.

Cloistered and active religious. There is, however, a distinction made between what is known as cloistered and active religious. In cloistered orders, the members spend a good deal of their time in prayer and meditation while the type of work in which they engage is such that they have virtually no contact with people outside their own community. In active orders, time is also devoted to prayer and meditation. For the greater part of their day, however, members engage in a variety of public ministries, such as education, care of the sick and aged, and social welfare. The Mercy community is an active order with Sisters working in many different areas of ministry. In later analysis of the Sisters' perceptions of the

change process, implications arising from the problem of diversity in ministry are examined in some detail in an effort to establish the influence of different ministries on the corporate mission of the religious group.

Vows. Membership of religious communities, both contemplative and active, is gained through the taking of "vows", that is, promises to express a permanent commitment to God in a particular way of life. Becoming a member of a religious community is voluntary but once a woman takes final vows she is committed to the way of living and working crucial to the religious community which has accepted her as a member. In addition to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience taken in other religious communities, a woman joining the Mercy Order takes a fourth vow. Traditionally, this has been expressed as a vow of "service to the poor, sick and ignorant." An alternative expression, "Apostolic service through the works of Mercy", may now be used in the formula of profession (Institute of Sisters of Mercy, Constitutions, 1982:17). The inclusion of the vow of service draws to the attention of a new member the importance which the Mercy Congregation attaches to this aspect of religious life.

Nuns and Sisters. In the previous Code of Canon Law, a "nun" was a member of a contemplative order, while the term "Sister" referred to a member of an active community (The Canon Law Society, 1983:120-124). While the former terms, "nun" and "Sister" have been replaced in the new Code by "religious woman", the term "Sister" is used throughout this study. In 1841, when the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy were confirmed, papal approbation was granted, for the first time, to a congregation of religious Sisters (New Catholic

Encyclopedia, 1967). This approval gave the Sisters the assurance that their life-style, work, and type of governance were accepted as legitimate in terms of Church requirements for a religious institute.

Constitutions. To protect more faithfully its vocation and identity, each religious institute has a body of laws by which it is governed. These constitutions are approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority in Rome and can be changed only with the consent of the same body (The Canon Law Society, 1983:107). The original Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy were approved in 1841 by the Apostolic See, that is, the appropriate authority in Rome, by means of a formal decree. Any changes to these Constitutions, such as adoption of a new structure of governance, must be presented for approval in Rome.

General Chapter. In approving the Constitutions of an institute, the Church confers on that institute the authority required at various levels, the highest of which is the General Chapter, a collegial assembly representative of the entire institute (Sacred Congregation for Religious, 1977:176). Its task is not limited to making laws; it should also foster spiritual and apostolic vitality.

Governance. Since the Second Vatican Council, the term "governance" has been used increasingly by religious communities to refer to the structures and processes of their internal government. Although before that time it had been rarely seen in literature relating to the Church, the term was used widely in society, as a result of its place in writings on education. Corson (1960:12) applied it to "that administrative process which . . . is distinctive, the process of deciding and seeing to it that decisions made are

executed." Later definitions were broader and included also the structures and the processes by which decisions are made (Hodgkinson, 1971:2; Carnegie Commission, 1973:vii). While the Vatican Council called for renewal of structure of governance based on the criteria of all renewal in religious life, it did not provide a model or a process (Thomas, 1977:92). It did, however, call for the realisation of the principles of participation, consultation, communication and corresponsibility, the same principles as those sought in educational and other institutions. In line, then, with increasing usage in the Church and in society, the Sisters of Mercy chose "governance" as the most appropriate term to describe the new form of government adopted by the community in 1981.

The foregoing discussion of definition of terms points to a certain legal relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and any particular religious community which cannot be ignored in a study of change within that community. For the purposes of this study, the fact that since 1841 the Sisters of Mercy have had public and official Church approval of their religious community as an authentic form of religious life had to be kept in mind. In this research study, the legal relationship between the Mercy community and the Roman Catholic Church was examined in some detail to discover the way in which that relationship influenced the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance in 1981.

GOVERNANCE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

In this section, it is argued that the nature of the research problem demands an understanding of the concept of governance as it applies to religious communities in the Roman Catholic Church. First, a brief review is made of the significance of Particular Law (that is,

law internal to a given institute) to the life of a religious community in order to show the relationship between Church law and the internal law of a religious community. Second, a study is made of developments in Canon Law as they are related to Particular Law. Third, the changing role of the legislative body of religious communities, that is, the General Chapter, is examined. Finally, change in governance is investigated in the context of national surveys of change in communities of women religious in the Roman Catholic Church.

Development of Particular Law

In the English translation of the Code of Canon Law explicit reference is made to the place of internal governance of religious communities. Canon 586 (The Canon Law Society, 1983:106-7) states that

. . . a true autonomy of life, especially of governance, is recognised for each institute Local bishops have the responsibility of preserving and safeguarding this autonomy.

This approbation of a religious community by the Roman Catholic Church constitutes it as a society within the Church with particular powers of self-governance. For example, the Church grants the members the right to elect the executive of the group, that is, the Major Superior and councillors, according to the norms of Church Law and the Particular Law of the institute. The Church, then, recognises and confirms the authority vested in these Superiors (McDermott, 1980:446).

As was discussed in the section on Constitutions, the general norms for the governance of a religious community are found in its Constitutions. Changes to such Constitutions are approved only after serious consideration by the religious community and lengthy examination by authorities in Rome. The detailed application of the

Constitutions to the daily life and work of the religious community is decided by the General Chapter and is known as Particular Law. In the Mercy order, this body of law is found in the Directory of each Mercy group.

While the legal prescriptions of the Church are basically the same for all religious communities, internal government of these groups shows a remarkable flexibility inasmuch as it has existed in a variety of concrete structural forms at different times and in different cultures. Many of these structural forms have been discussed in some depth in studies of the history of religious life (Bausch, 1973; Bokenkotter, 1977; Hostie, 1972; Knowles, 1969; Mohler, 1971; Vicaire, 1966). From these studies, it is possible to find clear evidence of the relationship between Particular Law, that is, law internal to a given institute, and the Code of Canon Law, that is, the common or general law of the Church. Saïd (1977:928) expressed this very forcibly:

It can be stated, without any fear of contradiction, that from the appearance of organised religious life in the Church until the end of the nineteenth century - indeed until the Promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 - the role of Particular Law in consecrated life was more important than that of the common or general law of the Church.

In recent years, Saïd has made a detailed study of Particular Law in his position as relator of the subcommission appointed by the Church authorities in Rome to work on the revision of the section of the Code of Canon Law dealing with religious institutes. In the following discussion of Particular Law, all page numbers refer to Saïd's (1977) work.

From earliest times, Particular Law was the only law which existed for the moderation of institutes and their members. Even with the growth of the great mendicant orders, largely well-organised and self-sufficient, little legislative action was required

on the part of the central authority of the Church. It was with the rapid development of institutes which were not monastic, particularly during the second half of the eighteenth century, the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth, that interventions of ecclesiastical authority began to be more and more numerous in the life of religious communities. These interventions, according to Saïd (p.929), were "sporadic, suggested by necessity or opportunity."

This growth of institutes which were not cloistered was the cause of an anomalous situation in Church legislation. In 1566, Pope Pius V had made the pronouncement that all such institutions were not officially recognised as religious institutes nor their members as religious. For many years it did not seem that this situation would change, and, as a result, each of these institutions developed without any special interference by the Church.

While many reasons may be given for the slow movement of intervention by the Church in the internal governance of religious communities, Saïd (p.929) asserted that:

the fundamental motive behind this situation was the fact that a religious family . . . with a peculiar nature, charism, inspiration and mission in the Church is an entity which requires norms of government adapted to that nature and peculiar qualities. And these norms could hardly be given by those who did not know the institute intimately or who were not personally familiar with that way of life.

