

# Imaging Mercy Today

## Feeding the hungry and the thirsty

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! There was a time when, with the Ten Commandments and the gifts of the Spirit we'd learnt from our catechism, some of us could recite the corporal works of mercy. To impress, a few might have been able to name the spiritual works as well. These days, even the most zealous religious may struggle to complete the list. So it's no bad thing that our Sisters of Mercy decided at their Chapter last year to chart their course by asking how to give expression to the works of mercy in our time.

We've decided this year to take their question to heart, and to use this monthly reflection on 'Imaging Mercy Today' as a chance to refresh our memories and sharpen our focus, taking each of the works of mercy in turn. We've had to refine the list to fit our schedule, choosing five corporal and six spiritual works of mercy. In tweaking the titles, we hope still to capture the essence.

The call to tend the hungry and thirsty is never far from Mercy's agenda. From redistributing unsold bread to operating food banks, collecting and delivering Christmas hampers to needy families or old people living on their own, our ministries of care continue to reach out to those on the margin. Community development includes a focus on healthy eating and on cooking food that's wholesome and cheap. Those who run Mercy schools and health facilities often have schemes to help students or staff in crisis. In a nation where significant numbers of children



MERCY 2010: Staff from St Anne's School, Manurewa, begin their year with a half-day pilgrimage to St Mary's Convent, Ponsonby

and old people live below the poverty line, chances are that someone near us is not getting enough to eat. Mercy's first call is to know the face of hunger when we see it – and to respond.

The larger view is daunting. *Mercy Global Concern* advises that more than 840 million people in the world are malnourished; 153 million of these are children under five. The sad truth is that they could be fed from what wealthy nations waste. Americans throw away enough food every year to feed 200 million adults, says a recent survey. The same study claims that wasted, rotting food in the US is adding to global warming and threatening America's fresh-water supply.

What can we do, faced with this contrast of epic famine and profligate waste? Dominican Miriam Therese MacGillis had some hints last year in her paper, *Choosing Simplicity in a Context of Deep Time*, Jul/Oct, Resolutions to Action, [www.lcwr.org](http://www.lcwr.org) ). Support local food and farmers' markets, she urges. Form community gardens in your neighbourhood, and grow some food of your own. Resist the privatisation of water, and the sale of bottled water. Demand that tap water be safe and accessible to all. Filter it and drink it. And she proposes that Congregations open their lands to sustainable farming, for themselves and local communities. The call for Mercy to act is clear – it's our faith in a God who blesses our whole world with abundance that is at stake.

- Dennis Horton

### Leaven for our world

E Te Atua,  
Whāea mahi rēwena -  
Baker-woman God:  
in every age your word  
nourishes us abundantly,  
as you inspire us to share  
the blessings you bestow.

Jesus, whom you sent  
as the living bread,  
taught his disciples  
to feed the crowds from  
the little they could find,  
and to fill the baskets  
from what was left over.

Be the leaven in our lives.  
Surprise us by making  
our meagre resources fruitful.  
From the bread you give us  
may we find for our world  
a plenty that never runs out.  
Amen.

# Mercy's window on the world

**Sisters of Mercy have been directly involved in rescue efforts in Haiti following last month's devastating earthquake, while Mercy groups around the world have shown support through aid and prayer.**

US paediatrician Sr Karen Schneider joined a team of doctors working in Haiti in a tent hospital; Sr Betty Scanlon, who serves as programme director for *Medicines for Humanity*, has launched an appeal in the US for unused or expired prescription medicines.

Mercy associate Maureen McCullough is actively involved in Haiti with Catholic Relief Services. Meanwhile Sr Ellen Flynn, who has spent over 18 years there, had just returned to the US four days before the earthquake struck; the centres at which she ministered in Port-au-Prince are now destroyed.

Irish Sister Mary Reynolds, who heads Mercy International Association, says the earthquake has shocked and saddened Mercy people around the world. Praising their gifts of aid, she paraphrases Catherine McAuley's famous saying, 'The people of Haiti need help today, not next week.'



*Photo supplied by Deirdre Mullan rsm*

As well as practical help, Mary Reynolds also describes prayer as a Mercy resource worth harnessing. "What if all Mercy women and men around the world, all the sick in our hospitals, all the students in our schools, all those involved in Mercy ministries, were invited to join in one great act of prayer, focused on Haiti's needs?"

Beyond the current crisis lies the long haul of reconstruction. "While Catherine reached out to those in immediate need, she paid great attention to long-term development and systemic change," says Mary Reynolds.

"In the months to come, the media crews will move on from Haiti, and the world will gradually forget this tragic happening. How can we ensure that this will not happen for us?" She backs Sr Deirdre Mullan of *Mercy Global Concern* in recommending the work of UNICEF, whose efforts are aimed at children and women, who are among the most vulnerable in times of crisis.

From her office at the UN, Deirdre Mullan reports that her own team and UN staff are doing their best to help as they continue to monitor the aftermath of the earthquake. "With a per capita income of \$3.60 per day, Haiti is the most impoverished nation in the western hemisphere.

"Its desperate conditions serve as a stark reminder of the great global disparity in terms of wealth and access to the tools which would help people to rise above poverty.

"With this as a backdrop, 2010 will be critical for one of the UN's key agenda items – its millennium development goals. Time is short. We must seize this historic moment to act decisively for the common good."

To donate to Haiti appeals, check out:  
[www.unicef.org.nz](http://www.unicef.org.nz)  
[www.caritas.org.nz](http://www.caritas.org.nz)

## Tending wounds at the world's highways

**Jesus calls all believers to relive the parable of the Good Samaritan, says Pope Benedict in his message for this month's celebration of World Day of the Sick.**

With his challenge, 'Go and do likewise,' Jesus is addressing everyone, says the pope.

"Jesus exhorts us to bend over the physical and mental wounds of so many of our brothers and sisters whom we meet on the highways of the world.

"He helps us to understand that with God's grace, accepted and lived out in our daily life, the experience of sickness and suffering can become a school of hope."

People are healed, says the pope, "not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering, but by accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love."

Since 1992, World Day of the Sick has been held on Feb 11,

### World Day of Sick 11 February 2010



which also marks the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The day's official celebration is being held in Rome, where Pope Benedict will invite people of faith around the world to join him in praying for those who are ill and in

pain, to recognise the call to respond to human suffering, and to recommit themselves to the church's healing ministries.

In his message, the pope praises Catholic healthcare structures as part of a "precious patrimony", developed down the centuries in many forms to meet the needs of the community.

These healthcare structures are vital, says Pope Benedict, so that the church "can effectively pass on the gospel values which safeguard human life in all its phases, from its conception to its natural end."

In this country, prayers and ceremonies will be held in several Mercy healthcare facilities, using resources developed by Pou Atawhai Centre for Mission.

These include a service for carers to honour all involved in Mercy's healing ministries, and prayers of intercession specially prepared for the day.