



Karanga Atawhai

A newsletter for Sisters of Mercy and partners in mission

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A glimpse into Mercy's unfolding future

By DENNIS HORTON

A glimpse of how Mercy may look in the future came when Congregation Leader Katrina Fabish spoke at last month's Hui Taumata Mercy Leaders Summit in Auckland. Her ministerial PJP Update came towards the end of the day-long event, attended by more than 100 Sisters of Mercy and partners in ministry.

She began by endorsing an earlier comment from Hui keynote presenter Mary Sullivan rsm that Catherine McAuley is present whenever Mercy people gather together with faith in God to face the future. "Catherine is indeed with us, because we are doing a new thing."

Her presentation began with the outline of a heart, drawn by Māori artist Henriata Nicholas from a design by Cheryl Connelly rsm and included in the publication *Atawhai Mai Atawhai Atu*. "It is the heart of God, an image of transforming love," said Katrina. "The image expresses our determination to keep the charism alive, to guard the treasure we have received, by hearing the cry of the poor and of the Earth. It reminds us of Catherine's insistence that mercy be cordial - reviving, warming and invigorating."

The bottom line of the ministerial Public Juridic Person (PJP) under consideration by Sisters of Mercy is a change of ownership, Katrina declared. "A new model of ownership is being negotiated here. The Congregation will relinquish its ownership of ministries. Lay men and women will oversee the PJP in the Mercy tradition. This is the work of the Spirit calling us forth."

An answer to the question 'why?' is found in the heart of God, whose mercy is always reaching out. Katrina quoted well-known US Benedictine nun Joan Chittister as saying that for a charism to flourish, it must be given away. The 'how' will unfold in communications such as this newsletter, *Karanga Atawhai*, at present bi-monthly but possibly more frequently if required.

The 'why' is unfolding as 'a brave initiative in Mercy, as we respond to the cry of Earth and of the poor.' A pathway for the PJP has been developed, outlining the tasks of three working parties (for mission, legal matters and finance) accountable to the Sponsorship Committee which has oversight of the whole process. It is hoped that a working model of the ministerial PJP will be developed by the middle of next year.

In a sketch of 'what we could look like', Katrina indicated that the two largest entities in Whānau Mercy would be the Congregation (Ngā Whāea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand) and the ministerial Public Juridic Person (absorbing the



A Mercy moment to share: Talk briefly with the person next to you about the links you see between the three words in this graphic - heart, earth and hearth.

Congregation's existing incorporated works). Smaller entities included in Whānau Mercy would include other works and partnerships. The Congregation's finances and property would continue to be administered by the McAuley Trust, and mission resources by Te Mahi Whakapono Mission Advisory Group.

Katrina ended her presentation with another reference to Mary Sullivan, who spoke of Mercy people as "God's hospitable collaborators, revising invigorating and warming Christ's brothers and sisters as they go their pilgrim way to the full and final embrace of God's love and mercy."

GRAPHIC: NGĀ WHĀEA ATAWHAI O AOTEAROA SISTERS OF MERCY NZ ©

Whānau Mercy - family joined by a single charism

When the Sisters of Mercy first travelled to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1850, it was the karanga or call from Māori women, conveyed to them by Bishop Pompallier, that inspired them to make their epic journey. No surprise, then, that the bicultural commitment between the sisters and Māori, this country's first people, has been a key strand in their unfolding mission.

Nor is it any surprise that, in looking for a concept to express the sisters' mission for the future, Kaihautū Wairua Mission Administrator Richard Kerr-Bell has settled on Whānau Mercy as a way of summing up this unfolding task. His paper, *Whānau Mercy - The Future of Mercy*, was included in the pack distributed to participants at the Hui Taumata or Mercy Leaders Summit in Auckland last month.

In its primary sense, whānau means family. 'The key understanding of the word whānau is to give birth, to give life, or to be born,' writes Richard Kerr-Bell. 'It denotes a blood link with others and with the mother. It provides a whakapapa, a connected lineage or relationship and an identity that one does not earn but is graced with, given, gifted.'

By extension, whānau is also used to describe a group of people who spend time together for a common

purpose or who share an identity from a shared work or focus. To become Whānau Mercy, one is 'born into Mercy', says this paper. With the characteristics of the parent one may be identified as having the 'momo' or likeness of Catherine McAuley. The momo or specific characteristics which the descendant carries may be described as a charism.

AROHA

Love/compassion/
relationship
God at the centre

KAITIAKITANGA

The guard/guide, the direction, action,
spiritual alignment with whakapapa - in the
best interests of the individual and group

WHĀNAUNGATANGA

Creating and enabling belonging, welcoming/
manaakitanga/atawhai/whakapapa/story

As a way of organising people, Whānau Mercy means sisters and their ministries, boards, employees, volunteers and companions. 'We organise with roles that enable the whānau to perform tasks according to expertise, gifts, a passion for Mercy spirit,' writes Richard Kerr-Bell. 'Each role takes place within the framework of tikanga Mercy, the way of Mercy, and practised with Mercy values.'

Tikanga Mercy, he says, is a way of being Mercy 'expressed in rituals and customs by those involved in the ministries and mission of the Sisters of Mercy in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.' Tikanga Mercy, or 'the Mercy Way', sets out a guide that enables our actions and choices to remain authentic and congruent with the founder's intent within the context of Aotearoa and the Pacific. 'By using the term "tikanga" we acknowledge the distinct identity of Māori as the originators of the call to Mercy to come to Aotearoa New Zealand and the partnership intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.'

Among many concepts that interweave and are related, the author identifies three values which underpin Tikanga Mercy. The first is aroha - love and compassion. One meaning of aroha, attributed to Maori priest and theologian Pa Henare Tate, is 'to be in the presence of the breath of God.' Aroha is reflected especially in work done with and for people, not indirectly or unconnected. Catherine McAuley speaks of 'tenderness in all things.'

The second value is whānaungatanga, meaning to cause, make, create relationship, to enable belonging and inclusion. 'What we do builds community, a warmth and a welcome.'

The third key value is kaitiakitanga. A kaitiaki is 'one who guards, who guides and ensures the spiritual, cultural and personal safety of people. Kaitiakitanga is about ensuring the long-term wellbeing of Earth and of whakapapa. It protects as well as defines what is in a person's best interests.'

- To read a summary of Richard Kerr-Bell's paper, [click here](#).

WORKING PARTY SNAPSHOT



Denise Fox rsm chairs the Legal Working Party, charged with developing the canonical structure of our ministerial PJP in accordance with church law, and a legal structure which accords with New Zealand civil law.

A former leader of both the Wellington Congregation and the newly formed Congregation of Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, Denise is based in Sydney where she currently serves as CEO for McAuley Ministries Ltd. She recently retired after two years as chair of the board of the Mercy International Association, on which she had also served as a director for nine years.