

Te Kete Atawhai

MERCY BASKET



FAITH TO THE FORE: At St Catherine's College, Kilbirnie, Year 12 student Stephanie Becker has painted these 3D letters to form part of a display in the school's sacred space, marking the Year of Faith. See feature, pages 6 to 8.



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The Hub – a winning recipe for Methodists and Mercy

By JANICE McDrury, Mission Coordinator, Mercy Hospital Dunedin

A NEW 'MERCY COMMUNITY KITCHEN' IS UP and running in the heart of South Dunedin. The Sisters of Mercy were called to work in this densely populated area of the city by Bishop Michael Verdon in 1896.

Eight sisters arrived in January 1897, and Sisters of Mercy have had a presence in the area ever since.

South Dunedin continues to be one of the poorest areas in New Zealand and this Mercy initiative has been developed in partnership with the Methodist Mission who established The Hub in July last year to support 'families in the early years'.

In the last eight months, 2015 visits by adults and 1072 visits by children have been part of The Hub's activities. Operations Manager John Crawford-Smith reports that the venture "continues to go from strength to strength, and it is now firmly established as a community resource which provides a variety of services.

"We are extremely pleased with the range of users, from both a social and ethnic perspective. It is clear that The Hub has become, as it was intended, a welcoming, supportive and safe haven for anyone wishing to use it.

"While most of this success is due to the staff there, Christine and Wikitoria, the financial support provided by Mercy Hospital cannot be overstated."

The Mercy Community Kitchen hosts a 'Grow, Cook, Eat' programme which invites families to learn about growing their own vegetables and then to discover ways in which items fresh from the garden can be cooked to make delicious and nutritious meals.

A cooking demonstration, which usually accommodates between six and eight people, is followed by participants trying out the recipes, and then taking the meal home to share with their family.

Themes or target groups are usually identified and two new programmes are currently being planned. The first is a joint initiative with the Heart Foundation and two Early Learning Centres (one of them Samoan) regarding healthy eating. This will be delivered in five-week blocks, and will focus on lunch boxes and easy dinners.

The second series will be for a group of eight fathers referred by Probation Services, involved in a five-week Dads' Cooking programme on Thursday afternoons.

On Fridays, families are encouraged to gather round the farm-house style kitchen table, to share conversation over a nutritious meal. Opportunities for courses are advertised on



Clockwise from top left: Setting the table for Sharing Feed; a welcoming entrance - the Hub's reception; play room for children; a zucchini to feed South Dunedin!; the vegetable garden.

The Hub's flier; but passing by the lush garden or attracted by the delicious aroma of home cooking can be enough to entice families to engage with the project.

The 'Grow, Cook, Eat' initiative is part of an array of services offered through The Hub. Parents are offered innovative strategies to enable development of skills and abilities, while children can engage in playgroups targeted to their needs.

Alongside these events are activities aimed at encouraging healthy growth and development; these range from assistance with breastfeeding through to B4 School checks. The Hub is also designed to be a 'one-stop-shop', providing access to agencies such as Budget Advice and Dunedin Community Law Centre.

Silver bells ring this month for St Catherine's

This month, St Catherine's Rest Home, the 28-bed Mercy facility in Ponsonby, celebrates 25 years since it began in 1988. Plans to mark the occasion on the feast of St Catherine, April 29, include a prayer service and afternoon tea. Sister of Mercy Barbara Tacon, who was the home's first manager, remembers its early days....



SR Barbara Tacon... 'we'd be lost without it.'

BARBARA TACON HAD RETIRED FROM nursing twice, when she was invited to take care of eight elderly Sisters of Mercy, on the ground floor of St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby.

Professed as Sister M Adrian in 1949 and graduating as a nurse at Auckland's Mater Hospital in 1955, she worked there as a theatre nurse for around 17 years before going as matron to St Mary's Hospital in Onerahi, Whangarei. She was 63 when she retired after 10 years in that role.

It was 1988 when she was invited to look after a group of older sisters at Ponsonby. "There were eight of them, all very sick. The rest home began that year, although it wasn't until 1989 that the arrangement was formalised, when we gained registration.

"It wasn't called St Catherine's at first; the name came later. But those eight sisters were all there. We needed someone to help with the work, especially with bathing, so we employed Fusi.

"She was renting a house we owned in St Mary's Bay. I talked to her, and she gave me the names of Mele, who worked for us at night, and Supi who came in the

afternoons. We had very little money to pay them. I provided some basic training; they worked alongside me, but there were no formal courses, as there would be today."

