

WHĀNAU MERCY MINISTRIES

Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai

The Mercy way of discernment for God's mission





Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai

Purpose

This Mercy way of discernment supports trustees, directors and leaders of Whānau Mercy Ministries (WMM) to make decisions that are:

- faithful to our WMM identity, including our Catholic identity and Mercy charism
- reflective of WMM's values
- responsive to WMM's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- attentive to WMM's commitment to care for our common home
- aligned with and in service of God's mission

Mission is not one consideration among many. It is the reason we exist.

Discernment ensures that mission remains the overriding concern in significant governance and strategic decisions. This is not only a process of analysis, but of prayerful discernment, seeking wisdom beyond us.

When to use Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai

This way of discerning, together, is for significant governance, leadership, or mission-impacting decisions, especially those involving purpose, people, place, or long-term consequences.

Not all decisions require discernment. Depending on the context this way of proceeding may apply when considering matters that involve:

- Strategic direction
- Major property or capital decisions
- Financial investments (including care of resources that sustain mission)
- Policy changes
- Educational or healthcare priorities
- Relationships with communities and whenua


Not every question will apply in every situation. The prompts are offered to support thoughtful, prayerful, and context-responsive discernment.

Why discernment matters

Everyone within a WMM ministry shares responsibility for mission and understands we are participating in God's mission:

- Trustees safeguard our Catholic identity, charism, and shape the overall strategic direction and vision
- Directors give effect to that vision within the local context of their ministry
- Chief executives, principals and managers ensure mission is embodied operationally

Discernment moves us beyond individual preference or organisational efficiency, toward what is right, just and faithful.



It invites us to ask:

What is the right and faithful response in this moment, in service of mission?

This way of discernment draws on:

- the Gospel, revealing the way of Jesus and what it means to live faithfully
- the Mercy tradition, shaping how we respond with compassion, justice and courage
- Catholic Social Teaching, guiding how we uphold human dignity, seek the common good, and act with solidarity, subsidiarity and care for creation
- the values of Māori spirituality articulated as Pono, Tika, Aroha and Whakatau, guiding how we see, discern, decide and act
- WMM's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi guiding partnership, equity, and the strengthening of Māori voice and leadership
- our responsibility for care for our common home, calling us to protect, sustain and restore creation for future generations
- a synodal way of proceeding, grounded in listening, dialogue and communal discernment in openness to the Holy Spirit

The movements of Mercy discernment

Mercy discernment is undertaken prayerfully. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, remaining attentive to where God may be inviting us as a ministry.

Mercy discernment begins with truth (pono), moves toward justice (tika), is shaped by compassion (aroha), and results in accountable action (whakatau). Discernment is not linear. We may return to earlier movements as understanding deepens.

There are four movements of discernment followed by a section on safeguarding WMM mission integrity.

- Pono – Seeing clearly
- Tika – Choosing rightly
- Aroha – Deciding with courage and compassion
- Whakatau – Acting and reviewing
- WMM Mission integrity check

Pausing to listen

After each movement, ensure that you allow time for silence, reflection, and prayer. This is crucial. Discernment is not only about the questions we ask but about creating space to listen for the movement of the Spirit. We do not carry the burden of discernment alone. By resisting the urge to rush to an outcome and allowing silence to do the heavy lifting, we create room for God to shape our understanding and guide us toward a faithful response.



Pono – Seeing clearly

We begin by seeking truth and clarity about the situation before us.

Clarifying the Situation

- What issue are we truly addressing?
- What is the timeframe and level of urgency?
- What facts, data and context must inform this issue?

Voices and Equity

- Who is most impacted by the decision we are making and have we sought their voice?
- Are dominant voices shaping this decision disproportionately?
- Who is not at the table who should be?
- Have we created space for listening and dialogue that reflects a synodal way of proceeding, especially for those most affected?

Te Tiriti o Waitangi considerations

- Does this decision align with WMM Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments?
- Are there historical or systemic inequities influencing this situation?
- Have Māori voices and wisdom been actively sought where appropriate?
- Is this decision grounded in, and respectful of tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori where appropriate?
- How is our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi reflected in both how we decide and what we decide?

Contextual Factors

- Contextual realities to consider: social, spiritual, organisational, financial, legal (civil and canon), political realities.

Without pono, a clear grasp of reality, our response cannot be truly tika or just.

Pause for silence. Resist the urge to solve or respond. Simply notice what is emerging, what remains unsettled, and where God may be inviting us next.

What truth or reality is becoming clearer to us?



Tika – Choosing rightly

With a clear understanding of reality, we discern what justice requires.

This movement may surface questions that require us to return to Pono or move more slowly.

Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching Lens

- What insights come to mind from the Gospel and our tradition?
- Does this decision uphold the dignity of the human person?
- How does this decision affect those who are poor or vulnerable?
- Does this decision strengthen the common good?
- Whose good is being served, and who might be overlooked or disadvantaged?
- Are decisions being made at the appropriate level (subsidiarity)?
- Does this decision promote solidarity?
- Does this decision respect our responsibility for creation?
- How does this decision reflect Catholic Social Teaching as a whole, not just in part?

WMM Values Alignment

- How does this decision reflect our core values?
- Does this decision strengthen whanaungatanga?
- Does this demonstrate kaitiakitanga?
- Does this decision embody aroha?
- Where might values be in tension in this decision?

Weighing Options

- What are the possible courses of action?
- What are the positive and negative impacts of each?
- What unintended consequences might arise?
- Does this decision challenge or unintentionally reinforce, systems of injustice, exclusion, or environmental degradation?
- Which option most advances our mission, aligns with our strategic direction, and contributes to the common good?
- What tensions between important values or goods are present, and how are we holding them?

