

Te Kete Atawhai

MERCY BASKET



MERCY TO MERCY: Alexia Jacobs, a teacher from St Anne's School, Manurewa, enjoys the company of pupils at St Theresa's School in Fusi, Samoa. See story, page 8.



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- ♦ Mercy Sister chosen as 'NZ Gardener of the Year' – page 2
- ♦ Two US Sisters of Mercy heading our way – page 4
- ♦ Jug and bowl symbols of Mercy service – page 6-7
- ♦ HIPPIY parents help their children to be ready for school – page 9

Sister of Mercy is New Zealand's top gardener

Sister of Mercy Rosemary Revell is the New Zealand Gardener of the Year. The award reflects her enthusiastic contribution to a Mercy project in Auckland that aims to equip families with the skills to grow healthy, sustainable food.

ROSEMARY WAS THE OVERALL WINNER IN the annual gardening awards run by New Zealand Gardener magazine. She came out on top after a public vote.

Her win garnered additional media attention, including an appearance on TV One's prime time current affairs show Close Up.

Rosemary is part of a Mercy team which coordinates a garden in Ellerslie called Papatuanuku ki Taurangi, Earth Promise. Sisters Teresa Anderson and Bridget Crisp are the other members.

The garden is adjacent to a Mercy community and Te Waipuna Puawai, Mercy Oasis, the Mercy community development centre. Visitors to the garden will encounter the Sisters, gardeners with disabilities, volunteers, women enrolled in gardening courses and pre-school children all getting dirt under their nails.

Rosemary has worked here since early 2010. A large circular garden is full of vegetables. Berries and grapes are trained along trellises. Further out are well-mulched orchard blocks containing apples, stone fruit and citrus trees. There's a glasshouse, sheds, chicken coops, shade-house and large compost piles – everything needed to support a diverse organic garden.

Across the lawn sits a prayer sanctuary, reflecting the intent of the Sisters to also make this a contemplative garden, a place where anyone can spend time reconnecting with their personal stories and their place in the story of the universe of which we are all a part.

The garden's existence reflects a decision made in 2000 by the Sisters of Mercy to dedicate all remaining land at the Ellerslie site to restoration of women, children and the Earth. Sr Katrina Fabish was instrumental at that stage and continues to provide guidance from her position in the Mercy leadership team.

From the garden's website: "Our thrust was to be communities of hope, to be witness to a right relationship with all Earth, to stand with those on the margins and explore new expressions of committed life together."

Today, this mission is expressed in several ways. The garden is run along organic lines to encourage life and enrich soil fertility. Three men with disabilities are employed, and their skills and sense of worth have grown significantly in the time they have worked here. Produce is donated to families in need of support, through Te Waipuna Puawai, while Sr Bridget teaches gardening skills to women and supports them to then start gardens at home.

Sisters Teresa, Rosemary and Bridget say their aim for the coming years is to continue "to build community around the garden."

Rosemary says winning the award strengthens her resolve



Sister of Mercy Rosemary Revell..... prizes will go 'to get others gardening.'

to keep supporting a garden team in which everyone cares for Earth and makes a contribution to community good through their own unique talents.

It was her warm personality and 'sleeves-rolled-up' leadership style that motivated volunteer gardeners Wayne Erb and Ping Sim to nominate her for the award. In their nomination letter to NZ Gardener, the couple wrote that everyone involved in the garden gains from Sr Rosemary's work ethic.

"Her persistence and humour ensure she gets the best work out of each of her gardeners, while helping them grow in skills and self-belief."

Rosemary has won several thousand dollars' worth of vouchers and gardening products, as well as a trip to the 2013 Ellerslie Flower Show in Christchurch.

Trip aside, Rosemary says the prizes will go towards projects at Papatuanuku ki Taurangi.

"I'm very happy to see the prizes go to the garden and to help others start their own gardens at home. With the vouchers, we will be able to put together garden set-up kits with basic tools and seeds for all those who join Bridget's gardening classes and go on to start gardens for their families."

Rosemary says she grew up in a family that gardened, and believes the present project is a way to renew that closeness to Earth and its natural resources that was evident in her youth.

"My dream for us is to recapture some of this idyllic time that was hard work, but fulfilling and rewarding because we were eating healthily and enjoying the exercise of work in the garden."

Her interest in gardening was renewed during a stint in Samoa in the 90s, when she encountered poor nutrition. Rosemary has worked much of her life as a nurse, but upon her return from Samoa, she retrained as a home economics teacher because she realised people could not have good health without good education.

The garden website is www.ooooby.ning.com/group/pktgarden

New website a window on our Mercy world

The maxim 'think global, act local' has been used to great effect by volunteers in recent decades, seeking to protect the world's environment by taking care of their own patch. Today, the same maxim catches the spirit of Mercy at work, making the difference in a myriad of small ways to bring hope to our world.

