

Staff 'battle' for clients

Five social workers from two Mercy community development agencies and one from McAuley High School joined with two Sisters of Mercy for a wananga in Auckland recently, looking at how Mercy is expressed in their work with clients.



MERCY social workers with workshop leader Natasha Hofmans (centre); beside her (fourth from right) is Sister of Mercy Jacqui Miles; Sister Salome Ioane is third from left.

The one-day workshop was led by Natasha Hof-

mans, who has over 15 years experience in social services through greater Auckland, with active involvement in key national organizations. The day was held at St Mary's Convent, Ponsonby, and coordinated by Rangi Davis of Mercy Ministries.

The wananga was timely, said Rangi, "especially when we

heard of how social workers have to advocate for their clients with institutions like Housing New Zealand, WINZ and Child Youth and Family.

"It seems as though social workers often have to go dressed for battle when they meet these agencies.

"Mercy staff, who work
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Te Hononga Atawhai

Mercy Focus

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New mission leader welcomed to Mercy

Appointed in June to the newly created position of Te Kaihautū Mission Leader for the Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand, Gabrielle Huria has been welcomed to her role with a powhiri in Wellington and a series of less formal whakatau in the four centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

Trained as a journalist, Gabrielle has worked as a researcher for TVNZ and a producer for National Radio. More recently she has worked for Ngai Tahu in a variety of roles.

In 2007, she left Ngai Tahu to develop her own communications company, contracting to government departments that wanted to improve

relations with their Maori stakeholders.

Gabrielle says the regional whakatau involved sitting with Sisters of Mercy and listening to how the Mercy charism has been lived and practised.

"Each founding story is unique and leaves a deep impression, along with the values that are at the heart of the ministries which the sisters have created. I'm grateful for the time spent in welcoming me, as it has helped me to see more clearly what is important in Mercy organizations."

Gabrielle looks forward to meeting with more of the Sisters of Mercy on an individual basis, and to visiting their ministries throughout New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga, to talk



NEW Mission Leader Gabrielle Huria (left) with Sister of Mercy Cheryl Connelly, at the opening of a second shop for Te Waipuna Puawai, the Mercy community development venture in Ellerslie which Cheryl helped to found; the shop will help to finance the centre's programmes.

with boards and staff, in order to understand their organisations better.

"One of the most important aspects of my role is to identify an agreed long-term direction that will strengthen education for and integrity of our mission.

"We need to ensure that everyone who enters the Mercy world has the opportunity to be committed to the Mercy charism and to engage with it. We want to continue the sisters' work on the cutting edge of social change, and

to see that this work remains relevant to all people living in Aotearoa."

Of Ngati Hine Matua descent, Gabrielle lives with her husband Te Maire and two sons in Tuahiwi, north of Christchurch.

Their two daughters are at university in Auckland; one of them attended Villa Maria, the Mercy girls' college in Christchurch, from Year 7 to 13. Gabrielle is a past pupil of the former Erskine College in Wellington, run by Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

Mercy keeping hope alive, despite the darkness

The heart of this year's McAuley Lecture, by Mercy International's executive director Mary Reynolds rsm, contained her own reflection on the short statement which emerged from the 2009 Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy in this country.

Their call was to be "centred in God, impelled to be Mercy, keeping hope alive in our world today."

Those ideals are "extraordinarily challenging," said Mary Reynolds, who invited her audience in the four venues where her lecture was presented to reflect on each of these ideals in turn.

Centred in God

To be centred in God is special in the Mercy tradition, "because at the heart of Catherine's life was that same call." Despite her busyness in setting up new foundations, she managed to ensure that God was at the centre of her life.

The challenge of our time, said Mary Reynolds, is to counter our culture of consumerism, described by one contemporary writer as "the culture of perpetual dissatisfaction."

We also have to confront the culture of busyness, learning from Catherine, "of whom it was said that no matter how busy she was, she could relate to people as if they were the only ones in the world at that moment."

Computers and I-phones create a crowded and noisy context to our lives, with zero tolerance for delays. As we move and breathe in this technological whirlwind, we need to create space where we can hear the whisper of God's Spirit, said Mary Reynolds.

"For Catherine, it was the practice of aspirations, frequently repeated as mantras, which kept her connection with God's Spirit alive in her. Whatever we call it, one thing is sure: without some spiritual disci-



NZ MERCY Chapter Icon 2009, focus for this year's McAuley Lecture by Mary Reynolds rsm

pline, a life centred in God is impossible."

Impelled to be Mercy

This means being passionate about God's mission today, aware of the suffering of people, especially women and children, and of the needs of our planet, and "responding to them with eyes and hearts attuned to God and steeped in God's word." Our responsibility today is at both the local and global levels.

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have both called us to ecological conversion, Mary Reynolds said. Working to bring forth a sustainable global society calls for a new mindset.

