

# Chapter 'a breath of new life for mission'

A "breath of new life and energy for mission" is how Denise Fox rsm described her Congregation's first Chapter, which concluded in Christchurch earlier this month.

Close on 90 Sisters of Mercy from New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga took part in the 10-day gathering, held to set the Congregation's direction and choose a leadership team for the next five years.

It was the first such meeting for Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, formed in 2005 when four former Mercy foundations came together as one.

In her role as Chapter president, Sr Denise alluded to the event's Maori name - *Tihei Mauri Ora*.

"May this outburst of breath fill us with new life and energy for the mission of God to respond more deeply to our call to Mercy."

The sisters were welcomed to Christchurch by Richard Tankersley on behalf of Ngai Tahu and by Bishop Barry Jones, who celebrated Sunday Eucharist for the group.

Elected as Congregation Leader for the next five years is Anne Campbell

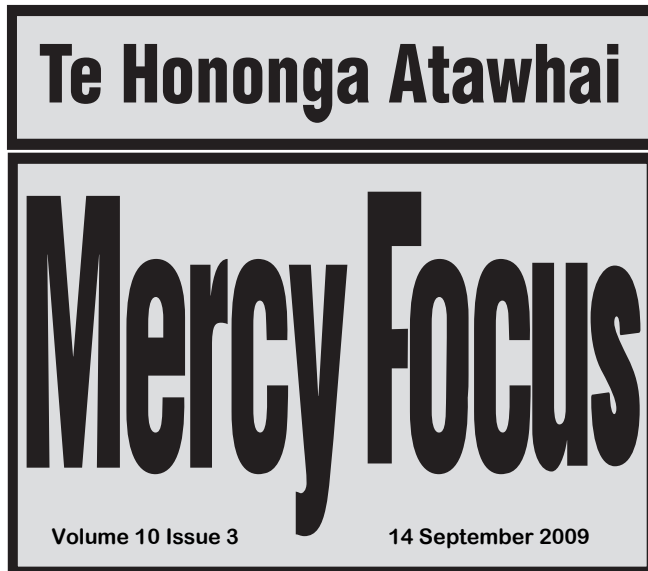


Anne Campbell rsm ... elected as Mercy Congregation Leader

rsm, who currently manages the Mercy Villas in Upper Hutt.

Voted members of the Leadership Team are Tui Cadigan rsm, Mary Catherwood rsm, Katrina Fabish rsm and Natalie Murphy rsm. The new team takes up office on December 12.

\* Chapter statement - p.2



Thursday 24 September is Mercy Day 2009  
Nga mihi nui — warm greetings to our readers!

## Writer is 'a bit of a legacy'

Choosing a title for her latest book was easy, says Mercy historian and archivist, Sr Marcienne Kirk, whose 287-page story of St Mary's College, Auckland, was launched last month.

*Legacy* was a title that "came with great clarity and considerable ease", she told the capacity crowd that filled the college staffroom for the wine-and-cheese event on August 21.

She was inspired by Catherine McAuley's quote, "my legacy to the Institute is charity," reflecting the founder's belief in the power of women to change their world.

Sr Marcienne said that the importance of women's role may be acknowledged today.

"But at the time St Mary's College was founded, it was perhaps a unique and different idea,



Sister Marcienne Kirk ... Mercy women "can do whatever they want"

"I've had former students say to me in later years that they don't remember a lot of what they were taught, but still recall being told that they could do whatever they wanted, if they really tried.

"With all respect to the wonderful scholars from St Mary's, some of whom have pursued great careers because of their association with the school, I still think that this is the most important thing they could carry away with them."

Sr Marcienne described herself as a "bit of a legacy", first as a pupil at St Mary's at the age of 12, and later as a teacher and principal at the college.

Favourite characters like Dame Sr Mary Leo, Mother Bernard Towers and Sr Veronica Delany created the legacy which she has tried to capture and write about.

"They were remarkable women, battling on to school every day, no matter what, doing their best with limited resources,

especially before Integration.

"In those days, a piece of chalk was a treasure."

Of her own school days she remembers especially the company of other girls, "the older girls ahead of you, and younger ones who looked up to you.

"I was fortunate to go to school at a time when we had really little ones, often the source of great entertainment. That kind of homeliness was part of the legacy I received."

Not a "brilliant" scholar, Sr Marcienne said she was too busy with things she should not have been reading, like following the course of the war.

"I only got there, because I was determined to do what the sisters would have liked to see me do.