IN NEW ZEALAND, SISTERS OF MERCY ARE preparing to launch their new website. It offers an especially localized view of Mercy, with images and the use of te reo Maori that give an unmistakably Kiwi flavour. Yet the wider Mercy world is never far from sight, with easily accessed links to the Mercy International Association and its office at the United Nations, Mercy Global Concern.

Patricia Rowe rsm, who has taken a lead role in developing the new website, explains. "In the spirit of Catherine McAuley, our Congregation remains an autonomous group in Aotearoa, Tonga and Samoa, with our own bicultural and Pacific flavour. But our links to the wider Mercy world, through Mercy International, are strong. These express our global interdependence around heritage, mission and values.

"The links with Mercy International help to place us in the context of Catherine's story. They also give easy access to the extensive resources held by MIA, as a source of education and inspiration for all who visit the website.

"Links with Mercy Global Action and the news pages of MIA are a way of sharing and celebrating our local achievements, as well as hearing of others and mobilizing for global action."

Patricia Rowe hopes that the new website will mean that local Mercy ministries will become better known. "There is a section devoted to Mercy in the Pacific which includes content written and videoed by sisters working in Tonga, Samoa and Chile. Pacific sisters working in Aotearoa are also featured; this reflects the multiethnic reality of our Congregation.

"Visitors to the site can take a video tour of three of the schools where sisters work in the Pacific. Some may be tempted to volunteer or offer practical help, as some of our Mercy companions have already done to such good effect."

Technology has changed since the Congregation launched its first website and later updated it in 2007, says Patricia Rowe. "Current technology allows us to use audio and video material to tell our story.

"The new site is user-centred; people will find that it offers an interface which enables them to connect with Mercy at work and to become engaged. Ours is a living organisation and we hope the website will be, too.

"The systems for updating the site are easily managed, and we have the dedicated personnel in place to do this. We will be on the lookout for stories and photos that highlight and celebrate our vision of working 'to keep hope alive.'

"Sisters of Mercy and partners in mission will be encouraged to share their stories. We are also hoping that Mercy ministries will link their websites to our own, both broadening our coverage and serving as a valued resource."

Visitors to the website may be surprised to find so many lay women and men doing so much of what sisters once did on their own. "This trend is threaded through the text, with stories that show how sisters and companions are working side by side in so many Mercy works. While this may be a surprise to some, the same trend is reflected today in Mercy congregations worldwide," Patricia Rowe notes.

Serving with her on the Congregation's website group, Te Pae Tukutuku, are Sisters of Mercy Natalie Murphy, Eileen Brosnahan, Raylene Dwyer, Anna Nicholls and Katrina Fabish who is the Leadership Team's communications spokesperson. "It's our hope that those who visit the website will come to experience the mercy of God at its deepest levels – seeing in the works of compassion a focus of mercy in our own time and place," says Katrina.

"We hope that they may be drawn to support and contribute in some way. They



Patricia Rowe rsm..... bookmark 'puts Mercy world in your pocket'.

may see that religious life today is a call to be with and among people, sharing ourselves in ways that bring healing to those who have been hurt by their experience of life."

Katrina also hopes that the new website may catch a wider, especially younger, audience through Facebook. "Bookmarks will be distributed to every pupil in our Mercy schools, and will be available to staff working in our other ministries. Those with iPhones may create a permanent link, get into Facebook and so keep connected.

"I think of Mary Oliver's poem, The Journey. No matter who we are, we are all connected in one community of life. The wild goose calls; the invitation is to see a place where we can belong and contribute."

The bookmark has been made to "put Mercy in your pocket," says Patricia Rowe. The design includes a QR (quick response code) which can be read by smart-phones and link the user instantly to Mercy's digital world. "It's a great way of engaging and sharing by social networking, especially for the younger, internet-savvy generation," she says. "QR codes are at heart an advertising key, and have the power to expand greatly our reach."

BOOKMARK: Copies of this bookmark, with its QR code in the bottom right corner, will provide instant access to the new website of the Sisters of Mercy New Zealand.



Coming our way

Planning to visit New Zealand next year are two well-known Sisters of Mercy from the United States.

DUE HERE IN APRIL IS SISTER OF MERCY Mary Sullivan, whose biography of Mercy's founder, *The Path of Mercy: The life of Catherine McAuley* was published earlier this year. She will be in Wellington to present at a Congregation Day on April 26, attended by Sisters of Mercy and some of their key partners in mission.

Her topic will be one of the key themes of her recent book, 'Getting up again' and 'Laying down our lives': the enduring values and present work of Mercy. The dust jacket of her book notes that no matter how exhausted she was from the rigours of her travel and ministries, Catherine McAuley was, in her own words, "always moved to 'get up again' for the sake of those in need."