Early in the twentieth century, however, several major steps were taken towards involving the Church in the internal law of individual communities. First, in 1900, full canonical status was granted to institutes which were not monastic. Second, in 1908, with the establishment of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, there was an office in Rome which could take care of the interests of these communities. According to Pope Paul VI (1967), the authority of the Sacred Congregation for Religious extended to:

. . . matters which concern the establishment, government and suppression of institutes; the safeguarding and pursuit of their specific purpose, their rule and discipline, their property and privileges, the training of the religious, their life in accord with their special characteristics, constitutions, and dispensations from the common law It is up to the same congregation to encourage the adaptations, renewal and growth of religious life.

Third, in 1917, the Code of Canon Law was promulgated. The significance of this step, as part of the context of the research problem, cannot be overestimated, and the Code of 1917 will receive detailed attention in the next section.

Development of the Code of Canon Law

Canon Law has been defined as the body of laws made by the lawful ecclesiastical authority for the government of the Roman Catholic Church. The lawful ecclesiastical authority for the Church is the Pope, and all laws which he enacts for the Church constitute Canon Law in the strict sense. The term "canon law", in the wide sense, is used to designate laws which Bishops and other legislators are empowered to make for the government of Church territory for which they are responsible.

Broadly speaking, the reasons which necessitated earlier collections of ecclesiastical legislation were the same as those which led to the compilation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Over the years the number of ecclesiastical laws had proliferated, so that by the beginning of the twentieth century anyone who wished to be informed about the laws regulating a particular matter had to go to several sources. In these sources, laws were not always arranged according to subject matter and even when collections were indexed a consultation of various indexes was often a demanding task. Many documents were of no possible use as they were either repetitions of previous laws or not laws at all. Some laws were virtually

contradictory, being called into existence by very divergent needs. While some laws no longer obtained, one could easily be ignorant of the existence of certain laws, doubtful as to the meaning of other laws, or unable to find them. Again, certain laws were confusing, harmful, and difficult in practice, particularly as they often had to be accommodated to the conditions of the times. In form, too, the law was often diffuse and involved. Finally, in certain matters, canon law was silent (Cicognani, 1943).

The official promulgation of the Code was made on May 27, 1917. It was a monumental work divided into five books, the second of which was entitled "On Persons". In this book, Part II was devoted to laws concerning members of religious communities. Gaining access to information in the Code presented several difficulties for women in religious communities. The Code was in Latin and women religious were as a rule not highly conversant with the Latin tongue. While versions or translations of the Code were forbidden without permission of authorities in Rome, an exception was made for the legislation touching institutes of nuns and religious organisations of lay people. Once they gained access to the Code, religious communities, in attempting to bring their Constitutions into line with the common law of the Church, used substantially, and often literally, the norms of that same common law as their Particular Law.

Among the outcomes of this situation, there was a decided loss of individual identity among religious groups as they tried to carry out what they saw as directives from Rome for their institute. They also found an increase in the number and kind of interventions from the central authority in their internal affairs, as well as a shift in the concentration of power from the particular community to the authorities in Rome. This weakening of the importance of Particular

Law was perhaps the most far-reaching in its effects on the concept of internal governance for many religious groups. While a certain amount of order and clarification was brought into religious life by the codification, detailed prescriptions in the legislation were seen as restricting rather than developing religious life. Communities of women religious found the Code onerous in many respects.

In every religious community, stories have been passed down from the last generation of Sisters of the ways in which adaptation to local conditions was made extremely difficult by the imposition of the new Code. Unfortunately, little of this has been recorded in any systematic fashion in Australia, but from the United States of America, there is a good deal of information.

Chittister (1977:75) cited several painful incidents in the life of the American Benedictine communities as the Sisters endeavoured to meet demands of the new Code. With other American groups, they shared the experience of trying to keep to the letter of the Code while living the spirit of their religious order in a "frontier" country. While the Code of Canon Law stipulated that the Sisters carry out the letter of the law of their community, social, economic, and even physical conditions in a new country made new demands on groups of women religious. In writing about changes in government of the new American Sisters of Mercy, Sabourin (1976:35) stated that

. . . though they treasured the traditions that had come down to them from their foundress, the circumstances in which they lived and worked often dimmed those traditions or made impossible for the Sisters to realise them completely.

McDermott (1979:153-55) offered a detailed examination of selected canons indicating the juridical inequality of laywomen and women religious vis-a-vis their male counterparts. She concluded that the view of women reflected in the Code and shaped by theological

principles, civil legislation and socio-cultural constructs of a patriarchal society was historically conditioned and required a re-examination and reformulation in light of contemporary studies and human experience. But times were changing, and gradually it became clear that the content of the Code of Canon Law did not fully reflect the reality of the lived experience of the Church. This was particularly so in regard to the canons on governance in religious communities. In the centralisation process encouraged by the Code, many aspects of self-governance were removed from the competence of the legitimate superiors within religious institutes and incorporated into the universal law for religious (McDermott, 1980:442).

This state of governance in religious communities did not go unnoticed by Pope Pius XII who encouraged openness in discussion and study, but it was Pope John XXIII who took a major step towards change. In January, 1959, he envisioned a renewal in the life of the Church, and in 1962 a Commission to revise the Code of Canon Law was set up. Since then, the Commission has consulted extensively with members of the Church, but the passage towards completion of the new Code has been slow. In attempting to account for this, Orsy (1978:115) pointed out that:

. . . the world of Canon Law originates in so many ways, in that of philosophy and theology. No serious reform is possible unless the reformers come to grips with our newly-acquired knowledge of man and our developing understanding of God's mysteries. Without such renewed vision, there will be no law suitable to the new age. Small wonders that there appears to be no end to the work.

Substantial reforms, however, have now been made and the work of renewing the Code has come to an end. On January 25, 1983, Pope John Paul II decreed the publication of the revised Code of Canon Law. The English version of the original Latin text was published in September, 1983, and is referred to in some chapters of this research.

However, it is worth noting that the substance of the new Code was well known to members of the Sacred Congregation during the negotiations that took place in Rome with the Sisters of Mercy in January, 1980 (see Appendix A: Extract from personal letter from Father Saïd to the researcher). Moreover, Australian women religious had been among those members of the Church asked to comment on a draft copy of the Code. Sisters of Mercy, then, were aware of possible basic requirements for their own new structure of governance.

While work has been continuing for the past twenty years on a renewal of the Code of Canon Law, another and probably more significant renewal has been taking place in religious communities. As was mentioned earlier, in 1965 the Vatican II Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life (Abbott, 1966:466) called for radical renewal and adaptation in religious communities, with the Council setting out the general principles to guide them in this task. The call was to a return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community, as well as an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times. Governance received special reference; the way in which communities were governed was to be re-examined in the light of the same standards as other aspects of community life. While all members of an institute were expected to become actively concerned in the renewal process, General Chapters were singled out as the special means for promoting this renewal.

The Role of General Chapters

Before 1969, every community was to hold a special "renewal" General Chapter at which the Constitutions were to be revised in line with the Council directives. It was hoped that a new Constitution would be a relatively stable document, the basic charter of the

community, containing only the essentials that define the community's nature, purpose and structure, leaving all other matters to be dealt with by succeeding Chapters (Fagan, 1981:315). The Council expected that the process of revision would take from 12 to 15 years. It was hoped that changes would be adopted on an experimental basis first, and that the experiments would be reviewed and evaluated at succeeding Chapters.

In its simplicity, this mandate contained the germ of significant changes in the government of religious communities, that is, the recognition of expanded authority and power of General Chapters. Certainly, even before this, there were General Chapters in all communities, and on the whole they were called together regularly. But their actions were rather limited and, particularly in communities of women, they were often confined to electing members of the General Council. Church Law itself has been rather silent on the matter of General Chapters; references to Chapters in the section on religious were "sparingly made, juridically inspired, and geared almost solely to elections" (Sacred Congregation for Religious, 1979:63).

