

Hands-on Mercies making a real difference

There are currently 273 Sisters of Mercy in the New Zealand Congregation, according to their leader, Sister Denise Fox.

She told last month's governance seminar in Auckland that most sisters, depending on age and health, are engaged in ministries that are hands-on – "we Mercies are very

practical people!"

Sisters of Mercy have 103 houses in New Zealand, spread from Kaitaia to Invercargill.

There are two houses in both Samoa and Tonga, and New Zealand sisters work in Santiago, Melbourne and Dublin.

Some 28 sisters are employed in Mercy organisations, another 17 are

involved in the work of the Congregation.

Sisters who trained as teachers or nurses are now on their third or fourth round of retraining for different ministries.

"And those who can't be actively involved take a keen interest in what you are doing and support you in prayer."

Mercy ministries in New Zealand currently employ 524 lay staff, in addition to volunteers, with salaries totalling \$15 million a year.

Another 350 are employed as staff at Mercy's five colleges throughout New Zealand.

Around 4000 students are enrolled in Mercy schools in this country, Samoa and Tonga. Each year, 600 of these move to employment or further studies.

"These women carry the vision of Mercy," said Sr Denise. "They are people who can influence others, help to bridge the gap between rich and poor, work for a just and fair society.

"Translate this energy into all our ministries – healthcare, community development, pastoral and spiritual services – and you'll see that Mercy does make a difference."

Te Hononga Atawhai

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Mercy to 'mend world in reach'

Mercy's task is not to fix the whole world all at once, according to Sister Denise Fox who leads the Congregation in New Zealand.

Instead, it's a matter of "stretching out to mend the part of the world within your reach."

The advice came in her opening address at a seminar on governance last month, attended by over 60 directors and managers of Mercy organisations from around New Zealand.

Heading the leadership team of the new Congregation, formed in 2005 from the four previous Mercy foundations in New Zealand, Sr Denise used her

address to highlight what Sisters of Mercy are saying about mission today, and what this means for people involved in the Congregation's current ministries.

At their assembly in Christchurch last January the sisters agreed to a list of themes crucial to mission.

These include being a compassionate presence, maintaining right relationship with Maori, addressing unjust systems affecting people at the edge of society, upholding the dignity and rights of all – especially women and children, and the interconnectedness of all life.

The themes are in the process of being shaped



CULTURES MEET: Lorraine Joseph, a resident of Mercy Villas, exchanges a hongi or traditional greeting with kaumatua Sonny Webster during a visit to Orongomai Marae in Upper Hutt. Looking on are Mohi Waihi (left) and Morna Taute. The marae visit was the last in a series of six sessions on *Treaty in Action* led last month by Rangi Davis, kaiarataki of Mercy Ministries Ltd, for around 25 older people living in Mercy's supported houses in Upper Hutt.

into a mission statement for the new Congregation, in time for its first chapter to be held next year. Not every sister will agree to every word, Sr Denise observed.

"What is exciting is that behind each of these themes are women who are passionate about those

concerns, and who have committed their lives to the poor and vulnerable."

She told those attending the seminar that as guardians of Mercy ministries, they are responsible for nurturing "a vision of possibility for the hopeless."

"As well as ensuring that

* turn to page 3

Spirituality – awakening to Mercy’s call

Fr David Ranson, who teaches spirituality at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, admits that his subject is notoriously difficult to define, though ‘awakening’ is not a bad definition.

Helping to make the point is the wide-eyed character in a Michael Leunig cartoon, haversack on his back, as he follows his duck – symbol of the soul – over what look at first like mountain tops. Closer analysis reveals them to be the noses of up-turned sleeping faces.

“I interpret this as Leunig’s inimitable way of declaring that the spiritual person is one who lives their life awake, whilst the rest of the world slumbers.

“Spirituality awakens us. It is the dimension of our lives that works to keep us awake to the deepest currents and springs of life.”

Fr Ranson’s comments came in his presentation on *Governance and Spirituality*, a keynote address at last month’s Mercy Governance Seminar in Auckland.

The issue for those responsible for Mercy organisations is not simply to be awake to opportunities as they occur, but to know how to respond to them in ways that reflect a genuine Mercy spirituality.

Fr Ranson observed that like many others, Mercy agencies today are increasingly being entrusted to people who are not members of a religious Congregation and whose stories differ from the founding story from which Catholic institutions have grown.

A new story

In his view, what is needed is a dialogue between the ‘memory’ of the founding stories and the ‘imagination’ of the people who now come with their own sense of professional calling and passion. “A new story is set to be told in this conversation, and a new spirituality set to emerge.”

To chart a course for this new spirituality, Fr Ranson has identified four characteristics which he regards as foundational for a genuine Mercy tradition, and which may help to define



Fr David Ranson ... retelling Mercy’s story the identity of our organisations.

