

Mission assured by 'energising, collaborative leadership'

Nga mihi atawhai—greetings to all in mercy! 'How are we to be in mission?' the Sisters of Mercy asked themselves at their 2009 Chapter. 'In energising, collaborative leadership' was part of the answer they gave. A glimpse of what such leadership may look like came last month as more than 100 of our own sisters, gathered for a three-day hui, invited some of their lay leaders to join them for a day.

Among the 30 or so who attended were CEOs from Mercy healthcare facilities, principals from Mercy colleges, managers of Mercy community development initiatives, directors of Mercy boards and mission personnel. Keynote speaker for the day was US Sister of Mercy Mary Sullivan, author of several books on Catherine McAuley and whose latest work is her biography of the founder, *The Path of Mercy*, published last year.

Her two sessions were titled 'Getting up Again and Laying Down our Lives – the enduring work of Mercy' and 'Sharing Christ's Merciful Yoke of Solidarity'. Two images provided a focus for each session; the first were Catherine's worn black boots, the second her black shawl. Drawn from each symbol was the invitation to sisters and their partners in ministry to stand with Catherine and to respond as she did to the challenges of the day.

'Getting up again' was how Catherine herself spoke of responding for the sake of those in need. She and her first companions became known as 'the walking sisters' for their willingness to go to wherever they were needed. She declared her preference for homemade boots – recommended for 'both neatness and economy'; and her last request, the night before she died, was that the package containing her boots be burnt 'till it was quite consumed' – a clear indication that her life's work was now finished.

The shawl, as Mary Sullivan explained, was the symbol of Catherine's response to the invitation from Jesus to 'shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.' (Matthew 11:29). This yoke, said Mary Sullivan, was an expression not of obedience to authority, but of solidarity with the humiliated

Mercy's founding steps

E Te Atua, hau taiao,
Breath of the cosmos:
pour your Spirit into our hearts,
that we may get up again
to lay down our lives
wherever your mercy waits to go.

Let us take on our shoulders
the yoke that brings rest to our souls,
as we reach out afresh
to all who are heavy-burdened;
for we know that in their needs
it is yourself we meet. Amen

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Imaging Mercy Today



Sister Raylene Dwyer of Christchurch, with US visitor Sr Mary Sullivan, author of *The Path of Mercy* and several other works on Catherine McAuley and keynote speaker at last month's hui in Wellington. (Photo: Patricia Rowe rsm)

and the lowly. "It is an image of Catherine's mercifulness; a yoke of generous sharing in God's tender mercy. If we bear this yoke, the hungry will be fed."

She recalled the instance in Catherine's own life, at the height of Dublin's cholera epidemic in 1832, as she brought home to Baggot Street, wrapped in her black shawl, the new-born baby of a woman who had died and laid it in a small bed in her own cell. "As you may guess," recounts Mary Clare Moore, "the little thing cried all night, Revd. Mother could get no rest, so the next day it was given to someone to take care of."

What's heartening for those entrusted with mission is to know that these symbols are now widely recognised by many engaged in our Mercy ministries. For some years, for instance, a pair of black boots has helped staff and students at Carmel College in Milford to 'walk the talk' around Mercy values. The boots have the habit of turning up unexpectedly, explains principal Kath Deady, in the staff room, on a library shelf, or beside a drinking fountain. "It's a way of keeping the value of service in the forefront of our minds."

At Mercy Hospice Auckland, the shawl has morphed into te korowai, the Maori cloak which provides the hospice with its Maori name and which symbolises the protective mantle extended to patients and their families as they face the challenge of life-threatening illness. The korowai is now conferred on an incoming CEO to indicate that they must first embrace the spirit of compassionate care before they can hope to offer it to others.

Mercy's true charism comes to life as Catherine's story is told and celebrated. It is especially when Sisters of Mercy join their partners in ministry that energising and collaborative leadership grows. - Dennis Horton