

Imaging Mercy Today

Burying the dead - a true work of mercy

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! One doesn't have to read much of Mercy's founding story, in both Ireland and New Zealand, to see how large death and dying are written on its pages.

Fifteen minutes' walk from Catherine McAuley's house in Baggot St is the Carmelite church of St Teresa's, beneath which lie the graves of 13 Sisters of Mercy who died between the founder's profession in 1831 and her own death 10 years later.

They include her niece Catherine who entered the community when she was 15; she died 10 months later from TB. Another buried there is Sr Elizabeth Harley, one of the two young women who took their vows with Catherine as the first Sisters of Mercy; she also died of consumption, just four months after her profession.

No wonder that Catherine wrote of times when 'the tomb seems never out of view', and why her rule required Sisters of Mercy to devote the first Sunday of every month to prayers for a happy death!

Death and dying were also a fact of life for the pioneer Sisters of Mercy in Auckland. The first of their number to die was Sr Liguori from Baggot St, who had joined Mother Cecilia Maher and her group as they passed through Dublin on their way to set sail for New Zealand. Her death in 1854, probably from TB, was followed a few weeks later by that of Sr Francis, a novice who made her vows as she died. The pair were buried in a small plot between the convent and St Patrick's Cathedral. 'Our two little graves are just before our eyes,' wrote Mother Cecilia. 'We cannot go in or out our chapel without seeing them.'

Gifts for the grieving

E te Atua, Kaiwhakamarie,
you come with comfort for all who grieve.
Not a sparrow falls to the ground
without your knowing;
you hold every one of us
in the palm of your hand.
Your mercy longs to find its way
especially to those who are alone,
unnoticed and unloved.

As we count your blessings,
show us what we must do
to be the bearers of your love.
Make us channels, as Catherine was,
of gifts worth more than gold
yet costing nothing to give -
a listening ear for those in sorrow,
a gentle and tender gaze,
and a kindly spoken word.
Mauri ora. Amen.



MERCY TODAY: Teresa Greaney rsm and Patricia Clark rsm at the April 10 celebration held at the graveside of Mother Cecilia Maher and her companions, marking 160 years since the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand. (Photo: Ann Coughlan)

Care of the dying and compassion for the grieving are hallmarks of Mercy. It was Catherine's resolve that no-one should die unaware of God's love, especially the poor. It was her empathy for them that accounts for her wish to be 'laid in the earth like the poor', rather than buried in the more expensive coffins required for burial in church vaults.

It's no surprise that hospice and palliative care remain priorities in Mercy's health ministry; our healthcare ethics uphold the sacredness of human life from beginning to end, but acknowledge that in God's good time, every life comes to a close.

As that point approaches, the focus shifts from curative efforts to relieving pain, enhancing the dignity and quality of life and continuing relationships with family and friends. Workshops in Hamilton and Auckland last month, led by ethicist Fr Michael McCabe, aimed at helping Mercy aged care facilities to uphold these goals in their palliative care practice.

Within our Mercy context, pastoral care staff and bereavement counsellors work well to support the dying and bereaved of all faiths and none; no life is without its meaning and death itself can bring enrichment in unexpected ways. Christian faith brings its own perspective to death and dying, as the life given by Jesus for those he loved brings hope and new purpose to all who live by his word.

In death, our Mercy founders continue to witness to the fruitfulness of their lives. Catherine's grave in Dublin has become a place of pilgrimage, while the celebration in Auckland each April at the grave of Mother Cecilia Maher never fails to bring joy, that seeds sown with such hope and courage continue to blossom. - Dennis Horton

Mercy's window on the world

Global citizens are those who

- # become outraged at the earth's degradation
- # acknowledge the burden of climate change on the poor
- # educate themselves about the environmental crisis

Sisters of Mercy and their co-workers around the world are being challenged to add their weight to a campaign in support of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

The call comes from Deirdre Mullan, rsm of *Mercy Global Concern*, based at the UN headquarters in New York.

The agency she leads is part of a task-force of UN advocates, formed to put pressure on governments to keep the promises they made at the MDG Summit 10 years ago.

In a recent briefing paper, Deirdre Mullan recalls that the Millennium Declaration aimed to cut extreme poverty by half, through eight measureable and time-based goals.

