



Sr Anne Campbell rsm

Mercy called 'to keep hope alive'

Sisters of Mercy and their partners in mission in this country are being invited to "free fall" into the heart of God, whose creative love is transforming the world.

The call comes from Sr Anne Campbell, elected as Congregation Leader by

Sisters of Mercy from New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa at their Chapter in Christchurch last September.

She told *Mercy Focus* that she has been inviting sisters in the Congregation to make a conscious pilgrimage together, "to free fall into the lavish goodness of God."

The invitation is to "join in God's transforming involvement with the world," the new Mercy leader said.

"We must allow our God of surprises to shape us together into an ever new creation for mission."

Sr Anne wants to extend the same invitation to the women and men now involved in Mercy ministries throughout the Congregation.

"Together we can create water-courses of Mercy, to

keep hope alive in our world today."

Her phrase echoes the statement issued by the sisters who participated in their historic Chapter, the first held by the Congregation formed in 2005 from the four previous foundations in this country.

That gathering was a "powerful experience of being one," said Sr Anne.

"Our hearts recognized, in our Chapter statement, the shape of what God is wanting to do among us."

"The shape did not come to an individual; it came to us gathered as one."

In her role as Congregation Leader, Sr Anne participated last month in the year's first meeting of the board of Tiaki Manatu Sisters of Mercy Ministries New Zealand Trust.

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Te Hononga Atawhai

Mercy Focus

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Visits renew story for Mercy schools

Staff from two Auckland primary schools established by the Sisters of Mercy began this year with visits to St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby, renewing their links with the story of Mercy's founding in this country.

In separate visits before classes resumed, around 60 staff from St Anne's School, Manurewa, and 30 from Star of the Sea School, Howick, spent a morning on pilgrimage to the historic property which the Sisters of Mercy acquired from Bishop Pompallier in the late 1850s.

Visitors were welcomed with a powhiri in the small cemetery where Mercy pioneer Mother Cecilia Maher and several of her companions lie buried.

On hand to greet the principals and their staff were members of the Pou Atawhai mission team, joined by retired sisters from St Mary's Convent, including several

former teachers.

Landmarks on the hiko included Mercy's hospice on the adjoining property, the *Heart of Mercy* bronze at the convent entrance and the kauri chapel blessed by Bishop Pompallier in 1866.

A Power Point presentation retraced the voyage from Carlow in Ireland of the first Sisters of Mercy to arrive in New Zealand in 1850. Teachers spent the rest of their time exploring their school values within the Mercy context.

"The visit was a chance for us all to refocus on the Mercy charism," said St Anne's principal, Philip Cortesi. "It's the story on which our school is founded."

"The challenge for us is to continue to live out that story today, as we keep building on our strong Mercy character."

The pilgrimage was a wonderful experience, said Mr Cortesi. "What better way to begin our school



HISTORIC VISIT: Staff of St Anne's School, Manurewa, visit the historic chapel at St Mary's Convent, Ponsonby, opened in 1866.

year than to be immersed in the Mercy story we're so much part of!"

Similar comments came from Marie Dawson, who heads religious studies at Star of the Sea School in Howick.

"Our staff were glad of the chance to reflect on our Mercy story and assimilate new ideas. We enjoyed the beautiful surroundings at St Mary's and the wonderful hospitality."

Mercy marking the measure of her years

By Dennis Horton

Ask Mercy's new Congregation Leader what inspires her, and she's likely to reply with a line from a famous poet or mystic, or with a poem of her own.

Her life as a Sister of Mercy has taken Anne Campbell through school teaching and adult education, parish work and community development, a six-year ministry experience in Peru, and recent years caring for older people in supported accommodation in Upper Hutt.

"The journey has led me through community development, pastoral care and ESOL tutoring, with a few creative detours up mountains and across deserts. But all the time, it's been Mercy that has marked the measure of my years.

"Mercy has been the container of the God-search which has been the orientation of my life. Mercy, in T S Eliot's words, is 'the needle eye through which all the threads of the universe are drawn'."

It's the people in her life that reveal God's presence, says Anne, like the families she lived and worked amongst in the mountains of northern Peru.

"They taught me how to be present in my hello, to say goodbye in pain and tears, to live simply with a grateful heart and graciously receive, to come to prayer with my heart rather than my head.

"These simple, priestly people in a priestless church were revealers of the sacred to me."

Because people like the catechist Leoncio and his family allowed her to be touched by their lives and gifted by what they shared, the last word Anne now says each night and her first word on waking is 'gracias'.

More lately, it's been others who have revealed the sacred to her: people in their autumn wisdom years, migrants and refugees struggling to find their home in this land.

"In the face of a world torn by war and injustice, increasing destruction of people and communities and Earth herself, I know we are called to bring to birth the mystery of who we really are.

"We are being called to walk in solidarity towards our oneness, beyond the



Sr Anne Campbell with Peruvian catechist Leoncio and family... people reveal the sacred.

borders of our own perceptions, our own religions, cultures and languages."

