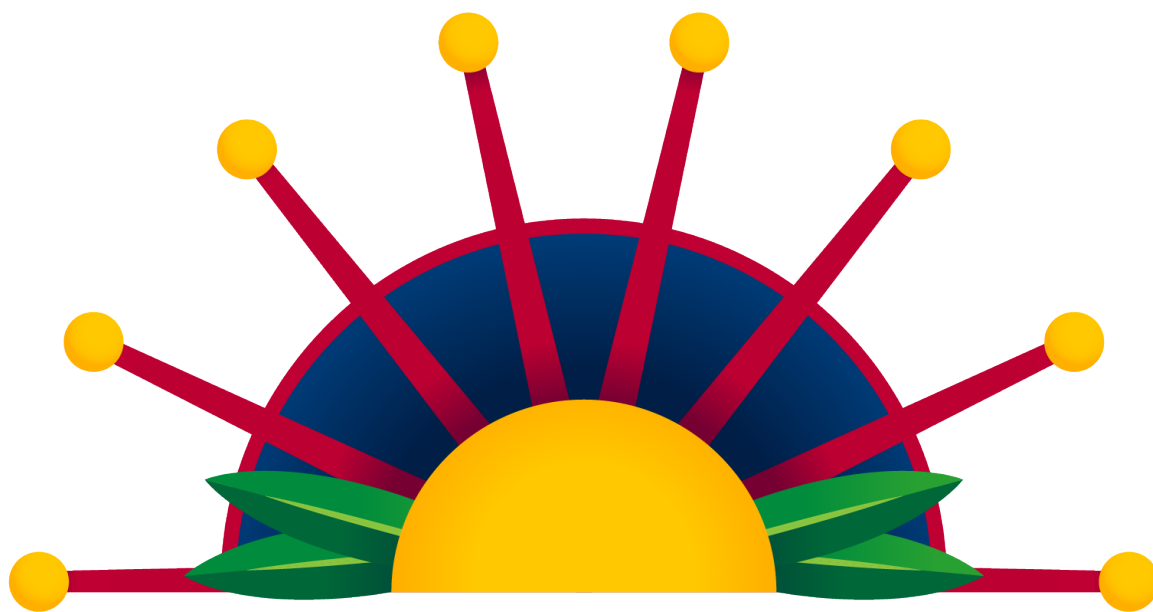




Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga

13 – 15 December 2026

Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga Show Mercy wherever we dwell

Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga — Show Mercy wherever we dwell — is both an invitation and a calling. It speaks to a shared responsibility to embody mercy across the many spaces we inhabit: our communities, our organisations, our relationships, and our world.

This hui is inspired by the 200th anniversary of Catherine McAuley opening the first House of Mercy in Dublin - a legacy that has been carried forward across generations and the world. This gathering celebrates the past while looking ahead to how religious legacies must continue to evolve. It recognises that charisms, such as Mercy, are not bound by geography, role, or status — they offer a shared calling open to all.

The symposium will explore the impact of religion across education, healthcare, and social services, with a thematic lens grounded in Catherine McAuley's own intention: "To serve God faithfully."

Whakapono, the faith that is at the heart of this calling, is not only belief, but lived practice: expressed through service, through relationships, and through a deep commitment to the dignity of people and the wellbeing of our common home. In this way, contemporary religious entities can offer a spiritual foundation and an active response to the needs of our time.

This symposium brings together diverse voices connected by a common purpose — to reflect, to challenge, and to act with compassion and justice. We acknowledge that we each come from, and belong to, multiple places — physical, cultural, spiritual — all of which shape who we are and how we serve.

The symposium also resonates strongly with indigenous worldviews across Aotearoa, Australia, and beyond, where connection to whenua (the land) and responsibility to future generations are central. In bringing these perspectives into dialogue with Mercy and faith traditions, we create space for deeper understanding, shared learning, and collective action.

Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga is therefore more than a theme — it is a call to gather, to reflect, and to lead with mercy and faith in every place we stand.



Te Whanganui-a-Tara - Wellington



200th
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDING OF
Catherine McAuley's
FIRST HOUSE OF MERCY

This symposium is inspired by Catherine McAuley's action, 200 years ago, to open a House of Mercy in Dublin to meet the needs of women experiencing poverty and inadequate education.