Now, some years after the Council mandate, an assessment of the history of General Chapters since 1966 shows three periods of development: an early period of participation and consultation, a middle period of experimentation, and the latest period of evaluation and spiritual discernment. During these periods, legislation of new modes of community interaction, authorisation of experimentation, and programmes for personal and corporate development resulted. One of the areas in which significant changes occurred was that of governance. Members of religious communities recognised that the new vision and spirit could not survive without new structures of governance which

would firmly uphold and promote common ideals and objectives (Fagan, 1981:322).

In the next section of this chapter, some of the issues related to change in governance in Roman Catholic religious communities are discussed as a background to change in governance in the Mercy community.

CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Change in governance in Roman Catholic religious communities is now examined in the context of national surveys and research projects undertaken with members of religious groups in Australia and overseas.

National Surveys

Since Vatican Council II, several national surveys of religious communities have been undertaken in different countries. In most instances (Leavey, 1976; Luchini, 1969; Neal, 1984), research has been directed towards the collection of statistical data as a basis for later studies in analysis and interpretation. Two of these surveys have particular relevance for the present study.

Australian survey. Leavey (1976), who conducted a study entitled "National Survey of Religious Personnel: Australia 1976", provided a useful background for the present study. The aims of the survey were two-fold; first, to provide a comprehensive picture of religious personnel and the main statistical trends in Australian religious life, 1966-1976, and second, to provide information and guidance for those whose task it was to direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Church as well as to lay the foundation for future research. From the vast amount of information that was collected,

Leavey was asked to write an interpretation of the results of the survey and to invite others to comment on the survey in the light of specialist studies other than her particular area, sociology.

As a result, Leavey (1978) raised several issues which have implications for this study. These included questions about the future of religious life as well as issues concerned with morale, social change, and the mission of particular communities. Quite a good deal of importance was attached to the place of leadership of the governing bodies in religious communities, particularly as it concerned the changing relationship between religious orders and the Church.

Leavey (1978:40) saw it as imperative that religious leadership should (i) articulate and evaluate the present role of religious communities in their various ministries and communicate this both to their members and to the Catholic public, and (ii) monitor and legitimate the new ministries being undertaken and integrate them into the organisational identity of the community. Referring to the ministries carried out by religious communities (Abbott, 1966:421), the Vatican Council established the principle that:

Whenever [religious] are legitimately called upon to undertake works of the apostolate, they are obliged to discharge their duties in such a way that they may be available and docile helpers to bishops.

This relationship between bishops and religious cannot be entirely, perhaps not even substantially, regulated by law. As Orsy (1978:125) pointed out, the relationship needed a great deal of reflection:

Successful co-operation will depend on the depth of understanding that each side has of its own and of the other's vocation, of their dedication to the welfare of the Church. The law can set only some minimal norms that are simply not enough. The more sensitive points in the life of the Church escape legal definition or determination by law.

While this study (Leavey, 1976) provided much valuable information

about the way in which Australian religious communities have changed generally, there was no evidence of the way in which change in structures of governance had taken place.

American survey. In a recent publication, "Catholic Sisters in Transition: From the 1960's to the 1980's", Neal (1984) reported on an extensive longitudinal study, the object of which was the analysis of changing structures of religious communities of Roman Catholic Sisters in the United States of America. The focus of the research was on Sisters, that is, women, in apostolic communities; nuns, that is, those in cloistered orders, were not included.

The report compared data collected by survey from Roman Catholic religious communities of women in America in 1966 and 1982. These data were then compared with those from a two-year study of revised Constitutions of communities participating in all stages of the joint survey. From her study, Neal (1984:70) concluded:

The data show clearly that major changes have occurred in all facets of the life of religious congregations of Catholic women in the United States since 1950. What has caused these changes cannot be determined by looking only at Sisters, only at the Church, or only at religious causes. A complex set of factors are interwoven in this phenomenon and many of these are linked not in a chain of cause and effect but have influenced each other in interactive ways.

Changes in the form of governance were among the major structural changes in religious communities in America since the Second Vatican Council. Learning to use new structures effectively was seen as one of the critical factors in the future of these groups. Further, linking this effort with service or the mission of the group was seen as an essential factor for the renewal of religious life.

For the purposes of the present research, Neal's findings gave insight into the complexity of change in religious organisations by showing where change was made, what choices dominated, and the kind of

problems which arose. Her whole study was a rich source of information against which to contrast findings about change in a religious community in a different cultural setting.

Research Projects

Results from research projects within particular religious communities in the United States provided insights into the way in which change in religious communities took place in that country, and suggested ways in which the present research might be directed.

Chittister study. A group of American Benedictine Sisters, all of whom had special connections with renewal Chapters by virtue of position or committee involvement, conducted a survey to provide information on the topic of change in their religious community (Chittister et al., 1977). All delegates to the Chapters of renewal were asked to be respondents. The study concentrated on the way in which change occurred, including the issues which prompted change. A particular emphasis was placed on the role played by the members of the renewal Chapters. Using their responses as a guide, the researchers set about analysing renewal as it occurred in the Benedictine Federation and assessing its effects.

The data were treated from a variety of academic viewpoints, including history, theology, and social psychology. While very little was said about the structures of governance, findings drew attention to changes in the process of governing and participation by members of the community in that process. However, to what extent governance and leadership were separated was not clear. It was concluded that changes had concentrated on the responsible participation of all of the members in those decisions which affect the whole community (Chittister et al., 1977:23).

Examination of the data also showed a noticeable shift in emphasis from undue reliance on formal means of decision-making, intended only for more weighty concerns, to an attempt to arrive to both personal and communal decisions in a responsible manner. The researchers in the Chittister study (1977:93) concluded that:

In the course of the renewal process it had become increasingly clear that government at any level in the Church, which was based on a simple dynamic of coercion by leadership and submission by membership, was to be rejected as incompatible . . . with the need to provide ways to gather, discriminate, order, and unify whatever wisdom was in the ecclesial community.

Over three-quarters of the respondents claimed the privilege of autonomy or the right to contribute to the creation of policies that affected the local expression of religious life. The obvious outcome was the increasing desire for self-direction and a consciousness of local responsibility, a far cry from the passive dependence on external authority in the past. Eighty percent of respondents said that experimentation in community life and in government was a central issue to them, to their communities, and to the General Chapter during this period. This issue has not yet been resolved by the Sisters. At the time of the study, the Benedictine Sisters were still struggling with the problem of finding structures of governance which would adequately reflect the decade of experience with the cultivation of new patterns of authority.

Studies by Ebaugh and SanGiovanni. In other studies of religious life since Vatican Council II, Ebaugh (1977), and SanGiovanni (1978) focussed on the large exodus of members from certain American religious communities during the past 15 years. In both studies, official authority structures were discussed in the context of mechanisms of social control (Ebaugh, 1977:18, SanGiovanni, 1978:14). Again, both studies made reference to authority patterns and their

influence on the modes of being and living in religious communities. In neither study was the matter of structure of governance seen except as constraint on members of the groups.

Conclusion

In summary, the emphasis in national surveys of religious women and in studies of individual communities of religious has been on gathering data on changes in life style and on the apostolic work in which Sisters were engaged. Findings pointed to change in authority patterns and to new processes by which decisions were made in different groups. Steps by which a new structure of governance might be developed and means by which its adoption might be effected were not mentioned in any of the studies.

The findings of the national surveys and the studies of religious communities were of special significance for this research project in that they offered insights into the general background of change against which change in structure of governance could be studied. For this reason, attention was next directed to the historical development of the religious group which is the subject of this study. Through analysing the way in which the structure of governance in the Mercy community had changed in the past, it was expected that insights into reasons for adoption of the new structure of governance would be found.

