

Imaging Mercy Today

Upholding the connectedness of all life

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Six years ago Fr Jim Conlon was in Auckland for a Mercy conference, pleading on behalf of the cosmos for 'listening hearts that can hear the voiceless.' Our world may have changed since the days of Catherine McAuley, he conceded, but the poor - of every species - still need our help.

The growing evidence since 2003, from vanishing rain forests to melting glaciers, serves only to stress the urgency of Jim Conlon's call. The shift is from regarding ourselves as outright masters of a world at our disposal, to seeing ourselves as connected with, related to, and dependent on all other forms of life.

The Bible's creation story, mandating humans to 'fill the earth and conquer it', needs standing on its head, so that we can see our role as guardians or kaitiaki of a creation under threat from generations of human depredation and neglect. There's a 'new story' waiting to be told, rich with insights from modern science that find their echo in so much first-nation wisdom, insisting that all life is linked.

Geo-justice is Fr Conlon's theme; it implies a relationship with all created life, not just with other human beings. And it starts with our recognising that other forms of life have a right to exist, independently of their usefulness to humans. The ultimate act of justice, he says, is 'to listen to the abused and voiceless of every species.' Among them are not just the battered wife and neglected child, but the endan-

gered plant and polluted shoreline - all of them victims of human violence, waste and greed.

Many of our Mercy organisations already know this truth and are working on it. You can't have healthy lives on a dying planet, they insist. Healing lives go hand in hand with restoring our damaged Earth. Action for global change starts in your own street.

Our own guidelines for sustainable practice took shape the year after Jim Conlon's visit. Based on the UN's *Earth Charter*, they offer some practical hints for 'preserving the integrity of all life.' With input from a working party representing most of our ministries, we called our resource *Atawhai mo te Ao - Mercy for Creation*. It's still a useful place to start.

Fr Conlon's own recipe for picking up the challenge of geo-justice consists of three basic rules: to honour difference, to nourish interiority and to celebrate communion. The rules turn into simple questions for any organisation keen to travel this path. How is diversity respected in your workplace? What are you doing to nourish the spirits of the people who work with you? What do you do to give them a sense of belonging, of being included?

The questions are timely as another Mercy Day approaches. The vision of the Sisters of Mercy carries the call to live with an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. In reaching out to enhance other lives, we may find there's a poverty within ourselves that is healed, too. - Dennis Horton

He Inoi - Prayer

Atawhai mo te Ao

Creating God,
womb in which our Earth took shape:
gift us with the vision to see
our links with all else that lives.
Make us kaitiaki of all you give us,
able to enjoy without exploiting.
May we find ways to sustain life
wherever it is at risk.

Eternal breath
from whom all life springs:
let your Spirit blow anew amongst us.
Open our minds to sense your presence,
and our hearts to see what may come
when your fire sets our kindling ablaze.
Let us bear your atawhai freely
to where it still waits to go.

Amen



Catherine
- in her
own words

The true spirit of Mercy

'All are good and happy. The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us - and oh what a blessing - it should make all things else pass into nothing. All laugh and play together, not one cold stiff soul appears. From the day they enter, all reserve of an ungracious kind leaves them. This is the spirit of the order indeed - the true spirit of Mercy, flowing on us - that notwithstanding our unworthiness, God still leaves His holy peace, extended to all our convents. Thanks to His holy name!'

The difference Mercy makes

Our motto at Waiatarua Mercy Parklands is 'Care, compassion, community'. Our vision is to put people first, to be a centre of excellence for care.

Our unsung heroes are the many staff who provide clinical care and administrative support for our residents – the frail and disabled, those who live with dementia, the sick and the dying.

No one makes our staff come to Mercy Parklands. They are mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, husbands, wives and sweethearts. They give of themselves from choice, freely and unstintingly.

I always marvel at the different ways in which we see Mercy at work here, all expressing that compassion for others reflected in the life of Catherine McAuley and in her founding the Sisters of Mercy.

