

# How is Mercy to be in mission? Meeting emerging needs

Nga mihi atawhai—greetings to all in mercy! On the flip side of a card announcing the brief Chapter Statement, issued by New Zealand's Sisters of Mercy at their chapter in 2009, is a series of searching questions which may provide a framework for some of our *Imaging Mercy Today* reflections this year. 'How are we to be in mission?' is one of them, and listed as the first among some sketchy answers is 'In prophetic response to emerging needs'.

Helping to unpack what this phrase might mean are three Mercy ministries which have developed over several years on adjoining sites in Ellerslie. Each of them bears witness, in quite different ways, to that challenge of responding creatively to emerging needs, stretching the tent-pegs of a going concern to draw others into a venture that offers life in Mercy's name.

Longest on the block is Waiatarua Mercy Parklands, the aged care facility bought by the Sisters of Mercy in 1990 for the long-term care of older people. A pipe dream for its current administrators is a purpose-built unit for people with dementia, but financial constraints mean that this is unlikely for the foreseeable future. What has emerged instead is the transformation of one of the facility's seven wings into an area designated specifically for those with dementia.

The wing has been redeveloped to provide a smaller, more 'homely' atmosphere for residents, who no longer have to move beyond its limits for many of their daily activities. An interior courtyard has been created, with a deck area, lawns and potted plants. The benefits of the smaller unit include greater opportunities for forming friendships, less anxiety and depression, more involvement in scheduled activities and greater mobility. There have also been fewer falls, and a reduction in medication.

CEO Ann Coughlan has welcomed the commissioning of the new-look Wing 2 at Mercy Parklands. "The project has been well designed with a minimum of capital outlay. It incorporates beautifully the key principles of our *Spark of Life* programme, enabling trained staff to engage more closely with residents who live with dementia. This project breaks new ground in the care we offer to a growing number of residents with dementia. Our staff and families are delighted with what is being achieved."

Next door to Mercy Parklands is Te Waipuna Puawai, the community development centre built and opened in 2004, to provide educational opportunities for low-income women and their families. After working for several years

## Imaging Mercy Today



'STRETCHING our tent pegs' may mean going beyond Catherine' McAuley's insistence that nothing benefits society more than 'the careful instruction of women', to see that men also need support in their role as partners and fathers. A local Mercy initiative to launch a 'Young Dads Group' is proof of how our ministries may need to grow 'in prophetic response to emerging needs.'

alongside women from Glen Innes and surrounding suburbs, offering courses which have affirmed and empowered them, Te Waipuna Puawai has taken an initiative to work with their partners and sons. In collaboration with two other groups in the community, the centre has run a Young Dads Mentoring Group for two years and is about to launch a Young Dads programme, aimed at improving their parenting skills and their relationships with partners and whanau.

"These young men are discovering that there is wisdom and experience within their group," says Puamiria Maaka, who heads Te Waipuna Puawai. "They are also learning that they have a voice, and that their mentors respect and value what they have to say. And as their mana grows, so does their ability to care for their women and children. It's a win-win situation all round."

Just beyond Te Waipuna Puawai is the garden developed over recent years on permaculture and organic principles. Known as Papatuanuku ki Taurangi Earth Promise Centre, the venture is being guided by three Sisters of Mercy. Bridget Crisp lives in the house which overlooks the garden; when she is not teaching women how to grow vegetables and cook them, she is relief teaching at McAuley High School in Otahuhu. Living in an adjoining flat is Rosemary Revell, last year's Gardener of the Year, now an acknowledged leader in growing plants and making compost. And spending an increasing amount of time at the gardens this year is coordinator Teresa Anderson.

"Our focus right now is on developing the policies and structures we need to make this venture sustainable," says Teresa. "There may not always be Sisters of Mercy involved with a hands-on role, but we want to see the project continue to grow as a Mercy ministry. And it will, if we get the ground-rules clear from the start."

Three examples, side by side, show a prophetic response to emerging needs. That's how Mercy hopes to be in mission, growing a future from seeds planted in today's fertile soil. May our Lenten efforts bear a fruitful harvest this Easter. - Dennis Horton

### Stretching our tent pegs

E Te Atua, hoa hikoi,  
God, companion on our journey:  
inspire us as we seek to be where we need to be.  
Help us to stretch our resources,  
to find room for those who would be excluded  
unless we make a space for them.  
May our trust in your providence  
make fruitful our ministries in your name.  
For no one is beyond the reach of your love. Amen.