The next section of this chapter traces the historical development of the structure of governance of the Sisters of Mercy, (Australia), in an effort to identify those characteristics in the religious community which could be said to have influenced the initial adoption of a particular type of structure at the time of foundation of the group and at later periods when the structure was changed. Through making a close analysis of these periods, the researcher

hoped to substantiate the premise that, in the one hundred and fifty years since the establishment of the Mercy community, a unique quality of organisational life had developed, and that part of this was reflected in the structure of governance.

EVOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNANCE OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY (AUSTRALIA)

Introduction

Several writers have pointed out that, in the past, analysis of historical preconditions has not been a popular approach to the study of change in organisations. Greiner (1967:51) drew attention to this when he discussed the number of major studies of planned change which focus largely on immediate stimuli for change, and especially on a Change Agent's particular strategy for introducing change. As examples of this approach, he cited the work of Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958), Argyris (1962), Blake and Mouton (1964), and Schein and Bennis (1965). Each of these writers tended to emphasise deliberate and conscious attempts at change. Greiner (1972) approached the introduction of change from a different perspective; he asserted that historical and unplanned forces play an important part in setting the stage and giving impetus to a planned change programme. In summary, the position held by Greiner was that the future of an organisation might be less influenced by outside forces than it was by forces within the organisation itself.

In the literature, considerable support was found for Greiner's approach. Among her criticisms of contemporary perspectives on organisations, Mary Zey-Ferrell (1981:189) expressed her concern for what she termed "their pronounced ahistoricism". She presented a strong argument in favour of the need to find a satisfactory way of operationalising historical issues. In speaking of different ways in

which this might be accomplished, she referred to a number of writers (Bendix, 1956; Chandler, 1962, 1977; Penrose, 1980; Selznick, 1949; and Zald, 1970) who emphasised the fact that clues to the possible future success of a particular organisation lay within the organisation itself and its evolving states of development. In particular, she argued that it was important to study the historical process by which present management had gained its power and to appreciate the consequences which this process might have for present and future relationships.

While Greiner (1972:38) was speaking specifically of business organisations, his writings offered insights into a way of studying historical development in a religious organisation. He proposed that an analysis of developmental phases in the life of an organisation would reveal organisational characteristics which shaped the growth of the organisation. Building upon earlier work on the structural development of organisations (Katz and Kahn, 1966), Greiner maintained that growing organisations moved through predictable phases of development, each of which was marked by a relatively calm period of growth that ended with a management crisis. Each evolutionary period was characterised by a dominant management style used to achieve growth, while each revolutionary period or crisis was characterised by a dominant management problem. Greiner asserted that since each phase was strongly influenced by the previous one, a management with a sense of the history of its own organisation could anticipate and prepare for the next organisational crisis.

In this study, the focus of the research is on the process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance for the Australian Sisters of Mercy. In light of a review of relevant literature, the researcher decided that analysis of the early develop-

ment of the Mercy community was a necessary background to the research. To guide her study of the historical antecedents, she chose the Greiner model as an appropriate framework for analysis.

As a result of studying each phase of the model, the researcher gained insights into the way in which specific choices about changes in Mercy governance were made during the period preceding the present research. She was aware, however, that Greiner's development of the model for business organisations limited its usefulness for the study of a religious community. In the following analysis of the historical antecedents of the Mercy community, limitations of the model and areas which need adjustment for this research are discussed.

In the next section of this chapter, phases in the evolution of the structure of governance are described, and organisational elements which may be seen as influencing the changes at each stage are identified. The way in which the stages of growth of the Mercy organisation have been distinguished for the purposes of this study is shown in Figure 1.

Phase 1. The Foundation Period:
The Foundress and her Vision

Unlike the birth stage of a business organisation where the emphasis is on creating both a product and a market, the foundation period in the life of a religious community centres around the founding person and his or her vision. The history of religious communities, according to Cada et al. (1979:53), reveals that each founder or foundress:

. . . experiences a new appreciation of the message of Jesus which leads to innovative insight concerning how the condition of the Church or society could be dramatically improved or how a totally new kind of future could be launched.

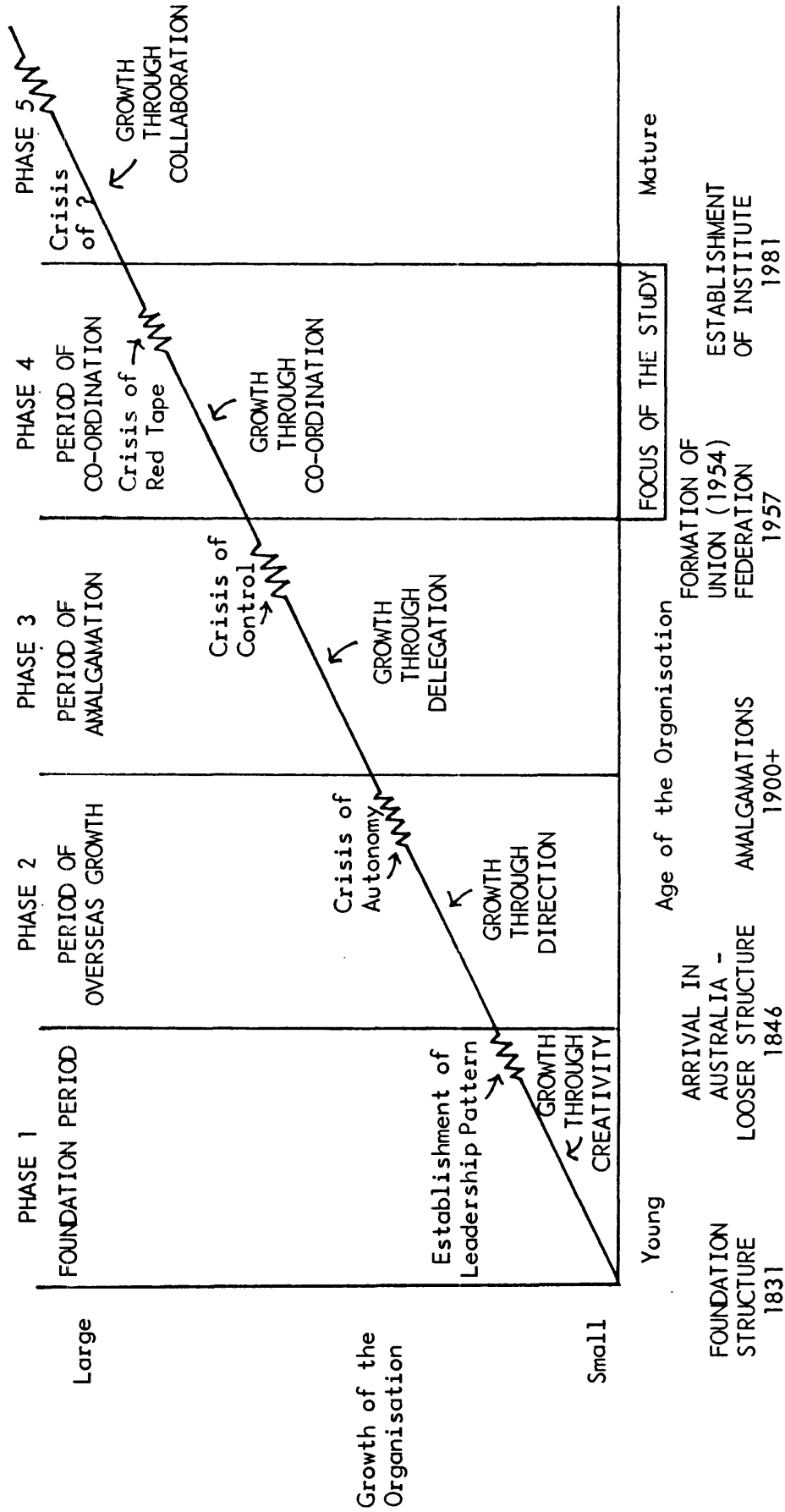


Figure 1

The Five Phases in the Development of the Structure of Governance: Sisters of Mercy (Australia) (Adapted from Greiner, 1972)

The importance which the Church attaches to the person of the founder of a religious community was made clear in the documents of Vatican Council II especially the "Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life" (Abbott, 1966:468). In this respect, the document stated clearly that:

. . . it serves the best interests of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose. Therefore loyal recognition and safe-keeping should be accorded to the spirit of founders, as also to all the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community.

