

A year for doing ordinary things extraordinarily well

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! The Christian church always steals a march on the rest of the world, by beginning its year with the first Sunday of Advent, almost a month before the calendar year has ended. But Pope Francis has stolen the march on us all, by inaugurating a special Year of Mercy on December 8, the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception. This is the day which marks the beginning of God's plan to save humanity through an outpouring of merciful grace, something which comes to us as pure gift, not a right we could claim.

Sisters of Mercy around the world have welcomed the pope's initiative and seen this Year of Mercy as an invitation to deepen their own charism and their hopes for the world. For our own Congregation, those hopes are summed up in a single word – whakawhanaungatanga, making right relationships happen. Their chapter last year has spelt out a new direction for Mercy in Aotearoa, Tonga and Samoa, as sisters and partners in mission are encouraged to widen mercy circles, to stand with fragile communities, to be disturbed into action wherever mercy reveals a need.

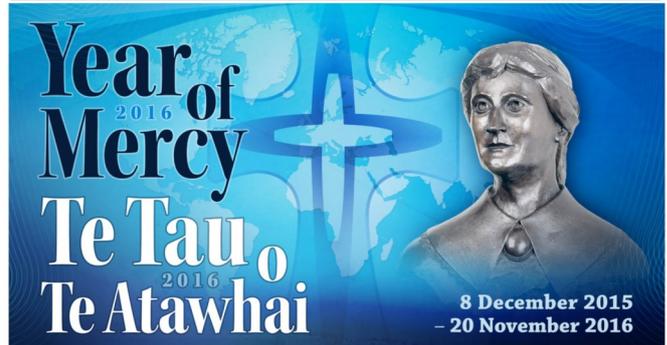
The diary for December is filling fast. Even before the month begins, COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference will have started - terrorists notwithstanding - in Paris, where New Zealander Bridget Crisp has joined other Sisters of Mercy in highlighting environmental issues such as the risks of fracking and the human right to fresh and drinkable water. Over the days the UN Conference is meeting (Nov 30 to Dec 11) we have been invited to join in praying the Prayer for our Earth, written by Pope Francis and included at the end of his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*. Each of Mercy's 12 Congregations around the world has taken responsibility to pray that prayer on one of the 12 days of the Conference; Sisters of Mercy Aotearoa have been assigned December 1 as their special day to pray that COP21 will produce a fruitful outcome. You may like to in-

Doors that faith opens

E Te whakamiharo,
God of endless surprises:
to you, no door stays finally shut
and your mercy always bursts through.
As the Year of Mercy draws near,
teach us to knock with faith,
believing that we will find a way
to step into the embrace of your mercy,
however far we may have strayed.

And teach us to open doors in our turn,
that all those who knock in hope
of a welcome may not be shut out.
As we ready for another Christmas
remind us of the stable door
that opened to a family in need,
so that a mother could cradle
her son, born in poverty
that we might be ever enriched.

Imaging Mercy Today



Year of Mercy logo © Mercy International Association 2015

vite some of your Mercy colleagues to join you in that prayerful exercise. You will find a copy of the prayer on the Sisters' website, www.sistersofmercy.org.nz

You may also like to share with your colleagues in an event to mark the opening of the Year of Mercy on Tuesday 8 December, with a ritual that focuses on opening the doors of mercy. That day, Pope Francis will solemnly open the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica in Rome, through which thousands of pilgrims are expected to pass in coming months. But this is a pope whose concern for the poor means that he doesn't expect us to travel thousands of miles to access the mercy we seek. A holy door near you will open, inviting you to step through and to share with others the mercy and grace you have received. A ritual in each of the four main centres has been planned, with input from Srs Natalie Murphy and Teresa Anderson who are helping to coordinate the Mercy International Reflection Process to take place here during the Year of Mercy. Email one of them if you would like details of the ceremony at the venue nearest to you, or if you would like to organise an Opening of Mercy doors ritual in your own place (nataliem@hotmail.co.nz or tanderson@somauck.org.nz).

December 12 is Foundation Day, celebrating both the founding of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley in 1831, and the beginning of our own Congregation in 2005. Several of our ministries mark this day with celebrations and award ceremonies of their own, rejoicing that the work Catherine began continues in flourish in our time. It is hard not to see, as a worthwhile goal for this Year of Mercy, the advancement of the cause for Catherine's beatification, a major step towards her being named as a saint of the church. The issue here is not that she needs to be honoured in this way, but that the worldwide church may benefit from the witness of her kind of sanctity.

The lesson of Catherine's life is learnt in seeing how she combines prayerful contemplation of God's mercy with practical action, in short careful steps rather than giant strides. The perfection she sought for herself and those who joined her depends, she said, "not so much in doing extraordinary actions, as in doing extraordinarily well the ordinary actions and exercises of every day." May her rule of life be the inspiration of our own, especially as this Year of Mercy unfolds. – Dennis Horton