

Te Hononga Atawhai

Mercy Focus

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New conference centre

Equipped with state-of-the art facilities, a new conference centre is part of extensive renovations which have been completed at St Mary's Convent in Thorndon, Wellington.

To be known as Te Wāhanga Atawhai Mercy Conference Centre, the venue includes a large conference room which can accommodate up to 100 people, with three smaller meeting rooms, kitchen facilities and the availability for professional catering. The premises are designated smoke-free, inside and out.

The conference centre

has been created as part of a new building, linking the four-storey St Mary's Convent to the chapel; the link building will eventually house a heritage display.

Temporarily vacated in June 2009, St Mary's Convent has been totally refurbished, with major earthquake strengthening completed before internal renovations which include double glazing and solar panels, as part of the sisters' commitment to sustainable living. The community was able to return to their home in December last year.

The ground and first
* turn to page 2

Mercies mark 150 milestone in Capital

Sisters of Mercy are gathering to mark 150 years of service in Wellington this month.

Celebrations include a luncheon at the Pines in Houghton Bay on June 12, and a Mass of Thanksgiving two days later at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Congregation Leader, Anne Campbell rsm says the event is a chance "to wrap our memory cloak around us, and to slip into the folds of a precious legacy.

"This is a time to bow our heads in gratitude and to raise them to welcome new horizons of Mercy today."

It's a century and a half since the first Sisters of Mercy arrived in Wellington on June 14, 1861. The trio made the week-long trip by steamer from Auckland in response to a request from Bishop Philippe Viard to save a mission on the verge of collapse.



SISTERS Eileen Brosnahan, Stephanie Kitching and Clare Vaughan at the entrance to the newly opened Mercy Conference Centre in Wellington. At right is a courtyard close to the main conference room.

Leading the group was Englishwoman Mother Bernard Dickson, who had served with a group of Irish Mercy sisters, nursing wounded soldiers in the Crimean War before being invalided home after suffering frostbite and two attacks of typhoid.

With her were Irish-born Sr Augustine Maxwell, who had journeyed with her to Auckland in 1857, and a young French postulant, Sr Marie Deloncle.

In Thorndon, they took

over the small school and the Providence, an orphanage for Maori girls, which had been staffed by four young women who had worked with Bishop Viard since his arrival in the city in 1850. From these small beginnings, the Sisters of Mercy developed ministries in many parishes throughout Wellington and Palmerston North.

Their work included founding more than 40 schools in the two dio-

ceses and taking over many others as the need arose. The Sisters of Mercy continue to own two colleges for girls – St Mary's in Thorndon and St Catherine's in Kilbirnie.

Their healthcare ventures included nursing in a temporary hospital during the Great Flu Epidemic in 1918, and staffing the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Palmerston North for 50 years, between 1950 and 2000.

* turn to page 2



New Mercy conference centre in Wellington

** from page 1*

floor of St Mary's Convent, opened in the centennial year of 1961, are occupied by the Congregation's Leadership and other offices; the second and third floors provide living space for the sisters' community. A stand-alone laundry has been refurbished and now serves as the Congregation's national archives.

The new conference rooms are fully air-conditioned, with large

plasma screens and an electronic whiteboard. Conference manager, Brian Adams, says the centre offers a unique haven in central Wellington, with excellent technology for group interaction.

The meeting rooms "have spacious break-out areas, with opportunities for outdoor seating to enjoy lunch or reflect on the business in hand."

Mr Adams can be contacted at brianadams@mercy.org.nz



SR Anne Campbell shows Clare Vaughan and Stephanie Kitching the new conference centre. Below, another courtyard view.

Plans for homeless women

Where does a woman go to live, if she has just arrived in Wellington with no money or family, out of work, discharged from hospital or released from prison?

The gap in services for homeless women has been identified by a group of four women in the Capital who have been researching the problem and working to address it.

Among the four is Sister of Mercy

Marcellin Wilson; the others are Karen Holland, a lay leader at St Anne's parish, Newtown, Sister of Compassion Catherine Hannan and Sister Raye Boyle of the Little Company of Mary.

"We noticed increasingly that women were sleeping behind the church in Newtown or under the gym at a local Catholic school," said the group in a progress report last month.

Their extensive research showed there is accommodation for women, if they are victims of domestic violence or have mental health issues. Teenage girls may also find a place with the Salvation Army if they are willing to attend Sunday service. And occasionally the Wellington Women's Boarding House has room available.

"Though no official study has been published, the experience of people working in the field indicates that there is a need for emergency accommodation for women in the City of Wellington. Such accommodation does, of course, exist for men."

The group has set up a Wellington Homeless Women's Fund, for donations now being received. Assurances of support have come from



Marcellin Wilson rsm ... 'women helping women sounds like a McAuley vision.'