“Taken together, these dimensions form the heartbeat, the pulse of the organisation. They determine what we do, why we do it, when we do it, and how we do it.”

The first characteristic is religious imagination. This helps to clarify why we do what we do. In particular, it shapes the way we imagine God at work in the world, and how we see evil being resolved.

Mercy sees God acting in ways that are sacramental, with one thing imaged in another. “In the poor, Mercy sees the face of Christ; in social and political currents, the emergence of a new order; in the quality of relationships, the dream God has for the world.”

Mercy identity is also shaped by the way it sees evil being transformed, says Fr Ranson. “Mercy understands that only in a love that suffers with us, that bears our own experience, do we find a way forward in the presence of suffering. This is the heart of Christ’s cross.”

A second characteristic that helps to shape what all Catholic agencies do is a social commitment that reflects our understanding of the kingdom of God.

‘Kingdom’, says Fr Ranson, is the term Jesus uses to designate a new social order, achieved when a culture of exclusion is changed into

one of embrace.

“Whenever there is a shift from shame to dignity, from fear to love, from blindness of vision to openness of heart, there the kingdom breaks into the world.”

The third characteristic that underpins Mercy identity is a church-based tension which shapes when we do what we do. Tension here relates not to bearing stress, but to holding two polarities together.

In the Catholic experience, the tension may be between the local and the universal, or between unity and diversity, with a call to recognise the needs of different cultures.

In dialogue

The last characteristic of Mercy identity is a dialogical strategy that shapes how we do what we do.

The word ‘catholic’ means universal, Fr Ranson noted. Our catholicity is reflected in our willingness to engage in an ever-widening circle of conversation, and by a dialogical approach to the questions and issues of life.

“Mercy organisations should be known for the way they engage in partnerships, and for how this dialogical strategy enables them to contend in a complex, pluralist environment.”

For Mercy identity to flourish, Fr Ranson concluded, the four characteristics he outlined need to be taken together. Not everyone may associate with all four.

It may be that one aspect – particularly that of social commitment – becomes the doorway enabling some who are not Catholics to share in the spirituality of our agencies.

“The real question is whether there are sufficient people in the organisation who can identify with all four dimensions.” A key issue is who, at the governance and management levels, will assume responsibility for fostering all four characteristics.

“Notwithstanding the struggle, the Mercy project is one of immense beauty. Let our agencies be known for the light they shine forth.”

For a full text of Fr Ranson’s paper email DHorton@somauck.org.nz

Hospital's new owners 'carrying on a legacy'

In opening his keynote address, Dr Lester Levy (see below) described as a privilege his involvement with the Sisters of Mercy and their advisors in the purchase of Mercy Hospital in 2002.

The negotiations "stand out way ahead of any other business relationship I've ever been involved in," he told the seminar. "We never had the

idea that we were acquiring a hospital. Instead we developed a concept that we were taking responsibility for a legacy," he said.

He admitted it had been a challenge to convince colleagues that as new owners, MercyAscot had not taken over or beaten anyone.

"And to convince them about taking

on a legacy and carrying it to the next phase has been difficult, but ultimately quite successful.

"I know patients who have gone to Mercy Hospital some years later and who say that it looks just as it used to. And I take that as a measure of success. It's been a real privilege and an enlightening experience."

Real leaders wield influence, not power

Leadership is not about authority or position, but about possibility. The task of those in leadership and governance roles is to make a breath-taking difference to other people's lives.

The comments from Dr Lester Levy, who heads the NZ Leadership Institute at Auckland University, came in a keynote address at last month's Mercy Governance Seminar in Auckland.

Dr Levy told directors and managers from Mercy organisations around New Zealand that leadership today is more about influence than power.

"We can't tell people what to do anymore. The world has changed. The new thinking is around our capacity to engage people, in order to win their commitment, time and energy."

A survey of the New Zealand workforce he helped to conduct last year shows that six out of 10 are disengaged, doing enough to hold their jobs but with no real effort or passion.

At the same time, only 37 percent of managers were seen to be authen-



DR Lester Levy.... collaboration the key

tic leaders – people whose behaviour matches their values and who have a strong sense of self-awareness and integrity.

"If you are an authentic leader," said Dr Levy, "it's much more likely that people around you are going to be confident, hopeful and resilient."

Citing a book on corporate gov-

ernance called *The Fish Rots From The Head*, he said that leadership is increasingly about social capital – bringing people together to make organisations work.

"We need leadership not so much to find the right answers, as to ask the right questions. There isn't a person left who knows the answers to everything. Most of us know less than we think we do.

"The only way we can find answers, build knowledge and move forward is by working together. The only way to deal with complexity is to have collaboration."

Dr Levy stressed the need for directors and managers to make time for reflection, describing it as "the engine-room" of leadership.