Now 84, Barbara admits that her biggest challenge when she started at St Catherine's was to know whom to contact and communicate with. "I'd had very few dealings with the health department or the hospital board in my nursing days. But I enquired and found out.

"I remember having to liaise with WINZ on issues such as pensions; it was difficult. But I got on very well with the health department, as it was in those days. They were excellent, and I made some good friends there. They pointed me in the right direction, and advocated for me."

Looking back, she sees St Catherine's Rest Home as very important. "We'd be lost without it. It has been a tremendous bonus for our sisters. It's been their home; many of them have lived and died there.

"When I think of those first eight sisters, I remember them all as so lovely. Benedict, Angela, Ephraim. Rosario was very interesting; she had cooked at the Mater

for years; a big woman, with a huge heart. She was a lay sister, with very little formal training. But she used to tell me wonderful stories of her early years, and of the great freedom they enjoyed then."

She remembers especially the prayerfulness at St Catherine's. "We had lovely prayer times together. We'd have Office in the afternoon, and the older sisters would assemble out on the porch. They were so beautiful – the spirit was wonderful.

"Later, we turned two rooms into a small chapel. I wasn't allowed to pull the hand-basin out, so we covered it over. Dear Sister Ethna used to round them all up for rosary. They were lovely sisters who had worked very hard, borne the heat of the day."

On top of Barbara's wish list is that the rooms of St Catherine's might be upgraded. "In my time, I had to get bells installed and many other things done. There was a refurbishment later on, but we didn't have much money. Our bursars were very prudent, and saved what they could.

"But it was adequate for the times. Those were days when we had just one habit, and very few personal possessions. But these days, people expect ensuites and all that kind of thing. If ever I have to go to a rest home, I'd choose St Catherine's; it has a lovely atmosphere."



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.

Silver jubilee an invitation 'to walk the talk'

Leading St Catherine's Rest Home into its Silver Jubilee celebrations this month is executive manager Sandra Hunt, who has been in the role for the past 15 years.

THOUGH ITS ORIGINAL RESIDENTS WERE all Sisters of Mercy, these days they include members from other religious Congregations and several lay women who enjoy the peaceful, prayerful lifestyle which is a feature of the facility.

"An integral component of our service delivery is pastoral care," says Sandra Hunt. "A chapel plus a prayer-room on site allow residents to share in daily Mass and the other events of the liturgical year."

The 28-bed rest home is contracted to the Auckland District Health Board to provide health and disability services for people over 65 who are assessed as needing rest home care.

"Our registered nurses and caregivers are committed to Mercy's vision,"

she says. "Staff turnover is very low, which ensures there is continuity and consistency of care."

Sandra is looking forward to this month's 25th anniversary. "It will be a time when all the staff will be able to reflect on all the wonderful residents whom we've cared for over the years. We'll remember the lessons of patience and gentleness in the face of loss they have shared with us, plus the 'oops' moments of daily living."

The central images in the facility's logo are a Mercy cross and Catherine McAuley's famous 'comfortable cup of tea', her last wish before her death for the sisters of her community.

"The spirit of St Catherine's is summed up in our motto – 'Mercy, living with

loving care.' That's a vision which invites us constantly to walk the talk."



ST CATHERINE'S executive manager Sandra Hunt ... low staff turn-over ensures continuity of care.

A caregiver who loves her job

Fusi Uhila came to Auckland in 1984, after her husband died in Tonga. She brought two young children, leaving an older two behind with family. Sister of Mercy Elizabeth McCaver, bursar at St Mary's in Ponsonby offered her a job, and she began working at the convent in January 1985, as a cleaner from eight to one, and a kitchen-hand from five to seven. In 1986, her older two children came to live with her in Auckland.



CAREGIVER Fusi Uhila with resident Sacred Heart Sister Theresa Brophy, on an early-morning stroll to collect the Herald for the rest-home. 'I really love my job.'

WHEN ST CATHERINE'S REST HOME OPENED in 1988, she was invited by manager Sr Barbara Tacon to work as a caregiver. Fusi says she worked alongside two Sisters, Sebastian and Alma, making beds and helping with bathing and showering.

"I bathed eight residents in one day; that was hard work. But in those years, they were all Sisters we cared for; that was very good." She has worked at St Catherine's ever since, apart from a break of a few months in 2010, when she had two knees replaced.

"The hardest work was showering and bathing. I remember at one stage I had to take a break, on the doctor's orders. And Elizabeth and Barbara asked if I could find some others to help. So I brought some from my church; they were good people; they listened to what I had to say and followed my instructions.