Symposium co-hosts



**WHĀNAU
MERCY
MINISTRIES**

Whānau Mercy Ministries was established to carry forward the rich legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, serving communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Founded by Catherine McAuley in 19th-century Dublin and guided by her teachings and the same spirit of mercy, justice, and love, Whānau Mercy Ministries seeks to serve all people with deep compassion, especially those in great need.

Grounded in core values of aroha, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga, Whānau Mercy Ministries is dedicated to transforming lives and weaving a future filled with hope.



**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON**
TE HERENGA WAKA
NEW ZEALAND

The Study of Religion at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington offers expansive, critical, and rigorous engagement with the world's diverse religious traditions and spiritual practices.

One of the largest of its kind in Australasia, the programme has a particular focus on how religion is understood, and what makes it relevant, today - exploring what it means to be religious, as well as to eschew religion, and how people live their traditions in practice.

Another key focus concerns how religion intersects with global geopolitical realities, and other dimensions of politics, society, and culture including morality and ethics and the shaping of human imagination and experience.

Programme (draft)

Sunday 13 December 2026

Metropolitan Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Hill St, Thorndon

2.30pm	Registration
3.00pm	Mihi Whakatau/welcome and opening prayer
3.30pm	Refreshments
4.00pm	Keynote 1
5.00pm	Panel Discussion
6.00pm	Opening Function in St Mary's College Hall
8.00pm	Closing

Monday 14 December 2026

Rutherford House, 23 Lambton Quay, Pipitea

8.30am	Registration
8.45am	Opening Prayer
9.00am	Keynote 2
10.00am	Morning tea
10.30am	Papers/Workshops 1
11.45am	Keynote 3
1.00pm	Lunch
2.00pm	Papers/Workshops 2
3.15 pm	Afternoon tea
3.45 pm	Papers/Workshops 3
5.00 pm	Conclude sessions
6.30 pm	Symposium Dinner in the Banquet Hall, Parliament

Tuesday 15 December 2026

Rutherford House, 23 Lambton Quay, Pipitea

8.30am	Registration
8.45am	Opening Prayer
9.00am	Keynote 4
10.00am	Morning tea
10.30am	Workshops 4
11.45am	Keynote 5
1.00pm	Lunch
2.00pm	Workshops 5
3.00 pm	Afternoon tea
3.30 pm	Keynote 6
4.30 pm	Whakamutanga/Ritual of Farewell
5.00 pm	Closure



We are delighted to have a number of presenters confirmed for the symposium, and as the call for papers remains, open, more presenters will be added to this document regularly. Details of the presentation topics and a final schedule will be available to registered participants in October 2026.

Student Programme

Please note that the heavily-subsidised student programme is most suited to those aged 16-25 and will run concurrently to the main programme with some overlap of presenters.

Due to space in the lecture theatres, some keynotes may not be available to those enrolled in the student programme.

Student registrations do not include the Symposium dinner.

Registration

Earlybird Registration (until 24 September 2026)

Earlybird registrations are \$275.00 inc GST.

This covers participation in the listed programme activities for all three days of the symposium, and includes the Symposium dinner in the Banquet Hall in the Beehive.

Other Registration

Registrations received after 24 September 2026 are \$325.00 inc GST and dependent on available spaces. This covers participation in the activities for all three days of the conference, and includes the Symposium dinner in the Banquet Hall at Parliament.

Student Registration

Students aged 16 are invited to register for \$50.00 for the dedicated student programme which will run on the same timetable and include some cross-over activities with the main programme. Please note that the student registration does not include the Symposium dinner.

All registrations are non-refundable but can be transferred to another participant. To register visit this link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/LBu1zhjHE4>