Towards the end of her life, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, was quoted (Bolster, 1981:307) as saying that she never intended to found a religious congregation: "All I wanted to do was to help the poor, because that seemed to be what God was asking of me".

Many people appreciated the unique qualities of Catherine's personality. In the following extracts from an address delivered during the 1931 Mercy Centenary celebration in Ireland, tribute was paid to the personality of Catherine McAuley in the foundation and growth of the religious community which became known as the Sisters of Mercy. Neumann (1969:63) recorded the tribute in the following words:

Institutions and great movements are personal things. Out from some rich personality they proceed. They achieve a personality of their own, but in the greater and more extensive personality that is theirs, we can still discern the personality from which they emanated. They retain something of the soul and spirit of their founders. They are a larger body, a more extensive personality . . . but the life that is theirs was first the life of a single man or woman. Without some insight into the spirit of that individual man or woman we have no understanding of the institute that springs like a living thing from their mind and soul.

What is known, then, of this woman and her vision which will help to account for the form of governance which developed in the founding period?

In 1778, Catherine McAuley was born into the upper middle-class Catholic sector of Irish society, in an age of sharp division between the "have's" and "have not's". Regan (1978) described how Catherine learned from her father a different pattern in dealing with the poor from that which prevailed in society of that period. It was a recognised Christian duty to give alms to the needy. It was a lady's duty to distribute these alms. It was not, however, a practice to show understanding or compassion, but rather to treat the duty of charity as a condescension, the bestowing of a reward on those deemed worthy. Following the death of her father in 1783 and the subsequent financial mismanagement by her mother who died when Catherine was in her teens, her life was marked by poverty and sorrow. As Savage (1949:27) pointed out, Catherine knew what it was like to live on charity and to suffer discrimination because of her religion. In 1803, Catherine was offered a home with distant Quaker cousins of her mother, the Callaghans, who gradually gave over to her the management of their estates. They also encouraged Catherine in her various charitable activities; teaching children at the gate-lodge of Coolock House, the Callaghan residence; instructing servant girls in the house and in the neighbouring mansions; and visiting the sick and the poor in the nearby village.

In 1822 when Catherine became an heiress to the Callaghan fortune, she decided to transfer her charitable activities to Dublin city and give them more corporate shape. Sabourin (1976:3) suggested that Catherine McAuley seemed to have only one compelling goal: the exercise of mercy. Her idea was to assemble a group of like-minded young women who with her would devote their time to works of mercy but who would not constitute a religious community. She decided that her inheritance would be used for the relief and instruction of the

poor and that she would build a refuge for distressed women of good character. Before long Catherine's project became a storm-centre of criticism. Some members of the Church in Dublin felt that the newly-built House of Mercy rivalled works of the Sisters of Charity and would drain financial support from them. Some clerics took offence that lay women were doing freely and under self-direction what the Sisters of Charity and the Presentation Sisters were doing within the structures of the Church. Regan (1978) recounted how the issue was further confounded: the builder of the House of Mercy had used a design which closely resembled a convent, the ladies had adopted a simple dress, and they had begun to address each other as "Sister". Catherine shrank from becoming a religious, but Archbishop Murray of Dublin expressed his wish that the group of Sisters form a religious institute to rescue them "from the anomaly of their painful position" (A Member of the Order of Mercy, 1881:32).

Institution of the Mercy Order. Catherine could understand the concern expressed by the Archbishop and decided to accede to his suggestion. After a period of training in religious communal life at the Presentation Convent in Dublin, Catherine and two of her companions were professed on December 12, 1831, as the first Sisters of Mercy. Archbishop Murray appointed Catherine first superior of the Sisters of Mercy and confirmed her in office in the name of the Church. Her first duty was to receive seven of her associates and to direct their religious training.

The first Rule of the new community consisted of a single chapter on union and charity, but constant pressure concerning the status in the Church of the "walking Sisters" promoted the gradual though reluctant adoption of practices similar to other religious communities of the day. Savage (1949:262-4) described Catherine's

anxiety to obtain written approval for the new Mercy community and her relief when this was granted on March 24, 1835. As increasing demands were placed upon Catherine to send her Sisters to serve the poor in a number of different places and new Mercy communities were established, it became evident that an appropriate form of government structure would be necessary. Jennings and O'Toole (1979:1.8-1.9) described, in some detail, the response Catherine made to this need.

First Mercy structure of governance. In the Constitution approved by Rome in 1841, the model chosen by Catherine appeared the ultimate form of decentralisation for an organisation with a membership greater than that localised in a particular convent and with a particular direction of service to meet local needs. Each convent was governed by a superior and two councillors elected for a specific term, with executive and, in extraordinary circumstances, legislative power, the latter being reserved normally to a Chapter of all professed members which met at regular intervals to review, to set policy directions and to elect. Decisions were made by the superior in regard to day to day matters relating to the life and work of the members, by the superior and council with regard to the more important matters, and by the Chapter regarding the appointment of leaders and momentous changes.

In governance, as in every other aspect of religious life in the Mercy community, Catherine modelled whatever she suggested or required. She refrained from making decisions for others, choosing to point out matters to be considered. When new foundations were made, Catherine gave on-the-job-training to her new superiors. As Regan (1978) pointed out, Catherine remained at least one month with them, longer if necessary. More than two hundred extant letters show how closely the Foundress kept in touch with each group after its

foundation (Neumann, 1969). While the actual structure, then, was simple, the personality of the Foundress, as well as her physical presence, was an important force in keeping before the Sisters the spirit of the community.

While the leadership pattern was also simple, several features of the initial foundations became significant in later stages of the growth of the community, and particularly the development of the structure of governance. First, each foundation was established in response to a request to undertake one or more works of mercy in a particular place, that is, the call to "mission" gave the initial thrust for founding a new convent. Second, to each new foundation Catherine McAuley sent a group of Sisters whose commitment to serving the poor of the district quickly became known and appreciated. For this reason, commitment of the membership to the mission of the group was an important element in the development of the religious organisation. Third, throughout the Mercy community, a special quality of leadership developed.

This quality of leadership was described in the Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, handwritten by the Foundress in 1833 (McAuley, 1833:32). The Chapter entitled "Of the Office of Mother Superior" opened with the words:

The Mother Superior to govern with advantage to the Community and merit to herself must show herself a model of regular observance, that becoming a pattern to the community, she may by example more powerfully engage them to the strict accomplishment of the duties of the Institute.

In speaking of the duties of the Institute, Catherine was referring to caring for the poor, the sick, and those in need of education, that is, to the mission of the Mercy community. Catherine's reference to the mission of the community indicated the importance she believed it should assume for the office of the local superior.

Several paragraphs in the original Rule also referred to the task of caring for the personal needs of the Sisters. The local superior was to consult with her Council once a month concerning the spiritual and temporal welfare of the community. In fact, Catherine (McAuley, 1833:33) said that:

. . . she shall attend to their counsels, and not be the least displeas'd should any of them differ from her, but show herself dispos'd to coincide with their opinion when convinc'd by the force of their reasons.

In this may be seen an early form of participative decision-making for the Mercy community. Moreover, leadership positions in religious communities are not held for life. This was the case at the time of the foundation of the Mercy community as it is today. After a Sister's term in office is completed, she becomes once more a member of the community and receives no special privileges because she has held a leadership position.