Tika requires both just outcomes and just processes.

Pause for silence. Resist the urge to solve or respond. Simply notice what is emerging, what remains unsettled, and where God may be inviting us next.

What is justice asking of us that we may not yet have fully considered?



Aroha – Deciding with courage and compassion

We attend to the deeper implications of our decision, guided by compassion, mission, and the Spirit.

Mission Integrity

- Which option most faithfully expresses our mission in this context?
- How does this decision strengthen our Catholic identity and Mercy charism?

Preferential concern

- How are the vulnerable impacted in this decision?
- Does this decision widen or narrow equity gaps?

Care for our common home

- What are the environmental implications of this decision?
- Does this decision contribute to ecological harm or restoration?
- Are we acting as kaitiaki of the whenua entrusted to us?

Aroha reflection

- Interior:
 - Have we allowed space for prayer in this discernment?
 - Where do we sense peace, disquiet or invitation?
 - Where do we sense we are being invited or called in this moment?
- Relational:
 - Have alternative views been genuinely heard?
 - Does this decision deepen whanaungatanga with people, whenua and tangata whenua?
- Ecological and legacy:
 - Beyond reducing harm, does this decision contribute to regeneration?
 - Would future generations thank us?
- Witness:
 - Would we be comfortable explaining how this reflects Mercy?

Aroha is disciplined compassion, grounded in pono and expressed through tika.

Pause for silence. Resist the urge to solve or respond. Simply notice what is emerging, what remains unsettled, and where God may be inviting us next.

Where do we sense invitation, peace, resistance, or disquiet as we hold this before God?



Whakatau – Acting and reviewing

We act on what has been discerned, remaining responsible to mission.

Having discerned together, we commit to action and ongoing responsibility. Discernment always leads to action, whether that is a:

- clear decision
- changed direction
- changed stance
- decision not to act (yet)
- commitment to ongoing review

Implementation

- Who is responsible for implementation?
- What resources (financial, staffing, infrastructure) are required, and are these sustainable and aligned with our mission?
- Do we have the capability and readiness to carry this decision through with integrity?
- Is trustee approval required?
- How will this decision be communicated in a way that reflects our values?
- Does this decision have implications for the local or wider Church, and who needs to be informed or engaged?

Support and Accountability

- How will we support those negatively impacted?
- How does this decision strengthen partnership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi?
- How does this decision shape our contribution to the local and wider Church, our partnerships across cultures, and our engagement with new contexts and opportunities?
- What indicators will show this is living our mission?

Review

- When will we review this decision?
- What are we learning?
- Has this strengthened our mission integrity?
- What have we learned about ourselves as a Mercy ministry through this decision?

Pause for silence. Resist the urge to solve or respond. Simply notice what is emerging, what remains unsettled, and where God may be inviting us next.

What responsibility are we being called to carry forward from this discernment?

Mission integrity check

Pausing to test whether this decision is faithful to our mission, values, and legacy.

Before finalising a significant decision, we pause to test its integrity against mission, values, coherence, credibility, and legacy.

- 1. Alignment**
Does this decision clearly advance our mission and Mercy charism?
- 2. Integrity**
Have we engaged meaningfully with our Mercy tradition and Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments, Catholic Social Teaching, and care for creation, not superficially but substantively?
- 3. Coherence**
Is there alignment between what we say we value and what this decision actually does?
- 4. Credibility**
Would we be confident explaining this decision publicly as a faithful expression of Mercy?
- 5. Legacy**
If those who come after us review this decision in 25 years, would they recognise it as courageous and just?



We should be as the compass that goes around its circle without stirring from its centre.

Catherine McAuley

Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai – The Mercy way of discernment for God’s mission

Using this guide

This quick reference guide supports real-time discernment in governance and leadership settings. It highlights core questions from the full *Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai* framework and is intended for use when decisions carry significant mission, people, place, or long-term implications. For deeper formation or complex discernment, the full framework should be used.

Te Ara Whakatau Atawhai	
<p>Pono – Seeing clearly <i>Reality, voices, context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What decision are we really being asked to make? • Who is most affected by this decision, and whose voices have we actively sought or missed? • How is Te Tiriti o Waitangi shaping both how we decide and what we decide? • What key realities (social, cultural, spiritual, financial, legal, environmental) must shape our response? 	<p>Tika – Choosing rightly <i>Justice, values, ethical discernment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching invite us to uphold here? • Whose good is being served, and who might bear the cost? • How does this decision reflect WMM values: aroha, whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga? • Which option most advances justice, the common good, and our mission?
<p>Aroha – Deciding with compassion <i>Mission, Spirit, compassion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which option most faithfully expresses our Mercy mission and charism in this context? • How are those who are vulnerable affected, now and into the future? • What are the ecological implications: harm, care, or restoration? • Where do we sense peace, disquiet, or invitation as we hold this in prayer? 	<p>Whakatau – Acting and reviewing <i>Commitment, action, review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the decision, and who is accountable for implementation? • Are the required resources sustainable and aligned with mission? • How will this decision be communicated in a way that reflects Mercy and respect? • When and how will we review this decision for mission integrity?
<p>Mission Integrity Check <i>Alignment, coherence, legacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this decision clearly advance our mission and Mercy charism? • Is there integrity between what we say we value and what this decision actually does? • Could we explain this decision publicly with confidence and credibility? • Would future leaders recognise this as courageous, just, and faithful? 	