"I like caring for older people, they remind me of my grandmother and my mum. I gained experience from watching others; and there were some training courses in the city on making beds. I knew from home, after looking after my three aunts, how to care for older people – I had watched my own mother look after them."

She remembers the night in September 2000 when fire swept through the kitchen of St Mary's Convent, and the rest home

was evacuated. "It was not really my night to work, but my mate asked me to work for her, because it was her birthday night.

"It was a big night. At three in the morning, we had to move the residents onto the porch outside, then to St Mary's School hall and into the old chapel next door. The community from upstairs came to help, but they were in shock. Luckily the ambulance and fire crews came to help to carry residents from upstairs, because we couldn't use the lift. They helped to bring blankets, and took residents to the toilets at the school.

"The next day, I didn't come to work. I asked Sandra to find someone else, because I was very tired."

After 25 years on the job, Fusi has no plans for retiring. "I'll do the work, until I can't do it anymore. I really love my job."

She enjoys the night shift, especially since the operations on her knees. She knows that she can call the duty RN during the night if there is an emergency. She looks forward to holidays, but is glad to work, "because there's no one at home now. I enjoy the company."

Mercy aged care 'a nice big package, never boring'

A news report from the Waikato late last year claimed that nursing graduates were steering clear of aged care. Worried over being in sole-charge with too much responsibility, new grads were also suggesting that aged care was 'boring and tedious'. So Te Kete Atawhai visited Atawhai Mercy Assisi in Hamilton last month, and spoke with two RNs and a nursing student on placement. Here's what they had to say.....

SUMI KUMAR HAS WORKED IN AGED CARE FOR more than three decades, on both sides of the Tasman. She feels quite confident in her work, but agrees that it's always nice to have another nurse to confer with.

She insists that aged care is never boring. "Continuity is something I like about long-term care. Going through the journey with our residents is amazing. We're told not to get attached to them, but we do, because it's human nature.

"Making sure they are comfortable is what I like to do. I feel that if I do a good job here, someone may do the same for my parents, and one day for me," said Sumi.

She agrees that, to some extent, aged care nurses need to be a special kind of person. "It involves respecting older people and showing them that they count. They are our elders, and unless we have the skill to recognise that, we couldn't work well in this area."

She disagrees strongly with the comparison some make between older people and babies. "While their needs may be similar, older people are completely different from babies. At 90 or 100, they have such an experience of life.

"They've lived through wars and depressions, done so many things. Babies are cute, and they need to be nurtured. But older people need to be respected for who they are. You can never take working here for granted."

Donna Glossop is a recent graduate, who began working at Atawhai Mercy Assisi about four months ago. She's glad to have found a job, after looking for almost a year. "There are only so many new-grad positions available, and lots miss out."

Before coming to Atawhai Assisi, she worked for an agency as a sole-charge nurse "and that was really scary."

At Atawhai Assisi there are always two RNs on every hospital shift. "I feel absolutely encouraged working here, alongside another nurse. Though I do my own rounds, I know that there's always someone with more experience just around the corner. They're really good and helpful.

"I haven't had a lot of experience of people dying. At times like that, I'm happy to let others take over the reins; I learn by watching. I wouldn't feel comfortable working on my own."

Donna agrees that in aged care, there's always something happening. "Lots of interesting things, lots of laughs. You get to know residents because they're here for a good length of time. They're not just patients, they're a person. You develop a connection with them, making sure that they're comfortable and have everything they need."

Donna believes that aged care is a very good place for a new graduate to begin. "You've got basic medical work, mental health issues and dementia, wound care. It's a nice big package. I don't think it's boring at all. You get to know the people – residents and their families."



NURSES at Atawhai Mercy Assisi, Sumi Kumar and Donna Glossop. 'There's always something happening here – lots of interest and laughs.'

Donna admits that while aged care is under-funded, there are some benefits about working at Atawhai Assisi. "I don't do night shifts, because with young children, I don't want to. In some other hospitals you don't have that choice. This facility is more accommodating and family-friendly."

She says there's a family atmosphere at Atawhai Assisi. "The sisters here are absolutely wonderful. Not being a religious person myself, least of all a Catholic, I find them really down to earth."

Sumi agrees that the support from the Sisters of Mercy on the staff is amazing. "If someone is not well, you can always call on them. It's nice to know that they're here when we need them. The time when people die is a privileged, life-changing moment. I'd never take over from a family member at the end, but if I'm there, I know it's a special moment."

Sam Wenham is a student nurse at Wintec, in her second of three years of study, and has just completed a four-week placement at Atawhai Assisi. It's been really good, she said, "because staff have been so welcoming and willing to explain what's happening, why and how things are done.