*Legacy* is not Sr Marcienne's first book. She has also written a history of the first Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand, as well as several smaller publications.

"I've enjoyed writing the book, although it was hard work," she said. "If I have any wits left, I'd still like to write a bit more."

\* Launch by new dame - p 3

## Glad to be among the 'belles of St Mary's'

**Fresh from her redesignation as a Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, historian Claudia Orange still takes joy in saying she is one of the "belles of St Mary's".**

Well-known for her writings on the Treaty of Waitangi and currently Collections and Research Group Director at Te Papa Museum in Wellington, Dame Claudia was back at her old school last month to launch a history of St Mary's, by Sr Marcienne Kirk.

Arguably the oldest Catholic school in New Zealand, St Mary's dates its foundation from 1850, the year the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Auckland and started teaching next to St Patrick's Cathedral.

Building on the present site in Ponsonby began in 1863, with four classrooms constructed the following year.

Very few New Zealand schools could claim such a long history, Dame Claudia noted. "A story in this country that spans over two centuries is pretty astonishing."

St Mary's College reflected the vision of Catherine McAuley, "a woman before her time" who believed in the power of education, health and spiritual growth to change women's lives.

"Empowerment of women was a pretty hot potato in the Victorian era, when women were chattels with no rights of inheritance."

By the time Dame Claudia began school, towards the end of World War II, the role of women had begun to change. But there was ambiguity in the teaching of young women in those years.

"We were being trained for life, and it was almost inevitable that we would marry and have a family. We



ST Mary's old girl, Dame Claudia Orange... 'I never thought anything else than that

were being brought up to be married women and to meet the world in that guise. But we were also being trained for work. And that ambiguity comes through in the book.

"I'll always remember Sr Veronica being disappointed when I left at Form 6. Mum and Dad couldn't afford for me to stay much longer. 'And after all,' they'd say, 'you'll be married by the time you're 20.' And I was."

She recalled that every teacher she had at secondary school went on

later to be a principal. "It was no surprise that I never thought anything else than that women would lead the world.

"This was reinforced by the pictures of the founders in the top corridor of the old Spanish block. As St Mary's students, we were hugely lucky."

The book stirred memories of Sr Veronica's poem about cows escaping from the convent paddock, in the heart of the city, and classes in deportment taught for over 30 years by Miss Daphne Knight.

"I liked her very much; she gave me the foundations of public speaking for which I have been eternally grateful."

Dame Claudia also recalled hopeless cooking classes - "not because the teaching was hopeless, but because I was.

"Like so many other families of the time, we had not only a mother at home but also a granny. We had a small pantry and the message was always 'get out of the kitchen!' So when I married, I could hardly cook an egg."

Dame Claudia said the new book would touch many minds and hearts. "It's a 'fun run' book that will bring back memories. It captures the essence of those things that make St Mary's a treasured place.

"It's a valued record, and we're extremely lucky that Sr Marcienne has done what very few schools are able to do."

*\*Legacy: the story of St Mary's College Auckland, \$30 plus postage. To order, phone Janice Holmes, (09) 360 7877 or email JHolmes@somauck.org.nz*

## Learning from young to embrace the world

*\* from back page*

"And the boy will gather himself together and read it for me, and he'll stand looking at me, as if to say, 'Is there anything else I can do?'"

"I've discovered since I wrote my book that out there in the community there is a wonderful reservoir of kindness directed towards us old people, if only we'll tap into it and express our need."

Sr Pauline said her spirituality has also changed since she turned 80, as she has reflected on Jesus' insistence that only those who become like children can enter the realm of God. She spends time now watching children at the local mall.

"They seem to be absolutely carefree. They've got no regrets. They're just right there, living in

the moment. And they seem to embrace fully the world they are in. 'This is my world,' they seem to shout, 'and I own it, I claim it.'"

One obstacle to spiritual growth is what Sr Pauline described as earnestness. "I see people as they get older becoming more anxious.

"They start saying more prayers, moralising about the world, especially about the younger generation - as though the world, in their day, was one wit better than it is today!"

"That's a myth we create for ourselves."

Embracing the world means finding joy and excitement in advances in technology that seems to take a quantum leap every week.

"I don't know what Ipods look like, but I think they sound fabulous. And goodness knows what

can't be done with the cell phone, over and above texting and twittering."

Sr Pauline told the conference she had flown from Christchurch the previous day, next to a woman who had had a cornea transplant in both eyes; after being blind, she was now able to read.

