

Imaging Mercy Today

Confronting injustice at society's edge

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy!
While there's no doubt that Catherine McAuley was deeply committed to human transformation, it would be a mistake to see her as simply another social activist clamouring for change.

The starting point for Catherine's vision of how lives might be changed was her own sense of being blessed by God with a richness and inner joy that, even in the worst and bleakest of times, never left her. To be inspired by mercy meant, for Catherine, the desire to share with others the riches she had received from a God whose goodness she never doubted. And while the circumstances of her own life changed, from the affluence of childhood to more straightened times in her teens, from the comfort of keeping house for the Callaghans and inheriting their estate to choosing to live and work among 'the afflicted poor', she never lost her love for life nor appreciation of its finer things.

We catch glimpses of this in her ability to make light of her troubles, whether it's a broken arm or a troublesome cleric; in the letters she wrote in rhyme, especially when she needed to admonish or chastise; in her love of dancing, and her delight in speculating whose ankle it was that had led Daniel O'Connell to speak of Sisters of Mercy 'gliding along, apparently poor' but with the elegant gait of educated ladies. Her sisters, said Catherine, should be the happiest people in the world. Her reason was clear: at the

heart of every dedicated life is a God whose gift is overwhelming love; and 'the only return God asks of us is a return of love.'

It was the divine love at the centre of her life which led Catherine in search of a more human kind of world. It's the same impulse that finds Sisters of Mercy today wanting to address the unjust systems that affect those at the edges of society. The vision of how things might be is born by encountering life as it really is; Mercy praxis is shaped by a thoughtful, prayerful reading of the signs of our times.

It's because Mercy now mentors teenage mothers and empowers women at the edge to grow in self-esteem that we're able to speak with conviction about breaking the cycles of poverty and abuse. It's because Mercy works alongside rangatahi living in at-risk situations, with programmes offering them mana and new skills, that we can talk of real hope for youth on the fringe. It's because our Mercy schools affirm young women in life choices and career paths that we can attest to their ongoing advancement. It's the work of Mercy's hospice and aged-care facilities that allows us to talk of living with dignity and purpose, despite the limitations of illness and old age. And it's our resolve to embrace Māori as partners in shaping our ministries that makes Mercy's commitment to Te Tiriti more than just words.

As Mātāriki heralds another year, let's rejoice at signs of a world made new by love. - Dennis Horton

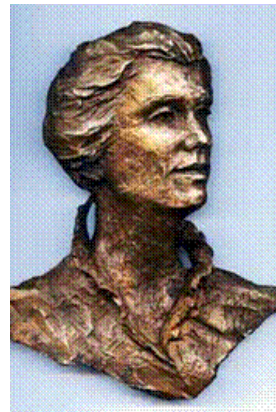
He Inoi - Prayer

Welcome to Mātāriki

Mātāriki atua,
blessed eyes of brightness,
piercing our pre-dawn sky
with your shining light:
you are our promise
in the midst of winter cold
that new life will come.

We join with our Mercy sisters
as they keep on their journey,
becoming a new creation for mission.
May their spirit of hope
in a future still unfolding
keep us open to all that is yet to be.

Mātāriki atua,
ka heke mai i te rangi e roa:
come down from far above,
bestow the first fruits
of a new year upon us. Amen.



Catherine
- in her
own words

Handy with a hammer

'Sr Aloysius has just called me with a great iron sledge in her hand. She saw through a small aperture a long room, instantly broke through a slight partition, and discovered a spacious apartment, full as large as our present community room. It will make six fine cells. She is now making out a House of Mercy—of stable and coach house. I never cease thanking God for giving me courage to bring her into action, and she is delighted.' (15 January 1841)

The difference Mercy makes

Seven years ago, Mercy entered the fast developing rohe area of Waitakere City.

It was the call or cry of our young people and children - te tangi me te karanga o nga rangatahi me nga mokopuna - that drew Mercy here. That same cry is still the heart-beat of our organisation today.

What a beginning to a wonderful relationship with the people of the land that links us to our commitment to Treaty! As a result of this, a journey and a vision were created. And so the story of Te Ukaipo Mercy Initiatives for Rangatahi unfolds.

When we speak of 'the difference Mercy makes', we celebrate the opportunities that have been developed for our people to bask in.

Te Ukaipo provides services at grass-roots, advocating for families in need through our *Whanau Atawhai* programme, and developing our community and working to restore its environment through our *Project Twin Streams*.

Our *Sustainable Households*,

Sustainable Living programme aims at educating families to live economically; we provide learning and creative arts opportunities for youth in at-risk situations through



Each month this year we're inviting the manager of one of our Mercy ministries to highlight the difference Mercy makes in their special field of endeavour. This month's perspective comes from APRIL NICHOLSON, kai kokiri / manager of Te Ukaipo Mercy Initiatives for Rangatahi Ltd in Waitakere.

our *Whakapakari o Roto* holiday project.

Te Ukaipo has a set of values that allows us to relate back to Mercy's founding spirit.

These values are embedded in our everyday operations and form the foundation that roots us to our being in this area.

Whakamanamanamai - empowerment - is a value that is golden in developing growth among our young people and their families.

We use a sustainable approach that equips us with the necessary tools to work collaboratively within all areas of our service. This has also enabled us to develop and nurture relationships with mana whenua, tangata whenua and our local community.

I would like to conclude with this whakatauki or proverb:

*Mate atu he tete kura,
whakaheke mai he tete kura.*

When the old fern frond shrivels away, the young will take its place.

That's the difference that Mercy makes with Te Ukaipo!

Mātāriki - life just as winter sets in

One of the drawbacks to living down under is that we miss much of the symbolism that goes with Christmas in the northern hemisphere.

There the bright star of Bethlehem begins to shine just as families are hunkering down for the year's shortest day. The lights of Christmas pierce the deepening winter gloom.

And the evergreen branches of the Christmas tree are proof that the rest of nature is just sleeping, not dead, and will soon burst into life once more.

Perhaps we can see Mātāriki as a welcome chance for a mid-winter celebration, as Māori and Pacific people mark the start of a new year.

The star cluster that's due to appear in the pre-dawn sky later this month is being observed by growing numbers of New Zealanders as a time for celebrating and socializing.

It's also a time to remember those who have passed on to



MATARIKI, the cluster of stars also known as the Pleiades, begins this year on June 24

the next world, like stars in the night sky. With Mātāriki comes the chance to acknowledge whakapapa or family history.

Suggestions include researching the family tree, bringing grandparents and grandchildren together to share stories, and creating some way to remember those who have recently died.

Mātāriki is also a time to prepare for the season of growth that lies ahead. It's the perfect

time to make plans for the land and design the spring garden. Now is when we need to get the seeds for spring sowing, to plant a native tree or shrub.

And once the mid-winter dinner is over, we can be serious again about getting fit, starting a diet or exercise plan.

Mātāriki is the right time to sort out our finances or family budget. Or to quit smoking, if we haven't already stopped.

Across the Tasman, there are little pockets of light as well. Artist Michael Leunig has some wise advice in his *Common Prayer Collection*:

'Dear God, let us prepare for winter. The sun has turned away from us and the nest of summer hangs broken in a tree. Life slips through our fingers and, as darkness gathers, our hands grow cold.

'It is time to go inside. It is time for reflection and resonance. It is time for contemplation. Let us go inside. Amen.'