"I've felt very comfortable assisting them, because they've wanted to involve me, especially in my first few days. It's always a bit nerve-racking, turning up on your first placement, not knowing what to expect. But staff here have been fantastic."

She has been impressed, too, by CEO Judy Hindrup, "whose passion for aged care was apparent, right from my induction day.

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From St Mary's College Auckland

'Faith and chips' a focus for Year of Faith

Senior students at St Mary's College, Auckland, are hosting a "Faith and Chips" evening for their colleagues from other Catholic colleges in the city. The evening begins with Mass and is followed up with hot chips and time for students to socialise.

MRS VERONICA FOUHY MULLIN, DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS Studies, says the event is just one of several ways in which St Mary's students are exploring the Year of Faith. Around 100 Year 12 and Year 13 students from Auckland Catholic secondary schools are expected to participate.

Each year, St Mary's College chooses a Mercy value as its theme for the year. "This allows our students to connect with the value, and to understand the wider implications of being Catholic Mercy women in New Zealand today," says Mrs Fouhy Mullin.

"To tie in with the Year of Faith, we are focusing this year on 'Compassion through Faith'. Our founder, Catherine McAuley, believed strongly in the value of compassion, and it is her ideal which we try to live out in our school today.

"Compassion is well reflected in the acts of service provided by our junior students for our seniors at exam time. They serve 'comfortable cups of tea' and homemade biscuits to senior students before they go into their exams twice a year. These are acts of service close to Mother McAuley's own heart."



FLASHBACK: Catholic senior students at last year's 'Faith and Chips' evening at St Mary's College, Auckland.

From St Mary's College in Wellington

Leadership means sharing gifts with others

Students of St Mary's College, Wellington, will focus in this Year of Faith on developing their own spirituality through Catholic liturgies, as well as through outreach to those in need, explains Judy Houlahan, Director of Religious Studies at the school.

THE YEAR BEGAN WITH A LEADERSHIP MASS, WHEN CELEBRANT Fr James Lyons challenged students to share the gifts which have

Catholics around the world are currently observing a Year of Faith, celebrating the past with gratitude and looking to the future with confidence.

The Year began last October, with the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, and a call from Pope Benedict to all members of the church, to open wide the door of faith with renewed hope and optimism. The Year will end on November 24, the feast of Christ the King.

"THE YEAR OF FAITH IS A CHANCE TO REFLECT ON WHAT it means to be Catholic in the world today, and on what a difference this makes in our lives," says Bishop Pat Dunn, secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference in New Zealand.

"It's a chance to understand more profoundly the foundations of our Christian faith, and to tell the story of our faith to others.

"It's very fitting that the Year of Faith begins on the anniversary of Vatican II, since this signalled the beginning of significant change in our church's history, with a time of renewal and increased participation in church life," says Bishop Dunn.

"Catholics around the country will be taking part in events designed to help deepen their faith and their sense of belonging to the church, he says.

Te Kete Atawhai invited Mercy colleges throughout New Zealand to provide some snapshots of how the Year of Faith is being marked by their communities. Their responses are featured in this display.

Designed by Sr Anna Nicholls, the candle from St Catherine's College displays a Mercy cross and the Year of Faith logo, featuring a boat, symbol of the church, and a sail bearing the initials of Jesus Christ.



YEAR 13 students of St Mary's College, Wellington pray together after receiving their Leadership badges for 2013. Loving service to others is their focus in this Year of Faith.

been given to them by God.

"To do this they need to show patience, kindness and compassion to those around them," said Ms Houlahan. "The challenge from Fr Lyons was that we are all called to lead others in this way."

"Towards the end of Mass, Year 13 students were called individually to receive their leadership badge; they then shared a prayer in which they accepted their role, asking God to help them to be the best leaders."

June at St Mary's College is kept as Mission Month, when students work to raise money for Takuilau College, a Catholic school in Tonga where Sisters of Mercy are involved. "This year, we hope to have personal contact with individual students at Takuilau. This will show love of neighbour in a more personal way," Ms Houlahan said.

St Mary's College is currently collecting cans for the Wellington City Mission food bank. "Our Vinnies group is collecting Easter eggs to share with people in various organisations around Wellington who might otherwise miss out."

"The Year of Faith is important to us as a Mercy College, reminding us to focus primarily on Jesus and to live out his call to us through the corporal and spiritual works of Mercy."

From Carmel College in Milford....