Inviting Mercy sisters and companions to "free fall" into God's creative love, Anne quotes US poet, A R (Archie) Ammons.

What's important is not looking for the shape of things to come, but "being available to any shape that may be summoning itself through me, from the self not mine but ours."

Asked if she'd made a resolution as this year of grace began, Anne answers with another quote, from the medieval abbess and mystic Hildegard of Bingen: "to learn how to be a 'feather on the breath of God', and let the Spirit have me!"

ID

You inquire the focus of my soul.
Its name number and address.

I am 13.7 billion years of emerging love.
Birthing, in the one world womb,
Teilhard's 'evolutive' God.

I am a creative process,
unfolding from the inner presence of the holy God.
I am holy mystery.

I am a celebration of the magnificent diversity,
beauty, life and death
that begins anew in each moment.

I am resonance
available to the vibrating shape
'summoning itself through me
from the self not mine but ours.' ¹

I am
tears and sweat
of Celtic pioneers.
Pakeha woman.
Rooted
in Catholicism.
Winged in Mercy.
'Shaped
by the cathedral of earth,
sky and sea'. ²

I am a phoenix rising from the wisdom ashes
of death and dislocation.
The ash still wet and heavy
on my wings.

Make of me
a feather
on your breath.

- Anne Campbell rsm

¹ A R Ammons, *Poetics*

² Joy Cowley



HAND-OVER RITUAL: Anne Campbell rsm (centre) with Leadership Team members Mary Catherwood, Tui Cadigan, Katrina Fabish and Natalie Murphy place their hands on the Congregation's mauri stone *Kahikitea Te Iwi* (The Uplifting of the People) at the hand-over ceremony on December 12 last year.

New RN: 'aged care where I'm meant to be'

Catherine Strawbridge says caring for older people has long been her passion. As a newly appointed RN at Atawhai Assisi Home and Hospital in Hamilton, she believes this is where she's meant to be.

"I enjoy working with the elderly. I've always wanted to do this, and I've maintained the interest throughout my degree. I've had different placements, but I've always come back to palliative care."

With her Bachelor of Nursing completed at Waikato Institute of Technology, Catherine comes to Atawhai Assisi as part of a one-year internship programme for new graduates, run jointly by Wintec and Waikato District Health Board.

As well as clinical support from her mentors at the Mercy aged care facility, Catherine also spends two study days each month at Waikato Hospital while she works on a post-grad paper through Auckland University and completes her professional development portfolio.

Her biggest challenge is getting to know staff and residents as individuals, as well as the complexities of aged care. "There's a vast range of medical conditions you have to know about here. It's a huge responsibility being on the floor."

CEO Judy Hindrup welcomes Catherine's appointment. "This is the first year that Wintec has placed new graduates in the primary health sector. We were lucky to get one of the high-achieving students. She's a mature graduate, and is coming ahead in leaps and



Catherine Strawbridge... life skills to share.

bounds."

Her first assignments have involved internal feeding procedures and peritoneal dialysis, as well as the hospital's medication rounds. "Catherine didn't realize how complex aged care was. She's taken that message back, and I may get to co-present a paper at a polytech conference on new graduate internships in aged care."

Catherine's appointment coincides with plans for a new 16-bed hospital wing at Atawhai Assisi, due to be built over the next few months. Judy expects the first residents to be admitted in mid-August.

"We'll be looking for four new RNs and five or six caregivers. This will add another 20% to our hospital staff and will alter the whole culture

of our facility. It's a change we'll need to manage."

The new RN believes that as an older person with two teenage children, she has some life skills and experience that younger graduates may not have. She was glad to train as a nurse, but admits the path wasn't always easy.

"It's been quite a struggle financially. I've brought up my children on my own. My father, who was my main support person, died in the middle of my degree. So doing this as an older student has been a challenge.

"But the passion I had for it was strong, so I kept going. And because I've gone through issues in my own life, I can understand the struggles others may have had. I can apply this well with my nursing skills."

Judy Hindrup sees the conditions of Catherine's internship as mission-driven. "This is mercy in action – making sure that she is welcomed and supported, that she feels part of the family and not out of her depth."

Now is a great time to be coming into aged care, says Judy. "Professionally, it's much more diverse than it used to be. There's a huge amount of satisfaction here for people-centred nurses.

"People think aged care is a cruisey street, but it's nothing like that. As public hospitals become more stretched, we're being challenged to find ways to give more and more complex care for our residents."

Pilgrimage for Carmel girls

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girls and boys. A gift of much needed stationery supplies brought great joy and excitement, says Taylor. "It was as if Christmas had come again."

The group stopped at the graveside of veteran Mercy Sister Cyril who spent years working in Pawarenga and who is buried next to St Gabriel's Church there. Her great-great-niece, Stephanie Hamlin, laid flowers and read a prayer. "And once again, we chorused together with another waiata," says Taylor.

