

Imaging Mercy Today

Baggot St journeys sharpen Mercy's focus

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Fresh from a week-long programme at Mercy International Centre in Baggot Street, Dublin are two Kiwi women closely involved in Mercy ministries in this country. Julie Reid coordinates the volunteer programme of Mercy Hospice Auckland, and Puamiria Maaka is the manukura or manager of Te Waipuna Puawai Mercy Oasis, the community development initiative based in Ellerslie and Glen Innes.

Sharing in a *Mercy Ethos* programme led by the Melbourne Congregation for sisters and their colleagues from both sides of the Tasman, the pair are the latest in a steady stream of New Zealanders who have attended similar sessions over the last decade, allowing Mercy personnel from this side of the world to draw from the well-springs that nurtured Catherine McAuley and to absorb her spirit in the house built for the ministries that were her focus in the last decade of her extraordinary life.

The pilgrimages mark a notable reversal of the trend begun even before Catherine's death, when members of her newly founded Congregation moved from Ireland to establish new foundations in different parts of the world. Today, the movement now sees a return to Ireland, with word of how Mercy ministries are working to make a difference to lives today. And as often as not, it is not sisters but lay women and men who carry the word to Baggot Street, and who seek to imbibe the spirit of Catherine for new and unfolding ministries.

Julie Reid's work includes the selection and training of more than 400 volunteers, whose gift of time and talent go to sustain and broaden the skilled palliative care provided

by the health professionals employed by Mercy Hospice Auckland. Puamiria Maaka leads a team of social and community workers for a clientele of women and their whanau, around half of them Maori, in projects that range from parenting courses for teenage mothers to early childhood development.

Like the hospice, Te Waipuna Puawai depends on funding from philanthropic trusts and generous individual donors, as well as from the Mercy Congregation in whose name both agencies operate. While sisters have pioneered these ministries and toiled to establish the reputation they enjoy, their future rests increasingly in the hands of lay people



BAGGOT St pilgrims Puamiria Maaka (left) and Julie Reid, caught together before leaving for Ireland last month, at a ceremony held at St Mary's Convent, Ponsonby to mark the 161st anniversary of the arrival of the first Sisters of Mercy in Auckland on April 9.

In Catherine's steps

E Te Atua Kaiwetewete:

God, you come to liberate and set free,
you show your power in the letting-be of being.
Let your Wairua be the breath we draw
whenever Mercy joins us.

Stretch our minds
to see where your love waits to go,
and fire our hearts
with impulses to match your own.

May nothing we do or decide
limit the reach of your embrace.
As we remember this year
the 170th anniversary of Catherine's death
and the rich legacy of her life,
renew in each of us her commitment
to all who wait to be set free,
in mercy's name.
Amen.

who need to be steeped in Mercy's founding spirit if the ventures they lead are to stay true to the vision from which they have sprung, in cutting-edge ministries that call constantly for change and re-sharpened focus.

It's likely that last month's two pilgrims will have stretched their itinerary to include St Leo's Convent in Carlow, where the karanga taken by Bishop Pompallier from Maori drew such a generous response from Mother Cecilia Maher and her companions, the first Catholic nuns to reach these shores in 1850.

There's something hugely appropriate about the visit by a Maori woman who now heads a thriving Mercy agency to Mother Cecilia's original home in Ireland, with fresh signs of ministries that have blossomed from the seeds those pioneer sisters planted in Aotearoa's fruitful soil. Here's hoping that the community of St Leo's were able to take new heart from the Mercy harvest which these two Kiwi pilgrims were able to share. - Dennis Horton