40ks in 40 days

As the Year of Faith began last year, commemorating the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Year 12 students at Carmel College undertook a film study of the life of Blessed John XXIII. Bridget Ryan, who heads the Religious Education Department, says the idea was to try and understand even a little about the man who went on to convene Vatican II, and to learn about the Council's impact on our church.

"INFORMED BY THIS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL teaching, the students then spent time discussing how they could lead the school in 2013 in at least one initiative that was overtly Catholic, as a means of witnessing to the faith," says Mrs Ryan.

"One of the results of this has been that in this year, when we are focusing on our Mercy value of Care of the Poor and Vulnerable, Carmel College has made as its main priority fund-raising for Caritas Aotearoa (the Bishops' agency for justice, peace and development).

"40ks in 40 days' is a sponsored walk initiative led by students not only to raise money for Caritas, but also to help students to focus on the period of Lent in preparation for the great Easter festival. It's a neat little package for our students, really – living the Mercy value, supporting our Church, and linking it all to a reflection of the Faith."

The two Year 13 students who came up with the idea and who led the project are Michaela Fraser and Injara Heller Rojas. Through a specially prepared sponsorship booklet, they invited Carmel students to get family and friends to sponsor them to walk 40ks over the 40 days of Lent.

Students and teachers were welcomed to participate in walking or running the 40ks; the pair hoped to raise a substantial amount through the scheme. A North Shore gym chain offered the use of their treadmills in exchange for a gold-coin donation to help participants reach their 40km goal.

All funds raised for Caritas will be going to Oceania, to provide assistance for Pacific Islands such as Samoa. "The aim is to make a difference in the lives of people who are experiencing poverty or injustice," the organisers explained. For tax purposes, they are providing receipts for every donation over \$5.



CARMEI College students Michaela Fraser and Injara Heller Rojas, who initiated the '40ks in 40 days' project during Lent. Funds raised will go towards programmes in the Pacific led by Caritas Aotearoa.

From St Catherine's College, Kilbirnie

Faith in God and self key themes for this year

Asking teenagers about faith has proved easier than she had imagined, says Jenny O'Brien, Director of Religious Studies at St Catherine's College in Wellington.

"OUR GIRLS ARE ABLE TO LIST many good reasons to have faith, including joy, hope, compassion and love," Mrs O'Brien reports. "Year 10 students are learning to make links between their personal journey and the journey that is faith, by designing 'hands' which illustrate both of these.

"Our new college candle, made by Sister of Mercy Anna Nicholls and incorporating the Year of Faith logo, has provided a strong focus for Assembly prayers."

This year's Spirit Captain at St Catherine's, Lagi Aukusitino, has initiated a prayer group which she hopes will help girls with their personal journeys. "I would like to see girls believing more strongly in themselves," says Lagi. "They need to strengthen their faith in themselves. I hope that by setting up this prayer group, I can introduce them to ways in which faith can build their self-confidence, as it did for me."

Mrs O'Brien believes that faith in God and in oneself are keys to a confident journey through teenage years. "I hope that girls at our school can work on exploring these two themes during this Year of Faith."



HANDS of Year 10 students at St Catherine's College link faith and life.

From Villa Maria College, Christchurch

Video clips, quiz night, youth Mass proposed

To mark the Year of Faith, students at Villa Maria College have come up with a range of ideas to celebrate this event, reports Maria Nonis who is Service Captain at the school this year.

"WE ARE INTERESTED IN creating a few short video CLIPS which show students speaking about what their faith means to them. The clips would be available on the College website for other students to see; they could also be played at assemblies from time to time, for the rest of the school to watch."

Another idea, says Maria Nonis, is to create a pamphlet outlining 30 different ways in which families can celebrate the Year of Faith at home. "The pamphlet would be available online and in hard-copy format, for each girl to

take or access at home with her family."

Another idea is to hold a quiz night involving all the Catholic schools in Christchurch. "This would be a fun night that would bring all our schools together." The last idea which Villa's service team is interested in exploring is a Youth Mass for students from Villa Maria and St Thomas of Canterbury.

"These are our ideas for celebrating the Year of Faith," says Maria Nonis. "We hope we'll be able to achieve as many of these as possible."



MARIA NONIS ... ideas abound for Villa Maria.

Mercy aged care 'a nice big package, never boring'

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It's nice to meet an aged care executive who genuinely cares about the service provided. Judy is definitely an advocate for what happens here."

Sam has found the hospital care at Assisi "really diverse and challenging. Because residents come in with different needs, with some requiring minimal support, others who need a lot more. So the variety is quite stimulating."

