

Baggot Street visit 'a light-bulb moment'



Virginia Noonan is a volunteer who currently serves on three Mercy boards, two of them connected to her old school, Villa Maria College in Christchurch. She describes her involvement as the result of a 'light-bulb moment', during a visit to Catherine McAuley's House of Mercy in Dublin.

In Ireland for a couple of days on an overseas trip with husband Aaron in 2001, they decided to pay a short visit to Mercy House in Baggot Street.

"I distinctly remember being met at the door by a Sister of Mercy. When I explained that I was a past pupil of Villa Maria in Christchurch, she smiled and said, 'Aha, another Mercy woman.' It suddenly dawned on me that I was actually part of something much bigger than my old school.

"I was part of an international network of Mercy. I realised that I wanted to remain an active member of this amazing network. Once I returned to Christchurch, I looked at how I could reconnect with Villa Maria through the Past Pupils Association.

"In the meantime, a colleague who had been on the college boards got in touch, to say she was needing to resign and was looking for someone interested in replacing her. After an interview with Sister of Mercy Mary Hanrahan, I was fortunate to be appointed to both the proprietor board and the board of trustees.

"I have loved being part of the Villa Maria community again, working with other trustees who are also passionate about the college. The decision to visit Catherine's House of Mercy that day has had a huge influence on my life. It has introduced me to wonderful people and organisations, led to other governance roles, and has deepened my own faith and commitment to the church."

Virginia has been on Villa's Board of Trustees since 2002 and currently serves as chair of that board. She is also a director on Villa's Proprietor Board, and since 2009 has served on the board of Tiaki Manatu Trust, helping to provide governance for the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy throughout New Zealand.

Virginia also serves on the board of the New Zealand Catholic Education Office, as well as on a commercial board involved in the travel industry.

A graduate of Canterbury University in Law and Arts, she was employed in private practice for some years before taking maternity leave. Her husband Aaron is principal of the Bryndwr parish school and their two children are now six and four years old.

A very supportive husband and extended family allows Virginia to juggle family and work commitments.

"My family was very fortunate to have escaped major property damage following the earthquakes. While our children don't know what it is to live in a city with multi-level buildings, I'm confident that, over time, Christchurch will recreate itself and our children will benefit from a dynamic and vibrant city."

A major project for Virginia has been the development of a web-based resource for Mercy-founded primary schools, many of which continued to be staffed by Sisters of Mercy for several years. "The focus at present is on the two Southern foundations, and has involved research into founding stories and school histories. We've had lots of interviews with Sisters of Mercy.

"The board of Tiaki Manatu is aware that some schools have not been familiar with their Mercy origins, and has wanted to provide them with readily accessible resources to help them rediscover their Mercy roots.

"I'm passionate about this project, and want to help our young primary students to engage with the Mercy story, learning to appreciate the sisters who dedicated so many years to educating and nurturing generations of young students."

Virginia says she has been humbled to see what an effect the Mercy story can have. "I've worked with people who over time have come to a deep appreciation of Mercy values, discovering what it means to be part of the wider Mercy network. At Villa Maria, I've seen at first-hand how young Mercy women are equipped to influence their world through the values they have absorbed.

"As a Mercy volunteer, my hope is that I can help as many people as possible to appreciate Mercy and its charism. Because our world needs a touch of Mercy."