

Death of Mercy care-giver a loss we all share

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Four years ago, Canadian-born Maggie Pouw featured in one of our newsletters, for her efforts as a caregiver at Atawhai Mercy Assisi, to get residents as well as colleagues involved in Bike Wise.

Promoted nationwide by the New Zealand Transport Agency, the month-long competition is aimed at getting Kiwis on their bikes. But Maggie's enthusiasm sought to enlist residents in an in-house competition, clocking up 2km with every four laps of a circuit around the aged care property in Hamilton.

"Some walked with their frames, others were pushed in their wheelchairs by family, staff or volunteers," Maggie explained. "A few had power chairs, so they could drive themselves."

Maggie told us that cycling was part of her lifestyle. "We try to tread lightly, so that our impact on the earth is minimal. One of the things residents know about me is that I cycle to work every day – rain, hail or shine. They're interested in that."

Tragically, Maggie was killed on July 7 as she cycled to work, not far from the rest home in Matangi. Her death has been for the whole Atawhai Assisi community what Catherine McAuley would have described as 'a real portion of the Cross' – a profound loss, which has affected staff and residents alike.

We invited Teresa Anderson rsm, a former mission director at Atawhai Assisi, to share something from her own heart for this reflection. Here is what Teresa told us: "Maggie was a vibrant member of our mission team.

Sharing the loss is Mercy's gift

E TE Atua, aroha kaha,
God, strong in compassion,
we join with the community of Atawhai Mercy Assisi
in mourning the sudden death of Maggie Pouw,
remembered there as a dedicated care-giver.
We share their sadness at seeing cut short
a life lived so fully in the service of others.

We remember her husband and family,
and pray that they will find comfort in knowing
that their wife and mother was so well loved.
We pray that her colleagues will be strengthened
in their resolve to keep alive and bright
the spark kindled by her energy and devotion.

We pray for our Mercy family, sisters and partners
in Mercy's ministries of compassionate care.
May we learn from Catherine to recognise
the cross when it looms in the lives
of those who bear the load beside us.
May we know that God is never closer
than when the burden seems heavy;
and that sharing another's loss
is Mercy's gift to us all. Amen.

Imaging Mercy Today



FLASHBACK: Maggie Pouw organising Bike Wise in 2010, with Atawhai Mercy Assisi resident Aileen Collett who clocked up 14km on her walking frame for the in-house competition that year.

Amongst her many gifts, I remember her deep concern for staff morale. Now and again, she would quietly mention that someone could do with a boost, and the ensuing conversation led to a mission team activity to support staff at the time. She contributed generously to our Bake Days, and encouraged others to do the same.

"She was also passionate about caring for residents. This was expressed in quietly singing as she worked; getting staff to learn to sing 'happy birthday' in a resident's own language, so they could sing it on the day; generally being cheerful as she went about her work. She has left us with many beautiful memories."

Our warmest condolences go to Maggie's husband Joe and her three adult children who travelled to Canada for her funeral. And we share the sense of loss that has been felt by the community at Atawhai Mercy Assisi, which gathered there for a memorial service in mid-July.

The lasting witness of Maggie's life is glimpsed in the way one person can affect other lives with her enthusiasm and energy. "She was a beautiful, fabulous person, one of those who jollied everyone along," Assisi's CEO Judy Hindrup told the New Zealand Herald. "She would arrive at work on dark, winter mornings, lit up like a Christmas tree." The irony of her death, said Judy, "was that she was an avid safety advocate."

In mourning her passing, may we catch some of the brightness of her life, to help us kindle a spark of Mercy in someone else's heart, even if for just a moment.

—Dennis Horton