Assisi has a well-established multi-disciplinary team, says Sam; as well as RNs, it includes physios, diversional therapists, healthcare assistants, the hair-dresser and pastoral care staff. "I'm really impressed with the level of care. All staff seem to care genuinely for the residents, who are treated as individual people, as opposed to the patient in Room 28 or collectively as a group."

Sam disagrees entirely with the suggestion that aged care is boring or tedious. "Especially at hospital level, you get great variations and differing needs. I don't believe it could ever be boring. And with a chapel on site and sisters involved, the spiritual side is well looked after, too."



STUDENT nurse Sam Wenham ... aged care 'really diverse and challenging.'

Sabbatical – a chance to reflect on life's journey

Twelve religious sisters have just finished a six-week sabbatical at Te Ngakau Waiora, the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Auckland. Seven in the group were from Australia, the others from New Zealand; most were Sisters of Mercy. Offered as a time of rest, with opportunity for renewal through prayer, reading and reflection, the six-week programme included a pilgrimage to Northland, with New Zealand author Joy Cowley as spiritual guide. Two of the participants share their impressions....

ON HER FIRST-EVER VISIT TO NEW Zealand, Sister of Mercy Helen Baguley hails from Gunnedah, a rural community in north-western New South Wales. A secondary teacher for most of her adult life, she taught science and religion – "a lovely combination" - before sharing in parish work and adult education.

She spent seven years in her small Congregation's administration, until about a year ago when it joined the new Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. "If we were still on our own, we'd have just 15 sisters; but since we belong to the whole, we've now got 900."

She is to move shortly to Papua New Guinea, to support an initial formation programme. "I'll be moving into a completely new phase of my life. And I thought this would be a marvellous time to be with the Lord and to see where this is all leading."

Eileen Brosnahan rsm, who lives at St Mary's Convent in Thorndon, Wellington, has spent 40 years in the classroom, primary and secondary, before editing the Seventh Form RE programme for New Zealand. She was also the Wellington coordinator for the adult Walk by Faith programme; she spent a year in Brussels, working in the international secretariat of Pax Christi International.

"I'd done renewal courses previously. I felt it was time to be renewed again, but didn't want to go overseas. I looked for something in New Zealand, and suddenly it appeared."

For both, the pilgrimage to Northland was the highlight of the six weeks. The bus trip included visits to the Hokianga with a stop to see the giant kauri tree Tane Mahuta, to Motuti marae and Hata Maria Church where the remains of Bishop Pompallier are interred, to the Peter Chanel Shrine and Pompallier House at Russell and to the Treaty House at Waitangi.

Eileen had been before to Totara Point and to Waitangi, but "Motuti is out of the way," she said. Leading the Eucharist there was Pa Henare Tate "who was so relaxed and non-threatening. His Maori just took us right in. The homily was about an hour long, but nobody seemed to notice the time."

For the Australians, a welcome onto the marae at Motuti "was amazing, a completely new experience," said Helen. "Being the first in line, I was really apprehensive about the hongi, unsure about whether I put my face forward first. But eventually we got our noses to touch and our breaths to meet. The lovely man who greeted me said 'Good on ya!' I was right then, and could go round the rest of them with no trouble."

Local people were welcoming and the hospitality was unbelievable. At the Peter Chanel Shrine in Russell, they'd been expecting a sandwich and a cup of tea, but locals put on a full meal – "only a handful of them, so gracious," said Eileen. Local Marist Fr Damian Dempsey celebrated Mass. "So relaxed in his use of te reo Maori."

"He knew a lot about Catherine McAuley, too," said Helen. "We were so much a part of it, because of this."

At the Mission House in Russell, manager Kate Martin spoke with authority in telling the Pompallier story. "Historians have glossed over Pompallier's contribution to the Treaty, ensuring



SABBATICAL participants Eileen Brosnahan rsm from Wellington, and Helen Baguley rsm from Gunnedah, New South Wales. New insights on life's journey.

freedom of religion for all New Zealanders," said Helen. "Kate was unafraid to say what other writers have still to learn."

Eileen agreed. "Maori are often still blamed for the torching of Kororareka – but it was the English guns that set fire to the town after Maori had fled. The truth still isn't being told."

A former history teacher, she admits to being "overwhelmed by how those French brothers and priests came here as strangers. I'd always felt as though I was part of an Irish church. It suddenly struck me how the French had come before the Irish, and that it's all part of a bigger picture of how the faith came to New Zealand.

"The strands that are there are all part of God's big plan. The French and the Irish both brought a special flavour. And now we're being challenged by our Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Samoan and Tonga communities – all these have a different experience of the same Catholic faith.