Mary Sullivan's other published

works include an edited edition of more than 320 of the founder's letters, and a collection of important writings by and about Catherine McAuley, including memoirs and annals by some of the first Sisters of Mercy.

Expected here in July, to deliver a keynote address to an Australasian Mercy Education Conference in Auckland, is Sister of Mercy Marilyn Lacey, founder and director of Mercy Beyond Borders. She has also been invited to give the annual Catherine McAuley Lecture, which is open to all and will be presented in the four major metropolitan centres.

Mercy Beyond Borders is a US non-profit organisation which partners with displaced women and children overseas to alleviate extreme poverty. A



Marilyn Lacey... *mercy beyond borders*

Sister of Mercy since 1966, Marilyn Lacey has worked with refugees in the US, Africa and southeast Asia for 25 years. In 2001, she was personally honoured by the Dalai Lama as an 'unsung hero of compassion'. Her memoir, *This flowing toward me: a story of God arriving in the stranger*, was published in 2009.

This volunteer has sewn many a stitch in time

For the last nine years, Irene Lagocki has walked from her home in Ellerslie to Mercy Parklands every Thursday afternoon in all weathers, to spend up to two hours mending residents' clothes. The trip takes half an hour each way.

IRENE HAS SERVED AS A VOLUNTEER SINCE a friend drew her attention to the job, advertised in the local parish newsletter. At first Irene thought it was about visiting but quickly discovered the task involved mending. "I was sure I could do it, sewing on the odd button."

In fact, the work these days doesn't involve so many buttons. Irene is more likely to be repairing torn garments or sewing on the labels that identify residents' clothing in the laundry. These days, Mercy Parklands uses adhesive labels, but the hot iron which applies them can easily damage synthetic materials. So Irene often has to sew the labels on delicate fabrics by hand.

Her work has lengthened the life of many a residents' favourite garment, but sometimes they've become absolutely worn out, beyond the point of saving. "Then, if it's too difficult to repair, I have to leave it at reception, asking families to replace it."

Irene is no newcomer to the Mercy world, having worked as an enrolled nurse at Auckland's Mater Hospital in the 1970s, when Sr Mary de Montfort (later Sr Patricia Hook) was matron. Her training there was interrupted when the Mater's nursing



IRENE LAGOCKI *nine years of careful stitching*

school was closed. She went on to nurse in Dunedin, at Waikato Hospital in Hamilton for over two years, and completed two stints at Middlemore Hospital in South Auckland. She has also worked as a nurse and a home help overseas.

Almost every week, there's a basket

waiting for Irene at reception, with items waiting to be repaired. She remembers Mercy Day 2007 as one occasion when there was nothing for her to do, and she was able to enjoy the celebration arranged for residents and staff. Occasionally she has taken work home, when it has been more complicated than usual.

She enjoys meeting people, and remembers some residents by name long after they have passed on, among them Annemarie Rushbrook, sitting in her wheelchair at the front door for a smoke, Evelyn Shannon, Mary Surrey, and former Ellerslie parishioner Leo van Hees. "I enjoy meeting people," says Irene. "Sadly, many of those I've got to know over the years have died."

Irene came to New Zealand with her parents and two brothers in 1951; her Polish father had been a prisoner of war and became a displaced person. Her mother was German. Irene speaks German, has been back to Germany a couple of times and lived there for two years at one stage. She never learnt to speak Polish. "My dad only used it to swear at me. The only Polish words I would have known I probably couldn't repeat."

Mercy way shows in the stories of its first women

Since a powhiri last August to welcome her to the role, Cecily Mantell has been the kai kokiri or manager of Te Ukaipo, a Mercy ministry based in Ranui, West Auckland, aimed at supporting rangatahi (young people) and their whanau.

OF MAORI AND CANADIAN DESCENT, CECILY HAS TRIBAL affiliations with Panguru in Northland. Her father died when she was quite young, and she had to take on the care of her two younger brothers. "This meant I learnt from an early age to manage my own affairs and the lives of those I was responsible for and to grow my whanau."

After training in social services and counselling, Cecily eventually became the first Maori counsellor at the North Shore Courts. Later she was instrumental in helping to set up the first Maori counselling centre on the North Shore.

A strong call to return to her mother's iwi saw her take a senior manager position in the far North, where she developed her organisational and management skills. "This move enabled me to grow my leadership style and take responsibility for a whole team. It also opened my eyes to the disadvantaged who faced huge poverty in the area."

Despite her desire to remain in the North and her passion for her work in the area, she found it difficult to stay. "My children began to have children of their own, and I always wanted to play an active role in my grandchildren's lives. I believe this is so important; the pull saw me take on a role as regional manager for a Maori health provider, based in Auckland.

