

Mercy's circle timeless, 'spirit of life itself'

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! For the 200 and more who gathered to celebrate Mercy Day in Auckland last month, the words of the song were certainly true, 'the circle of mercy is timeless.' In a ritual to mark the occasion, 14 young women, mostly Pasifika and all with links to McAuley High School in Otahuhu, stepped up to be commissioned as Nga Rangatahi Atawhai – Mercy Young Adults.

As part of the ritual veteran Sisters of Mercy, in their 80s and 90s, pinned a badge on each of the young women, and one of its mentors presented the group with a jug and bowl, symbols of the servant leadership they were invited to exercise. "This ceremony signifies your being 'sent forth' as volunteers and partners in our Mercy mission," said Sr Katrina Fabish, on behalf of the Congregation's leadership team. "We pray that your hands and hearts will be strengthened for the work that lies ahead. May you be compassionate to human need, courageous in facing challenges, tender and strong in all you undertake, and faithful to the commitment you have made."

The commissioning came towards the end of a ritual in which a range of Mercy ministries were acknowledged, beginning with the sisters themselves who stood to light their candle and reaffirm their current Chapter Statement, "Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, centred in God, impelled to be Mercy, keeping hope alive in our world today." Sharing in that segment was the sister from Wellington who heads the national Mercy archives, repository of so much of Mercy's story in our land.

There followed the naming of Mercy's healthcare facilities in Auckland and Hamilton, several Mercy colleges and a cluster of Mercy community development initiatives, led either by sisters or their partners in mission. As each enterprise was named, its mission or vision statement was read and a smaller candle lit from the Congregation's large flame and both were placed in the focal point, to symbolise our own Circle of Mercy.

Keeping to the path

E Te Atua Atawhai—God of mercy,
Your Word is written large
across the whole universe
in the wonders of your creation.
As we remember Catherine
and those who have walked in her steps,
let the retelling of their stories
open our minds and hearts,
to see new paths of hope and possibility unfold.

Challenge our traditions still further,
that we may bring new life to them.
May our curiosity reach beyond what we know,
to what being close to you may reveal.
Let us honour the web of life,
creating its mosaic from the pieces each brings,
to find in the midst of our work
the circle of mercy that lifts us in hope,
and holds us in your loving care.
Tihei mauri ora. Amen.

*Produced by Pou Atawhai Centre for Mission,
Auckland © October 2012*

Imaging Mercy Today



COMMISSIONING: Members of Nga Rangatahi Atawhai Mercy Young Adults declare their commitment at the Mercy Day celebration in Auckland last month. (Photo: Patricia Rowe rsm)

Watching the ceremony was a gathering of Sisters which included visitors from Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, colleagues from many local Mercy ministries, companions and associates. Special greetings in the mihi of welcome went to two representatives of the Congregation's leadership team, and to husband and wife Pio and Chrissie Jacobs, who over many years have earned kaumatua or elder status when Mercy gathers in Auckland.

The emergence of this new group of young Mercy women, inspired and guided largely by Sr Salome Ioane, currently on the staff of McAuley High School, signals a way for another generation to become involved in the works of Mercy – not with a lifelong commitment through religious vows but with the generous dedication of their youthful idealism and desire to make a difference in their world. It's a trend which McAuley students and graduates have launched but which other Mercy schools here may well follow, as they have in other countries.

The challenge for those leading Mercy ministries is to help create the spaces in our ventures where these keen young women may channel their efforts. Volunteers are already making a huge difference in some areas, like the 500 and more who give generously of their time to Mercy Hospice Auckland. Or like the former Mater nurse who for the past nine years has turned up for a couple of hours every week at Mercy Parklands, to mend residents' clothes and sew labels on items too delicate for the hot iron used on more robust fabrics. It's a quiet involvement that goes largely unseen, but one which helps the spirit of Catherine McAuley to flourish.

It's worth recalling that it was two young women, volunteering their time and talents, who first moved into Catherine's House of Mercy when it opened 185 years ago. We could do worse than return to that model, in our efforts to see Mercy flourish anew. - Dennis Horton