

# Imaging Mercy Today

## Promoting rights of women, children

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy!

A shadow falls across our theme this month, highlighting Mercy's commitment 'to promote the dignity and rights of all, in particular women and children.' As people in Ireland reflect on their government's report detailing six decades of child abuse in church-run institutions from the 1930s, Irish Orders including the Sisters of Mercy are having to ask how they came to stray so far from their founders' vision.

There can be no doubting where Catherine McAuley stood. While never marrying, by 1829 she had become legal guardian to nine children, including nieces and nephews, two young cousins and two orphans. That same year she offered full board, as distinct from overnight accommodation, to 30 women needing a place to live. Her House of Mercy became Dublin's first residential hostel for working girls; by 1841 there were 52 women and girls crowded into her Baggot St residence.

Catherine made huge efforts to rescue women and girls at risk, and to find ways of advancing their cause, 'fitting them for earth, without unfitting them for heaven.' And she was far ahead of her time in recognising the importance of education for women, keenly aware of their role in shaping society and influencing the lives they touched.

There is soul-searching now, as Ireland's Sisters of Mercy apologise to all who suffered in their orphanages and industrial schools, and as questions are raised as to why so many Irish children came to be without homes and parents of their own. But there is fresh re-

solve, too, to see Mercy's global resources channeled to where they are most needed.

As Mary Reynolds rsm, executive director of Mercy International Association, reminded her audiences in New Zealand last month, Mercy is being urged today to harness its worldwide energy as never before. 'What's needed is an energy of inclusion, of welcome, of befriending those who are different. And we don't have to go further than the doors of our own ministries to find that challenge.'

We have our own shadows to face here. Last month's report issued by New Zealand's Children's Commissioner shows that each year around 45 children under five are seriously injured and around five are killed, by people they should be able to trust. Some have been in CYF's care. Figures released here in April on violence against women are no better. One in three New Zealand women has been abused by a partner; one in four has suffered sexual abuse as a child. Around 32 women and girls are killed by assault each year. Many more live in fear of violence.

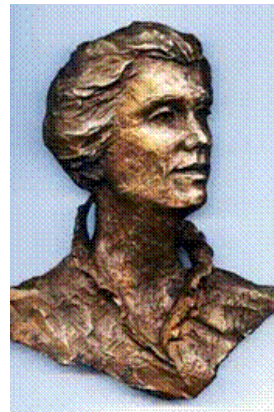
As Truth and Reconciliation commissions around the world attest, saying sorry is just the start of a healing path; working for change shows our real determination to make amends. Many of Mercy's present efforts - empowering women for life and work, imparting parenting skills to teen mums, helping refugee women to settle and progress, and raising the social awareness of girls at our Mercy colleges - are steps towards a better world. We need more of them. - Dennis Horton

### He Inoi - Prayer

#### A mother's touch

E te Atua whāea,  
with a mother's love  
you bring us to life.  
Breathe into us  
your own gentle wairua.  
Make us cherish all that lives,  
able to see our interdependence  
with other people and things -  
no longer a collection of objects  
but a communion of subjects.

May the women in our midst  
help to shape our world,  
showing men how to care,  
to awhi and protect the young,  
to find strength in gentleness,  
in giving ground, in letting be.  
Let our aroha be tender,  
that all we touch may  
bear the imprint of your love,  
in mercy's name. Amen



Catherine  
- in her  
own words

#### Power of a good woman

'No work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor, than the careful instruction of women.'

'Because whatever the station they are destined to fill, their example and their advice will always have influence; and where a good woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.'

*(Familiar Instructions)*

# The difference Mercy makes

**St Mary's College is a decile 7 school with roll of 820, drawn from both ends of the socio-economic spectrum.**

With an ethnic mix which includes 16% Pasifika and 10% both Maori and Asian, ours is a multicultural school with a diversity that provides excellent learning opportunities.

The Sisters of Mercy who established the school in 1850 have long had a commitment to excellence. Our belief in social justice means that we feel strongly about the right of all students to an excellent education, regardless of the level of privilege they experience in their own lives.

To extend our excellent academic results further, we have continued to develop a culture of learning within the college. Through sharing professional practice, our teachers seek to be innovative and to try new strategies in their classrooms.

Students are encouraged to achieve their potential, and special evenings are held to educate parents in supporting their youngsters' learning.

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 SANDY PASLEY, principal of St Mary's College, Auckland.



Higher expectations of student achievement require a supportive pastoral care system, seen as critical to our success. Our learning support department identifies students with learning needs, both those who are academically gifted and those with learning difficulties.

All students at St Mary's are closely monitored, with strategies in place to improve their learning. Teachers are helped to recognise differences in student abilities and to cater for these with differentiated learning programmes. As part of our unique music curriculum, every student from Year 7 to 9 learns a musical instrument. This compulsory requirement reflects the high correlation between academic success and learning music at a young age.

The real key to improving achievement is the appointment of staff who share our vision and who believe in a values-based education. We know that unless their motivation is grounded in the desire to uphold and develop the dignity of each young person in their care, we will never fulfil our original and God-given mission.

The vision we have is that our students leave St Mary's College empowered with an excellent education, to take their place in society and to work in the Mercy tradition of justice and compassion for others.

## Mercy dream for healing Earth, healing lives

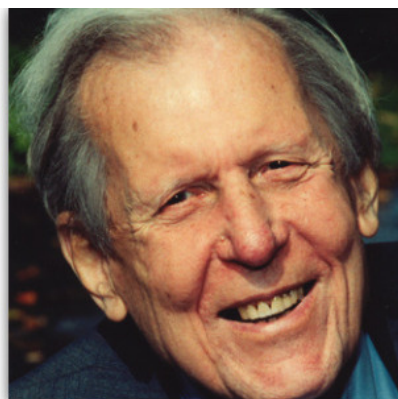
**Self-styled geologist Fr Thomas Berry died in the US last month, after a lifetime committed to exploring the history of Earth and its evolutionary processes.**

But he remains an inspiration for many around the world who see the link between spirituality and care of the Earth.

For three Sisters of Mercy in Auckland, Berry's insights have helped to shape plans for turning their eco home and land in Ellerslie into a 'Community House of Hospitality'.

Katrina Fabish, Rosemary Revell and Bridget Crisp will open their house and permaculture garden next year for local people to find healing through a range of projects, helping them to reconnect with the Earth.

The trio have named the venture 'Papatuanuku ki Taurangi—Earth Promise', with its key purpose of 'working for a just and sustainable Earth with women, children and families in local areas.'



Thomas Berry... 'the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects'

Plans include using the well-established garden to teach organic principles, supporting local families to develop their own gardens, and providing space for creative activities such as making mosaics and outdoor pavers.

Katrina Fabish has already begun classes in mosaics; several Maori women have made memorials for children who have died or been killed.

Funding from *Task Force Green*

will create job opportunities for those whose lives and disabilities make finding work difficult. The first to be employed under the scheme began a 26-week seed-raising project in May.

At the heart of the venture is a desire to honour the land and its people. 'Our commitment to Te Tiriti calls us to deep relationship with tangata whenua and to acknowledge that this land is not ours to own, but a gift to be shared,' says Katrina.

She quotes Thomas Berry: 'The grandeur of the Universe Story will sustain our energies, while the renewed kinship with Earth community will ground our actions.'

For Bridget Crisp, the new venture will be an expression of her vows to live Mercy's call.

The third in the group, Rosemary Revell, returns in April from serving at MIC in Dublin. 'I hope we'll help families to care for the Earth and make it a better place for all to live.'