"This was an amazing experience and taught me so much about people with disabilities, and made me appreciate what God has afforded me."

Now based in the Ranui/Massey area, Cecily says she has thrown herself into community development, aware of the high number of low socio-economic families in the district. "We have huge health issues – overcrowding in homes, 30 recent cases of rheumatic fever in our area. Unemployment is high; young people are falling through the cracks in the education system.

"And that leads to other factors. We have increasing numbers of rangatahi (young people) who go to live with their grandparents, to take the stress off their families. Grandparents are suffering financially, as they try to keep young people afloat."

The biggest challenge, says Cecily, must be rangatahi and their relationships. "We want to enhance their lives and give them opportunities. At the same time, we're working with their families, trying to make change so there can be better outcomes and improved quality of life."

Cecily's dream for Te Ukaipo is to make it a hub for people,



CECILY MANTELL *creating opportunities for young*

offering them opportunities as they come in. "That's what people need. They have the ability, but not the opportunity. The hub would offer them choices for healthy life-styles, employment pathways, and learning places.

"Underlying all these would be our connection with Papatuanuku, mother Earth. Our role in these learning places is to be kaitaki – guardians, based on respect for ourselves and others and for the Earth and its resources."

Cecily admits to being in awe about the Mercy way. "Since I came in and took on this position, I've been impressed by the way women have done things in Mercy – impressed by their strength and resilience.

"The Mercy way is always about the story. The first story comes from Dublin with Catherine McAuley. Another chapter tells the story of Mother Cecilia Maher and her journey to New Zealand. I so admire these women and the journeys they have taken.

"I believe that working in the Mercy way is about having some of the same attributes which these women have handed down. The axle of our lives turns from the past, and revolves into the future. In the Mercy way, I believe I stand and carry another chapter on from these women.

"I now find myself at Te Ukaipo, and for the first time can see how everything in my life has prepared me for this role. I really feel that this is my calling, and I want to do my utmost to grow the organisation, so that it can fulfil its mission and hold true to its Mercy values."

Changes at Mercy Spirituality Centre Auckland

Having completed 13 years leading the development of services at Te Ngakau Waiora Mercy Spirituality Centre in Auckland, Sister of Mercy Rita Vessey is pleased to announce that she is handing over the reins to newly appointed Chief Executive, Dr Jennifer Reid.

JENNIFER IS AN ACADEMIC MEDIEVALIST, specialising in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon language, literature and spirituality. Her research explores the impact of media and communication on cultural expressions of spirituality.

She completed her Ph D at the Centre

for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, and has held appointments in the Celtic Studies Program at the University of St Michael's College, in the Department of English at York University, and most recently in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam.

Rita Vessey will continue working at Te Ngakau Waiora as Facilities Manager, and looks forward to the ongoing development of this special ministry of spirituality – the search for wholeness through a journey to the heart.

Mercy's 'timeless circle' boosted by Mercy young adults

Mercy Day is usually marked in Auckland with a celebration on the weekend nearest to September 24, attended by Sisters of Mercy, their friends and associates and partners in mission.

If a Sunday is chosen, the event often includes a Mass celebrated at St Mary's Convent. But this year planners chose the Saturday, with a non-eucharistic ritual that focused on the timeless circle of Mercy, held in the auditorium of St Mary's College, Ponsonby.

More than 200 gathered for the occasion; they included Sisters of Mercy from Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin as well as from many parts of Auckland. Among them were two representatives of the Leadership Team and Stephanie Kitching rsm, who heads the national Mercy archives in Wellington.

Highlight of the occasion was the commissioning of 14 young women as Nga Rangatahi Atawhai, Mercy Young Adults, mostly from Pasifika backgrounds and all with links to McAuley High School in Otahuhu. Several in the group are now pursuing university studies, while a couple are still in their final years at school. The group has been inspired and guided largely by Sister of Mercy Salome Ioane, currently on the staff of McAuley High, a diocesan school founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1963 which retains a strong Mercy identity as part of its special character.

As part of the commissioning Sisters of Mercy from St Mary's Convent, most in their 80s and 90s, pinned a badge on each of the young women and presented them with folders outlining details of some of the major Mercy ministries in Auckland and opportunities for working among them as volunteers. One of the mentors of the group presented a jug and bowl which had been used to bless the group, offered as symbols of the servant leadership they were invited to exercise.

"This ceremony signifies your being 'sent forth' as volunteers and partners in our Mercy mission," said Sr Katrina Fabish, on behalf of the Congregation's leadership team. "We pray that your hands and hearts will be strengthened for the work that lies ahead. May you be compassionate to human need, courageous in facing challenges, tender and strong in all you undertake, and faithful to the commitment you have made."

