

SPIRITUALITY – WHERE TIKANGA MĀORI AND MERCY MEET

The interweaving of Māori and Mercy values was the theme of a conference of Mercy leaders held in Auckland last month, and attended by more than 70 Sisters of Mercy and their partners in ministry.

The first of two keynote speakers was Sir Edward Durie, the first Māori to serve as a High Court Judge in New Zealand and a leading expert on the Treaty of Waitangi. The second was Sister of Mercy Mary Reynolds, executive director of Mercy International Association, whose presentation was delivered live from the House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin.

Sir Eddie began his presentation by addressing the charge sometimes made by young Māori today



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that Christianity was imposed on their ancestors by colonization. He described this as “an extraordinary denigration of our past,” insisting that Māori accepted Christian values with alacrity more than 20 years before the links with the British Crown were established.

“The main attraction of Christianity for Māori was its pervasive sense

of spirituality, reaching across the whole of life,” Sir Eddie said. “In fact, that spirituality was already here; the missionaries simply enhanced it.”

While Christianity came in 1814, British law came in 1840. “We fought against it; it did not mesh with our tradition, the concepts were different.” For the Crown, land was important but lakes and rivers were not, Sir Eddie explained. “In the Māori world, lakes and rivers were vital, because that’s where our food came from – fish and water fowl.”

For the Crown, land was owned in fee simple by individuals; for Māori, land was owned by the community. For the Crown, power came from the top down; for Māori, power was given by the community at the bottom.

In the boardroom, Māori see the spiritual dimension as primary. “You can see why Māori took

to the Bible and its creation stories. Whakapapa underlines the spiritual beginnings of life. Business is not just the business; the challenge is to ensure that what we do puts us in touch with our beginnings. Decision-making is a sacred task. The process moves from karakia (the opening prayer) through mihi (the welcome to each participant) to the business.”

The principle of whanaungatanga (family connections) involves a personal ongoing relationship. “The contract may be just one page, but it stands if it is made with someone you trust,” Sir Eddie noted. In a marae context, people eat together, sleep together then work together. “The real skill in whaikōrero (speech-making) is to link what you say with what has been said before. This is what leads to consensus, where all stand together.”

In her presentation, made from what had been the first classroom in Catherine McAuley’s House of Mercy in Dublin, Mary Reynolds described the founder as “an extraordinary woman who broke impregnable barriers.” Her life experiences – including being orphaned and made homeless at a young age – opened Catherine to an empathetic understanding of others, said Mary Reynolds. She also developed a thirst for justice at an early stage of her life and saw the works of mercy as the business of her life.

“Catherine believed that nothing was too good for the poor, because in each of them she recognised the person of Christ.” She remained troubled by a bureaucracy that had prevented her from rescuing a young woman who had come looking for help. “As soon as she had the means, she built a shelter for needy women and children, all of whom were welcomed and treated with kindness.”

Mercy leaders today need to learn from Catherine McAuley, to become creators of new patterns, said Mary Reynolds. Under her leadership, Catherine transformed communities in her time. Mercy leaders and boards should learn from her example to do the same today. “They must be able to enhance today’s patterns for tomorrow’s mission.”

Points to ponder:

- What might our board learn from the leadership style of Catherine McAuley?

- Name a value or aspect of your Mercy ministry which Maori are likely to identify as their own. Talk about the reasons for your choice.

MĀTĀRIKI - PLANNING FOR A WORLD WITHOUT HUNGER

Among the eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified by Mercy Global Action as most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy is the second, Zero Hunger. The goals set out a vision for the world for the next decade and a half, so that we will all work collectively and collaboratively to end poverty and hunger.

The hope of all those who have endorsed these goals, including the New Zealand

Government, is that by 2030 the nations of the world will have made giant strides towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

A tall order? Yes, but one that is achievable. Like its partner poverty, with which it goes hand in hand, hunger is not natural or inevitable. It is, as Nelson Mandela noted, “man-made, and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

The problem is a global one, affecting lives here as well as overseas. The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services estimates that there are around 622,000 people living in poverty in this country, or one in every seven households, including around 230,000 children. Living in poverty means experiencing hunger and food insecurity, reduced life expectancy, poor health outcomes, debt and unaffordable or bad housing.

A recent National Children’s Nutrition Survey found that one in five Kiwi families said they could only sometimes afford to eat properly. A further one in five households reported that food sometimes or often ran out because of lack of money.

There is enough food to feed everyone in the world. The biggest problem is not the supply of food but its distribution. A lot depends on how we measure



how well we are doing as a nation. US president Franklin D Roosevelt wisely said, “The real test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much, but whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

In terms of the UN’s sustainable development goals, including Zero Hunger, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission offers some helpful advice on how we can get involved (www.hrc.co.nz – the Global Goals, Goal Two – Zero Hunger). The first step is to take action, by joining the worldwide movement to make the goals well known. Adding our regular support to groups like UNICEF and Save the Children, or to Caritas Aotearoa which is currently raising funds through its East African Crisis Appeal, could be a place to start.

The second step recommended by our Human Rights Commission is to tell everyone. “The more people who know about the SDGs, the more successful they’ll be,” says the HRC. “We need your help to share the goals. In conversation, on email, in debate, at home, work or school. Whatever it takes, tell everyone.”

Planning for the future is one of the key themes of Mātāriki, the Māori new year which begins this year on Sunday 25 June. Traditionally the cluster of stars appeared at the end of the harvest season. This was the time when storage houses (pātaka kai) were filled with food. The kūmara had been gathered and stored in specially prepared pits to ensure a year-round supply.

Conservation and care for the environment remain key themes in celebrating Mātāriki; giving thanks for land and water that have provided sustenance is important. We are also reminded in this season to respect and protect nature, so that future generations may enjoy the same quality of life that we cherish.

– Dennis Horton

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