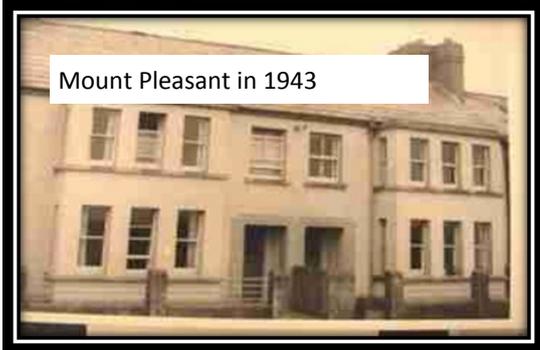


IRELAND

FMDM EARLY BEGINNINGS



Mount Pleasant in 1943

In 1942 two FMDM sisters, Mother Margaret and Sr. Bernard Rudden were sent to Ireland to find a suitable location for a Nursing Foundation. The late Bishop Dignan welcomed the sisters to the Clonfert Diocese and on December 8th of that same year, the first Mass was celebrated in a little house that had been obtained by the sisters in Mount Pleasant, Ballinasloe. It was in Mount Pleasant that the sisters established their community and set up their first nursing home.

The first patient was admitted on February 11th 1943 and, the first Baby was born on 20th February.

Bishop Dignan donated a gift of some land in Brackernagh for the sisters to build a nursing home. Fr. Cogavin raised the first sod on April 16th 1943, and in October of that year Bishop Dignan laid the foundation stone, for the building now known as Portiuncula Hospital. In 1945 a thirty-six-bed hospital was completed and the first patients transferred from Mount Pleasant on 28th February. The transfer was not without problem as, due to wartime, there was little transport available. Eventually the patients were transferred by means of the baker's van and equipment followed on the green grocer's horse and cart! The local community were involved with the hospital from the very beginning. On the opening day, 9th April 1945 Bishop Dignan celebrated Solemn Mass and blessed the new hospital. There was a reception for 200 guests.



PORTIUNCULA HOSPITAL in 1945

There had been plans for over twenty years to build a public hospital in East Galway, and the site adjacent to Portiuncula became the focus of attention. Following negotiations with the Department of Health, the FMDM Congregation bought the site and a one hundred-bed extension, comprising of East and West Wings was constructed and opened in 1952. In that same year, the new convent for the sisters was started.

Following negotiations begun in 1948 with the Irish Nursing Board, approval for a nurse Training School was given in April 1953. The Madonna College of Nursing was inaugurated on May 24th, the first students being FMDM sisters. Later on lay students joined the College. It was in that same year that we lost a great friend and benefactor in Bishop Dignan, who died on April 12th 1953.



PORTIUNCULA HOSPITAL today

In the final decade of 20th century we witnessed momentous decisions and changes. Our first lay Matron, Mrs. Mary Courtney was appointed and took up duties on 1st August 1990, just a few days after Mother Margaret Keenan had died in England. By September of this year FMDM sisters had relinquished the key administrative posts, a Board of Directors has been established and a new executive team headed by Mr. Tony Whyte came into being.

Refurbishment of Portiuncula Convent and a new extension for retired FMDM sisters was begun in 1992. Some sisters returning from our missions after many years of service were hoping to return to Ireland in their later years and several of our sisters who worked in Portiuncula were now needing more specialised accommodation.

We celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Portiuncula in 1993. During this year our incumbent President Mrs Mary Robinson visited the hospital and later in that year the then Minister of Health Mary O' Rourke. It was Mary O' Rourke that started the process of obtaining new operating theatres for the hospital. With the awareness that we as a congregation would not be able to administer the hospital in the future two processes were set in place; one was the Mission Effectiveness programme in which we as FMDM hoped to ensure that Portiuncula's Traditions and Values would be perpetuated by our staff. Sr. Seraphina Weston FMDM and her team of voluntary helpers from among the staff displayed great enthusiasm in pursuit of this aim. The second was a long-term process of discernment with sisters and staff as to how best we could transfer ownership of the Hospital and ensure its continuing service to the community in and around Ballinasloe. Meanwhile, in 1996, Mr. Bob Tucker was appointed as chief Executive Officer, a position in which he served us faithfully until he returned to the U.K.

After many negotiations and much hard work Portiuncula Hospital was finally transferred to the Western Health Board in the year 2000. As the sisters prepared to move into their new communities over the next eighteen months the sisters were confident that Portiuncula would go from strength to strength assisted by a new Management Team under the leadership of Ms. Brigetta Mc Hugh as general Manager. The sisters were planning for their new accommodation with a view to moving out within eighteen months.

The first group of sisters to leave Portiuncula for a new community was in August 2000 when three departed to Drogheda to begin a new community.

The main body waited until the new Franciscan Convent was completed in November 2004 and since then three other small communities have sprung up in Ballinasloe: St Collette's within the new complex of the Franciscan Convent, St. Clare's on the Dublin road on Brackernagh and Assisi convent in Harbour Road.

FRANCISCAN CONVENT—Ballinasloe