Housing New Zealand, Capital and Coast Health and the Ministry of Social Development, with significant contributions from several Congregations of Women Religious as well as from individual donors.

Armed with supportive references from social service agencies in the city, the group applied successfully to the Wellington City Council for a grant which will enable it to contract a project manager for the scheme.

"This is a major step forward on our long journey to support homeless women in Wellington," the group reports.

A trust deed is now being prepared, enabling members with financial and legal skills to be appointed to the proposed board.

Sr Marcellin Wilson told *Mercy Focus* that with prayerful support, the group is working to transform a small area of need in Wellington. "Women helping women" sounds very like a McAuley vision, she observes.

Mercy 150 years in Wellington

** from page 1*

Proceeds from the hospital's sale were channeled into healthcare ministry for the elderly.

The care of young children which began with the Providence in Thorndon moved in 1910 to an orphanage in Upper Hutt, now the site of Mercy Villas, where 41 units, flats and apartments provide supported accommodation for older people in need of income-related

rental housing.

Sr Anne Campbell praised the generous readiness "to divide and share" shown by Auckland's founder, Mother Cecilia Maher 150 years ago.

"Today we're able to breathe in the spirits of those who have danced the path of Mercy before us; to salute and celebrate the rhythm of their courage, creativity, passion and perseverance."

Matariki 'time to remember, and to look ahead'

Matariki, the Maori New Year which began on June 4 is being marked by Mercy agencies in a range of ways, reports Rangi Davis, kaiarataki of Pou Atawhai, the Mercy mission centre.

Students at Carmel College have planned a series of lunchtime events, including a sausage sizzle to raise funds for tapestry bodices for their kapa haka group, as well as demonstrating flax-weaving and singing waiata to the rest of the school.

Staff at Mercy Hospice Auckland are meeting informally at lunchtime

for Kai and Korero sessions over a five-week period; led by Waka Atawhai, a group of Maori staff, the sessions include lessons in flax weaving and will end with a meal featuring dishes of different cultures.

At Te Waipuna Puawai, the Mercy community development centre in Ellerslie, Rangi has shared some of her own mother's recipes for coughs and colds, using plants known to Maori for their healing qualities; others have offered advice, helping women to plan for their families diets that reduce the risk of diabetes.

At Mercy Ministries, the Pou Atawhai team hosted a Matariki afternoon tea for their colleagues, with homemade shortbread and stars woven from flax, each holding a quote from Catherine McAuley.

"Matariki is a time for honouring our tupuna, our Mercy ancestors who planted the seeds which we are still harvesting today," says Rangi. "It's a time to remember, and to look to the future to where the stars point.

"Matariki is also a time for drawing lessons from our past legacy which can open our eyes to the future."

Mercy's first call 'to answer unmet needs'

Back from her visit to Baggot Street Puamiria Maaka, who leads Te Waipuna Puawai, the Mercy community development centre in Ellerslie, is full of praise for the Mercy Ethos programme at the end of April.

With fellow Aucklander Julie Reid, volunteer coordinator at Mercy Hospice Auckland, she joined the week-long programme at Mercy International Association, with a group of other Mercy leaders, most from Melbourne.

Puamiria was impressed by keynote speakers who brought the story of Mercy founder Catherine McAuley alive. These included MIA executive director and Sister of Mercy Mary Reynolds, who will visit this country to deliver the annual McAuley Lecture in July (see details, back page).

"I gained a real insight into the political, religious and social world in which Catherine lived. With a deeper understanding of her personal suffering, I now feel comfortable about claiming to be a Mercy woman."

Puamiria is also more strongly convinced of Mercy's call to respond to "unmet needs" in the community. For agencies like the one she leads, this means a constant review of the services being offered, to ensure that they are directed where the need is greatest.

Among the priorities she is now advancing is a new community-based response to family violence. With the acronym *The Heart* (standing for healthy relationships in Tamaki), this initiative will seek



KIWIS Puamiria Maaka (left) and Julie Reid at Mercy House in Baggot Street, Dublin.

to create environments where healthy relationships, free from violence, are the norm.

This is an intentional move into the prevention space, by promoting ways of relating among partners, to children, within families, streets and neighbourhoods.

"The truth is that most people don't want violence in their lives," says Puamiria. "They would prefer a different way. Our task will be to model and promote alternatives to the behaviours and patterns of abuse and violence that destroy family life."

The Heart will see Te Waipuna Puawai 15 other community-based agencies in Tamaki, and regional agencies like Police, Family & Community Services, Auckland Council, SHINE, Plunket and Barnardos, in areas where local families and communities have identified a goal and agreed to work together to pursue it.

This year, the Ellerslie-based

agency is also doubling its programme for Teen Mothers. Launched as a pilot scheme in 2008, the project will offer four sets of the 16-week programme twice in 2011. While the core sections of each course can be predicted, all units are shaped specifically to meet the requests of the young women who are participating.