I have talked to a number of staff about what Mercy means. They speak eloquently of surviving in the tough environment of caring for lives which are often challenging, of happy and sad stories, of supporting residents and their families, and of unfailing compassion.

Here are some of the words they use to explain what Mercy is at Mercy Parklands:

Mercy is not just about doing well; it's about being present in the moment, about offering a gift of

hope and light to others.

Mercy is there in our desire to do well what we do – at the business end as well as at the bedside. Mercy is about maintaining high standards and managing low ones. It's about raising the bar in the things we do.



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. This month's perspective comes from ANN COUGHLAN, CEO of Waiatarua Mercy Parklands Hospital/ Retirement Home in Ellerslie, seen here with mission team member Julie Knott serving homemade soup for outreach projects.

Mercy is seen in the care shown to our residents. We witness to what lies beyond, to the spiritual in everyone's life, however this is expressed. Our holistic approach means caring for the whole person.

Mercy is the support given to staff in times of need, on or off duty. It's also there in the care staff show to one another.

Mercy is also committing to development and training, to ongoing quality improvement. It's encouraging staff to look for new activities and projects that will assist our residents' quality of life.

Mercy is also about prayer. A resident recently spoke of how she can enter the chapel and find peace and serenity in that sacred space.

Pastoral care means providing religious services and spiritual counsel. It also means celebrating key events, like Anzac Day, Remembrance services and Mercy Day.

Our work also acknowledges the importance of community, so we spend time with residents, getting to know them and the things that give their lives meaning and value.

In a nutshell, Mercy values are at the heart of everything we do. We are driven by our own Mercy story, with its tradition of service and its distinctive character. In the end, it's Mercy's compassion and skill that make all the difference.

Catherine's spirit lives on in Mercy today

It's 182 years this month since Catherine McAuley's House of Mercy first opened its doors in Baggot Street, Dublin. Today the house serves as a centre for Mercy International Association's global outreach and as a venue for pilgrims drawn by Catherine's life and spirit.

Mercy organisations around the world keep Sep 24 as Mercy Day, with events to celebrate their founder and to show how her spirit is reflected in current ministries and outreach projects.

In Auckland, Sisters of Mercy will join with companions in mission for a Mercy Day celebration at 2pm on Saturday 26 Sep at St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby.

The ritual will include input from sisters just back from their Chapter in Christchurch, and from two Mercy healthcare executives who took part in a pilgrimage to Baggot St earlier this year.

In Hamilton, Atawhai Assisi Home and Hospital will hold its annual Mercy awards ceremony on Sep 17, with acknowledgements to staff and volunteers for their years of service and outstanding commitment to Mercy values.



HOUSE of Mercy, built for Catherine McAuley in 1827, reflected in high-rise windows of Baggot Street today.

On Mercy Day, Te Waipuna Puawai, the Mercy community development centre in Ellerslie, plans to host a 'Gratitude Café' when whanau, friends and colleagues are invited to drop in for hospitality and a chance to celebrate the centre's recent achievements.

"It's a chance for us to say thanks

to everyone for the awesome work they do," says Tara Joe who coordinates the centre's programme for young mothers. "It's also about rekindling the flame of passion we need to do our jobs well."

Later that day, St Catherine's Rest Home will celebrate by launching a newly designed Mission Statement, incorporating its logo, motto and Maori name.

At an afternoon tea to follow the ceremony, a koha of outreach funds will be presented to Te Ukaipo, the Waitakere-based Mercy venture supporting rangatahi and their whanau.

During this month, staff at Waiatarua Mercy Parklands Hospital and Retirement Home in Ellerslie are being invited to a two-part retelling of the Mercy story. The first of these features *The Circle of Mercy*, a DVD on the life and work of Catherine McAuley.

The second session is a Power Point presentation, *Emerald in the Koru*, which tells of Mercy's journey to Aotearoa and the work of Mother Cecilia Maher. The facility's Mission Team will host 'A Comfortable Cup of Tea' on Mercy Day for residents and staff.