



# Mission *of* Love



BY MARY SCANLON, LITTLE COMPANY OF MARY



# Introduction

In the 1990s, the Little Company of Mary Leadership team in London decided to strengthen bonds of unity within the Congregation. They convened four gatherings, two in England and two in the United States, and invited each province to nominate representatives to attend.

I was privileged to represent Aotearoa New Zealand Tonga. We had the joy of meeting one another, often for the first time, sharing our lived experience of being LCM in our own country, and exchanging symbols of our individual cultures. On my return to New Zealand, in an effort to communicate the insights both at home and abroad, I began to write small monthly reflections. I selected a significant day in each month that contained elements of our spirituality, drawing on Liturgical themes, the seasons and so on. I discovered the richness of our spirituality, and the writing discipline became a joy and a pleasure.

In time, the reflections took on a life of their own, and I was but their organ. Like all writers, I had some difficult times when writing did not come easily, but the privilege of expressing and sharing our spirituality far outweighed those challenges. Through my writings, I have endeavoured to live out Mary Potter's directive: *"To be for the members of the body of Christ today what Mary was for her Son on Calvary."* Now 20 years on, I know it is time for me to put down the virtual pen and close this chapter of my life.

In order to begin the writing, and even more to have continued over almost 20 years, I have received support, encouragement and assistance from a large number of people. My thanks go to:

- *Venerable Mary Potter; my inspiration and spiritual guide*
- *the Little Company of Mary Leadership Teams, over the years, who have authorised my work, with special thanks to the Province of the Southern Cross Leadership, who have encouraged and financed this publication*
- *my Little Company of Mary communities, local and worldwide, who continued to affirm and encourage me*
- *the Little Company of Mary Associates and Affiliates, local and worldwide, who responded with enthusiasm to the reflections*
- *my many friends, at home and abroad, who welcomed the reflections and provided advice and support during the fallow times of writing.*

To each of these, and others unknown to me, I offer a heartfelt vote of thanks. May the spirituality of Mary Potter continue to touch your heart and move you to pray for the suffering world in which we live.

**SR. MARY SCANLON, LCM**





## About the author

Mary Scanlon is the eldest of four children born to Albert Scanlon, a teacher, and Mary his wife, a seamstress and home-maker. The family left Wellington when Mary was six and she attended nine schools in various parts of New Zealand, a stressful childhood during World War Two. She finished her schooling in Greymouth on

the West Coast and then worked as a nurse aide at the local Grey Base Hospital, where she witnessed the trauma of young men demobbed home with terrible injuries.

Mary then went to Canterbury University to study languages. She obtained a nurse aide position at the Little Company of Mary Hospital in Christchurch, and there she observed a dedicated level of nursing care, with emphasis on the spirituality of the patient's needs. Very soon, Mary felt that God was calling her to join the Sisters, even though her own natural inclination was not towards religious life.

To the joy of her family, Mary decided to enter the Little Company of Mary Novitiate in Sydney in 1949. Australian culture was unfamiliar and the formation challenging, but her heart was in the spirituality of accompanying people in their suffering and dying.

Mary made her Profession in 1951. She graduated Registered Nurse in 1954, Registered Midwife in 1956 in Adelaide, and returned to New Zealand in 1958. In 1960, she graduated New Zealand Diploma of Nursing Education, and Registered Psychiatric Nurse in 1974. Over the following years, she ministered as a Nurse Educator, Psychiatric Nurse, Principal Nurse and finally Bereavement Visitor at Mary Potter Hospice, Wellington.

In the 1990s, Mary was part of an international group of Sisters who met in London and Los Angeles to share their lives as a Little Company of Mary presence in different countries. These Reflections emerge from those meetings. Mary now lives a full life at a retirement village, involved in pastoral care to the residents, and in activities of the Village such as the choir, the book club and the Scrabble club.





## Mary Potter

### Founder of the Little Company of Mary

*'Suffering is the touchstone of Love.'* So wrote Mary Potter as she reflected on her life's work, the foundation of the Little Company of Mary.

Born in London in 1847, Mary grew up with four older brothers in a single-parent home, after her father abandoned the family when Mary was one year old. Mary was physically frail all her life, being born with a serious heart defect. As a young woman, she experienced a brief romance and engagement, and then had a short time as a Sister of Mercy novice. Her health deteriorated there, however, and she returned home gravely ill to be cared for by her mother.

Over the next few years while virtually an invalid, Mary prayed constantly. She felt herself drawn more and more to the foot of the cross and to companionship with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, standing in solidarity with her dying Son. Mary Potter knew that God was calling her to respond to the needs of the world's sick and dying. Some of her Marian writings were published, and Bishop Bagshawe in the Nottingham diocese was impressed with her insights and obvious holiness.

Mary's mother was opposed to her daughter's undertaking any initiative, so in January 1877 Mary made the courageous decision to leave home and travel to Nottingham. She set up house in a cold, abandoned factory, but her heart sang with the love of God and God's people. Young women soon joined her, and on July 2, 1877

Mary Potter brought to birth a congregation of religious women dedicated to prayer for and care of the sick and dying. She named it the Little Company of Mary, to reflect the Sisters' call to be companions of Mary at the Calvaries of people's suffering, dying and death.

The congregation spread and is now in several countries. Mary Potter, though ill, travelled to Rome in 1882 to gain canonical approval for the congregation. She died in Rome in the evening of April 9, 1913, and was hailed as a saint by cardinals and cabbies alike. She was declared Venerable in 1988.

Mary Potter was above all a contemplative, learning from Mary on Calvary the quality of stillness in the presence of the Lord. This led her to embrace the Paschal Mystery, which brings fullness of life for all humanity. She bequeathed to her Sisters this spirituality in all its richness. In her words: 'We live in the joy of the Resurrection! It should be a fresh joy to us each day.'

The Little Company of Mary Sisters today live Mary Potter's Mission, and express it in ministries such as hospice care, counselling, pastoral work and bereavement support.

For more information about the Little Company of Mary, visit: [www.lcmsisters.org](http://www.lcmsisters.org)





In the 1990s, Sister Mary Scanlon was one of an international team of Sisters who met in London and Los Angeles to share their experience of living out the charism of the Little Company of Mary (LCM) in their own culture.

On her return to New Zealand, Mary began writing monthly reflections exploring LCM spirituality in the context of the Church's liturgical cycle. This is a task she has dedicated herself to for nearly 20 years. These reflections have long been a source of encouragement and inspiration for the LCM community in New Zealand and around the world.

*The Mission of Love* is a selection of these reflections. They shine a fresh light on the teachings of Mary Potter, the founder of the Little Company of Mary, and reveal a lively and compassionate spirituality lived out by the writer over more than 60 years.