The commissioning came towards the end of a ritual in which a range of Mercy ministries was acknowledged, beginning with



ABOVE: Members of Nga Rangatahi Atawhai Mercy Young Adults read their statement of commitment at the Mercy Day celebration at St Mary's College, Ponsonby. RIGHT: Sr Salome Ioane leading the commissioning ceremony at this year's Mercy Day celebration in Auckland.



the sisters themselves who stood for the lighting of their candle and joined in reaffirming their current Chapter Statement, declaring their resolve to be "centred in God, impelled to be Mercy, keeping hope alive in our world today."

There followed the naming of Mercy's hospice and aged care facilities in Auckland and Hamilton, several Mercy colleges, and a cluster of community development ventures, led either by sisters or their partners in mission. As each enterprise was named, its



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Mercy ministries are represented in this Mercy Day focal point by a summary of their mission or vision statement and a small lighted candle. (Photos by Patricia Rowe rsm). BADGE: Sister of Mercy Mary Molloy, a former chaplain at North Shore Hospital, pins the badge on Nga Rangatahi Atawhai member Philomena Petaia. CUPPA: Enjoying a comfortable cup of tea after the Mercy Day celebration are (left) Cathy Harrison of Christchurch who helped to mentor the Mercy Young Adults group and Sister of Mercy Rita Vessey, manager of the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Auckland. MIHI: Listening to the mihi of welcome are kaumatua Chrissie and Pio Jacobs of Auckland, Sister of Mercy Mary Foy and her colleague from Te Ukaipo, Jacquilin Tuatara, a social work intern.



mission or vision statement was read and a smaller candle was lit from the Congregation's larger flame and both items were placed in the focal point, to symbolize our own Circle of Mercy.

Special greetings in the mihi of welcome were extended to visitors and to husband and wife Pio and Chrissie Jacobs, who over many years have come to earn kaumatua or elder status whenever Mercy gathers in Auckland.

The emergence of the new group of young Mercy women

signals a way for another generation to become involved in the works of Mercy, said Sr Salome – "not with a lifelong commitment through religious vows, but with the generous dedication of their youthful idealism and desire to make a difference to their world." She said the trend has been launched by McAuley students and graduates, "but it's one which other Mercy schools in New Zealand may well follow, as they have in other countries."

Jug and bowl, symbols of servant leadership

A large jug and bowl, used to commission a group of Mercy young adults in the Mercy Day ceremony in Auckland this year, were presented to the group as symbols of the service they are expected to provide.

On hand to welcome the 14 young women was Sr Salome Ioane. "We invite you to come forward now and dip your hands into this bowl of water," she proclaimed. "Water is the symbol of life. May it bring you strength and coolness, refreshment in the heat of the day, and new energy for God's mission."

"Just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, demonstrating exemplary servant leadership, so we call you to follow his example both in ritual and ministry."

One of the group's mentors, Cathy Harrison of Christchurch, explained the significance of the presentation as the commissioning ritual concluded.

"We have chosen these symbols – bowl and towel, jug and water, as symbols of service," she told the young women.

"Jesus knew well the ancient Judaic tradition of serving, of extending hospitality to strangers. As desert people journeyed, they would be welcomed into homes and communities through this

ritual. The long, dry and dusty journey would often be rewarded with rest and life-giving water, to revitalise and cleanse especially weary feet.

"Jesus chose these symbols at the Last Supper. The washing of feet became synonymous with the servant leadership we encounter so often in the gospels. The women and men who followed Jesus took this model seriously.

"The towel is your badge of service: on your knees before others, in the service of others, and in homage to them – for Christ is there! Except it may not be as romantic

as that sounds. So you will reach out and clutch God's hand – the God who has reached out and stooped to you, loving and needing you – and your towel.

"Catherine McAuley was an exemplary servant leader. Servant leadership could be considered a universal model, but there are some distinguishing features which invite and engage us as Mercy people.

"Servant leadership is a ritual of humility. It is a privilege, an invitation to the sacred ground of serving others. It will involve sacrifice, extending us as we engage in duties of care requiring the

upmost respect.

"Sometimes we will be guests in others' lives. Sometimes we will be hosts. It will be hospitality that unites and informs you of your responsibility as Nga Rangatahi Atawhai Mercy Young Adults.

"Your title is a reminder of this sacred tradition, of how it has continued to be enriched across time and across many centuries. Today, we present to you this jug and bowl and towel, as symbols of your call to serve others."

Trip to Samoa provides two-way enrichment

For a third time Philip Cortesi, principal of St Anne's School in Manurewa, has led a group from his school to Samoa. This year, a party of 45 – equal numbers of staff and pupils from the Mercy-founded school in South Auckland – spent a week in Samoa.

THE GROUP TRAVELLED BY BOAT FROM UPOLO TO SAVAI'I, WHERE they bussted to see blowholes, waterfalls and lava fields, swam with turtles and visited local markets.