The long journey back to the marae ended with a candlelit dinner, because of a power failure. "It was interesting, to say the least, for 150 girls to eat, shower and get ready for bed in the dark," Tessa recalls.

"But we managed without too many casualties. An impromptu concert, lit by cell phones, lifted our spirits before bed."

A poroporoaki or farewell ended the marae stay, with another blessing from Pa Tate and some final words of wisdom. "We left with a sense of togetherness," says Taylor.

"We gained a richer appreciation for tikanga Maori, and for the synchronicity between Maori spirituality and our Catholic faith."

One of the last stops on the hiko was at Waitangi, where the famous Treaty was signed in 1840. "We could almost feel the presence of those who had gathered there all those years ago," says Tessa.

"It seemed an appropriate way to end our trip, at the place where the history of our united nation began."

Thanks from both girls go to principal Kath Deady and teacher Sue Morgan, to Sister of Mercy Teresa Anderson, Whaea Rangī Davis and her husband Kingi, and to parents for accompanying the group on their hiko.



SR Teresa Anderson with Carmel students at the grave of Sr M Cyril Corbett, who is buried next to the church in Pawarenga.

Mercy and Maori meet for pilgrims

Visits to Motuti where New Zealand's first Catholic bishop is now buried, and to the small settlement of Pawarenga where Sisters of Mercy have lived and worked for more than 80 years, were highpoints for Carmel College students on a pilgrimage to Northland last month.

A group of 150 Year 13 girls made the 3-day hikoi to Hokianga with staff and parents, visiting sites steeped in Catholic history and Mercy lore. The group travelled in three buses, sleeping two nights at Tamatea marae.

An early stop was in the Waipoua forest to see Tane Mahuta, New Zealand's largest kauri, over 51 metres high and more than 1200 years old.

"It was humbling to stand in the presence of something that has been alive since Maori are thought to have arrived here," says head prefect Tessa Wilton. "Thinking about the events it has witnessed during its lifetime was mind-blowing."

Encountering the tree was a moving experience for Taylor Eastwood, one of this year's Maori leaders at Carmel. "In recognition of this ancient treasure, we sang our much



GIANT KAURI: Carmel students Taylor Eastwood (left) and Tessa Wilton in front of Tane Mahuta, New Zealand's largest kauri tree in the Waipoua forest.

(Photo - Rangii Davis)

loved school waiata. As odd as this sounds, it felt right to sing to this godlike tree, standing together under its canopy."

With other tuakana leaders, Taylor also led the group onto the marae near Motuti where they stayed.

"I felt emotional and humbled to be leading alongside our principal during the karanga of welcome. Here I was, walking in the footsteps of my ancestors, who had lived long ago on a marae similar to this."

A 6.30 rise came early next morning, says Tessa, "especially for those who didn't get much sleep after spending the night in the same area with dozens of friends."

She describes as "surreal" the Mass celebrated on the marae by Pa Henare Tate, before the group moved to the little church where

Bishop Pompallier's remains are interred.

"As we watched the casket being raised to view, we heard of the huge struggle to bring his remains back to New Zealand. Hearing of his involvement in our history, we couldn't help but feel that this is where he belonged."

Pa Tate also blessed and presented badges to three of this year's four tuakana leaders. "It was a privilege to have our badges blessed by this inspiring priest and kaumatua and conferred on us," says Taylor.

A two-hour trip - far longer than expected - took the pilgrims to Pawarenga to visit the settlement's small primary school, Te Kura o Hata Maria, with a current roll of 36

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Residents inspire staff to get on their bikes



BIKE WISE organizer Maggie Pouw (right) with resident Aileen Collett who clocked up 14km on her walking frame.

For the past three years, it's been colleagues at Atawhai Assisi whom caregiver Maggie Pouw has inspired to join the Bike Wise challenge, promoted nationwide by the New Zealand Transport Agency.

But last month, Maggie persuaded residents of the Mercy aged care facility in Hamilton to share in the event, run as an online competition throughout February, aimed at getting Kiwis on their bikes.

While only staff could register officially, residents of the hospital-rest home joined in, clocking up 2km with every four laps of the circuit around the property.

"Some walked with their frames, others were pushed in their wheelchairs by family, staff or volunteers," Maggie explained. "A few had power chairs, so they could drive themselves."

Participation was the highlight. "It's great that residents have been getting out more," Maggie noted.

"We have some with quite severe dementia, but they responded to the walk outside, seeing the birds in our aviary, enjoying the breeze. It has benefited them enormously."

Residents are not eligible for a Bike Wise certificate, said Maggie, "but internally we'll have our own celebration, with certificates for each resident that record their mileage."

Canadian-born and married to a biologist, Maggie says cycling is part of her lifestyle. "We try to tread lightly, so that our impact on the earth is minimal."

"One of the things residents know about me is that I cycle to work every day - rain, hail or shine. They're interested in that."

She is very pleased that 40% of Atawhai Assisi's 77 staff took part this year, even if their facility did not win the competition. "The real gains are the enjoyment, the sense of community it builds, the fun."