

Matariki – Maori new year, time for new beginnings

Nga mihi atawhai – greetings to all in Mercy! This month, we interrupt a series of reflections on the Chapter statement of the Sisters of Mercy, pondering on how they are to be in mission, to mark the half-way point of this year, as Maori invite us to bid welcome to the season of Matariki, which begins on June 10. It marks the appearance of the Pleiades, the cluster of stars which come into view low on the north-eastern horizon on the tail of the Milky Way, just before dawn. It heralds the Maori New Year.

Matariki is a chance to learn about those who came before us – our history, our family, our bones. It signals growth; it's a time for change, a time to prepare, and a time for action. Matariki celebrates the diversity of life. It's a celebration of customs, language, spirit and people. Matariki is our Aotearoa Pacific New Year.

How better to glimpse its meaning than by listening to a group of 10 or so mostly Maori women who have just completed an eight-week Mana Wahine programme at the Mercy centre in Ellerslie, Te Waipuna Puawai? Maori spirituality was their theme, a chance to enter into a journey of discovery about themselves. As the course drew to its close, they were asked to reflect on what they had gained from the course, and on where they were headed. Here are some of their responses.

'I gained new friends and shared experiences with them,' said one. 'I plan to join a numeracy and literacy programme here, with the hope of returning to paid employment one day.' 'Learning about Te Ao Maori (the Maori world) has helped me to see how important it is to acknowledge life and nature,' said another. 'I plan to focus on communications next term, and my long-term goal is to do nursing at Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT).'

'When I first came here I felt insecure and was afraid,' said a third. 'But the Maori values I discovered showed me that I have wisdom, and the others on the course have brought back a sparkle in my life. I aim to become fluent in te reo Maori.' 'Learning about the value of manaakitanga (hospitality) has helped me to appreciate myself better,' said a fourth. 'I'd like to do more courses at Te Waipuna

Matariki - seeing with God's eyes

'To have seen me is to have seen the Father,' says Jesus. In him, we see a God of compassion, who hears the cry of the poor, and promises rest for all who labour with heavy burdens. Mata ariki, the eyes of God, look on our world with a heart to renew and grace to transform it.

Let not the comfort of our lives paralyse our hearts.
May we reach out in Christ's name to touch his flesh,
shouldering the yoke of those who are weighed down.
May this season of Matariki be a time for us
to renew our commitment to the reign of God,
that the hungry be fed and those who weep may laugh.
Mauri ora. Amen

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Imaging Mercy Today



LEADER Rangi Davis (front, second from left) with women on the Mana Wahine course a 'Matariki' moment, opening up to new beginnings, through the spirit's power.

Puawai, with a view to studying counselling.'

Another has her sights set on a small business course. She would like to gain more fluency in Maori and to get a job that promotes te reo. 'I want to understand more about basic Maori words and the concepts they express,' she added. Another would like to pursue a course in academic writing at MIT, and to work with Youthline.

Course leader Rangi Davis explains that Te Waipuna Puawai has offered these wahine the opportunity to explore spirituality as "a way to find new meaning in the midst of their everyday struggles, including societal expectations, ingrained poverty, poor health, poor housing and limited education.

"Staff and volunteers at TWP helped to transport the women and children from Glen Innes to the centre in Ellerslie. At first the women felt shy and a bit apprehensive about exploring spirituality. Some of them thought that this had to do with God and religion, but they soon discovered that they were learning more about themselves, their talents and skills, their dreams and goals.

"The time they spent was about identifying key issues and learning tools to help with change and hopefully to make a difference to the future of their whanau and community.

"One of the wahine learnt a proverb that moved her – 'ko te kaha kei te tinana, ko te mana kei te wairua' – 'strength is in the body, but power is in the spirit'. With the wairua, we all have the chance to change and gain wisdom, she said. Mauri ora."

What will Matariki mean for each of us this year? Where is our commitment to Mercy leading us? Did you hear Pope Francis warning against 'gentrification of the heart' as a consequence of comfortable living? He called on us all to 'touch the flesh of Christ' by caring for the needy. "How much damage does the comfortable life do," he said. "The gentrification of the heart paralyzes us." Wouldn't Catherine McAuley have loved that! - Dennis Horton.