In summary, leadership in a Mercy community was expected to be attentive to the poor in the local district. This expectation that the leader of the group had the same aspirations as her community bound the religious group in a way that made a crisis of leadership virtually impossible.

During the foundation period, while each Mercy community responded to different needs in different areas, Sisters in all groups followed the same Mercy Rule which guided their way of living and working. When she could not visit them, Catherine kept in touch with the new Mercy foundations through what she called her "Foundation Circulars to the foreign powers" (Neumann, 1969:62). Some six years after Catherine's death, the superiors of the different convents came together to draw up the Customs of the Institute in a definite form. By recording the customs and traditions as they were being handed down, it was hoped to cement a firm bond of unity and to codify for

reference practices established by Catherine herself. A distinctive "Mercy spirit" developed in the communities to such an extent that even in later foundations outside Ireland, Sisters could move from one Mercy convent to another and feel at home. A special Mercy ethos or culture was developing.

Phase 2. Period of Overseas Growth:
Rapid Growth in Number of Foundations

In the first ten years of the life of the Mercy Order, there was an extremely rapid growth in the number of foundations outside Ireland. In Greiner's (1972) concept of the development of a business organisation, it was at this stage that a crisis of leadership could be expected. He stated that founders of business organisations often do not wish to step aside even though they are probably temperamentally unsuited to be managers. Those companies who install a capable business manager will move into a period of sustained growth. The appointment of a strong manager who is acceptable to the founders and who can pull the organisation together is the first critical developmental choice for the organisation.

As the number of Mercy foundations grew, the potential existed for such a crisis in leadership; but Catherine McAuley did not try to manage every convent herself. Whenever possible, she stayed for some time with the Sisters when they began a new foundation. Her influence on the development of the new Mercy community was largely related to ensuring that the Sisters were adequately prepared to respond to the mission demands of the area. The type of governance which she established gave a great degree of autonomy to each community so that the mission in a particular place could be developed to meet the needs of the poor in that place.

Independence in structure of governance. Following the earlier pattern in which each foundation had become a separate entity, overseas foundations showed real independence in structure of governance. In the 1830's, the Roman Catholic Church still viewed North America and Australia as missionary countries. For this reason, it was important that the local Bishop in a particular area should be unimpeded in the way he ran his diocese. The new Mercy community had to be able to meet his local problems, and remain untrammelled by stringent control from elsewhere.

Each Mercy community, then, was encouraged to develop a spirit of autonomy. Neumann (1969:64) was of the opinion that, in making this arrangement originally, Catherine had no choice for two reasons: she knew of no other form of government, and she did not have enough Sisters to supply the missions from the parent house, so that after the initial establishment of a foundation, it was expected that new members would be recruited from the local area.

On occasion, the demands of local Mercy autonomy and the demands for cooperation by a Bishop could not be reconciled. While Catherine was alive, and able to go to the scene of any difficulty with local Church authorities, the local Mercy community felt assured of maintaining the original spirit of the Mercy Order and the original form of local government autonomy. Sometimes, however, interference from a local Bishop caused tensions to develop even among members within the religious community. O'Donoghue (1972:83-87) described the relationship between Mother M. Vincent Whitty and Bishop James Quinn in the early period of the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Brisbane, and the particular difficulty experienced by a Mercy group as they tried to counter an episcopal bid for undue control:

[Mother Vincent's] greatest difficulty with the Bishop arose from their different attitude to authority, how she should exercise it in her community, and how far he should control her and her community.

This and other stories about the Brisbane Sisters point to the strength of the unique quality of life they had developed, due in no small part to the courageous leadership of certain Sisters. At the same time, the total Mercy group was committed to meeting the challenge of the mission, in this case, to establishing an independent school system to serve the Catholic population throughout the vastness of Queensland.

Perhaps the most striking example of the degree of autonomy exercised by a local group was found in the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia. Mother Ursula Frayne led the first band of Mercy Sisters from Ireland to Perth in 1846. Because the Sisters were living under extremely difficult conditions, the Sisters in Ireland sent them their return fares. Ursula Frayne and her group decided "to give Perth another go". Kent (1982:28) recounted how they stayed and established 16 more foundations across Australia.

Greiner's (1972) method of analysis helped to explain the nature of leadership in this early period of Mercy history. In this period of growth in a business organisation, Greiner (1972:42) saw a crisis of autonomy as a result of outside demands placed on lower-level managers. At the same time, he saw other influences at work within the organisation. For example, communication becomes more formal and impersonal as a hierarchy of titles and positions grows. In the case of the religious group, a tradition of struggling together against odds was more powerful than pressures from outside the organisation. In the Mercy community, local superiors saw autonomy of governance so much part of the way of life for the Sisters that they struggled to retain it. It persisted in spite of some

quite extraordinary pressure to the contrary, even from within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

Phase 3. Period of Amalgamation: System of Growth Characteristic of the Mercy Order

The highly decentralised system of growth characteristic of the Mercy Order proved to be particularly appropriate in the last century for the New World countries - Australia and the United States of America. Growth of foundations in this country was so rapid that by the early years of this century there were at least eighty convents scattered across the continent, some founded from England and Ireland, others from already established Australian convents, most of which had progressively become independent of their founding convents (Jennings and O'Toole, 1979:3.4).

There was one rather striking exception to that pattern of independent development. In Queensland, 27 convents had been founded from the original foundation, All Hallows', in Brisbane, and continued to be seen as branch houses of that community. Reasons for that pattern of Mercy development may be traced back to the policy of diocesan centralisation by Bishop James Quinn. O'Donoghue (1961:55) quoted Mother Vincent Whitty, the Foundress of the All Hallows' group, as saying

The Bishop intends that all the Convents should be united as branch houses and, considering the wants of the mission, I am sure that is best.

These words were of some significance coming as they did from a Sister of Mercy with Mother Vincent's background. She entered when the Order was only eight years old: the whole of her novitiate of two years and nine months was spent with Catherine McAuley who personally prepared the novices for their profession -- the day on which they made their vows (O'Donoghue, 1972:7). Mother Vincent, then, was a

Sister of Mercy who would have special insights into the way in which the Foundress came to decisions such as those which she faced in relation to the mission in Queensland. Episcopal pressure was certainly there but what was best for the mission was all-important.

New direction for traditional pattern of Mercy governance. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Australia, certain events proved influential in turning the traditional pattern of Mercy governance in a new direction. Many communities were very small and there was concern for the proper religious formation of the Sisters. For this reason alone, it seemed that some process of consolidation was necessary, but how this was to be achieved was not at all clear to the Sisters. However, certain events beyond the control of the Sisters gave impetus to some form of consolidation.

In Victoria, the Bishops of the time, conscious of the possible implications to the provision of Catholic education of the withdrawal of Government funding from private schools in 1883 and of the passing of various Education Acts, saw that it was imperative that an Amalgamation of all Victorian Mercy convents be made. A similar situation developed in the United States of America. Sabourin (1976:27), in a scholarly study of the movement towards amalgamation of Sisters of Mercy in America, stated that the influence of the wishes of the hierarchy of the Church was significant, not only in Australia, but also in America. In Victoria, the response of the Sisters to the call from the Bishops to amalgamate was not immediate throughout the State. Although the first General Chapter was held in 1908, only ten Victorian convents were represented. Gradually, applications came from other convents, but it was not until 1932, 25 years after the Amalgamation was agreed upon, that the final approval came from Rome for the Rules and Constitutions of the

Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Victoria and Tasmania
(Jennings and O'Toole, 1979:3,7).

The lack of enthusiasm and even discontent regarding the Amalgamation was noted by Hartigan (1979:62) in a recent study of the Amalgamation:

. . . the Sisters of Mercy in the early years of this century were by no means unanimous on the question of union between the houses of the order even in one diocese. Some even felt so strongly about it that there was no way out except abandoning their mission.

