

# *Catherine McAuley and Baggot Street*

- In 1803 Catherine went as a companion to live with Mr. and Mrs. Callaghan, friends of her guardians.
- Catherine spent twenty years with the Callaghans at Coolock House where she gave catechetical instructions to the household servants and the poor village children. She taught needlework to young women and ran a small shop to sell their goods.
- In his will William Callaghan appointed Catherine his sole legatee, knowing that she would use the money to provide 'protection and education for young servant girls'.
- William's generosity enabled Catherine to put into effect her plan to educate young girls but also to extend her vision to a variety of social services for poor women and children.
- In 1824, she leased property in Baggot Street Dublin. The building was not approved of by Catherine's family and was christened 'Kitty's Folly' by her brother James.
- But Catherine's concern for the marginalized was equaled by her wisdom and she intended that the wealthy of this area would be brought into daily contact with struggles of the poor. She hoped that those blessed by material security would be moved to support and even join in her service.
- The house on Baggot Street was ready for use on September 24, 1827, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy.
- The House of Mercy flourished; hundreds of girls enrolled in the school, a home for young servant girls and the visitation of the sick were also added to the activities under Catherine's care.
- Catherine's dream had become a reality, her sisters were to: 'educate poor girls, to lodge and maintain poor young women who are in danger...and to visit the sick poor.'
- In the ten years between the founding of the Order and her death Catherine founded nine foundations in Ireland and two in England.
- Catherine would stay at new convent to help set up its ministry and to lead the sisters in prayer. Her loving presence was a great encouragement to the new community.
- Each new foundation was independent of the mother house at Baggot Street but Catherine linked them to herself and each other by frequent visits and letters.
- She used to send what she called 'Foundation Circulars' where she gave news of the congregation, offered or sought advice, created verses to amuse or soften a correction and shared her joys and disappointments.

