

Justice – working together for the common good of all

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! What would Catherine McAuley like best about our church today? Its invitation to lay people to be involved in mission and to recognise its call to ordinary folk to be holy? Its recognition of theologians - women as well as men - who see faith in God linked to contemporary issues as diverse as fracking and human trafficking? Or perhaps its determination, through the leadership of the present pope, to become a church of the poor, for the poor? Each of these priorities, in its own way, reflects a commitment to tika or justice, which is the theme for our reflection this month.

Each of our Mercy ministries lists justice as one of its core values, usually described as “working together for the common good of all.” Justice counts on team work, in which all of us have a part to play and something to share, because we have all in some way received gifts from a merciful God – atawhai mai, atawhai atu – mercy given, mercy received.

There is also an aspect to the search for justice which Catherine would endorse, and that’s the sense of urgency which drives it. As she famously insisted, “the poor need help today, not next week.” It was not that Catherine saw any virtue in poverty, but she knew, as do Francis and the church he leads – that God’s view is that no one should be excluded from a bounty intended for all. It’s the idea that any should be ‘discarded’ or denied the dignity which the Creator means us all to share which is repugnant.

As Pope Francis told the general assembly of the United Nations when he addressed it in September, justice “is the constant and perpetual wish to render to each one their due.” The focus must be on those “who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights.”

In highlighting the rights of those who are excluded in any way from their share in the common good, Francis also emphasised the “right of the environment”, insisting that in today’s world the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are usually linked, and that the poor are often those who suffer first and most of all when the environment is abused.

What is so refreshing about Francis, greeted on his four-day visit to Cuba as ‘herald of a new liberation’, is his focus not on what Catholics believe but on how we behave. He will be remembered by priests and Religious in Havana for speaking to them without notes on the twin themes of pov-



KATH Petrie, former principal of Carmel College in Auckland, stands by one of the large rocks engraved in Māori and English with the school’s core values. This one bears the title of ‘Tika’ or ‘Justice’. The call in the coming Year of Mercy - for Carmel College students and for us all - is to see that these values are engraved on our hearts.

erty and mercy. He spoke of how the tenderness of God is glimpsed in the slobber of a disabled person trying to kiss, and he praised Religious who “burn away their lives” caring for the discarded.

That same concern for “human beings who are easily discarded” emerged in his speech to the UN a few days later, when he spoke of those who are innocently caught up in wars and conflicts – “individual persons, our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die.” It is our concern for justice which reminds us that they share with us a common home.

At the heart of this concern is a respect “for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic.”

And lest we wonder what a pope is doing talking about economic reform or climate change, about asylum seekers or human trafficking, let us not forget his insistence that acting for justice is a key component of living the Gospel and that, in the end, we will be judged on how well we have done the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. “The time has come for the church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more,” says Francis in announcing the forthcoming Year of Mercy. “Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”

- Dennis Horton

A mercy beyond justice

E Te Atua, rapu i te tika,
God, seeker of true justice,
in your loving view
no one is discarded or overlooked
but all are seen and embraced.

Extend our hearts and our gaze
to see, in this coming Year of Mercy,
that mercy and forgiveness reach
beyond justice, with the promise of
a door ever open to new life.