

Mercy pioneers among our 'premier exports'

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! "Hurra for foundations," wrote Catherine McAuley in 1841, "makes the old young and the young merry!" She could well have been writing about the gathering in Auckland last month, when Sisters of Mercy and their friends celebrated the founding 40 years ago of their ministry in Samoa.

On hand to lead the concelebrated Mass was retired Cardinal Tom Williams from Wellington, who had been parish priest of the village of Leulumoega when the four pioneer Sisters from Auckland arrived there to begin their work on 21 January 1972.

He vacated the presbytery to make room for the sisters, and lived in the sacristy for five months while their new house was being built.

"When they gave their 'yes' to this call, there was nothing more than a waving sea of palm trees at Leulumoega and the havoc of hurricanes," he told the capacity crowd gathered at St Mary's Convent for the jubilee celebration.

"But the faith of Mary was resolutely reflected by those founding sisters. The Magnificat in today's gospel expresses our joy on this special occasion. The support for Samoa, initially from sisters in Auckland and later from the whole Congregation, has been incredibly generous.

"The Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues rate among New Zealand's premier exports. I know I speak for the bishop, priests and people of Samoa today when I offer their profound thanks. We join with them today in inviting God's blessing, from this ruby jubilee to the golden years ahead."

Three of the four founding sisters were at the jubilee Mass – Aucklanders Judith Leydon and Edwina Ulberg, and Nora O'Neill who has returned to live in Ireland. The fourth

Imaging Mercy Today



WITH Cardinal Tom Williams after last month's 40th jubilee Mass are Sisters Nora O'Neill, Edwina Ulberg and Judith Leydon, who founded the mission in Samoa in 1972.

member of the group, Sr Claver Schollum, who established a health clinic in Leulumoega, died in 2003.

The Mass concluded after Sr Judith presented a 'mission candle' to the six Sisters of Mercy currently responsible for three schools in Samoa. She invited the youngest in the group, Tulili Ah Ping, to accept the gift.

"In presenting this 'candle of hope', I call on you to be always open to new developments, and to launch out into the deep," she said.

The phrase, echoing Jesus' instruction to Peter before his miraculous catch of fish, is now the motto of Paul VI College, opened by the Sisters of Mercy in February



WEARING puletasi specially made for the occasion, Samoan Sisters of Mercy line up at last month's 40th jubilee. From left, Salome Ioane, Priscilla Kohlase, Paula Anamani, Marieta Ifopo, Tulili Ah Ping, Akenese Nun Toon, Malia Fetuli, Edwina Ulberg and Fatima Lemisio. (Photos: Patricia Rowe)

1972 for 72 third-form girls but which has been co-educational since 1992.

The celebration at St Mary's Convent, Ponsonby, ended with a sit-down meal for over 200 guests, followed by story-telling and siva (Samoan dances). Among visitors were Sisters of Mercy from many parts of New Zealand, and a choir that included past pupils of Paul VI College now living in New Zealand.

A message from Congregation Leader Anne Campbell, absent through illness, was presented by Leadership Team member Mary Catherwood. "Catherine McAuley and Cecilia Maher would be smiling at the rich diversity of people gathered here today," she said.

"We thank each of you who have contributed to the ministry in Samoa – sisters and colleagues, family, generous friends. This is a time to renew our commitment to be centred in God, impelled by mercy, working to keep hope alive in our world today." - Dennis Horton

Launching into the deep

In every age, God of mercies beyond all telling,
You call people of faith to cast their nets
where they have not fished before,
and to draw from the plenty that you bestow
an abundance to share with those in need.

We give thanks for the generous witness of
those who have shed Mercy's light before us.
Make our lives fruitful as we learn from them
to cast our nets in waters that wait only
for our love and courage to fathom.