"If I'm living in an era that has the resources to make the blind see, I want to embrace it with all my heart."

She admits that there's a paradox in old people learning to become childlike, but it's the wisdom that lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching.

"I read a quote quite recently from Pablo Picasso, who said that it takes 'a long time to grow young'. I think I know what he was talking about."



## Brief statement captures Chapter's spirit

**Short and to the point - that's a fair way to describe the simple statement with which the Sisters of Mercy ended their Chapter in Christchurch this month.**

Rather than debate the wording of a longer draft mission and vision statement, the sisters settled for a much briefer Chapter Statement: "Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand centred in God, impelled to be Mercy, keeping hope alive, in our world today."

The text has been incorporated in the design shown here.

"The draft mission and vision statements provided an excellent base for



reflecting on our direction," said Sr Denise Fox who has led the Congregation for the past four years.

"The Chapter Statement is the fruit of all the discussion and other work we did prior to our meeting in Christchurch."

Meanwhile the themes outlined in the draft mission and vision statement will continue to be explored in Pou Atawhai's monthly reflection series, *Imaging Mercy Today*, until the end of this year.

"The work we did at Chapter was very much enriched by those themes," said Sr Patricia Rowe, a member of the Leadership Team.

## Maori values help Mercy focus at school

**Step into the foyer of St Anne's School in Manurewa, and you know you are in a Mercy world. A portrait of Catherine McAuley has pride of place, surrounded by Mercy values and a distinctive Mercy cross.**

The school was begun by the Sisters of Mercy in 1952, with a roll of around 70 pupils. These days, it's an integrated diocesan school, staffed by mostly lay teachers, with around 600 pupils.

St Anne's is a multicultural school, with a decile 2 rating and close links with the local parish and community.

Principal Philip Cortesi is committed to nurturing the school's special Catholic character and its Mercy traditions. He is also keen to see Maori culture and values reflected in the life of the school.

Last month, he invited his Board of Trustees to join him for a Saturday retreat, led by Rangi Davis from Pou Atawhai Centre for Mission.

With a focus on Maori theology and spirituality, the retreat centred on how values of tika (rights) and aroha can shape the way Catholic schools treat children and their families, uphold people's mana and dignity, and resolve problems in restorative and healing ways.

"It was a chance for us to see how Maori spirituality can influence the way a Mercy-based school operates," Rangi explained. "What are the values that underlie Maori spirituality? How do they influence our decisions, and how can they be integrated into the life of the school?"

From his point of view, the principal was delighted with the day. "The board is already a very united team, but the retreat drew them closer," said Philip Cortesi.

"Rangi has a great skill in helping people to tell their own stories. As a mother with adult children and



PRINCIPAL Philip Cortesi (centre, with jacket) and members of St Anne's School board of trustees at their retreat day.... linking Maori theology and spirituality to Mercy core values.

mokopuna of her own, she is able to draw from her lived experience.

"She helped board members to understand their role as guardians of the school's special Mercy character."

Later in the month, Philip released 19 support staff from his school for a professional development day at the Pou Atawhai Centre in Ponsonby.

Among the group were teacher aides, library and administrative staff and the school's IT expert. "We just hope the teachers can manage for a day without us," one of them quipped as their bus arrived. "They'll certainly appreciate us when we get back!"

Once more, the theme was Maori theology and spirituality, with Rangi Davis again inviting staff to explore the links between tupuna (ancestors) and mokopuna (descendants), and to consider how a school can build mana and self-esteem for all concerned.

"The support staff clearly feel valued at St Anne's," said Rangi at the end of the day. "They had a strong

sense of belonging and a real pride in being part of a Mercy school. "They've been chosen by their principal, not just for their academic qualifications, but for their life experience and motivation."

Philip Cortesi reports that his support staff were still buzzing, days after their visit to Ponsonby.

"Five of the 19 are new to St Anne's; they had a chance to connect with the larger group.

"And our teacher aides could see why Maori spirituality is so important in the one-to-one work they do."

Philip says his school is lucky to still have a Sister of Mercy on the teaching staff. "In fact we've never been without a sister since we started."

Plans for the future include a professional development day for the whole St Anne's staff at the beginning of 2010, led by Pou Atawhai team member, Sr Teresa Anderson.

"This will help us to develop a unified path for how we work. Mercy is the glue that binds us together."