"The most compelling piece of information from our study was that the New Zealand workforce was telling its managers, "you have no self-awareness."

"If people have no capacity for reflection, how will they learn anything about themselves at all?" he asked.

"Self-awareness is at the core of all leadership," said Dr Levy.

Mercy stretching to 'mend world in reach'

* from page 1

your staff are imbued with this vision, you need to take time to reflect, to educate yourselves, to feed your own spirit."

The ministries inherited by the new Congregation form a "wonderful, colourful mix", ranging from quite small to very large. One of the challenges has been to realign governance structures in ways that suit mission and vision and also meet the Congregation's legal obligations.

The Congregation's lawyers have recommended that in the light of new legislation relating to the Charities Commission, a new trust be formed, under which all of the Congregation's ministries can be registered together.

The new trust - Sisters of Mercy Ministries New Zealand Trust Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Tiaki Manatu – is currently being set up.

Legal steps have also been taken to register the Mercy name, in order

to protect the Congregation's identity and mission. Use of the name by at least one other organisation has resulted in some confusion.

Sr Denise has asked that any misleading advertising or news be reported to Mercy Ministries Ltd, so that the issue can be addressed.

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ST Mary's College pupils Amanda Saldanha (left) and Veronica Mills.... World Youth Day a chance to grow as people and believers.

Young Kiwis to join Mercy hui at WYD celebrations

Students from Mercy colleges in New Zealand are counting down to World Youth Day in Sydney next month, billed as the Olympic Games of religious faith and the largest event of its kind in the world.

Attended by Pope Benedict, the week-long event will be preceded by a Mercy WYD Conference on July 14, held at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College in North Sydney.

With a strong social-justice focus, the one-day gathering is pitched at students and staff from Mercy secondary schools from Australia and around the world.

The largest Kiwi contingent will be 52 students from Villa Maria College in Christchurch. Another 14 are going from Carmel College in Auckland, and St Mary's College in Ponsonby is fielding a team of over 30. A similar number is expected from Roncalli College in Timaru.

Fund-raising for the trip began at Villa Maria almost two years ago. A Mercy calendar launched the funding effort, followed by catering for school events, a fashion parade, t-shirt sales and sausage sizzles.

As well as their own fares, Villa Maria students have raised enough to provide

Pilgrims stepping out in faith

For two Year 13 students at St Mary's College in Auckland, joining with thousands of other pilgrims at World Youth Day next month will be a chance to grow as people of faith.

Head girl Veronica Mills says she is aware of God's help in becoming the best person she can be. "I think WYD will help me to grow as a person. I'm excited by the chance of finding out more about my beliefs."

Each young person is like a building under construction, says Veronica. "I'm hoping that WYD will enable me to build a couple more stories."

Amanda Saldanha, a house captain at St Mary's, sees the pilgrimage as a chance to step out in faith. For her, religion helps to make a person whole. "Through my mother's influence, I'm aware of having received the power of the Holy Spirit. WYD will help to deepen that experience."

Amanda is hoping for a stronger

faith. "I think it will be a powerful occasion, seeing so many young people celebrating their faith together, a huge community in touch with God."

Veronica agrees. "I expect to find it quite an emotional experience, standing in a large group, surrounded by so many others."

The 27 students from St Mary's will travel with four staff members and a parent. Their Mercy badges and school uniforms will help to identify them, as will a New Zealand flag and a school banner.

"But what's really distinctive about us are our Mercy values, and the way they are shared among ourselves," says Amanda.

The pilgrims will reflect St Mary's multicultural roll. "Culturally, we're quite a diverse group," Veronica adds.

Once WYD is over, the two have promised to share with *Mercy Focus* some of the highlights from the event.



VILLA Maria College students Jenna Donaldson, Terese Renwick, Laura Lagan and Abby Jones making blankets from polar fleeces for their WYD pilgrimage next month. In the rear are director of Religious Studies, Sister Anna Nicholls, and principal Mrs Mary Lynch.

sleeping bags and thermal gear for pilgrims from Paul VI College in Samoa.

A highlight for several Mercy colleges last year was to host the WYD cross as it journeyed from Rome to Sydney. Students are now meeting regularly to focus on their spiritual preparation for the event, with a Sister of Mercy praying for each pilgrim.

Sister Anna Nicholls, who is director of Religious Studies at Villa Maria, says that while pilgrims from her school are caught up in the excitement of preparing for the trip, they may have no idea of the impact of World Youth Day.

"The most important time will be after the event, when they reflect on its meaning and recall significant moments with their God."

Anna says the huge travel costs seem hard to justify, but she believes the world needs women who are empowered by mercy. "My hope is that the WYD event will nurture the faith of our young Mercy women.

"I hope it inspires them to the point where they can never imagine their lives without God. For lives centred on God lead to lives lived in service of others."