



Karanga Atawhai

A newsletter for Sisters of Mercy and partners in mission

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An Advent project - unfolding quietly by God's good grace

By DENNIS HORTON

Catherine McAuley is remembered by one of her first biographers as someone who had a great dislike of noise and display in the performance of religious duties. "She was often heard to say, 'How quietly the great God does all his mighty works; darkness is spread over us and light breaks in again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters'."

The season of Advent, which begins once more early next month, reminds us that this same great God is still at work in our world, keeping the promise of one who comes to save us, bringing new light into our darkened world to all who are ready to declare their need.

The architects of our PJP have outlined an evolving pathway to move our organisations from where we are to where we hope to be. The new will emerge, without a great deal of noise or upheaval. The first of four phases involves a process of investigation, with the Sponsorship Committee and its three working parties clarifying the purpose of the ministerial PJP and the structures we shall need for a new entity to be created.

The second step is one of decision-making, with recommendations from the working parties as to the final model for the Sponsorship Committee to adopt. A third step involves transition, with consent from the Congregation and local bishops and approval from Rome enabling the creation of the new PJP.

The final step has been named the operative phase, when the PJP structure will be in place with its governance board appointed and a process of mission formation implemented.

Like every journey of faith, this is a process led by the Spirit and based on a deep conviction that God will guide and support every undertaking based on trust in Providence. The charism of Mercy and the core principles of Whānau Mercy will shape this endeavour from its beginnings to its first steps. And as Catherine herself declared, it will only prosper if God continues to be the primary source of its life and vision. 'We have ever confided in Divine Providence and shall continue to do so.'



PHOTO UNSPLASH

'How quietly the great God works', Catherine McAuley

Chapter endorses path to PJP and Whānau Mercy

Even before they gathered for their five-yearly Chapter in Auckland three months ago, Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand had already recognised the need to ensure the future of their incorporated ministries.

Among a series of eight action steps emerging from the previous Chapter was a decision to have a clear plan in place by 2020 for these ministries and this was already well underway with the formation of the Sponsorship Committee and the three working parties with work focused on mission formation and governance in a new creation for mission.

The topic was highlighted at this year's Chapter when sisters participating in the process were able to meet

and hear reports from the PJP Sponsorship Committee and the chairpersons of its three working parties.

The Chapter affirmed its commitment to the ministerial PJP. Drawing from their newly approved Constitutions which call for "a new way of living God's mercy in courageous response to the needs of the times", Sisters of Mercy New Zealand are committed to journeying together in hope, focused on mission as we work together to bring the PJP to a reality.

The Congregation also endorsed the concept of Whānau Mercy which recognises that sisters live and work alongside their lay partners in a broader Mercy family.

Hope for future key to working party tasks

If there's one word to describe the attitude of those on the working parties for our PJP, it is hope. Denise Fox, who leads the Legal Working Party, says members of this group have spent their first few months reading articles on other PJPs to better understand their task.

"For each of us, this has been new territory, but we would certainly agree that the work of our group and of the other working parties provides for a hope-filled future for our Mercy ministries."

Doc Godfrey, who leads the Finance Working Party agrees that the current mood is one of confidence, determination and hope. "I think this mood stems from the personal and professional qualities of each member of the group. All have been encouraged to put forward their views and ideas whenever we have met."

Information has been boosted by reports from the other working parties and from the Sponsorship

Committee, and from a trip to Brisbane earlier this year, where representatives of our own PJP process had the chance to meet members of Mercy Partners, a PJP which was approved by Rome in November 2008.

The Finance Working Party includes two Sisters of Mercy and two men currently board members of a Mercy ministry. "The diversity has helped our working party with a range of views that challenge thinking around the table and generate in-depth discussion," says Doc.

The same diversity is reflected in the Legal Working Party, on which Denise Fox is joined by two other Sisters of Mercy and four lay partners. The diversity of background and skills has been a blessing, says Denise. "We have been able to bring our professional strengths to our work. When our tasks come to an end, we shall miss working together on a challenging project."

Mission a heart-felt invitation to walk with others

Luke Ryan is a member of the Finance Working Party. He currently serves as tumuaki or chair of Te Waipuna Puawai, the Mercy-founded community development ministry in Ellerslie.

He is Māori, of Ngāpuhi descent, and grew up in the Auckland suburb of Tamaki where he and his family relied on the same kind of services that Te Waipuna Puawai provides. "This kind of support has helped to shape me into the person I am today.

"I felt called to play an active role in the Tamaki community, so I joined Te Waipuna Puawai as a board member, drawing on my skills in corporate finance and technology and on my experience in running a storytelling business," says Luke.

"Being part of Te Waipuna Puawai has also helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my own Māori heritage."

His exposure to the corporate world has given him the ability to meet a wide number of people on the international scene. "During this time, I found that I was able to see the bigger picture and to take time talking to the people involved and listening to them.

"Over a decade, I was exposed to a number of finance-oriented roles which gave me a grounding in what needs to be done and what needs to be talked about. Sometimes you can change the pace or scale of things; at other times, you must learn to be patient and wait.

"I then moved into becoming a business owner. Ironically, this change period was when my walk with Te Waipuna Puawai began. This phase exposed me to leadership that lifts and falls, to courageous

conversations and to the weight of carrying a group of people towards a common goal."

This is where mission is vital for any Mercy ministry, says Luke. "Mission not only sets the direction through its vision, but it also shows you how to walk that direction with others (values). When you are open to the idea that people make a community, your view of things changes. Processes and projects support a community, but they don't define it.

"People become the assets, and with them their values weave together to create a community vision of change. When our decisions forget to take this into account, we are reminded of our mission. Yes, the balance sheet and profit and loss are important. But without people involved, does that importance have meaning?"

Luke is quick to endorse the focus on Whānau Mercy, the fact that we choose to support one another rather than simply accept that we need to work together. "The words that resonate for me in this conversation is that we are here, not just me on my own. To open one's heart does not have to be a heavy task but is one that starts with a conversation about wanting to work together.

"Walking together and realising that our mission is one and the same can provide us with that feeling of warmth and comfort when we need it. We are reminded that mission comes to us as an invitation. We have to ask ourselves, 'Do we let that invitation extend to our hearts and to those who walk with us?'"

Above: Luke Ryan - PHOTO TE WAIPUNA PUAWAI