## History wall tells Mercy's hospice story

**Ask Sister Margaret Timms about her role in getting Auckland's Mercy Hospice off the ground 30 years ago, and she's quick to set the record straight.**

"I didn't found the hospice; I fell into it," she insists. "I may have done some of the planting, but the garden was already dug."

Now well established on its new site on College Hill, Mercy Hospice Auckland dates its origins from 1979, when Sr Margaret oversaw the formation of the St Joseph's Unit of Continuing Care at Mater Misericordiae (later Mercy) Hospital in Epsom. It was one of the first three modern hospices to be established in New Zealand.

But Auckland's Sisters of Mercy had begun caring for terminally ill patients well before that date, with a 13-bed Hospice for the Dying opened in 1952. "Care of the dying has always been part of our vision," says Sr Margaret, who led the St Joseph's Unit for 13 years.

"Modern palliative care has made huge advances, and Mercy Hospice Auckland is among the leaders in the field. But the foundations were laid by our pioneer sisters who established the Mater in 1900. We stand today on their shoulders."

Last month the hospice marked its 30th birthday with an open day for families and friends, offering a chance to visit the site and to inspect a newly installed history wall that tells the story of Mercy's ongoing care for those with life-threatening illnesses.

Combining text and photos, the five-metre wall is made from a series



Sister Margaret Timms in front of the new history wall at Mercy Hospice Auckland... 'care of the dying has always been part of Mercy's vision.'

of paper scrolls, woven through vertical rods running from ceiling to floor.

The display narrows to focus on a bronze by Gael O'Leary, originally cast for Mercy Hospital, which traces the ministries brought by the Sisters of Mercy from Ireland to New Zealand and the Pacific.

The display's weaving pattern makes a link with the cloak that gives the hospice its Maori name, Te Korowai Atawhai, an image of the palliative care extended to hospice patients and their families.

Nurse manager Julia Thomson, who is also on the hospice's mission team, says plans for the wall began to take shape after Mercy Hospital was sold in 2001.

"There was a feeling that the history of the hospice would be lost unless there was a concerted effort to capture it.

"The plans kept changing, but after we moved to College Hill and the bronze was also relocated, it seemed timely to try to put something together for our 30th anniversary."

Several Sisters of Mercy helped to identify strands of the story, among them archivist Sr Marcienne Kirk and Sr Rita Vessey, a former principal

nurse of Mercy Hospital.

Back from a pilgrimage to Baggot St earlier this year, hospice CEO Jan Nichols brought her own sense of the Mercy story. Staff of Waitarua Mercy Parkland were consulted on their experience of developing a visual display two years ago.

Much of the art work was done by Penny Clydesdale and Warren Bott from NorWest Advertising, who have a long association with the hospice and who provided some of the photos incorporated in the design.

"Penny and Warren designed the feature to link up with the bronze and Te Korowai Atawhai," Julia explained. "They are responsible for our branding, and have a good appreciation of our mission."

"Certainly, Penny thinks the whole concept has turned out very well. And there was a good response from the sisters and other guests who visited on our recent open day. We feel this helps to capture the legacy of Mercy."

"The history wall provides everyone involved here - staff and volunteers - with a sense that they belong to something extraordinary, which has grown and continued to evolve for over 180 years."

## Lessons for living still be to learnt after 80



SR Pauline O'Regan... learning from young to embrace world.

**When at 80, Sister of Mercy Pauline O'Regan wrote her book on old age, she secretly thought she knew all about the subject.**

Seven years on, she admits her attitudes have changed in quite a few ways.

On a panel at an international conference on Spirituality and Ageing in Auckland this month, Sr Pauline confessed that she once bristled at the tone that many use when they speak to older people. But not any more.

"As I've made my way

through my 80s, I've found that no longer do I hear the patronising edge in the tone.

"I hear rather the kindness behind it, and the desire to help."

There was a time, as her sight began to fail, when she took her magnifying glass with her to the supermarket.

"I'd stand there peering at the prices and checking the brand names, very independent and not a little self-righteous, and getting more irritable by the moment."

These days she leaves the magnifying glass at home.

"I've changed my behav-

our in this matter. I treat everybody in the supermarket as my sister and brother who are ready to help me.

"And I have discovered that's exactly what they are."

She chooses people who look least likely to be asked for help. "I love tattoos."

"Or the 14-year-old boy who's making his grumpy way round the shop. And I say, 'Would you mind reading for me what's on that notice up there? I have very bad sight.'

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