"The French presence hit me physically, up there in that house. Despite the enmity between France and Britain at that time, the French brothers and priests came to Russell, and then down to Marlborough and Nelson. Then the Irish came, and now it's being

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PA Henare Tate shows visitors on the Sabbatical pilgrimage a painting of Bishop Pompallier on the wall of the meeting house at Motuti marae. "We have a new appreciation of ancestors," says Australian Sister of Mercy Helen Baguley. "We have that richness, but we don't celebrate it in that open way. It's very real for Maori; why can't it be real for us, too?"

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enriched by the new ethnic groups coming in. Into it all came the Sisters of Mercy, with something of our own to add to the mix."

Helen said the Australian sisters especially have gained a new appreciation of ancestors. "Just walking onto a marae, seeing the magnificent weavings and carvings, and hearing Maori say 'this is our great-grandfather.'

"It made me think, we've got all that richness, but we don't celebrate it in that open way. It's very real for Maori; why can't it be real for us, too?"

Both sisters were appreciative of Joy Cowley's input. "She was our spiritual companion, helping us to focus on the deeper meaning of the whole process," said Eileen. "Her reflections were always right to where we were – the forest, the marae, the whole of creation.

"She gave us a focus on the bigger picture. When she stopped, there'd be just silence. It was prayerful; she connected us with our surroundings." Helen agreed. "None of it was lengthy input, but it was always spot-on, and an invitation to recognise that we are living in God. I found it very valuable."

The six weeks were very well planned, and the pair paid tribute

to local Sisters of Mercy Rita Vessey and Cathryn Wiles-Pickard for their attention to detail. "They walked the pilgrimage before us, deciding where we might go and what we could do," Helen said.

"They had their eyes and ears open for extra things going on in the community. The day after we arrived, they pointed us to a Chinese festival being held nearby; the following week, there was a Waitangi Day celebration; later, there was a Pacific festival at the Cloud on the waterfront."

The six weeks included input on life as a journey led by God, reflection on the gift of years and the process of transition, and a four-day retreat led by Marist Bishop Stuart O'Connell.

"It's been a deepening of what I had before," Eileen concluded.

"I haven't learnt a lot that is new. But what I had has been strengthened and affirmed. It has supported me in my spiritual journey as I walk into the ageing years."

Helen concurred. "I haven't learnt anything new. But I've gained new perspectives on what I already believe. And I've been challenged to go further in some areas. The sabbatical has encouraged my own creativity. I hope I can stay in this mystery place and realise that I don't have to have answers, but can enjoy just asking questions, waiting to see what happens."



PARTICIPANTS on a six-week sabbatical at Mercy Spirituality Centre ready to board their bus for a four-day pilgrimage to Northland. Pictured with the 12, including seven Sisters of Mercy from Australia, is Terry the tour bus driver and (fifth from left) New Zealand writer Joy Cowley who was their spiritual companion.

Mercy spirituality – contemplation in action

Late last year, leadership of Te Ngakau Waiora Mercy Spirituality Centre passed from Sister of Mercy Rita Vessey, who led the centre for 13 years, to newly appointed Chief Executive, Jennifer Reid. Canadian-born and specialising in medieval studies, Dr Reid talks about her appointment and what Mercy offers in this Year of Faith....

AS THE FIRST LAY WOMAN TO LEAD the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Epsom, Jennifer Reid sees her appointment as a sign of real openness on the part of the Sisters of Mercy. "They've looked for someone with an affinity with Mercy's mission and charism to make the bridge between themselves and the wider community."

"It's a sign of their commitment to faith that the sisters can look at their own journey and see that there's room for non-religious to play a part in their ministries," says Dr Reid. "I think that's really exciting."

It's a trend she has seen developing in Canada, where a good friend now heads the campus ministry of a Catholic college at the University of Toronto. "She's a lay person, and a woman. It's interesting to see these changes taking place. And it's something I've noticed in New Zealand, too. But then this is the land of Kate Sheppard, after all!"

Dr Reid praises what she describes as "a creative transformation" – not knocking down what exists, but finding ways to build on what is there. "It's so easy for people to feel threatened and to

act from a point of panic and confusion. But I think the Mercies here have recognised the potential for creative change and found a way to move forward.

"The challenge for me is to ask how I stay faithful to the commitments the centre has made in the past, and to the position the centre holds within the Mercy family, and still provide that sense of creative transformation."

Dr Reid says she used to think of New Zealand as a kind of upside-down Canada. "There are numerous cultural cross-overs, attitudes and similarities. Our temperaments are quite similar. To that extent, it's quite easy to slot in."

