

Imaging Mercy Today

Praying for our living and dead

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Perhaps it was because the spectre of death was never far from Catherine McAuley and her contemporaries that the links between the living and the dead in those days were so strong.

When her good friend, Sr Elizabeth Moore, writes in March 1840 of a young sister's death in Limerick, Catherine replies that the community at Baggot Street was delighted and astonished to hear of the details. "'Oh, that's not death,' they all exclaimed," writes the foundress. "It was indeed a heavenly ceremony – more so than any reception or profession; it was like a grand entrance into Paradise."

Catherine goes on to tell Elizabeth of a priest who had called after the death of one of their own community, offering congratulations at having another friend in heaven. "I asked him if it would be wrong to hope that a community was now formed there. He answered, 'What are they here for, but to prepare for heaven? They ought to go as soon as they are ready'."

Twenty-first century health and living standards may find us less hasty to quit this mortal coil than our 19th century forebears; yet we can still share with them the sense of being joined with those who have gone before us. The two days of Christian observance which begin this month are flip sides of the same great coin – death does not end life, but transforms it. All Saints Day honours all who have reached their destiny; All Souls Day is a chance to pray for those who may still be journeying there. Both affirm our faith that, whether we live or die, we are sustained by God's merciful love.

Catholic belief in the communion of saints, uniting the spirits of living with those who have gone ahead, is mir-

rored in Māori and Pacific people's awareness of tūpuna. A formal visit to any marae will show how ancestors continue to be honoured, whether in the photos that gaze from whare nui walls or in the carvings that decorate the posts and beams. None of us is 'an island, entire of itself'; we carry within us the imprint of those who have lived before us, and our own spirit will help to shape – for good or ill – the lives of those who follow.

In these hi-tech times, Mercy International offers three places on its worldwide website where prayers or reflections can be added. Callers can visit Catherine's tomb, to post a prayer or read what others have requested. Or they can pray especially for Catherine's intercession, as part of the cause for her canonization. The last option is to add a greeting to the seasonal reflections that celebrate Mercy



MERCY TODAY: Sr Frances Stewart rsm, who helps to update the white board outside the chapel at St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby; two lists invite prayers for the living and the dead.

All saints together

We stand on holy ground,
and we are holy, too.
For God's wairua dwells in us,
a seed planted in time,
destined for glory.

We pray for those we love
who have gone before us;
we ask God to care for them,
to lead them by grace
to life unending.

We join in gladness
with saints in every age.
Their lives inspire us still;
we hope to be with them
in God's own presence.
Mauri ora! Amen.

events throughout the year. Whatever their choice, it's a chance for Mercy sisters and companions to be part of a global network that links hearts and souls around the world.

Closer to home is the whiteboard outside the chapel at St Mary's Convent in Ponsonby, adjoining the offices where the latest in these reflections on the spiritual works of mercy is taking shape. The walk past the chapel is a regular reminder of our local faith community and the people it reaches out to embrace. One list records those who have died in recent days; the other names those who are ill or facing a crisis of some kind. We are invited to remember them in love and commit them to God's care, until the time when our own name is added to the board. It's nice to be part of a community that remembers, because it knows that this is what God does, too. - Dennis Horton

Mercy's window on the world

The appointment of former Chilean president Michelle Bachelot to lead a new United Nations body to focus on issues relating to women has been hailed by *Mercy Global Concern*.

Aimed at improving the lives of women and girls around the world, the new body will be known officially as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, but is more likely to be referred to as *UN Women*.

Sister of Mercy Deirdre Mullan, who heads *Mercy Global Concern* at the UN headquarters in New York, has praised the initiative, announced last month by UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon.

"This is one of the most amazing developments I've seen in my time here."

Deirdre Mullan says the new body has been set up by the United Nations after years of difficult negotiations, and will merge four separate UN divisions which have been dealing with women's and gender issues.

"UN diplomats say that four years of negotiations between Western nations and developing countries have been



Michelle Bachelot will head *UN Women* - welcomed by *Mercy Global Concern*

tough, because of varying views on women's rights, Deirdre Mullan reports.

"*UN Women* will focus on ensuring that all UN agencies and organizations live up to their expectations to gender equality,

Michelle Bachelot, 58, headed a centre-left administration in Chile from 2006 until

March this year, when she was replaced by conservative Sebastian Pinera. Last year she was listed by *Forbes* magazine as one of the world's most powerful women.

Ms Bachelot, who attended high school in the US for two years, was arrested in Chile in 1975 along with her mother by the rightist military junta that took over the country in a coup two years before.

Exiled to Australia, she later moved to Germany before returning in 1979 to Chile where she studied medicine, specializing in pediatrics.

"Ms Bachelot brings to this critical position a history of dynamic global leadership, highly honed political skill, and uncommon ability to create consensus," said Ban Ki-moon in announcing her appointment.

"I am confident that under her strong leadership, we can improve the lives of millions of women and girls throughout the world."

Ms Bachelot's selection follows the UN general secretary's appointment earlier this year of his first ever special representative on sexual violence in conflict.

Young White Ribbon man leads the way

Young people can be leaders to promote positive change for families, says White Ribbon Ambassador, Johnny O'Donnell.

As a student at Nelson College, he co-founded Students Against Violence Everywhere, a youth action group formed to end violence in the community.

He has been chosen by the Families Commission to be a national White Ribbon ambassador.

"Family is such an important part of our lives, but it is an environment that can be both nurturing and damaging for youth," he says.

"Having positive relationships with our parents is rewarding in so many ways, and yet too many teenagers experience just how destructive violence can be to families."

Research sourced by the Families Commission shows that when youth experience family violence, not only are relationships jeopardized, but so is the possibility of youngsters having a healthy, non-violent relationship with their own children.

"When I was 16 we started SAVE in Nelson, because we could see the effects of violence within families in our community," Johnny explains.



SOLIDARITY: Men in Nelson show support for White Ribbon Day at a rally organized by *Students Against Violence Everywhere*. SAVE coordinator Johnny O'Donnell (left) holds the banner.
(Photo: Marion van Dijk, *Nelson Mail*)

"We had friends who were victims, so we decided to use our voices to help end the violence. The White Ribbon campaign recognised the work we were doing, and invited me to become an ambassador, which was a real honour.

"White Ribbon asks men to be leaders and to make change possible. That's a

sentiment I totally applaud. If we want our world to be a better place, we need to take responsibility.

"It's no good expecting some super hero to save us. That only happens in the movies. If youth want change, then we need to show leadership, not leave it to others.

"I want a world where there is no vio-

'If youth want change, we need to show leadership, not leave it to others'

- Johnny O'Donnell

lence in the home. Where relationships are built on mutual respect, and where people my age can have great relationships with their parents, not ones built on fear."

The White Ribbon campaign encourages men to talk openly about family violence, to support men who want to change their abusive behavior, and to challenge comments and actions by men that are abusive.

White Ribbon Day, Nov 25, is an international day when people- especially men - wear a white ribbon to show that they won't condone or remain silent about violence against women.