As Gaudry (1981:15) pointed out, one Mercy group in Victoria, Ballarat East, believed it best served its mission by not joining the Amalgamation. Ballarat East exercised its prerogative of remaining as an independent community, and established its college for teacher education which was to play a significant role in the Catholic tertiary education field in the state of Victoria.

The general impression of the early part of the twentieth century history of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, however, is that there was a steady movement towards amalgamation of the Mercy convents throughout the country. In this country, as in the United States of America and in England (Sabourin, 1976), there was great uncertainty among the Sisters as to the wisdom of amalgamating: yet in many places there was undoubted pressure from particular Bishops to move into amalgamation as rapidly as possible. There were two major reasons for their insistence. Although many Bishops saw amalgamation as a benefit for the mission of the Church in their area, others were more strongly influenced by a series of directives concerning religious life which emanated from Rome. Not the least of these was the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917.

The "period of amalgamation" bears an interesting comparison with the "crisis of control" period discussed by Greiner (1972:43).

As the different field managers in a business organisation become more autonomous, and often more parochial, top management is inclined to attempt a return to centralised management which usually fails because of the scope of the operations. In the case of the religious organisation, the impetus towards a more centralised form of management also came primarily from outside the religious group. In the previous discussion it was shown how closely the life of the religious group was bound to that of the Church, and also how the mission of the community might be influenced by demands and changes in the civil society in which the group was located.

This must have been a period when the Sisters experienced great tension within their communities. The tradition of local autonomy, particularly as it concerned the mission, had remained strong, but a desire for unity between convents was increasing with the gradual breaking of links with the original founding convents and the geographical isolation of many of the Australian Mercy communities. Questions concerning leadership and mission were of great concern, and the experiences of this period as many groups moved into amalgamation were to be remembered in the next stage of the development of the pattern of governance for Sisters of Mercy in Australia.

Phase 4. Period of Coordination:
Union (1954) and Federation (1957)

In Greiner's (1972) model of growth, the next evolutionary period was characterised by the use of formal systems for achieving greater co-ordination, with top executives taking responsibility for the initiation and administration of these new systems, and an eventual crisis of red tape when the organisation became too large and complex to be managed through formal programmes and rigid systems.

By the 1950's, the consolidation of the smaller groups in the Mercy Order had reduced the number of groups to 17; these are now listed with the names they have retained since that period and with the date of foundation: Perth (1846), Melbourne (1857), Goulburn (1859), Brisbane (1861), North Sydney (1865), Bathurst (1866), Rockhampton (1873), Singleton (1875), Townsville (1878), Gunnedah (1879), Adelaide (1880), Ballarat East (1881), Grafton (1884), Cairns (1888), Parramatta (1888), Wilcannia-Forbes (1889), and West Perth (1896).

While this consolidation was taking place in the first half of this century, Australian society had undergone great social change, as was the case with other societies of the age. It was the opinion of Pope Pius XII, however, that members of religious communities of women had not kept pace with such change. A man of rare vision, who could see that the potential of religious women for good in society was largely untapped, he requested the Sacred Congregation for Religious to invite the Mother General of every group of religious women in the world to attend a meeting in Rome in September, 1952. At the meeting, Pope Pius XII spoke strongly of a number of matters regarding the life and work of religious women. These included the need for Sisters to be more directly at the service of the Church and to be professionally trained for their work. Sisters were to engage in sport and recreation, and the religious dress was to be modified to suit the demands of modern life. Two further matters were put before the Sisters. Groups of Sisters following the same Rule were expected to come together in some unified way, while Conferences of Major Superiors should be formed in different countries to provide mutual assistance to the Sisters of various groups.

Although two Australian Sisters of Mercy had attended the meeting in Rome, no definitive move to respond to the Pope's

directives occurred until after receipt of a letter from the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin. Sent to the Mother General of the Sisters of Mercy in Melbourne and dated October 20, 1952 (copy held by researcher), the letter asked for suggestions from all Mercy groups in Australia on possible modifications to the religious dress. This request led to a gathering of Sisters of Mercy at Monte Sant'Angelo, Sydney. Little attention was given to the matter of religious dress, but a good deal of discussion was devoted to the idea of uniting in one form of government all the Sisters of Mercy in Australia. This matter had been introduced in an address by the Apostolic Delegate, Most Reverend Paul Marella, who put before the Sisters the views of the Church on the subject of union. In Greiner's terms, formal systems were developed to achieve greater co-ordination, with top executives (in this case the hierarchy of the Church) taking responsibility for the initiation of the new systems. In fact, prominent churchmen were conspicuous in the unfolding story of Mercy co-ordination.

Formal inter-congregational links. From the first tentative exploration of the concept of union at the Sydney meeting, and within the comparatively short period of five years, the Mercy Sisters of Australia took the decisive step of entering upon formal canonical inter-congregational links. Gaudry (1981:24) gave a succinct description of the outcome of this step which was the formation of two bodies -- the Union and the Federation.

The Australian Union of Sisters of Mercy (approved July 26, 1954) was organised on the model of the centralised institute. A Superior General was elected with authority over the Provinces which comprised the Union - Perth, Melbourne, Goulburn, Bathurst, Singleton, Gunnedah, Adelaide and Wilcannia-Forbes. A Generalate House was established in Canberra, and Mother Patricia O'Neill of Melbourne was elected first Superior General. The remaining nine Congregations - Brisbane, North Sydney, Ballarat, Grafton, Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, West Perth and Parramatta, chose to retain independent status, but were united in the

Federation of the Australian Sisters of Mercy (approved November 21, 1957). The Federation Council, representing all the Congregations, promoted unity through its broad policy-making functions, and the Federation Statutes themselves provided for uniformity in Constitutions and Customs. The first President of the Federation was Mother M. Damian Duncombe of Brisbane.

The fact that different groups of the Sisters of Mercy chose to be co-ordinated in ways that were so very different canonically provoked two questions: Why were these two forms of governance chosen? In what ways did they differ?

Keeping in mind the place of religious communities within the Church, it should be understood that directives from the Pope were considered with the utmost seriousness by members of these communities. Not only did unity among groups of religious with the same founder or foundress appear to be based on commonsense; the notion promised greater co-operation among groups for their mission in the Church. In other words, it would have been very difficult for the members of any Mercy group to choose to remain independent and make no change. All groups decided to change, either to Union or Federation.

This period of Mercy history is rich in documentation. Every Mercy group has preserved a mass of correspondence -- from one Major Superior to another, between Major Superiors and the Church lawyers who assisted at meetings concerning unification, between Mercy groups and the Sacred Congregation for Religious. Moreover, at no stage could the role played by the Apostolic Delegate be discounted. It must have been a matter of some concern for successive Delegates to take all steps in their power to encourage religious groups to act upon directives from Rome. Again, many of the more prominent actors in the struggle towards the most appropriate form of union can still remember, in some detail, the events in which they were involved at that time.

Jennings and O'Toole (1979:1.44) pointed out that groups who accepted the Union structure were, for the most part, those who

already experienced that kind of organisation in an amalgamation, and believed that it passed no threat to local autonomy. Those not prepared to join the Union saw it primarily in its full legal sense as a highly centralised form of government, and as they did not have the experience of living in an amalgamated structure saw that joining the Union could pose a very real threat to their existing and much valued autonomy.

In later years, when Sisters of Mercy spoke of their widespread concern to preserve those rights belonging to the local level, they often cited the remarks passed by Sister M. Ephrem Hartigan, Provincial Superior of Melbourne Province Australian Union, 1972-1978, in a paper presented at the March, 1979, Special National Mercy Meeting at Gunnedah. Referring to the foundation leaders, Hartigan (1979) suggested that the matter of local autonomy was not put in jeopardy either in the Union or the Federation by virtue of the fact that the Union elected women of retiring age as General Superior and Council, while Sisters elected as President and Executive of the Federation were fully occupied as Superior Generals in their own group.