"But once you've been here for a while, and got over the clean-green image and been to a few beaches, you begin to realise that there are a lot of differences and things you have to change your thinking on."

She comes from Toronto, a metropolitan area of 5.6 million and a heavily urban scenario. With a more rural context and a smaller population, New Zealand also has quite a different ethnic mix. "So I often feel I am negotiating a

very alien world. I don't identify with the Pacific at all, but with the North Atlantic. And that's a very different orientation."

She admits to being repeatedly shocked by some of the differences relating to the common good, and the kind of social commitments New Zealanders make collectively as a population. "Issues like child poverty, childhood diseases, living conditions, and your reluctance as a nation to address these issues – I find that really disturbing, to be honest. Canada is more socialist-minded."

Dr Reid says there are continual arguments in her own head about the Martha and Mary roles. "I'm torn between action and contemplation. What's amazing about the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy in general is that they stand for an active spirituality. It's not one to the detriment of the other; it's both together.

"Spirituality is the thing in us that causes us to use the language we use, to move through the world as we do, to make the choices we make. What's great about Mercy is that there's room for everyone in its outlook. Yet it doesn't let



Jennifer Reid has lectured in medieval studies, but she has also taught highland dancing. "I haven't taught it for several years now, but I had my own dance studio back home. I'll be starting one off here soon, I hope. That's the thing about spirituality – it's not something you do just sitting on a chair. It's your whole body; it's another way of celebrating."

anyone off the hook. Mercy's core values are important to me, too, particularly in the social justice area.

"Look at Catherine McAuley, and you see one individual who has such a passion for social justice and such a blinding concern for her own people, that she just put her best foot forward. In doing so, she created an energy and an impetus for change, and that transformative energy lives on.

"What's more, it's an action that anyone can enter into and take on. So I think that the radical piece of the Mercy story is its belief that one person can make the difference as they are. For the Year of Faith, that's the one thing the Mercy story can support us in. Whatever our greatest concern is, we have the power, the energy and the ability, as we are, to do something about it."

Dr Reid believes that's the beauty of our world right now – "we're able to walk through the doors that open and seize the opportunity for dialogue with others and stand alongside them. That's another Mercy thing – I'm going to be beside you, I'm going to be here. Using whatever medium or tool it takes to do that; I think that's very much the Mercy way."

Talk about commitment to Te Tiriti, and Dr Reid admits that this is something new to her. "I've read the

Treaty and been to Waitangi, I've seen the document in Wellington, but it leaves me still with mixed feelings. I come from another colony, established in a very different era with a different set of problems because of how it began and evolved.

"Having experienced Waitangi Day, I ask, what does this actually mean to New Zealanders and to Maori? I guess what I come up with is that we're all responsible for this story and for the care of Aotearoa New Zealand. This is 2013, and we're only going to move forward. In this context, we need to look at our commitment to the land, and to put ourselves in each other's places.

"It's reflected in our name – Te Ngakau Waiora. The Maori names chosen for our Mercy organisations are very deep and full of meaning, and we need to take some of that on board. Te ngakau – the heart, seat of affections and feelings, 'the seat of the soul'; wai – flowing water, the memory of things heard; and ora – life.

"So this is the place of life-giving waters, how amazing is that? Spirit, earth, personhood, continuing journey, memory – all of these things, wrapped up in one name. I think this is exactly the kind of thing that resonance with the Treaty of Waitangi indicates."

Mercy 163 years in Aotearoa NZ

AS SISTERS OF MERCY AND THEIR COMPANIONS GET together this month, on the weekend nearest to April 9, to remember the arrival of the first sisters on these shores, the focus of their thanksgiving is the chapel built by Mother Cecilia Maher and opened by Bishop Pompallier at Easter 1866. The historic building in Ponsonby is currently being reroofed and already boasts a new spire and cross, constructed in stainless steel.

The shingles pictured here are being replaced by pre-painted long-run colour steel, which is closer to the original galvanised iron. Nails are being used at eight-foot intervals to create a pattern similar in appearance to the original roofing. Some of the purlins under the shingles have rotted and have been replaced, but the original ceiling remains intact.

The exterior of the chapel will be repainted once the roof has been completed, and new concrete paths will be laid, providing easier access for wheel-chairs. The chapel is used regularly for class liturgies by pupils of St Mary's College next door, and is a popular venue for weddings of those associated with the school.

The substantial cost of the renovations has been borne by the Congregation. The Sisters of Mercy are aware that the chapel is a taonga of great significance, and their hope is that it will be sound now for another 100 years or more.



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