



## Matariki – celebrating milestones old and new

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**Do you remember learning at primary school that New Zealand was discovered in 1769 by Captain James Cook? Or perhaps you were taught that in fact he rediscovered the land, since it had first been sighted by Abel Tasman 127 years earlier and that it was after this discovery that we became known by the Dutch name Nieuw Zeeland.**

In any event, we can be sure that very soon rangatahi throughout New Zealand will grow up with a more accurate version of how and by whom their country was found. Including the remarkable navigational skills of tangata whenua, the first people to reach these shores centuries before sailors from Europe appeared on the scene.

Next year sees the introduction of a new history curriculum in New Zealand schools. From Year One to Year 10, students will have a chance to gain a new take on their place in the world, on the story of where they have come from and on the forces that have shaped their nation. A spearhead for designing the new curriculum was a petition from students at Otorohanga High School, seeking recognition of the true facts about the land wars fought between Māori and the colonial forces of the day. Not all the facts in our history are flattering for one side or the other, but the new curriculum attempts to see that the true story is told.

The way history is taught has a bearing on how well we can put ourselves in the shoes of traditions other than our own; learning to understand and feel at home with other cultures is an important part of kotahitanga or unity within our nation. It is in that sense that we should look forward to Matariki, the event being celebrated as a public holiday for the first time on Friday 24 June. Linked to the appearance of the cluster of stars also known as the Pleiades, Matariki marks the beginning of the Māori new year, traditionally a time for celebrating harvest,

remembering family members who have died and sharing stories significant to whānau and family.

Announcing Government's decision to introduce the public holiday, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described it as a distinctly New Zealand holiday. 'It is a time for reflection and celebration, and our first public holiday that recognises Te Ao Māori,' she said. 'It's a way to acknowledge our nation's unique and shared identity and the importance of tikanga Māori.' Implicit in her comments is an invitation to honour what Mercy's Treaty policy names as the principle of letting go, of yielding our inherited ways of thinking to new ideas and new patterns of living. This may involve us in conversion, a change of mind and heart and a willingness to shift from a position of

dominance to walking alongside our Māori sisters and brothers as equals.

No one knows better than Mercy's people how important stories are for keeping the original vision and dream of our endeavours alive. It is by remembering the courage and sense of purpose shown by our founding sisters that we draw energy for today and tomorrow. Our challenge is not to do what they once did, but to draw from their



witness to Mercy in their day lessons for our own. Catherine McAuley saw at first hand the hardships that had resulted from penal laws in Ireland; she knew what a difference education and skills training could make, especially to women and girls. The driving force in her life was that no one should be excluded from the all-embracing and tender love of her God.

Perhaps we could spend time marking Matariki this month by thanking God for the chance to live in this wonderful land, for the bountiful harvests it produces, and for the way that Māori and Pākehā are able now to live and strive together in Aotearoa New Zealand today. May Catherine and our other Mercy founders inspire us to be stars in our turn, that others may enjoy what we have received in mercy's name. Mauri ora!