

Made from stardust, to cherish creation

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! An invitation last month to a mid-winter theological reflection, topped off with mulled wine, sounded too good to miss. The day in Auckland had been preceded by one in Dunedin, and similar days in Wellington and Christchurch will offer an opportunity to Sisters of Mercy throughout the country to share the experience.

The opening prayer invoked the Holy Spirit, the fire that renews the face of the Earth, to kindle our hearts. The prayer concluded with a ritual in which each of those present lit a small candle as they pronounced their name. 'The next time you gaze at the evening stars, spare some companionable thoughts for these glowing balls, wandering silently in the vast universe,' the ritual declared. 'For you are looking, in a sense, at your ancestors. Most of the elements of which we are made or which allow us to live – carbon, oxygen, nitrogen and many others, were created in stars. Even the fluorine that makes our teeth strong.'

A DVD, *Journey of the Universe*, featured cosmologist Brian Swimme reminding us that humanity holds a privileged stand in a 14 billion-year story of evolution. 'We live at a time when the human species is being asked to play a central role in activating the flourishing powers of Earth's living systems.' A student and colleague of Fr Thomas Berry, Swimme reiterates the US priest-ecologist's call for 'a new intimacy with the Earth.' In these critical times when Earth's future is imperilled by so much human activity, the realisation that 'we are all stardust' may help us to cherish and protect what gave us life.

Mercy scripture scholar Kathleen Rushton of Christchurch shared some biblical and theological insights on the Pro-

Reflecting on the 'God particle'

God at the heart of creation, it is your power that sustains the smallest particle, and binds it in relation to others, enabling creation to unfold in patterns of amazing diversity and order. We praise your presence in every part of the universe you have made.

In our work of caring for the vulnerable, help us to see the dignity and worth of the smallest, and to nurture the networks of care and support that bring meaning and value to their lives. As we rejoice in the wonder of our being, let us know that our greatest gift is to share with others the tender love you have shown us.

Stretch our minds beyond the bald constraints of costs and figures, to go where love and beauty will take us. Renew in us Catherine's deep trust in Providence, that we may risk enough to create a vision of how things might be, when we dare to hope, in mercy's name. Amen.

Imaging Mercy Today



COSMOLOGIST Brian Swimme, narrating in *Journey of the Universe*; he believes the world's current self-destructive trajectory can be redirected by our discovering a new intimacy with the Earth.

logue of John's Gospel, showing how John's account of coming of the Word into the world was shaped by the cosmologies of the ancient Greek and Jewish writers. Her notes highlight a letter from Pope John Paul II written to the director of the Vatican Observatory in 1988 to mark the third centennial of Newton's physics, calling for closer dialogue between scientists and theologians. 'As they grow and mature, people cannot continue to live in separate compartments,' the pope wrote. Dialogue with scientists enables people of faith 'to expand their partial perspectives and form a new, unified vision.'

The day's discussion ended with a closing reflection. 'Within the universe, our planet Earth, with all its wonder, beauty and fragility, is a meeting-place of the divine and the human. We are called to walk this path of chaos and order with open minds and confident hearts, if we want to reach something new.' 'With open eyes and a listening heart, we are enabled to see the universe as a womb of immense creativity, and to experience ourselves as nurtured into a new consciousness. In the words of Thomas Berry, "to have restored to us our cosmic origins is a gift beyond measure".'

A leaflet outlining the day included quotes from Franciscan Sr Ilia Delio, who is expected to lecture in New Zealand next year. 'God imparts to creation its inner dynamism,' writes Ilia Delio, whose works include *The Emergent Christ*. 'Because creation is essentially related to God, who is love, evolution is the unfolding process of God in love.'

- Dennis Horton