"We cannot respond to our wounded world from our old world view, believing that we are the owners and controllers of a planet there to meet our needs, as if its resources were inexhaustible."

Our task is to deepen our awareness of the new Universe Story, "to

live it out in all its implications; to refocus our spirituality and our understanding of our mission, in the light of that story." That means reviewing our Creation story, as well as our stories of Christian faith and religious life, said Mary Reynolds.

"What we will discover in the process is that all of life is interconnected, and that whatever happens within that web will either enhance or diminish the whole life of the planet."

Impelled by Mercy also means being aware of the exploitation of women. Catherine McAuley saw a close link between poverty and especially the sexual exploitation of women, and this was one of the main reasons for her setting up the House of Mercy in Baggot Street.

There is a very real connection between the oppression of the feminine and the destruction of the Earth, said Mary Reynolds. In the deeply-drawn line between the haves and have-nots, those who suffer most are women and children. Some 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live in poverty today are women.

"Extreme poverty continues to make women victims of exploitation, and leaves them vulnerable socially and morally. It also leaves them as potential victims to the form of slavery we have come to call human trafficking."

Keeping hope alive

The Christian era began in the darkness of the post-Easter phase, with stories of life triumphing over death, light over darkness. The amazing stories of hope that emerged after the earthquakes in Christchurch may offer a paradigm for our world, of God's mercy at work in the midst of human suffering.

Mercy staff affirmed in advocating for clients

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so hard to respect the dignity and worth of their clients, are stunned sometimes by the judgmental response of these larger organizations to people seeking their services."

Key insights from the day included the importance for social workers to network and affirm one another, and to "sustain the soul in our work, celebrating the light and dark in the lives of those we work with."

Especially valued was the chance

for the women to share together and draw inspiration for one another. "There was time to look at what mercy means, and at what we need from the organizations we work for," said one participant.

Issues of social justice surfaced in their discussion. "We were challenged by our need to work at the micro-level, while keeping the bigger picture in view. Wherever possible, we need to work for change and advocate better

policies at the macro-level," said another.

"I found the networking valuable. We tend to work in our own small patch, forgetting that what we do contributes to the larger whole. This was a wonderful chance to be nourished and encouraged to return to the field with fresh energy for what is always demanding work."

A weekend retreat for Mercy social workers is planned for October.

Sustainability 'a crucial lesson for our time'

* from back page

beautiful space full of fruit trees and vege beds, and fully-equipped for all sorts of projects.

"We wanted a garden where we could work on a regular basis. So fitting in with Rosemary and the other gardeners makes this easy. There's never a shortage of things to do and we're learning so much. It feels like a horticultural apprenticeship.

"On a deeper level, we enjoy gardening as a meaningful, life-affirming type of work. It's an expression of voluntary simplicity. The Sisters of Mercy have a vision for which we feel real affinity."

Wednesdays are often the highlight of their week, says Ping. "A treasured time between days of office work, to unravel and let go our thoughts of planning, prioritizing and resourcing. Instead, we can contemplate and breathe a little, while working with our hands in the earth.

"When I work for money, I feel that I'm earning something that's necessary but several steps away from what I really want in life. When I'm volunteering in the garden, I feel that I'm short-cutting



COMPOSTING:

Wayne Erb (second from right) and Ping Sim with other workers take a break from building a new compost heap at the Mercy garden in Ellerslie. Sustainable living means 'living not with less, but with much, much more,' says Ping.

the system: that in exchange for my work, I can live a moment of joy just there and then."

Ping would like their child to grow up in a world where people journey together, respecting each other and the Earth. "I believe that through creating special spaces like Papatuanuku ki Taurangi, we can offer a vision to the world that by living within our means – financially and environmentally – we are living not

with less but with much, much more."

Wayne is also keen to show how people can enjoy a more equitable use of Earth's resources, while allowing nature to flourish.

"The first few decades of our child's life will be a crucial time of change for humanity. So I feel a keen link between the well-being of our little family and of the world at large."

Word 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!

September 24 is always a red letter day in Mercy circles, marking as it does the anniversary of the opening of Catherine McAuley's first House of Mercy in Dublin.

This year, the date also coincides with Moving Planet, a global initiative aimed at drawing people around the world to show their resolve for moving the planet beyond its dependence on fossil fuels. A diversity of actions, ranging from street marches to bike parades and kite-powered demonstrations, has a single aim: to show decision-makers around the world that it's time to move to a clean energy future. In her McAuley Lecture this year, Mary Reynolds rsm, executive director of Mercy International Association, has spelt out the importance that environmental issues have for Mercy people today. Our commitment to care for the planet is a major part of keeping hope



alive in our world today, she noted.

A new consciousness of how all life is connected is providing Mercy people with new vision, said Mary Reynolds, leading them to ponder new questions and live differently.

"We will move to courageous, prophetic action, on behalf of justice for the Earth and its peoples.

