



Tikanga Mercy: knowing what we stand for

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Following the whakatauki or proverb* which opens and ends the Statement of Purpose of Whānau Mercy Ministries, explored in last month's reflection, come four guiding principles of tikanga Mercy. They answer the question of what whānau Mercy stands for. 'We are committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the tradition of Catherine McAuley, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the sacredness of all creation.' The four principles are listed, not in order of importance but as equally significant, such that if any one were missing, the identity of the entire Mercy whānau would be at risk.



Kaitiakitanga – a core value of Mercy, to guard and protect the wellbeing of Earth and all that lives within it.
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The Gospel of Jesus Christ is essentially the good news which Jesus came to bring, summed up best in his own response to the disciples of John the Baptist, sent to ask who he was and what he was all about. 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see,' said Jesus. 'The blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor.' (Matt 11:2ff)

Mercy is at work today when God's love is carried to the edges of our world, making a difference where it counts to people who least expect its saving and transformative power. Mercy's mission is God's own, to bring to life the whole of creation and to overturn whatever prevents it from flourishing.

The tradition of Catherine McAuley means that whānau Mercy is called constantly to shine the light of God's love wherever in our world it is dimmed by poverty, sickness and need. It was Catherine's unique charism that brought hope and healing to the Ireland of her day, enabling those who came to share her dream to join her in working to make a difference. Catherine's vision began with her 'willingness to enter the chaos of another' which is how James Keenan defines mercy in *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*. Our commitment to Catherine's tradition involves us in an ongoing review of our focus. Is this where we need to be working? Are these the lives that wait for us to make a difference that counts?

The third guiding principle is Mercy's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, reminding us that Mercy came to Aotearoa New Zealand in response to a karanga or invitation from wāhine Māori. In response to this karanga, our sisters seek to uphold the spirit of the Treaty by nurturing their bicultural partnership with Māori. To honour the Treaty today means that Mercy cannot rest while life expectancy and other vital statistics fall so much shorter for Māori than for many other citizens.

The fourth guiding principle, upholding the sacredness of all creation, means that Mercy is committed today to caring for what Pope Francis has described in his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si'* as 'our common home'. We cannot be seen as champions of life if we are not deeply concerned for a planet at risk. As well as hearing the cries of the poor, Mercy must also listen to the cry of the Earth and throw its weight behind whatever helps our world to recover from the wounds which humanity has inflicted. Today kaitiakitanga is one of Mercy's core values – the determination to guard and protect the wellbeing of Earth and all that lives within it.

Can you think of any way in which commitment to one of the four guiding principles outlined above might be strengthened in the Mercy ministry in which you are involved?

* *Atawhai ki uta, atawhai ki tai, kia horahorahia, ki te rito o te ao marama* –
May mercy be felt inland, may mercy be felt on the shore, may mercy be widespread,
living in the heart of our world today.