

Karanga Atawhai

The voice of Whānau Mercy Ministries APRIL 2025



Demisemiseptcentennial:

A New Word for a Momentous Occasion

Here's a new word for many of us – demisemiseptcentennial – shared by Sarah Dwan, Principal of St Mary's College, Auckland, as the school prepares to celebrate a remarkable milestone: 175 years since its founding.

9 April 2025 marks a significant date for the entire Mercy whānau, commemorating the arrival of the first Sisters of Mercy to Auckland. Throughout the year, we will gather for a number of special events to celebrate this milestone – including 175 years of St Mary's College, Wellington, founded by Bishop Viard 11 years before the Sisters reached the capital, and 75 years of St Catherine's College, Kilbirnie.

Many of us gathered recently at Auckland Cathedral to honour the arrival of the first Sisters. I emphasised then that the Sisters were never alone in their mission. From the very beginning, just like Catherine McAuley, they worked alongside lay people in the delivery of healthcare, education, and community services. The presence of the trustees of Whānau Mercy Ministries at the celebration is a testament to the structures that now carry this legacy forward.



Likewise, the presence of so many friends and ministry partners, along with the young women from Auckland's Mercy colleges, was a living witness to the enduring charism of Mercy.

As we continue to celebrate this joyful Easter season, let us give thanks with full hearts. May this time of renewal bring abundant blessings to you and your whānau. We pray that the light of Christ shines brightly in your lives today and always, and that His presence continues to guide you in your mission of Mercy.

Sr Denise Fox rsm, Congregational leader

Kua hinga te tōtara i te wao nui a Tāne

A mighty tōtara has fallen in the great forest of Tāne

Whānau Mercy Ministries mourns the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. Throughout his papacy, the call to Mercy remained a constant and guiding light. As he once said, "A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just."

Bishop Steve Lowe reflected, "The Holy Father reminded us of the importance of walking together as the entire People of God – lay people, religious women and men, and clergy – following the path of Jesus."

We join with the Catholic community across Aotearoa New Zealand and globally in praying for Pope Francis, in gratitude for his humble, merciful servant leadership.



Celebrating 175 Years of Mercy in Aotearoa New Zealand

To mark 175 years of Mercy in Aotearoa New Zealand, the directors of Whānau Mercy Education Ltd hosted a vibrant celebration on the 9th of April. The evening focused on connection and whakawhanaungatanga, with an emphasis on building and strengthening relationships across the Mercy whānau.

Over 100 people attended, including staff and students from St Catherine's and St Mary's Colleges, representatives from Mercy Villas, the Sisters of Mercy, Church leaders, past pupils, Mercy primary schools in Wellington, and other friends of Mercy.

A highlight of the evening was an engaging and insightful presentation from Anna Nicholls, one of the WMEL Directors. Anna spoke about how Catherine McAuley established networks, and how the Sisters of Mercy replicated those networks when they arrived in Aotearoa.



She drew a powerful connection between these historical foundations and the ongoing work of Whānau Mercy Ministries today, describing how whakawhanaungatanga continues to express the Mercy charism in a contemporary way.

From the UN to Aotearoa: A Mercy Journey for Our Common Home

In March, I had the privilege of travelling to New York as part of the Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF), a year-long programme for women connected to the Sisters of Mercy or Mercy ministries. Run by Mercy Global Action, MELF focuses on leadership development through engaging with global justice issues—particularly environmental degradation and the displacement of people. Our cohort is a diverse group of 10 women from around the world, each bringing unique perspectives shaped by our local contexts.

A highlight of our New York immersion was attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), established in 1946 by Eleanor Roosevelt. This year's session marked 30 years since the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality. We participated in a wide range of events and conversations—some inspiring, some confronting—all reflecting the ongoing struggle for justice. In the context of current U.S. political developments, many

speakers described worrying “rollbacks”, highlighting the urgency of continued advocacy.

One of the most moving moments was standing in the UN Security Council chambers, just after a powerful address by the UN Secretary-General. The emotional weight of that space shifted something in me—I found myself, for the first time, genuinely moved to pray for world peace.

A core part of MELF is developing a project to give back to the Mercy world. Mine explores how Mercy governance boards assess their response to what's being called the “8th Work of Mercy”: Care for Our Common Home. I'm developing a tool grounded in the Mercy tradition to support boards in reflecting on and strengthening their ecological response. I hope this will serve Mercy ministries—particularly here in Aotearoa—as we deepen our collective response to the ecological crisis with wisdom and courage.

Charlotte Cummings, Trustee



Landing with Mercy: The Founding Spirit that Still Guides Us

At the celebrations in Auckland, this reading from a letter of Cecilia Maher to Bishop Haly of Carlow was read aloud. It captures the founding spirit of Mercy in Aotearoa, a spirit of deep faith, warm hospitality, readiness to serve, and courageous yet careful action.