Co-ordination of the Sisters of Mercy, however, had taken place. A study of the documentation concerning the two forms of governance gave some answers to the questions raised earlier as to why these particular forms were chosen, and in what ways they differed from each other. From the documentation, a review is now made of events leading to the decision to establish the Union and, later, to form the Federation.

Establishment of the Union. At the end of the gathering of the Sisters of Mercy at Monte Sant'Angelo, Sydney, in October, 1952,

the Sisters had agreed to hold an Annual Mercy Meeting, with the first in Melbourne in September of the following year. The following information about this Meeting was taken from the Minutes of the first session, entitled "Meeting of the Mercy Delegates, Melbourne, September, 1953".

At the beginning of the meeting, Most Reverend Daniel Mannix, Archbishop of Melbourne, pointed out that the growth and spread of the Sisters of Mercy made a bond of unity essential to give the Church the best possible service. He praised the communities already united for their splendid work in the Archdiocese.

As seven different groups had placed on the agenda the question of Union, it was to receive first attention. On this matter, two Sisters presented papers. In her discussion, Mother M. Bonaventure Healy of Ballarat East spoke of the type of governance chosen by Catherine McAuley, and in practice among the separate communities. She expressed the problem facing the Sisters in the following way:

The loss of this unifying principle is what we are feeling today. Can we achieve it by changing the whole system of government? This is the vital question. It seems contrariwise to the workings of Divine Providence to have phenomenal growth for one hundred years on one plan, and then change over to another plan quite opposed to it. Could there be any solution lying between the two?

The solution she offered was what is now known as the Federation. Each Mercy community would retain independent status, but would unite with other Mercy communities through a Federation Council with a Mother President. In suggesting this, she also said that at some future time, something more elaborate might develop, but that the Federation scheme seemed to her to be something which would unite them there and then without any great change.

Mother M. Paul of Bathurst, one of two Australian Sisters of Mercy who had attended the meeting in Rome in September, 1952, then

presented a paper in which she also addressed the matter of unity of all the Australian Sisters of Mercy. She, however, spoke strongly in favour of the establishment of a Union, that is, a form of government in which the Sisters were united under a Mother General, with the Institute divided into separate provinces. Her experience in Rome encouraged her to favour this form of government, as did her knowledge of a similar development in the United States of America.

This first session of the Melbourne meeting ended with the suggestion of postponing efforts towards Union until all English-speaking Sisters of Mercy were ready to take the step. The following day, however, Reverend H. Jordan, M.S.C., read a paper outlining the history and development of the Institute founded by Catherine McAuley, especially growth of the Mercy Order in Australia. This paper which strongly favoured the adoption of what he called "organic union" greatly impressed the Sisters. Eight of the 17 Mothers General decided to petition the Holy See for permission to form such a Union. On Saturday, September 12, 1953, in Melbourne, Father Jordan drafted a letter petitioning the Holy See to allow these communities to form a Union. The Washington Rule of the American Sisters of Mercy was read with a view to requesting the Holy See to permit Australian Sisters to adopt it so far as it was practicable in Australia. On September 14 the Sisters of the various communities returned to their respective convents, all expecting at least a year would elapse before any final step would be taken to make the Union a reality.

In May, 1954, a formal petition for Union was forwarded to Rome. On August 5, each of the Mothers General received a telegram from the Apostolic Delegate to the effect that at the end of the month they were expected to be in Sydney to hold the first Chapter of the Union and to carry out elections and necessary business.

To the search for formal union, this was certainly a very speedy conclusion for eight of the 17 groups.

The succession of events just outlined indicated some of the reasons for the choice of the Union form of governance by some groups: the influence of directives from Rome that religious groups with the same foundress should take steps to come together, the encouragement of the Apostolic Delegate and the churchmen appointed to work with the Australian Sisters, the arguments put forward by the two sisters who had been at the Rome meeting, the Sisters' knowledge of American efforts in the matter of unity, and the earlier experiences of amalgamation by some of the Australian Mercy communities.

While these reasons might be deduced from the extensive material held in the archives of each of the 17 groups and also in the Secretariate of the newly-formed Institute, they were also supported by the information given during interviews which were carried out for the study of the history of government in the Australian Union of the Sisters of Mercy (Jennings and O'Toole, 1979). From these interviews the impression was also given that the Sisters who formed the Union saw that such unity would be a considerable source of strength, particularly for religious education and professional training of the Sisters, as well as the mission of the group.

Formation of the Federation. For the remaining nine groups of Sisters of Mercy in Australia, the matter of retaining their local autonomy loomed very large. They stressed the need to return to their own communities to discuss the matter with their councils and to ask for the opinion of their Sisters. In many cases, the Bishops in the dioceses in which the Sisters worked supported the Sisters' wish to retain their autonomy, and were active in assisting the Sisters to

prepare a Petition for Federation.

After extensive consultation with both the Sisters and Church lawyers, a Petition to set up the Federation was sent to Rome, and on November 21, 1955, the Sacred Congregation gave its approval for the establishment of the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia.

Some years later, in an address to the Sisters of Mercy of Brisbane (Hogan, 1968:6), Reverend J. Hogan, S.J., a Church lawyer often consulted by different Mercy groups, described the essential features of the Federation as follows:

[The] Federation . . . was to be a grouping of autonomous congregations, each remaining independent in government under its own Mother General, but agreeing to accept uniformity in Constitutions, Ceremonial and Customs. There would be a Federation Council, consisting of the Mother General and the First Councillor of each member congregation, which would meet at least every two years, "to discuss matters of common interest, and to promote mutual cooperation and assistance".

Looking back on the early days of the Federation, Hogan (1968:9) pointed out that just as the Sisters of the Union, when they came together under one Mother General, had to yield some of their independence as separate communities, so, too, in the Federation, the coming together meant surrendering the rights of independent action.

In comparing the Petition for Union and the Petition for Federation, certain similarities emerged. Both wish for unity of members, for a common Constitution and Rule, for better formation of the Sisters both in the principles of religious life and in the apostolic works of mercy of the community, and both outlined the form of governance by which these would be achieved. It was in the form of governance that the Union and the Federation differed. In the Union, the Sisters believed they could best achieve their aims through a centralised form of governance; the Sisters in the Federation believed that for them the most appropriate form of union was decentralised.

Conclusion

This point in the evolution of the structure of governance marked the beginning of the present research. The co-ordination which Greiner (1972:41) discussed in regard to business organisations had begun. He suggested that during the period of co-ordination more efficient ways of allocating resources develop. This development poses new problems for managers and management, the solution of which demands strong interpersonal collaboration.

In the Mercy community in Australia, establishment of the Union (1954) and the Federation (1957) was the coordination stage, and establishment of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia (1981), the collaboration stage in terms of Greiner's model. According to Greiner (p.43), during the phase of development following the coordination stage, the organisation becomes too large and complex to be managed through the existing formal system, and a lack of confidence gradually builds between "headquarters and the field". Greiner pointed out that both groups criticised the bureaucratic paper system that had evolved; a red-tape crisis was created. For the present study, the researcher decided that this stage of Greiner's model was not sufficiently detailed to serve as the framework to guide the research. However, insights from this stage proved useful in indicating that a "crisis of red tape" in the Mercy community would have to be overcome before strong interpersonal collaboration could occur and before the adoption of a new structure of governance could be achieved.

As the focus of the research is on the process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy, it was important that an analysis of the historical context of the research problem be presented. The researcher gained insights from the study of the context which helped to direct the

review of literature. In the next chapter, it is argued that an understanding of the nature of the religious community is necessary in order to study the process of change leading to the new structure of governance in the Mercy community. At the conclusion of the review of literature, a conceptual framework is formulated to guide investigation of the research problem.