

Imaging Mercy Today

Joining those whose vision we share

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy!
How times change! An early biographer of Catherine McAuley recounts how she and her young friends dressed as society women to win access to Dublin's public hospitals, at that time under Protestant administration. Her aim was to provide a ministry of care to Catholic patients who were ill or dying. As part of the subterfuge, the group travelled in Catherine's own carriage, though this was discontinued once the routine was established.

In Auckland these days, Mercy Hospice continues to be owned by the Sisters of Mercy and guided by their healthcare philosophy and ethics, though its services are available to patients within the Auckland DHB region and its doors are open to people of all faiths and none. Its ecumenical delivery of pastoral care caters for the needs of all denominations – to the surprise of a local priest who was offered daily Communion during a recent stay. "I wasn't sure if the hospice was still Catholic," he confessed.

The truth is that Catherine would almost certainly be surprised to see where ecumenism and religious tolerance have led us. Her own world was shaped by the bitter divisions of her day, and by the struggle of Irish Catholics to see their basic rights returned. While Mercy schools still strive to form young lives in faith, most of our other ministries are offered regardless of colour or creed; and our Catholic commitment is expressed more by what binds us to others than

by the issues that divide us.

How is the identity of a Catholic facility better reflected – by the cross and other sacred images on its walls, or by staff whose care turns gospel values into action? The full answer may well mean 'yes' to both questions, though the second is more difficult to ensure than the first.

Time was when Catholics knew there was only one answer to every important question, and that theirs was the only church with a completely correct scorecard. These days, we are more likely to concede that in this life all see through a glass, darkly, and that others have insights into truth from which we can learn. There is more value in finding how we can work collaboratively with those whose vision we share, than in insisting that ours is the only one worth pursuing.

Meeting on our doorstep in Melbourne, this month's Parliament of the World's Religions brings together representatives of Earth's major faiths, as well as members of indigenous communities. The basic premise of the gathering is that in today's world, understanding between people of different traditions is no longer optional, but essential.

The same great theme explains why the UN has chosen rapprochement as its theme for 2010. Partnership with others is our only way forward. Mercy people should be among the first to know this, and to respond. - Dennis Horton

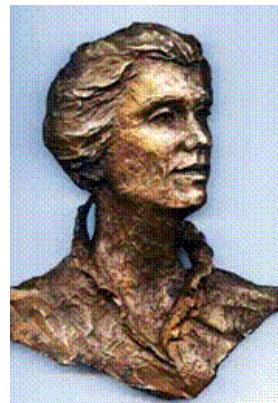
He Inoi - Prayer

Light for our world

Jesus, Word of power,
Hehu, te Kupu mana:
when we reach out
with compassionate care
we find you in each other,
and we too are made whole.

Jesus, son of Mary,
Tama ngakau marie:
your peaceful heart
reveals God's likeness;
you show that God is honoured
whenever the last come first.

Jesus, God with us,
Matapihi o te Atua:
you are the window to show
what true compassion is like.
Let your light shine
now through us,
in mercy's name. Amen.



Catherine
- in her
own words

A Christmas wish

'We have one solid source of happiness amidst all this tripping: we can keep our hearts fixed on God. Neither change of motion or place can deprive us of this. And if he will vouchsafe to look towards us for one moment each day with approbation, we shall get on joyfully to the end of our journey. Oh let us implore him to do so at this season of mercy and love.'

(Baggot Street, 20 December 1840)

The difference Mercy makes

The Mercy Ethos Pilgrimage which I attended in Dublin earlier this year was a cherished opportunity to revisit Catherine McAuley's world, and to reflect on her lasting influence.

Much of the difference that Mercy makes in 2009 stems from this remarkable woman. For me, Mercy exemplifies the three 'Cs'.

Courage

Catherine's courage and tenacity in establishing her first House of Mercy was reflected in the dream which saw the Mary Agnes Wards for the aged and dying built in Auckland's Gilgit Road in the 1950s.

