

Imaging Mercy Today

Mātāriki - welcoming the Māori new year

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Mātāriki starts early this month, on June 4, and with it comes the call to join Māori in celebrating their new year. The appearance of the Pleiades, a cluster of stars in the pre-dawn sky, is the centuries-old signal for Māori that nature's cycle of growth and life is about to begin once more. It's time to let Earth rest and restore itself, while plans for replanting take shape, and resolutions are made which lead to better health and budgeting of our resources.

Mātāriki is also a time for renewing our sense of whakapapa, our ancestry, the DNA we've inherited that makes us who we are and endows us with resources for the future. For those of us who live or work in a Mercy world, it's another chance to give thanks for those brave Mercy pioneers who left their homes and familiar worlds to move to new frontiers and challenges. As our sisters and their friends in Wellington prepare to celebrate 150 years of Mercy in that city, we remember Mother Bernard Dickson and her two companions, who left the home in Auckland where they had not long settled, to journey once more to the unknown into which Providence seemed to be calling them, unsure of where this would lead or how they would cope. It was not a call for the faint-hearted or risk-averse, nor a time to recreate another Carlow or Crimea or Auckland. Their call was to respond to the needs they found in

this new place and time.

Responding 'to unmet needs' is how Puamiria Maaka, who leads Te Waipuna Puawai, is describing the distinctive quality of Mercy ministries. Fresh from her Mercy ethos pilgrimage to Baggot Street in April, this manager of the Mercy community development initiative in Ellerslie insists that what makes Mercy different is its readiness to address the gaps that no one else will fill. It was certainly a quality of Catherine McAuley that she was keen to move quickly to wherever human needs lay unattended.

The story surfacing in Wellington just now tells of how Sister of Mercy Marcellin Wilson and three others in the Capital –



PUPILS from Holy Cross School, Papatoetoe, established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1953, greet Sister Marcienne Kirk and others from the St Mary's Convent community during a visit to the cemetery on the historic Mercy site earlier this year.

Mātāriki: keeping hope alive

Mātāriki atua,
blessed eyes of brightness,
piercing our pre-dawn sky
with your shining light:
you are our promise
in the midst of winter cold
that a new harvest will come.

Let this winter
be a time for fresh planting,
for hoping and waiting,
for opening our hearts and minds
to a newness waiting to be born.

We join with our Mercy sisters
in Wellington, rejoicing in 150 years
in that city, still working
to keep hope alive
in the lives they touch today.

Mātāriki atua,
e whangai iho
ki te mata o te tau, e roa, e:
Blessed Mātāriki,
bestow through our ministries
the first fruits of this new year.
Amen.

two from other Congregations and the third a lay pastoral worker – identified a need for emergency shelter for homeless women. Aware of women sleeping behind the Newtown parish church or under the gym at a local Catholic school, the four women have researched the problem, enlisted support from key agencies and individuals, and gained City Council funding to turn their plans into reality. As Marcellin notes, the theme of 'women helping women' sounds very like a McAuley vision. After 150 years in the Capital, how better for Mercy to mark its anniversary than by highlighting needs that wait to be addressed, in Catherine's own words, 'today, not next week'.

In a typically thoughtful 'From where I stand' column in the National Catholic Reporter, US Benedictine Joan Chittister reflects recently on a piece of Irish granite that sits on her desk, from the ruined foundations of her great-grandfather's home in Donegal. As well as remembering and cherishing our past, she writes, we need to consider 'who we truly want to be.'

'Now is the time to consciously examine what our policies prove us to be – rather than simply repeat who we have always been told we are. When the new wave of displaced peoples show up on the doorstep, homeless, jobless, adrift and abandoned – it is important to remember where we ourselves came from, what we needed then, and who we really want to be now.'

Mātāriki is our chance to look again for the unmet needs that lie close to us, and to see what the spirit of Catherine prompts us to do about them. That's Mercy keeping hope alive today.

- Dennis Horton