

Te Tiriti— the bicultural path we share

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Last month ended for the mission team which produces this reflection with a workshop for 20 staff from Mercy Hospice Auckland, refreshing their insights on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The two-hour catch-up session offered the chance to reconsider this country's founding document against the background of recent events, including the government's decision to retain Section 9 of the State Owned Enterprises Act, committing the Crown to ensure that nothing happens in the sale of state-owned assets to compromise Treaty principles.

Recent media coverage included a call from Trade Minister Tim Groser for Maori to be taught as a compulsory subject in our schools, emphasising bilingualism as a gateway for young New Zealanders to understand another culture and world-view. In contrast was news of a large donation to the Act party from Invercargill businessman Louis Crimp, given in the hope of helping that party in its opposition to "special treatment" for Maori. "All the white New Zealanders I've spoken to don't like Maoris," said Mr Crimp, "the way they are full of crime and welfare." The debate which ensued ranged from wondering how contemporary New Zealand has produced such extreme and narrow views as Mr Crimp's, to asking whether Act needs to distance itself from him or even to return his donation.

The workshop also focused on a report published last March, noting that young Maori are being admitted to hospital with acute illnesses at a significantly higher rate than non-Maori. From a University of Otago research unit, the report found that the rate of hospital admissions for rheumatic fever for young Maori – under 24 – was 23 times

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higher than non-Maori admissions. Young Maori were also almost twice as likely to be admitted to hospital for type-two diabetes. The figures raise questions of equity that any fair-minded New Zealander will want to explore.

The 20 staff attending the workshop included several from the hospice's in-patient unit as well as nurses caring for patients in the community, staff from Mercy Hospice shops operating throughout the city, and a member of the hospice's management team. Some had spent years working overseas and recognised on their return here a growing understanding among New Zealanders of Treaty issues. There was a consensus that attitudes towards Maori are often better than those shown to first people in the other countries where they had lived. And there was appreciation for the way Mercy organisations work to respect culture and cultural difference. Treaty-based principles and practices provide an excellent basis for awareness of, and respect for, all other cultures.

Co-presenter at the workshop was Rangi Davis, who urged that as well as providing culturally appropriate health services, hospice staff need to know something about how Maori perceive their world. "It's not just a matter of having the right drugs and treatments. You also need to know what's likely to be on their mind or troubling their spirits as they move from their world to enter yours." The workshop was a chance to reinforce the message that Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand remain firmly committed to honouring te Tiriti o Waitangi, and that central to this is the task of nurturing their relationship with tangata whenua.

This month, our sisters will meet for Congregational Days in Wellington and Christchurch, looking at how they honour their bicultural journey. And the month will end with another Treaty workshop for staff from Mercy Hospice Auckland, this one an introductory session for people who may be new to the country and who may not have encountered or thought about the Treaty before.

The vital question for Mercy people in mission today is about how commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi is to be expressed. More than anything, it involves a living relationship. Who are the Maori we know best, and what are the concerns that link us to them most closely? These are questions for all New Zealanders today, ones that Mr Crimp, by the sound of it, hasn't begun to ask at all. - Dennis Horton

One nation, many strands

E Te Atua, kaitiaki o te kawenata,
God, guardian of your covenant:
In every age you keep your word,
calling us all from bondage to freedom,
from death to abundant life.

As one nation of many peoples, help us
to rejoice in the differences that enrich us,
and to work at overcoming those that divide.
Bind us as diverse strands of a single rope,
whose strength lies in what each piece brings.

Let us see how the common good is at risk
when some are marginalized or left behind.

In our diversity that reflects the richness
of your gifts, may the justice and aroha we share
mirror your love and compassion for us all,
in mercy's name. Amen.