"We will take personal and communal responsibility for our lifestyles. We will consider the implications for the environment of the choices we make—such things as

the buildings we construct, the types of cars we drive, the food we eat and where we obtain it.

"We will simplify our living, use our resources wisely, educate ourselves on the critical issues affecting our planet and address them with urgency.

"Our involvement in efforts on energy consumption, carbon footprint and climate change will contribute to effecting changes within political systems. This new consciousness is transcultural and transreligious and transgenerational. It opens us up to new hope; it can be used to draw us closer into the mystery of hope."

Our Congregation recognizes the need to join local with global actions on this topic. We welcome the efforts by Sisters of Mercy and their companions to link Mercy Day this year with Moving Planet activities. The founding charism of Catherine McAuley is certainly echoed in such commitment. Kia kaha!

- Katrina Fabish rsm,
Leadership Communications.



Sister's link with Mercy Hospital's 75 years

Sister of Mercy Barbara Ferguson can remember as a 10-year-old being taken by her parents to see the opening of Dunedin's first Mater Misericordiae Hospital in 1936.

She was on hand this July to share in celebrating the hospital's 75th jubilee, with a dinner at the Dunedin Town Hall for staff, consultants and invited guests.

After a long career as both a primary and secondary school teacher, Sr Barbara joined Mercy Hospital as director of mission in the mid 1980s, and also served on the hospital's board and ethics committee.

The 75 years have been blessed with "wondrous changes", says Sr Barbara, "as the demand for private hospital care has increased, and Mercy Hospital has grown to meet that demand." So it was with joyous

RIGHT: Sister of Mercy Barbara Ferguson, with the cake marking 75 years for Mercy Hospital in Dunedin. Photo by Craig Baxter, with permission of Otago Daily Times.

thanks that we Sisters of Mercy gathered with our board of directors, medical specialists, staff and friends to celebrate the many blessings that have marked these 75 years of service to the people of Dunedin and beyond."

The hospital moved to its present site in the 1960s, with a new day surgery and renovated facilities opened in 2008. Today it is the only private elective surgical hospital in Otago, with six theatres, 48 overnight beds and in excess of 6000 surgical admissions last year—a huge growth in comparison with the 400 operations performed in the hospital's founding year.

The jubilee celebrations began with the blessing of 11 milestone plaques laid in a pathway between the hospital and the historic Maronito House nearby.

The weekend events included a Mass at Holy Name Church celebrated by Bishop Colin Campbell and a DVD presentation of the 2011 McAuley Lecture by Sister of Mercy Mary Reynolds, executive director of Mercy International Association in Dublin. Highlights of that lecture are included on page 2 of this issue.

"It was beautiful to see staff com-



ing back to the dinner in the town hall," said Sr Barbara. "They're precious people—all of them."

* *Milestones of Mercy Hospital*, a 40-page collection of photos and text, is available from Dr Janice McDrury, Mission Coordinator, Mercy Hospital, Private Bag 1919, Dunedin; a donation of \$10 to \$20 will be welcomed for Mercy mission outreach projects.

Time in Mercy garden brings its own reward

Meet two new volunteers at Papatuanuku ki Taurangi, the Mercy-owned permaculture garden in Ellerslie.

Wayne Erb and Ping Sim are spending a day each week in the garden, alongside Sister of Mercy Rosemary Revell who oversees the venture and three men who help regularly in the garden.

Wayne is a free-lance writer, whose features appear in the *Education Gazette* and other magazines, while his wife Ping works part-time as a transport planner for Auckland Council. Wayne was the last child to be delivered at Auckland's Mater Maternity before the unit closed in 1979. They are expecting their first child later this year.

After living overseas and in Wellington, the couple found the Mercy site through an internet search for a community garden project in Auckland's eastern suburbs. "I was surprised by the strong environmental perspective shown by the Sisters of Mercy, and how they tie their work to big stories about the universe," says Wayne.

"I admire the practical, down-to-earth attitudes shown by the sis-



VOLUNTEERS Wayne Erb and Ping Sim at the Mercy permaculture garden in Ellerslie..... 'the Sisters tie their own work to the big stories about the universe,' says Wayne.

ters, and their dedication to working with people on the margins of society. I remember saying to Ping, early on, that these sisters are quite radical."

Ping agrees. "One of my strongest first impressions came from the art work and library in their home – liberal, feminist, green, questioning thinking in a Catholic context. I like to borrow their books and learn from a spiritual space I didn't know existed before."

When they moved from Wellington to Auckland last year, they left behind Kai o te Aro, a neighbourhood community gardening group in the Aro Valley which they had both enjoyed.

"We made a decision to work part-time for a year and to use our spare time to garden more at home and in the community," Ping explains.

Wayne says the Mercy garden in Ellerslie fits very well with what they were looking for. "We came one day to check it out, and Sr Rosemary gave us a tour. We went away laughing with delight, I recall. The garden was clearly the sort of place we wanted to work in, a

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