"We've learned a lot through consulting the young mums who take part in this venture. It's because we are meeting their needs that participants indicate a high degree of satisfaction in the programmes we run."

A team from Massey University has been evaluating the Teen Mums programme since it began. Now in its third year, the longitudinal research is providing valuable data for the future of this aspect of the agency's work.

Puamiria's trip to Dublin has also helped to identify a focus for the two shops her agency will soon be running. 'Responding to families' unmet needs' will be the slogan for these two stores, the first of which has been operating in Botany for a year, selling quality clothing, footwear and homeware, at affordable prices.

With a generous \$60,000 grant from the Guardian Trust, Puamiria says her agency plans to open a second store. "This will allow us to be more self-sufficient. Like many NGOs, our dependency on philanthropists leaves us vulnerable.

"These two stores will help to generate our own income stream, so that we can keep on responding to the unmet needs in our communities."

Mercy aged care staff dig deep for quake folk

It's no secret that aged care staff are not among the country's highest earners.

But after the huge earthquake that devastated so much of Christchurch in February, staff at Waitatarua Mercy Parklands gave more than \$900 through authorised deductions from their wages.

Another \$145 was raised with a sausage sizzle, and the mission team at the Ellerslie-based aged care facility topped up the donation with outreach funds to \$1500.

Gray Crawford, who manages social services at the City Mission in Christchurch, acknowledged the gift from Mercy Parklands as 'wonderful.'

"The money has been directed to Sister of Mercy Mary Wood in the food bank, so that we can continue to provide necessities such as cloth-



WITH black apron, Sister of Mercy Mary Wood, who coordinates the food bank at Christchurch City Mission, works with volunteers at one of two temporary food banks set up in the suburbs to help earthquake victims with food and water. In 10 days, they gave out over

ing, food and water to our vulnerable clients."

He explained that City Mission staff had initially been unable to return to their buildings in the CBD, but had set up two temporary food banks in the suburbs.

In a 10-day period in March, they provided 300 hot meals to people without electricity, saw 1094 people for social work support and gave out 3387 food parcels.

When City Mission staff finally re-

turned to their premises, they found that the power had been off for over a week, and a huge amount of frozen food had thawed and had to be discarded.

"But people and businesses throughout New Zealand have been generous, and we have been able to replenish our food stocks," said Mr Crawford. "Your kindness has enabled us to make a real difference to people's lives at this tough time," he told Mercy Parklands.

News from the Congregation

Nga mihi nui, nga mihi aroha, tena koutou katoa. Warm greetings to all our companions, partners in ministry, associates and friends of Mercy!

We are in a process of reviewing both the purpose and distribution of our Mercy publications, with an eye to saving paper and costs.

In the past, we have used a variety of ways to relate with Mercy companions throughout the country, and it is opportune now to bring these together.

We hold our Mercy companions in great regard, and honour the relationships we have at many levels throughout Aotearoa, Tonga and Samoa.

Into the future, Mercy Focus will regularly include a section from the Leadership of Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. This will focus on sharing Congregational events and news with companions, associates and friends of Mercy.

Currently Mercy Focus is edited and produced by Dennis Horton, of



the Pou Atawhai Centre for Mission, on behalf of Tiaki Manatu Mercy Ministries.

For the past 12 years, this quarterly bulletin has sought to keep all those involved in Mercy's ministries in touch with one another.

We acknowledge Dennis's skill and expertise in sharing the 'light of Mercy mission' with all of us, and Mercy Focus will continue with this emphasis.

Our ministries will continue to receive this quarterly publication. If you are not involved in one of these ministries but think of yourself as a friend of Mercy and would like to continue receiving Mercy Focus, please complete the form included in this issue.

Kia pai to ra, Katrina Fabish rsm
Leadership Communications

McAuley Lecture 2011

Sisters of Mercy invite all companions to this year's McAuley Lecture, to be given by Mary Reynolds, rsm, executive director of Mercy

International Association.

Her topic will be 'God's Mercy from Age to Age: a reflection on the birthing, expansion and challenge of the Mercy charism.'

With wide experience as a secondary teacher and counsellor in Ireland, Mary (left) has served on the Leadership Team of the Congregation in Ireland. Her current task is to lead MIA in accordance with its vision.

The dates, times and three venues of her lecture are as follows:

Sat 9 July, 2pm, St Mary's Convent, 7 New Street, Ponsonby, Auckland.

Mon 11 July, 7.30pm, Te Wāhanga Atawhai Mercy Conference Centre, Guildford Tce, Thorndon Wellington.

Wed 13 July, 7.30pm, St Joseph's Parish Centre, 133 Main North Road, Papanui, Christchurch.

