



Karanga Atawhai

A newsletter for Sisters of Mercy and partners in mission

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Leadership sends petition to Rome for PJP approval

By DENNIS HORTON

More than two years in the drafting, documents to support the establishment of a ministerial Public Juridic Person (PJP) have been sent to the Vatican for approval on behalf of Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. To be known as Whānau Mercy Ministries, the PJP will own and oversee ministries established and formally operated by the Congregation.

The petition was sent in October to the Holy See by the Congregation's Leadership Team. "We are at an exciting stage now," Team member Raylene Dwyer told Karanga Atawhai. "Thank you for capturing in print a record of this time in our history."

The documents were drafted by the Sponsorship Committee and its three working parties, relating to mission, financial and legal issues. The next step in the process will see the selection and appointment of between five and nine trustee directors who will serve on the board of Whānau Mercy Ministries. According to the board's statutes, a majority of these will be Catholics. The trustee directors will be responsible in canon (church) and civil law for the PJP and its ministries. Their primary task will be to ensure that the new entity is faithful to the call of the Gospel through Mercy mission.



The Leadership Team of Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand Tina Vaeatangitau, Sue France (Congregation leader), Raylene Dwyer, Mary Wood and Judith Moroney meet to proof-read their petition to the Holy See, seeking approval for their establishment of a ministerial PJP.

Preparing for our PJP: some milestones on the way

By DENNIS HORTON

At first glance, it might seem just a timely HR response, finding newcomers to fill the gaps in Mercy's ministries left when religious cannot fill them. But there are much deeper and richer reasons for the decision by Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand to entrust their healthcare, education and community service ventures to a ministerial PJP.

The new canonical entity, which the Congregation hopes will be approved by the Holy See in the coming months, will own and oversee a raft of around a dozen major ministries, established by the Sisters of Mercy over the past century and a half. The process of welcoming lay women and men to leadership roles has been an evolving one, as sisters have discerned the need for new levels of energy and expertise to see these works of mercy sustained and carried into the future.

A ground-breaking move came in the 1980s and '90s, when most Mercy education and healthcare ministries became incorporated limited-liability companies, each with a proprietor's board to provide governance and financial independence. The boards included at least

one Sister of Mercy as a participating member and were ultimately responsible to the Congregation's Leadership; the board brought a measure of autonomy which has been vital to their growth and success.

The path to incorporation coincided with the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, an international gathering of Catholic bishops which called for greater involvement of lay men and women in the life and mission of the church. The same council also called on members of religious Congregations to rediscover their founding charism or spirit, as a way to renew their vision for the future.

**continued overleaf*

PJP - a missionary option for Catholic lay people

**from front page*

Catherine McAuley, who spent 53 of her 63 years as a lay woman, had never intended to form a religious Congregation and did so only when it became clear that this was the option if her vision of bringing God's mercy to the world was to become a reality. She knew enough to realise that this could only be achieved by being close to the world's poor and suffering; the community she formed soon became known as the 'McAuley walking sisters' who would find Christ not in a cloister but in Dublin's streets.

World where God and humanity meet

The vision of Vatican II was also of a world with God at its heart; the joys and the hopes of the age, 'especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted', are also the joys and hopes of the followers of Christ, declared the constitution on The Church in the Modern World. 'Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.' Catherine McAuley was anticipating this great theological insight in recognising the world as the point where the mercy of God and humanity were most likely to meet.

As more lay people assumed responsibility as board members, managers and staff, Sisters of Mercy recognised the need to provide them with mission formation. To fill their role successfully, newcomers would need to hear Mercy's story, to understand why the sisters had established a particular ministry, the ethos which drove their decision to found it and the vision which accounted for their involvement over many years.

Mission formation played a critical role in this process, with programmes of induction and ongoing formation for lay people who joined Mercy as partners in ministry. The broad-based programmes told the story of Catherine and the Mercy founders who came to New Zealand, outlined the core values of each ministry and the priorities which brought the Congregation to this country and inspired its members to serve in a distinctively Mercy way.

The integration in the late 1970s of Catholic schools into New Zealand's State education system, by which the salary of lay teachers was paid by Government but the Congregation remained the owner of Mercy colleges, was a milestone in this unfolding story. The partnership between church and state enabled Catholic parents to ensure a religious education for their children, without being faced by the expensive fees of private schooling. The determination of state authorities to recognise and uphold the 'special character' of each Catholic school, to see this character written into the school's charter and to track its pursuit, has been a major factor in the success of the integration process.

Part of the living legacy of the Sisters of Mercy is their spirituality of an evolving creation, allowing God to be seen in the events of an unfolding and unfinished future. At a time when care for the environment has become a matter of urgency for all people of faith, a commitment to Papatūānuku and to life-forms facing extinction has become a key focus for Mercy's ministries and those

who serve in them. The degradation of Earth joins the displacement of people as twin causes for people of mercy in our day; there is a realisation that the cry of the poor and the cry of Earth are one.

Our Mercy culture is one of manaakitanga (hospitality) and inclusion, of reaching out to ensure that no one is excluded or left behind. Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand have never forgotten that the original karanga or call which brought them here was an invitation from wāhine Māori to come from Ireland to share their life and wisdom. Their bicultural journey remains a vital part of the Congregation's story. 'It is in living out the mission of our baptism and the charism of Mercy in Aotearoa New Zealand that we commit ourselves to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi,' says the preface of its Constitutions.

Creating new structures for mission

Commitment to Te Tiriti continues to be an essential ingredient in every Mercy ministry. Dialogue with tangata whenua (people of the land - our first nation people) to clarify where hearts can meet to face long-standing inequalities and create new structures of justice will be key aspects of Mercy's future mission.

In 1850, Sisters of Mercy were the first Catholic women religious to reach New Zealand. They were pioneers in education and healthcare, establishing schools, hospitals and community development initiatives as part of the church's mission. Today, the same Congregation is once more breaking new ground, paving the way for New Zealand's first ministerial PJP, in which lay Catholics will lead church ministries for teaching, healing and creating networks of care. Whānau Mercy Ministries will go a long way to becoming what Pope Francis described in his exhortation The Joy of the Gospel as a 'missionary option', a new church structure in Aotearoa New Zealand that has the mission of God as its first goal.



Whanaunga Mercy: depicting the unity and diversity of roles within Whānau Mercy.

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