“We reached Auckland on the 8th of April!! At 3 o'clock in the morning land was discerned – immediately the Bishop rose, went on deck, and with extended hands blessed his Diocese. You, my Lord, may imagine our sincere joy on seeing the long wished for New Zealand....Next afternoon, the clergy in one boat, the nine Sisters of Mercy in a second, quitted 'Oceania' and in a few minutes landed. By this time all were informed of the events, and the beach presented a most animated appearance.

All the inhabitants were there to witness our arrival. The emigrants are generally Irish, so we had a most affectionate welcome. Many of the natives were there also.

We were conducted to St Patrick's Church and when settled in our quiet pew the procession moved on consisting of Acolytes, Students, Priests and the two Bishops. The Magnificat and other appropriate hymns were intoned, the Benediction given in thanksgiving.

After the function we were brought (that is the Sisters) to the schoolroom of the orphanage where a variety of refreshments were prepared for us. The attendants were our future pupils, the room was hung with banners invariably used in the festival of Ireland's Patron Saint.

Afterwards we were conducted to our temporary abode, a very nice wooden house where we remain until the former presbytery



shall be ready for us. It joins the church and has a girls' and infants' schools attached. The morning after we reached, the school mistress left Auckland, so on the following Monday we commenced our school duties.

There were about 60 girls in attendance but several additional candidates have since presented themselves. When we shall be settled near the church and better accommodation we expect a large school. As yet the infant school has not been – but soon we shall have the charge of the infant boys and girls. There are 8 in the little orphanage; if we could receive all that are presented we could number many, we must however be prudent.”

How do we hold together the Mercy spirit of generous response to need with the practical wisdom of sustainable service? Are there tensions in this balance that we, in this time, are currently navigating?

*Creative Commons: Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand – Ref: AK.201.1.002
Letters of Mother Mary Cecilia Maher – Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Auckland*

Whānau Mercy Ministries Formation Webinar

This is a reminder of Whānau Mercy Ministries second formation webinar to be held on Thursday, 15 May 2025 from 7.00pm to 8.00pm. Emma Maddren CEO of Mercy Hospice will be discussing the topic: *“Reshaping our services to meet those with the greatest need. How we are understanding our underserved communities at Mercy Hospice.”*



You can join the webinar by clicking the **Teams link provided here**. This is worth one CPD.

Spiritual Care Australia Conference 23 June to 25 June

The Conference theme is *“Beyond the Surface: Spiritual Care and Mental Health”* brings into focus how one’s spirituality is critical to their mental health.

Professor John Swinton is a highly regarded international expert in the area of spirituality and mental health and will offer the backbone of our keynote presentations each day of our conference. The full conference program is available **here**.

Mercy Echoes Podcast

Mercy International Association have started a podcast that is available to listen to on spotify. All three episodes are here: www.rb.gy/13zuz4



Whānau Mercy Ministries Website

The website has been designed to display on any phone, tablet or desktop. To access the website, the URL is www.whanaumercy.nz or scan the QR code.



New resources added regularly, including karakia.

Mercy Communications Café – Mercy International Association

MIA invite you to register for the next Mercy Communications Café which will be taking place on Tuesday 13th May at 9.00pm local time to Dublin. (8am Wednesday 14 May NZ time)

A much sought after speaker, Father Philip Larrey will speak on the topic of *‘The Fantastic Implications of Artificial Intelligence’*. Find out more information here: www.mercyworld.org/newsroom

Self-registration is open now: [mercyinternational.zoom.us/meeting/register/oeh0Y7irQsqjvG8Wiy6vQ](https://mercyinternational.zoom.us/join/mercyinternational.zoom.us/meeting/register/oeh0Y7irQsqjvG8Wiy6vQ)

Important Dates for Whānau Mercy

- 11 May** Day of Prayer for Vocations
Mother’s Day
- 11-17 May** National Vocations Awareness Week
- 12 May** International Nurses Day
- 16 May** Pink Shirt Day
- 24-31 May** Laudato Si’ week
- 25 May** World Day of Prayer for Children
- 1 June** World Communications Day
- 2 June** King’s birthday
- 1-8 June** Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 20 June** Matariki

Click the links to find out more about volunteer opportunities at Mercy Hospice and Te Waipuna Puawai.



Te Ngākau Atawhai – Heart of Mercy: In Aotearoa, the Mercy Cross, central to Catherine McAuley’s spirituality, is supported by a pair of koru. The koru represent the unfolding of new life and link our Mercy story to the spirituality of Māori and the ancient lore of this land.

Karanga Atawhai is the newsletter of Whānau Mercy Ministries, a Ministerial Public Juridic Person (MPJP) under Canon Law.

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