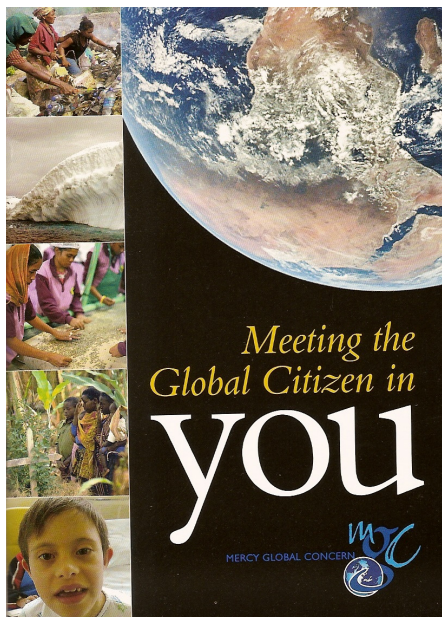
"Our world possesses the knowledge and resources to achieve the MDGs, and to embrace a sustainable development process for a more secure future.

"When world leaders gather at the UN for the MDG review summit in September, the voices of their citizens will follow them, telling them loudly and clearly 'We will no longer stay seated or silent in the face of poverty and the broken promises to end it'."

A Stand-Up 2010 Mobilization is being planned for September 17-19, in the lead-up to the review summit.

Global citizens insist on

- # challenging large companies that pollute the environment
- # simplifying lifestyles and curbing their carbon footprint
- # promoting sustainable development at the local level



Meanwhile, *Mercy Global Concern* is promoting its latest publication, 'Meeting the Global Citizen in You.' The 55-page pocket booklet invites Mercy sisters and their companions to change the way they look at the world.

Only global citizenship can redress the imbalances and inequalities of our day, the booklet insists.

"People have to see with new eyes and understand with new minds, so that they can truly turn to new ways of living."

Urging a change to people's angle of vision, the booklet quotes human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, who says that the fate of humanity is now so intertwined "that we can no longer consider the blessings of this world one's own and deprive others of them at the same time."

Global citizenship is needed, with both the vision and action required to tackle global apartheid in a world of obscene disparity. Today a privileged few reap huge benefits while many more suffer very real deprivations, say the authors.

"The challenge facing us today is to think like dreamers, yet act in a pragmatic way—just like our founder, Catherine McAuley."

The foreword to the booklet is written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who endorses efforts by Sisters of Mercy to bring about change.

He hopes the book will help its readers to become Ubuntu persons - "open and available to others, and willing to be vulnerable."

For a copy of *Meeting the Global Citizen in You*, email DHorton@somauck.org.nz or office@mercy.co.nz

Carmel event to launch Maori new year

The arrival of Maori New Year is being marked at Carmel College on Auckland's North Shore this month with a special Matariki Day celebration on Wednesday 16 June.

The lunch-time event will be led by the school's four Tuakana leaders, who have spent the past month training in traditional Maori stick games, flax weaving and poi making.

The group has met weekly with their kairarataki or mentor Rangi Davis to plan and practise for the event. "I think we've have found the stick games the hardest to learn," says Taylor Eastwood.

"It's been a true test of our coordination. But improvement is obvious after each practice session."

With a karanga to launch the event, students and staff will be welcomed by school principal, Kath Deady. After a prayer to welcome Matariki, the tuakana leaders will demonstrate their skills, inviting others to try their hand at



KAIRATAKI Rangi Davis... Matariki a time for Maori and Pakeha to celebrate together.

stick games, weaving and poi making.

Other displays will feature Maori art work, Mu Torere (a Maori version of tai chi), a focus on health promotion and photo displays from the hikoi or pilgrimage to Hokianga made in February by a group of Year 13 students.

Taylor Eastwood says that preparing for their Matariki Day has been an exciting process. "I hope that if we're successful, this will be the beginning of an ongoing

tradition at Carmel."

Tori Rickard, another of the tuakana leaders, agrees. "It's a chance for the school to get a feel for Maori culture. We hope others will catch the energy of our Matariki presentation, join in and have fun."

The pre-dawn rising of Matariki, the cluster of stars also known as Pleiades, marks 'Te Tau Hou' - the Maori New Year, a season for planting and seafood harvesting.

It is also a time when traditionally Maori gather to remember their ancestors and whakapapa, to share kai and hospitality, to gain new insights and learning.

Rangi Davis explains: "In mid-winter, Maori would get together to acknowledge the events of the past year, and prepare to greet the year ahead.

"In more recent times in Aotearoa, it has become a special time for Maori and Pakeha to respect the land we live on, to celebrate the unique place we live in, and to find ways of sharing and growing together."