

Trade of innocents, a focus for Mercy Day now

Nga mihi atawhai – greetings to all in Mercy! As Mercy Day dawns once more, we are challenged to join hearts and minds with Mercy folk everywhere, working for a world that still waits to be transformed by the vision which saw Catherine open her first House of Mercy 186 years ago. Though Mercy's spirit remains unchanged, the focus shifts as our world moves on. Today, Mercy's global network proposes two huge issues to be addressed – climate change and human trafficking. Here in New Zealand, we may find it easier to focus on the first than the second.

Living as we do with oceans all around us, it is tempting to think that human trafficking is not the problem here that it is for European nations whose borders are so easy to cross. But those with an eye to see can recognise the signs of trafficking even here – especially in the exploitation of migrants working in some of our restaurants and aboard our coastal fishing vessels and the rise in under-age prostitution, especially in the streets of South Auckland.

Invited by her Congregation to undertake special responsibility for monitoring the issue of human trafficking is local Sister of Mercy Anna Nicholls, who links up regularly through video conferences with Mercy Global Action at the United Nations and its worldwide networks.

Anna believes that the issue of human trafficking is much bigger in New Zealand than many of us might imagine. "Much of the evidence is anecdotal; part of our task is to ensure better local research. Stories circulate about migrant workers being paid \$4 an hour in some of our restaurants. Or some may earn more, but they are also having to pay their employer a huge amount for being sponsored to stay here – the going rate is around \$15,000, I was told recently."

No one in New Zealand has yet been prosecuted for trafficking, says Anna. "And because no one has been

Imaging Mercy Today



TRADE OF INNOCENTS: A still from the movie, a focus for Mercy.

caught, our laws haven't been tested well. There are international protocols on trafficking, and while New Zealand does have a national plan of action, further research to determine the extent of trafficking is urgently required." She belongs to a group, Aotearoa New Zealand Religious Against Trafficking of Humans (ANZRATH), which has links to its Australian counterpart (ACRATH). Amongst other things, this group encourages avoiding products which have been made through forced labour, trying to ensure through our buying power that there are fewer trapped as slaves in our world." Preference is for goods with a 'fair trade' label.

For Anna, trafficking is a pressing issue for Mercy today. "Catherine McAuley was a woman of the gospel, and she heard the call of Jesus to help those in need. There are so many people today who are being trafficked and kept in slavery who need the touch of Mercy. A huge number of these are women and children, who were the special focus of Catherine's concern."

Trade of Innocents is a recently released movie that focuses on the exploitation and trafficking of young girls in Cambodia. "It's powerful, in the sense that it's a thriller and a drama, so it has more appeal for young people than a documentary that screens for an hour and a half." Anna has purchased the rights to screen the movie publicly in this country and hopes to show it in Mercy colleges throughout New Zealand. "From the movie, we hope to have some conversations and discussion after each of the screenings. We're starting at Carmel College on September 19, and we'll use our networks to contact other Mercy schools.

"We hope to raise funds, ideally to do some research on child prostitution in New Zealand, to see what we can get in the way of concrete evidence for a law change, but also to support some of the organisations that are working here in the area of trafficking." This Mercy Day, may Catherine's spirit help us to make a difference on one of the critical issues of our time. - Dennis Horton

Greatest in the kingdom

E Te Atua, whaea o nga hunga rawa kore:
God, you are mother to the little and the lowly.
Through your son Jesus you welcomed children
and blessed them as greatest in your kingdom.
Move us to work to eliminate the forces that
deprive children of their rights and
that destroy their innocence and integrity.
Show us how to honour and respect
the dignity of all women, that with them
we may together find ways of enriching
all humanity as you call us to do,
in Mercy's name. Amen.

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