

END OF ERA

Farewell to Sisters of Mercy

It was a big, formal farewell for the two remaining Sisters of Mercy in St Mary's Catholic Church Hall on Tuesday, October 25 who will leave Corowa shortly to retire in Young.

The imminent departure of Sister Maureen Hummerston and Sister Mavis Hanlon ends a 124-year-old tradition of Sisters of Mercy in Corowa.

Both Sisters described leaving Corowa as very sad. "We are the last of a long line. It's inevitable," Sister Maureen told The Free Press.

"Corowa is a wonderful community. We love Corowa. The people are quite unique, because of the strength of the families, the strength of the community, the strength of the faith and the goodness and kindness of people."

Sister Mavis took her vows in 1952, almost 60 years ago, and Sister Maureen in 1954, 57 years ago. Both have spent the last eight years in Corowa. For Sister Maureen, it's her third time in Corowa for a total of 16 years in the birth place of Federation.

At last week's farewell, all speechmakers referred to the sad occasion of farewelling both Sisters.

"I always felt it a privilege to share ideas," Parish Priest Fr Paul Hart said of Sister Mavis and Sister Maureen. "They had plenty of ideas for me to work on as they were usually around a lot longer than I have been."

"They will be missed but we go and continue their work. They provided a lot of help to many a person. I'll certainly miss them but we pray things go well for Sister Mavis and Sister Maureen."

St Mary's Primary School Principal Jan Lowden said Mercy has always been a strong part of the school's tradition from Sisters Maureen and Mavis and referred to the wonderful work of the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine Macauley which in turn, has resulted in wonderful service in Corowa.

"We've been influenced in a great way and we are very grateful," Mrs Lowden said of the Sisters' work in both the school and the community.

Mrs Lowden said it was her school teacher, Sister Maureen as prin-

cipal, who introduced the school's motto 'Love and Truth' in 1969.

Active parishioner Jim Regan described the Sisters of Mercy work in Corowa of almost 125 years as a terrific effort. "Like a lot of wonderful things, it has come to an end," he said.

"There's a sense of real sadness and I say thank you to all those women who gave so much of their life to service Corowa. To you both (Sister Maureen and Sister Mavis), as our last representatives, over the 150 years of Goulburn Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, God bless you."

MC for the farewell, Ian Brooks, thanked the Sisters very much for their wonderful service. "There's a strong feeling of gratitude we owe you over the many years," he said.

Sister Maureen thanked the speakers for their "kind words" and to all who provided the "lovely spread of food", and emphasised she and Sister Mavis are not Nuns, but Sisters of Mercy for their much broader role in the community. "We have the fondest of memories. I'll cherish you for the rest of my life," she said.

Sister Mavis also expressed her happiness in Corowa, adding it was nice to be leaving on her own terms.

Sisters of Mercy began in Corowa on January 17, 1887 when four Sisters from St Brigid's Convent in Albury stepped from the train at Wahgunyah Terminus to take charge of St Mary's School. The Presbytery, built by Father Slattery in 1878, became the convent when the Sisters of Mercy arrived in 1887.

At one stage, there were nine Sisters in Corowa. "Most have gone to God," Sister Mavis said. "There are three surviving Sisters - Sister Jean Murray, who has polio and is in Albury, Sister Therese Anne Esler (lives in Young) and Sister Elizabeth Mitchell (also in Young)."

"We've had different, but wonderful priests in Monsignor Lane, Father Wilfred Plunkett and our current, great priest, Father Paul Hart."

Corowa's two Sisters have enjoyed a wonderful relationship with St Mary's Primary School which Sister Maureen, who was school principal from 1969 to 1974, said has seen a change in education from the old style.

"A lot of new ideas have come in, breaking new ground," she said.

"Speed reading, beginning of team and open plan teaching, and levels for students of similar abilities being in the same class. We started using the media a lot, getting feedback from pupils to newspaper articles."

The Sisters described their early days before Corowa as artificial in many ways, a more monastic life, with life regulated by the bell and spending a lot of hours of silence.

"But it has evolved," Sister Maureen, said, which included a doing away of the dark uniform in the early 1970s. "Today, more women in their 30s become Sisters of Mercy and from many different walks of life - including nurses, doctors and health specialists."

"At Corowa, at school, we had a practice of good, strong discipline which I hope was fair. Our aim was to make learning a happy and fun experience."

In Australia, The Institute of Sisters of Mercy

is a group now comprising some 1500 Catholic women dedicated to serving people. Their inspiration is drawn from Catherine McAuley who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland in 1831 after initially establishing a House of Mercy in Dublin in 1827. She recognised the needs of those who were marginalised and oppressed by unjust social attitudes and practices of the day.

Catherine responded by establishing a House of Mercy in Dublin which provided educational, religious and social services for women and children who were at risk of homelessness through exploitation and entrenched poverty. Catherine was most fondly referred to by the Corowa pair of Sisters who in 2009 were among the Goulburn congregation of the Sisters of Mercy who were formally acknowledged by the Australian Government for their part in Goulburn's 150-year history.

Sister Mavis will leave Corowa about November 17 for the Mount



It's almost the end of an era, after 124 years ... a cheerio from the last of Corowa's Sisters of Mercy. Sister Mavis Hanlon (left) and Sister Maureen Hummerston were formally farewelled on Tuesday, October 25 with a big gathering of well-wishers in the St Mary's Catholic Church Hall.

St Joseph's Convent in Young and Sister Maureen a few weeks later to a rented unit in Young.

"There are only 10 months between us in age. Our families live up that way and it is close to the centre of the community arrangement in Orange. The Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea," Sister Maureen said.

Sister Mavis and Sister Maureen, former Anglicans, are 80-years-of-age and 79 respectively, with Sister Maureen turning

80 on June 2 next year. "We love our God, our way of life with faith and compassion, and the people we serve," the two Sisters said.

They've loved their latest accommodation of two years, a brand new unit on the triangular-shaped corner allotment which previously contained, among other things, a pile of rubble and an old shed.

Instead of what had become an eyesore, a beautiful, stylish garden has been planted by the

Sisters of Mercy which contains many and varied native plants, and four different coloured rose bushes.

"It is a garden designed so that it's easy-care, low maintenance and low water," Sister Maureen said. "It is our gift to the parish."

It was a sad and emotional time at their farewell, with an appreciative gathering pouring out their love for Sister Mavis and Sister Maureen and wishing them the very best in retirement.



Speechmakers at the farewell of Sisters Mavis Hanlon and Maureen Hummerston, Fr Paul Hart, Jim Regan and Jan Lowden.



In the beautiful garden created by Sisters Hummerston (left) and Hanlon - their "gift to the parish".