

Local, global days of grace for Mercy

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Always a special month in Mercy's calendar for its inclusion of Mercy Day, September was doubly significant this year. For the Chapter of our own Congregation, held Sep 24-30, coincided with days of celebration in Dublin to mark the 20th anniversary of the Mercy International Association. The live streaming of events from Catherine's House of Mercy and venues nearby meant that these could be shared simultaneously with Sisters of Mercy around the world. The ecological maxim of acting locally and thinking globally assumed new significance, as Mercy communities worldwide were able to join in unity of prayer and common purpose.

Among the many highlights shared from Baggot Street was a presentation by Mary Reynolds rsm, executive director of Mercy International Association for the past five years. In a reflection entitled 'Shapers of the Dream', she traced the emergence of Mercy's charism, as a 'gift given by the Spirit for the building of the kingdom', sprung from the vision that formed in the heart of Catherine McAuley early in her life. Charism, said Mary Reynolds, is "the meeting of the deep story with the needs of the age."

The challenge for Mercy today, in words of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in his homily at the Mass to mark MIA's 20th anniversary, is not simply to recycle the charism but to resurrect it in response to the trauma and suffering of our day. As Mary Reynolds put it, "the deep story emerges as charism, as it rises to the occasion."

Tracing the growth of Mercy from its founding in 1831, through periods of expansion and stabilization, through the upheaval that followed Vatican II, Mary Reynolds identified the present in terms of three critical choices – either extinction, minimal survival, or revitalization, the last being "a transforming response to the signs of the times."

Religious are challenged today to resist the temptation to turn inwards to maintenance and self-preservation, and to focus instead on "the mission of God, which calls us as urgently today as it did when our Congregation was founded." The future of mercy, she said, "is not ours to invent, but one which we can anticipate co-creatively; God is in charge, embracing the new world order that is emerging."

Sisters of Mercy currently serve in 47 countries on five continents. Most of the issues they face are not only local, but global as well. There are around 8000 sisters, 5000 associates, and around 250,000 lay partners in mission. Of those who currently participate in the programmes hosted

E Te Atua hoatu manawa -
God, your breath brings our world to birth.
We pray for our Earth in its brokenness;
as we reach out in mercy, may we be a bridge between
how things are and how by your grace they may become.

Make us people of action, inspired by Catherine's charism,
with a vision that opens us to a future still emerging
through your tender and nurturing love.

Stir us to be disturbed by what falls short of wholeness,
deeply convinced of the difference we can make. Amen.

Imaging Mercy Today



NEWLY elected Leadership Team of Sisters of Mercy New Zealand (from left) Srs Raylene Dwyer, Judith Moroney, Tui Cadigan, Sue France and Katrina Fabish. (Photo: Sr Maria Goretti Howley)

by Mercy International, 56 percent are partners in mission, 16 percent are young students.

"Let's widen the tent," said Mary Reynolds, "so that those who believe in what we do can be part of the mission, by sharing the resources they bring." As we explore the future of Mercy, she asked: "What can we do better together than any of us can do apart?"

The global streaming from Dublin included a greeting from our present Congregation Leader, sending good wishes from Aotearoa and inviting prayers for the Chapter about to begin, and a ritual prepared by New Zealand sisters and lay partners, focusing on the future of Mercy. Hosting this ritual in Dublin were sisters who have served in New Zealand, led by Sr Rosello Pepper of Onehunga.

Sisters at their Chapter spent a morning reflecting on their mission with national mission personnel, chairs of Mercy boards, principals of Mercy colleges, CEOs of Mercy health facilities and managers of Mercy ministries. The time was seen as part of the sisters' "continuing goal to strengthen our relationship with companions in mission."

The Chapter concluded with the election of a new Leadership Team which will guide the Congregation for the next five years. The team will be led by Katrina Fabish and includes Tui Cadigan, Raylene Dwyer, Sue France and Judith Moroney. The new team takes office on Foundation Day, December 12.

No mention of Chapter 2014 would be complete without an acknowledgement of Sr Ethel Bignell, who died in Wellington just as the Chapter began and was laid to rest after it concluded. Ethel was a teacher at several Mercy colleges, principal at St Catherine's College, Leader of the Wellington Congregation between 1991 and 1995, and served as administrator of Mercy International Association for eight years. She is remembered for her gifts in governance and strategic planning, and was a key contributor to the recently published mission resource, *Atawhai Mai, Atawhai Atu*. She is deeply missed by all who knew and loved her, and her presence will continue to be felt in the Mercy resources that bear her indelible touch. May she be at peace.

- Dennis Horton