That step gained momentum in 1979, when the Sisters of Mercy chose to become leaders in the modern hospice movement, opening Auckland's first inpatient hospice, the St Joseph's Unit at the Mater Misericordiae (later Mercy) Hospital.

It was a brave step made in a difficult funding environment, but one that both health professionals and the community desperately desired.

That courage continued when the hospice was retained as a core ministry at the time Mercy Hospital was sold in 2002.

In fact, courage is required every year, as we need to trust that \$2 million net will flow into our coffers

through a variety of fund-raising initiatives, in order to keep the hospice functioning.

Compassion

Catherine's vision and mission were driven by the unmet needs she saw in



Each month this year we've invited the manager of one of our Mercy ministries to highlight the difference Mercy makes in their special field. This final perspective comes from JAN NICHOLS, chief executive officer of Mercy Hospice Auckland.

her community. Today, hospice care is based on the need for people to be afforded the best possible care when cure is no longer possible.

Like other Mercy organizations, Mercy Hospice represents and upholds the value of compassion, at a time when the influence of science and technology has expanded, often at the expense of a sense of humanity.

People turn to us for healing at one of the most important landmarks in the life of an individual and family. The gifts we have to offer - of empathy, kindness and quality care - are outstanding examples of Mercy today.

Community

Catherine McAuley realized the importance of community engagement and support from the day her House of Mercy opened.

The work of Mercy is our gift to the community, and the community responds with reciprocal gifts for Mercy. Local people enable us to manage and expand our programme, through their gifts of time, skill and money.

Being part of the Mercy community in turn brings volunteers and donors a sense of fulfillment, as they are able to make a tangible difference in their local community.

Simple - but highly effective - these principles make us proud to be part of Mercy, one of New Zealand's longest serving organizations.

Healing our Earth by hearing each other

Over 10,000 participants are expected at the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions, meeting in Melbourne this month.

First held in Chicago in 1893, the event brings together representatives of the world's major faiths and indigenous peoples, in a spirit of inter-religious understanding and cooperation.

The Parliament will run for seven days with around 450 events, including seminars, conferences, debates, performances, concerts and exhibitions.

Keynote speakers include the Dalai Lama and Sydney's Cardinal George Pell, as well as US Sister Joan Chittister and a host of international figures.

Home to Aboriginal communities as well as to most major religious traditions, Melbourne offers an ideal location for this year's gathering.

Since 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions has been held every five years in a major international city.

A key premise for the event's organizers is that in today's world, understanding among people of different traditions is essential for peace and the future of humanity.



In the words of Swiss theologian Hans Küng, 'There will be no world peace until there is peace among the religions. And there can be no peace among the religions, without dialogue.'

The Parliament seeks to educate for global peace and justice, by calling on people of faith to understand and respect differences.

It also works to create networks that cross cultures and lay the groundwork for reconciliation.

This year's Parliament has as its slogan 'Hearing each other, healing the earth.' Organizers are calling on all people of faith to find a common ground through dialogue.

Among the event's major themes are care of the Earth and its indigenous peoples, overcoming poverty, securing food and water for all people,

building peace and creating social cohesion in urban and rural areas.

This month's Parliament will focus on the struggles and spiritualities of indigenous peoples, especially of Australia's Aboriginal communities.

Meanwhile Te Ngakau Waiora, the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Epsom, has taken a lead from the United Nations, adopting 'rapprochement' as its theme for next year.

The UN has declared 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, recommending that events be organized which focus on dialogue between religions and cultures, as a way to increase understanding and peace.

The theme will be explored at Te Ngakau Waiora through a winter series of interfaith talks.

"Speakers from major world faiths will share with us what it is like to follow their tradition in New Zealand," explains Valerie Jabir, who coordinates programmes at the Mercy Centre.

"This dialogue will hopefully lead to a better understanding of each other, helping us to celebrate what we have in common, and to appreciate what is different."