Highlights of the visit included time at St Theresa's School at Fusi, which over 10 years has been supported by St Anne's School through its mission outreach programme.

"We took a range of resources on this visit, - books, art supplies, first-aid equipment. We had spare sports uniforms we weren't using, some ukuleles and a couple of guitars," Mr Cortesi explained.

"We had a mixture of things to take. We spread it out and asked people to keep a space in their luggage, packing less than the maximum allowed. This was my second visit for the year. My wife and I had been there in April, so I know now what to take."

Mr Cortesi says the visit has benefits for his own school, providing a cultural experience for staff and pupils which enriches the community in New Zealand. "Of the 600 in our current roll at St Anne's, just on 300 are Samoan. Fifteen of our staff are Samoan. Two of them (a brother and sister) have family who live in Fusi. Our past experience has shown that people gain a better understanding of what we are doing through our mission outreach."

Over the years, the links with Mercy schools in Samoa has developed a close relationship. "I'm at present doing enrolments with new entrants for next year. As I check the details on birth certificates, I can often say 'you're from such and such a village. I know where you're from; I've been there.' The whole tenor of the conversation changes; people become more relaxed. We've made a connection. Each enrolment takes an hour now!

"The trip has really highlighted that relationship. It's been good for our school. While we've been helping St Theresa's, there's been a benefit for our school, as well."

Mr Cortesi says his own staff have returned with a deeper appreciation of resources they might otherwise take for granted. "The reality is that even after all the support we've given, what the school in Samoa has is still quite basic, compared with what we have.

"Our staff say the visit makes them realise that we shouldn't take what we have for granted. We have so much, and we expect it to be there. In Fusi, there is no such expectation. Every small



Chop suey for morning tea, shared by a couple of pupils at St Theresa's School.

thing we give is appreciated, because they have so little. What they treasure is what our teachers simply expect to have, because that's our culture.

"We see people living and working with very little, in comparison with us. When we have Samoan families here who are struggling, in need of things; when they may be late for appointments or fail to turn up, there's a lot more patience and understanding of what it is they have to cope with."

Mr Cortesi says the outreach programme at St Anne's is Mercy-inspired. "We've identified seven core Mercy values – compassion and hope, especially. I can see the same values being embedded in the school at Fusi. What we've been attempting here over the past 10 years reflects the same values that are being nurtured at the school there."

Where to from here? Mr Cortesi is already planning another visit with his wife or another member of staff in March next year. "We want to continue. It's become a school mission, which has grown and has links into the parish, as well.

"It's very noticeable now that when we fund-raise for Samoa, the parish get in behind. When we have raffles and market days, parishioners get involved, because they know it's for their people.

"I'm always thinking of what I could do, if I spent longer there. And I'm reminded constantly of how blessed our own kids are to be in this environment."



LEFT: A typical classroom at St Theresa's School in Fusi, Savai'i, Samoa, showing the resources and class work on display.

RIGHT: Philip Cortesi, principal of St Anne's School in Manurewa – 'I'm reminded constantly of how blessed our own kids are to be in this environment.'



HIPPY – parents helping children to be ready for school

Carmel McLaughlin works as coordinator of HIPPY in the Auckland suburb of Pt England, training tutors to support parents to teach their children skills they need to make a successful start at school. With strong links to our Mercy world, Carmel talks about helping parents to make a difference in their children's lives.....

IT'S NO SURPRISE WHEN HIPPY coordinator Carmel McLaughlin talks about being at home with Mercy values. Like her grandmother and mother before her, she was a pupil at St Mary's College, Ponsonby. And between training as a Karitane nurse and working for Plunket, she spent some time gaining experience at Auckland's Mater Hospital.

HIPPY, for the record, stands for 'Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters.' Brought to New Zealand by Great Potentials in 1992, the programme now operates in 32 bases throughout the country. Carmel is employed by the Mercy community development agency, Te Waipuna Puawai, but works from her base, the old dental clinic at Ruapotaka School in Pt England.

"I feel very privileged to be working as part of the Services team at TWP. Working at Te Waipuna Puawai means being part of a team that is able to provide a wrap-around service to our HIPPY families. We are able to offer childcare, transport to meetings, support and mentoring from social workers and adult education courses.

"About 4pm one recent Friday evening, a HIPPY mother contacted me about needing some food. We were able to go directly to TWP's base in Glen Innes, and there was a food parcel waiting for her.

"The centre in Ellerslie offers such a peaceful, holistic environment. The tough world outside is shut out for a bit, and you can see people begin to relax and sink into this space. It's very precious. We use the centre for our fortnightly HIPPY group meetings, where we can bring our parents together to experience opportunities that will enrich their parenting."

