

The birth that illumines our lives and world

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! In a series of more than 20 short video clips on mission, produced by Catholic Health Australia and featured currently on its website (www.cha.org.au), one pair in particular has a message worth pondering by Mercy people in these weeks leading to Christmas. Bishop Eugene Hurley of Darwin, who chairs the Australian Bishops' Commission for Pastoral Life, draws from Blessed John Paul II's document issued to mark 2000 as a Jubilee Year. He quotes the pope as saying that the church is in the world as 'the living presence of the love of God, who leans down to every human weakness, in order to gather it into the embrace of his mercy.'

That's a powerful image of what Mercy's mission invites us all to be, and of how our ministries are meant to be seen – the living presence of the love of God, reaching out to wherever humanity struggles or suffers, to draw it into the embrace of God's mercy. Bishop Hurley goes on to speak of our role in being the ears of Jesus, hearing the quiet voices that too often get blocked out by a strident, noisy world,

Living signs of God's love

Another Christmas draws near,
as the lands where Jesus lived
seem as far as ever from the peace
promised by angels at his birth
to men and women of good will.

The birth of Jesus cannot be consigned
to the past, said Blessed John Paul II
in declaring the Jubilee Year of 2000;
'the whole of human history stands
in reference to him,' said the pope;
'our own time and the future of the world
are illumined by his presence.'

How does Christ's light fall on us today?
What changes to our lives does his coming invite?
Jesus 'is the special newness which surpasses
all human expectations' and by his grace,
we are renewed. The church, says the pope,
'is the living presence of the love of God,
who leans down to every human weakness,
to gather it into the embrace of his mercy.'

As we prepare our hearts and homes
for this Christmas, may we know anew
that we are to be that living sign of God's love,
reaching out to whatever human weakness
is within our power to embrace;
not to judge or condemn, but to heal
with our touch, as only love can.
May Christ be born again in us;
may the warmth of his love
shine from us. Amen.

*Produced for He Waka Tiaki Mission Team,
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Imaging Mercy Today

and the hands of Jesus, touching the untouchable and restoring mana where it has been damaged or crushed.

From the church's perspective there are no fringe people, says Bishop Hurley, who warns of the danger of labels. He speaks of Aboriginals in his diocese – sleeping 'in the long grass'; in the Northern Territory over 90 days, 23 people suicided, 17 of them Aboriginals, most of them young. If we must use labels, let's call them our brothers and sisters, he insists – the only label which Jesus allows. For in his kingdom, there are no margins to which people can be banished or made invisible. Those with the greatest need are always centre-stage, and in serving them we serve the Christ who identifies them as his own.

As another Christmas draws near, we are challenged once more to ask where the Christ whose birth we celebrate waits to be made present. In his Jubilee Year statement, Blessed John Paul insists that the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem can't be consigned to the past; 'the whole of human history stands in reference to him; our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence.' Jesus is 'the special newness which surpasses all human expectations.' Can we name the gift we bring to life in our world, through our involvement in Mercy's ministries this year?

- Dennis Horton



BLESSED John Paul II opens the great door of St Peter's, with a Jubilee Year to start the new millennium. 'The birth of Jesus cannot be consigned to the past, he said. 'Jesus is the special newness which surpasses all human expectations. In him, we are renewed.'