

# Imaging Mercy Today

## God at work in an unfolding universe

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy!  
With fewer vocations and ageing communities, many of our religious orders these days could be forgiven for thinking of themselves as endangered species.

Yet as last month's Chapter held by our own Sisters of Mercy in Christchurch shows, lives that are centred in God are well placed for keeping hope alive. Far from being just wishful thinking, that hope is grounded in the very modern perception that God is at work in an unfolding, unfinished universe.

Drawn from contemporary science, the New Story offers an evolutionary view of creation, helping us to see that our entire world is a work in progress, but that humanity's place in the scheme of things is neither as automatic nor as assured as earlier generations may have imagined.

Life as we know it now is a gift, a grace. How long it survives depends, in part, on how well we play our role as co-creators with God, ensuring that our choices and decisions are life-giving, for ourselves and for the many forms of life which count on us and on which we ourselves depend.

The New Story invites humans to a humbler view of our place on Earth. Compared with the billions of years it has taken for our planet to evolve, we are very recent comers; and in the short time we have been here, human beings have done huge ecological damage, destroying life for many species and placing our own long-term survival at risk.

In Catholic circles, women religious have led the way in developing a conscience on environmental issues and in making the link between faith in God and care for the Earth. In recent times Sisters of Mercy in this country have committed themselves to preserving the integrity of all creation, seeking practical steps to ensure that their decisions and actions are life-giving. Sustainable practice is seen as a moral imperative, not just a fashionable trend.

But the insights of the New Story involve more than just a greening of the church; they challenge us to accept that life as we know it continues to evolve and change, and that from today's chaos and upheaval tomorrow's possibilities will be born.

The patterns of religious life which sprang up with such vibrancy throughout Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries may not survive into the 22nd; but from their transformation new ways of expressing faith and service will emerge.

As Sr Doris Gottemoeller rsm has noted, there never was a golden age for religious life; there were only ever people of faith, like ourselves, who loved God and dared to dream. We will keep hope alive, so long as we are led by our own.

What is critical, as we move forward into a future that remains hugely unknown, is that we know the story from which our dream is born. A clear sense of our Mercy identity forms a vital reference point for change on our evolutionary path. - Dennis Horton

### He Inoi - Prayer

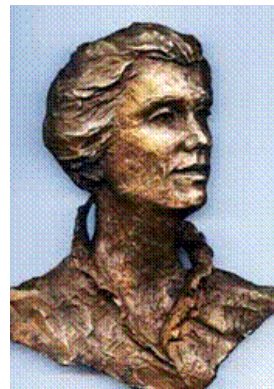
#### Light for our time

E te Mārama ki te ao nui,  
God, light that illumines  
our vast galaxy and beyond:  
we give thanks for this moment  
and your gift for us to be.

Time is the seed of life,  
when every now is filled  
with unseen potential,  
open to endless miracles  
of growth and change.

Let your light illumine us.  
Be the brightness to reveal  
what possibilities may open,  
if only we dare to dream.

Work within us now  
the miracle of your grace,  
that aroha and hope be born  
anew in us, in mercy's name.  
Amen.



Catherine  
- in her  
own words

### The joys of British rail

'We sailed from Kingston on Monday evening, arrived in Liverpool at half past six next morning. Proceeded in the train most comfortably, and reached London in very good time. Just think a moment what an extraordinary expedition: we dined in Baggot Street on Monday - and arrived in London with time enough to take refreshment, say our prayers, and go to bed early on Tuesday night. Very different from our travels in Ireland - we were 16 hours going from Limerick to Tullamore!'

(Bermondsey, December 1839)

# The difference Mercy makes

**St Catherine's Rest Home grew out of Mother Catherine McAuley's inspirational love of her sisters, witnessing their need of loving care in their older years.**

Originally, our rest home cared only for Sisters of Mercy; but its owners soon realized that there was a need felt by lay women in the community who would welcome the peaceful, prayerful and caring lifestyle which is a feature of our facility.

Today, St Catherine's is a 28-bed rest home, contracted to the Auckland District Health Board to provide health and disability services for people over 65 who are assessed as needing rest home care.

Services offered at St Catherine's reflect the philosophy of the Sisters of Mercy, promoting the unique dignity and value of each resident's life.

We follow the example and vision of Catherine McAuley, by ensuring that our mission and values are thoroughly integrated in all aspects of our work.

In the tradition of Mercy, we provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere; there is a strong

focus on gracious hospitality.

The prevailing culture is one of respect and compassion, valuing and affirming residents by showing that we accept and appreciate individual differences.

Our registered nurses and caregiv-



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 SANDRA HUNT, Administrator of St Catherine's Rest Home in Ponsonby.

ers are committed to Mercy's vision. Staff turnover is very low, which ensures that there is continuity and consistency of care.

An integral component of our service delivery is pastoral care; a chapel and prayer-room on site allow residents to share in daily Mass, and the other religious celebrations and events which are part of convent life.

St Catherine's residents live alongside the community of St Mary's Convent; its sisters live by example the Mercy spirit, and provide valuable support to both staff and residents and their families.

Our commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi is reflected in our Maori name, Te Kainga Atawhai o Hata Katarina, and in the koru which form the background of our logo.

Its central images are a Mercy cross and Catherine's famous 'comfortable cup of tea', her last wish for the sisters of her community before her death.

The spirit of St Catherine's is summed up in our motto, 'Mercy - living with loving care.' That's a vision which invites us constantly to walk the talk.

## A beckoning God, 'big enough to believe in'

**There was a time when questions about the purpose of life were simple, because the answers never changed.**

Whatever happened, says Joan Chittister in a recent column, we took to be the eternal will of a God who had made all things.

But along came Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution, and with it an entirely new way of seeing both creation and its maker.

In this view, God has become the God of ongoing creation, of "life involved in contributing to its own emerging form," Joan Chittister writes.

"A self-creating universe becomes co-creator with the humble God who shares power and waits for the best from us, and provides for what we need to make it happen.

"We become participants in the development of life which is not so much planned as it is enabled.

"And God becomes the God of a universe on its way to growing into glory, of becoming one with its creator."

From this perspective, notes



A PULSE of light emitted from a red super-giant star illuminates a cloud of interstellar dust (Photo by Hubble/NASA)

Joan Chittister, the God of evolution becomes mother as well as father. "God the mother understands pain.

"She bears us, then lets us grow from error to solution, from failure to success. She loves us for trying.

She not only sets the standard, she helps us over the bar."

The evolutionary focus that Joan Chittister proposes does not deny purpose in the universe—on the contrary.

"Evolution is, in fact, a great spiritual teacher. We learn from fossils that development is most often a slow and uncertain process, a precarious experience that demands both time and trust in the God of the future.

"Time is grace, and trying is virtue. Struggle is a sign of new life, not a condemnation of this one.

"Evolution shows us that the God of becoming is a beckoning God who goes before us to invite us on, to sustain us on the way, rather than a judging God who measures us by a past we did not shape."

This view of God invites adults to believe that their work on the planet really matters, says Joan Chittister. "Evolution gives us a God big enough to believe in."

\* For full article, see *The God who beckons*, National Catholic Reporter, <http://ncronline.org/print/14671>