

Mercy's Earth-Care 'more than tree-hugging'

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! 'Hurrah for foundations!' wrote Catherine McAuley. 'They make the old young and the young merry.' A mix of old and young gathered in the summer sun last month for a ceremony at Papatuanuku ki Taurangi, Earth Promise Centre, a Mercy house and permaculture garden developed over recent years in Ellerslie.

Around 60 Sisters of Mercy, family and friends sat under pergolas borrowed from Waiatarua Mercy Parklands, the adjoining aged care facility, for the launch of the centre and the blessing of a garage which has been renovated to form a hub where the garden's workers and volunteers can gather for meetings, meal-breaks and workshops.

Among the crowd was Congregation Leader Sister Anne Campbell; with other guests, she was welcomed by the centre's coordinator Teresa Anderson rsm, one of three Sisters of Mercy currently involved with the project. The trio are supported by three part-time employees and a small group of keen volunteers. Produce from the garden is harvested for regular distribution to needy families in the suburbs of Glen Innes and Panmure.

A ritual to bless the centre was led by Rosemary Revell rsm, who is also involved with the project. The blessing focused on the interconnectedness of all life on Earth, with symbols to show its dependence on water, fire and air. The third Sister in the group is Bridget Crisp rsm, who teaches cooking and gardening and helps families to grow their own vegetables at home.

Introduced as 'the dreamer' was Katrina Fabish rsm, who 20 years ago was among a group of Sisters of Mercy in Auckland who focused on the restoration of women, children and the Earth. She recalled that in 2000, as the Congregation celebrated 150 years in New Zealand, women had gathered on the site to plant the first large tree. The healing vision had included over time the restoration of a nearby wetland, the building of Te Waipuna Puawai, a centre for community development, and the erection of an eco-house where sisters could live and provide hospitality.

Agenda for a new creation

E Te Atua, Kaihanga o te ao,
God, Creator of our world,
we pray for Papatuanuku,
our fruitful mother Earth,
sustaining every living creature
but threatened today
from global abuse by humans
of its fragile resources.
Let us renew our resolve
to ensure that whatever we do
will enhance Earth's life
for now and generations to come.
May our dreams help Earth's promise
to unfold, enabling your mercy
to bless our world with abundance. Amen.

*Produced for He Waka Tiaki Mission Team
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Imaging Mercy Today



BLESSING: Congregation Leader Anne Campbell rsm sprinkles water to bless the garden at Papatuanuku ki Taurangi Earth Promise Centre in Ellerslie. Holding the bowl is Bridget Crisp rsm, one of three sisters who work at the centre; behind, Cathryn Wiles-Pickard rsm, holds aloft a symbol of Earth featured in the blessing ceremony. Photo: Patricia Rowe rsm

Katrina admitted that care for Earth is often hard work. "It involves more than just hugging trees," she confessed. "Weed-control without weed-killers can be a real penance." The garden stands on land which is inclined to flood and becomes very wet in the winter; the house is built on poles buried deep in the soil to ensure its stability.

Katrina described the ceremony as 'a small moment in the ongoing dream. We are now a centre, with no longer just a garage, but a room. If we look at the Earth, we see we are not in good times. But food for families is the heart of this work.'

As part of the ritual, members of the team read out the centre's vision and mission statement, before calling on some of the invited guests to help them plant seedlings. Among the team were workers Michael Paerau and Nick Clarke, as well as Joyce Rapata, a young woman whose family is one of more than 200 currently supported by Te Waipuna Puawai and who has been learning how to plant vegetables and to grow them for her whanau. She praised Sister of Mercy Marie Brown who drew her into the project. 'Without the dreamers, there would be nothing for us to wake up for,' she said.

Congregation Leader Anne Campbell prayed a blessing on the centre. 'We give thanks for the original dream and for the hard work that has sustained and developed it since 2001. We celebrate the aligning of new energies and dreams, with Earth's patient generosity towards us. She teaches us how to live in mutual relationships, in shared abundance, in gratitude for gift. She blesses us with beauty.

'May the life of this place continue, through the shared produce of soil and labour, through education in sustainable practices, through celebrations of seasonal ritual and storytelling.' The ceremony ended with refreshments of food and fruit-juice harvested from the garden.

— Dennis Horton