HIPPY is a two-generation programme that works with both parent and child. The scheme enrolls families which have children between the ages of three and a half and four and a half, and supports them to teach their children the skills they need to make a successful start at school.

Carmel draws a contrast between her own experience as a mother, and how she sees parents she works with struggle to feel comfortable in the school setting. "I watched each of my three children go to local colleges and participate in school activities achieving their goals. I was there every moment I could be. And I know that the input from my husband John and me, especially with our daughter who has an intellectual disability and is in mainstream education, has supported them to achieve their full potential and has created a pathway for



HIPPY coordinator Carmel McLaughlin helping parents to be their children's best teachers.

life-long learning.

"So it's quite sad when I see children here having to go into school on their own, struggling with their lack of self confidence, while their parents sit in the car park. These parents clearly feel that it's not their place to get involved in their child's learning and transition to school."

As a HIPPY coordinator, Carmel asks some leading questions as new parents are enrolled. "We ask parents about their education and employment history. In the course of enrolling 50 or 60 parents, I'll often come across several who'll say, 'No, I didn't have any secondary schooling,' or 'I left at 10 or 12'. I'm working with families sometimes where they've never known anyone in their home go to work, where unemployment has gone on for a long time, across the generations."

The HIPPY programme provides encouragement and support for a parent to be the best teacher of their child by actively engaging in their child's learning journey. Through participating in the programme for two years with their child, HIPPY parents will often have the confidence to become more involved in their school communities, on school committees and boards, and will go on to seek more skills and education for themselves.

HIPPY is a hand-up, not a hand-out, Carmel explains. Its great strength is the fortnightly one-hour home visit by the tutors she has chosen and trained. The tutor role-plays activities with the parent, showing them exactly how to teach their child. Every other week, parents attend a group meeting with other parents, learning together and sharing insights.

Parents have to actively participate and complete the activities with their child.

Parents work with their child for 15 minutes a day, five days a week, for 30 weeks of the year, over a two-year span. The programme uses well-developed resources, with a scripted text to help parents be confident about what to say.

HIPPY children arrive at school ready for the experience, says Carmel. "To be ready, they need to be able to sit, to listen and process information and respond to it. HIPPY children begin school doing better than others; they maintain these gains throughout their primary years. And HIPPY can change the whole focus in the home, involving parents positively with their child.

"My job as coordinator is to develop skills that support tutors and parents to work with their children, encouraging and creating enthusiasm when engaging with their children. At tutor training, you'll often catch me showing how to read a book to a child, getting some intonation into my voice as I read. What we're hoping for is that children will come to love books. And that when they go to school, they'll not only know how to hold a book, but will really want to know what's on the next page.

"I try to get some passion into the story, so that tutors will take that home and enjoy reading to their children. Then they'll



HIPPY tutors Pauline Mairangi, Karen Muava'a and Here Paewhenua with Carmel McLaughlin, after receiving their certificates this year.

go into other homes and they'll do the same. And then they'll get feedback – 'my child just watched me, when I read' or 'my child loved the book, and carried it around with him all week'."

HIPPY costs parents \$1 a week, or \$30 a year. Government funding for the project currently sits at 80%, with the shortfall drawn from sponsors and fund-raising. The 20% goes towards children's resources and hospitality for group meetings. Carmel is always looking for support to fund this shortfall. "It helps to provide resources that bring a life-changing opportunity for the families I work with."

Mercy in action

Here's what some HIPPY families report:

'AARON IS DOING WELL AT SCHOOL. HE GOT A CERTIFICATE A FEW WEEKS AGO AND A prize this week.'

'My four-year-old was debating with his big brother about the name of a HIPPY shape. He had learned about oblongs; he was very proud of himself.'

'One of our tutors reported that in the holidays, they visited the beach and her son delighted in naming the star fish he saw in a pool. We had been reading a book called The Rock Pool – Te Kopua Pohato.'

'She loves her new book. I noticed that she had put it in her bag when she went to visit nana.'

A proud mum shared with other parents at a group meeting: "He has started school, and the teacher said he is different from the other kids – he sits on the mat, listens and participates in the activities."

'I didn't know he was so smart! He told me the picture was a kiwi, not just a bird!'

'He enjoyed the exercise in sorting out the cutlery. Now he has an idea about how to set the table.'

'We enjoyed the snowman activity, and the touch-and-tell exercise. They were fun!'

Here's what some HIPPY tutors said after working with their child:

'She didn't take her eyes off me the whole time I was reading.'

'She was waiting when I got home, and told me it was HIPPY time!'

'He found it hard to sit and do HIPPY at first, but now he loves it. We are doing it at a better time, when he is not so tired.'



HIPPY child Amon with a principal's certificate he received after starting school.

From mooring post to waka afloat, it's all mission work

A national mission team, He Waka Tiaki, has emerged to replace Pou Atawhai, the Auckland-based mission team established in 2004. The change, from a focus on Auckland ministries to a much broader perspective, follows the decision by Sisters of Mercy in this country to become a single Congregation.

HEADING THE NEW GROUP IS GABRIELLE Huria in Christchurch, who has the title of te Kaihautu or mission leader; the name is shared with the helmsman of a canoe, who calls for paddlers to stroke as one. Two members of the former Auckland group are Sister of Mercy Teresa Anderson and Dennis Horton. From Dunedin comes Janice McDrury, mission coordinator of Mercy Hospital.

He Waka Tiaki links the team to the governing body, Tiaki Manatu; 'tiaki' means to protect and care for.

Gabrielle Huria reflects on the significance of the name chosen for the new team.

"Names are very important, as they tell the whakapapa or the story of a group. When one is in the flow of life, things fall into place, or the Holy Spirit guides. It was a pleasant surprise when I asked a Kaumatua for a name and he came up with the waka analogy without knowing my title as Kaihautu."

"As a national group we are still finding our rhythm, and I'm deeply grateful for the expertise and knowledge that our collective has.

"The key priority for He Waka Tiaki is to provide the best service possible to all Mercy ministries. Put simply, we seek to keep the flame of Catherine McAuley alive in our world today."

Goals for the coming year include a one-day course in 'the Mercy way' for senior students at all Mercy schools. Students will focus on self-development, life goals and high achievement within the Mercy ethos.

The group has also developed induction packs for new members of Mercy boards and for those appointed to lead Mercy ministries, such as school principals and healthcare CEOs.

External experts will be contracted to help with particular projects as required. Currently Christchurch educationist John Gourley is working on a course to further engage students in the works of Mercy. Rangi Davis has also helped this year in the delivery of Treaty of Waitangi workshops to staff from Mercy Hospice Auckland.

The Pou Atawhai team was formed eight years ago by the four mission staff employed by Mercy Charities in Auckland;



HE WAKA TIAKI: Gabrielle Huria (centre) with Janice McDrury (Mercy Hospital, Dunedin), Teresa Anderson rsm and Dennis Horton (mission facilitators in Auckland) and consultant John Gourley of Christchurch.

BELOW: This diagram developed by Dr Janice McDrury for He Waka Tiaki gives a framework for the group's current strategies to develop leadership in Mercy ministries.

they included Anne Corry who led the team after several years as mission director of Mercy Hospice and Mercy Hospital, and Rangi Davis who served as kaiarataki on the team for 13 years.

Dennis Horton, now in his 14th year as a mission facilitator, says that change has been a constant feature of the work. He was first employed in 1999 by Sisters of Mercy Auckland Charities Ltd, which later became Te Tairere Atawhai Mercy Ministries Ltd. Following the decision by the Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand to create a single Congregation, the organisation was reshaped into Tiaki Manatu Sisters of Mercy Ministries Trust.

"We've had to adjust our thinking and way of working," Dennis Horton explains, "as the parameters of our involvement have expanded, from an entity that focused on ministries in Auckland and Hamilton, to one whose sphere of operation includes not only the whole of New Zealand but Tonga and Samoa as well.

"Back in 2004, the image we chose for our team was based on te pou, the pillar of a building that supports the structure,



carries the weight and creates the space in which people can live and move and do the work to which faith and imagination call them. Te pou was also seen as the pole giving the compass its true bearing, making sure that a diversity of ministries remained centred on Mercy's first and lasting call.

"The image chosen for the new team is he waka, a canoe that can sail in any direction that's needed, versatile and able to adapt to changing needs and climates," says Dennis Horton.

Celebrating another Foundation Day

December 12 is kept in our Mercy world as Foundation Day, remembering the day in 1831 when Catherine McAuley and her two young companions, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley took their vows as the first Sisters of Mercy. The same date was chosen in 2005 by Sisters of Mercy throughout New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga to establish their new single Congregation, Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand.

Several of our Mercy ministries mark Foundation Day with ceremonies to honour staff with long-service awards – Mercy Hospice Auckland, Waiatarua Mercy Parklands and St Catherine's Rest Home are among those with plans to do so this month. The ceremonies usually end by sharing strawberries and ice-cream, a long-standing tradition that probably reflects the joy of our pioneer Sisters from Ireland in discovering summer fruit ripe in December! We join with our companions everywhere in affirming Sisters of Mercy as they renew their commitment to Catherine's vision, and in honouring staff who have served faithfully in Mercy ministries over many years. 'Hurra for foundations,' wrote Catherine in 1841, 'makes the old young and the young merry!' Happy Foundation Day to all our readers!

Dennis Horton, He Waka Atawhai, December 2012



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