Locations

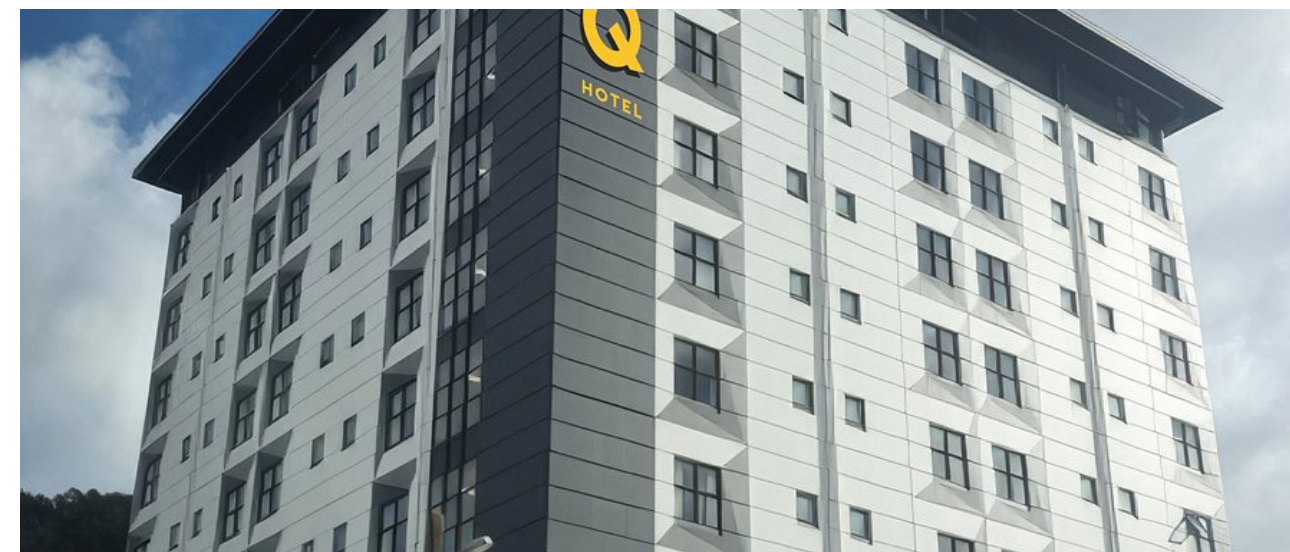
All locations are within easy walking distance.

Rutherford House is located at the main bus station and adjacent to the train station.

The Symposium dinner will be held in the Beehive, the home of the New Zealand Government.



Accommodation



WQ Hotel

A group booking for conference accommodation has been secured at WQ Hotel which is a 8 minute walk from the conference venue.

The cost is \$175.00 per night per person and includes breakfast.

A double or twin room (limited availability) is \$205.00 per night for two people and includes breakfast.

Accommodation bookings (until the allocation is exhausted) can be made through the registration form.

Other accommodation

Wellington has excellent public transport options. The conference venue is situated at the central bus and train station for Wellington, allowing direct accessibility for participants to stay in other parts of the city, including the Hutt Valley and the Kapiti Coast.

Airport Transfers

An airport bus travels directly between the airport and symposium venue, departing approximately every 15 minutes.

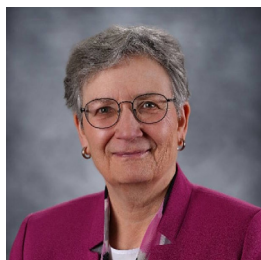
Symposium Presenters



Dr Tricia C. Bruce is a sociologist of religion whose books include *Faithful Revolution*, *Parish and Place*, *American Parishes*, *Polarization in the US Catholic Church*, and *Our Lives*. She is President-Elect of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Past-President of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, a Senior Research Fellow with the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, and was a papal-appointed consultant to the Synod on Synodality.



Dr Mathew Guest is Professor in the Sociology of Religion within the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University in the UK. His recent research has focused on religion in higher education contexts and the appropriation of neoliberal assumptions into religious identities across the globe. His most recent book is *Neoliberal Religion: Faith and Power in the 21st Century*.



Dr Mary Pat Garvin is an educator, consultant, and facilitator for religious congregations worldwide. She received a doctorate in psychology from the Gregorian University where she also served on the faculty for eight years. In 2025, Mary Pat received the Outstanding Leadership Award from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Her research interest is the interplay of spirituality and psychology in the promotion of a healthy and holy living of religious life.



Dr Geoff Troughton is an Associate Professor in the Study of Religion at Victoria University of Wellington. His broad-ranging research focuses on religion in New Zealand, the history of modern Christianity, and contemporary religious change.



Anna Nicholls is studying toward a PhD at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. She is leaning into her experiences working in Mercy organisations to explore the changing image of Catherine McAuley over time. Anna is a current director of Whānau Mercy Education Ltd.



Philip Alexander-Crawford (Te Whiu, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Rēhia, Ngāpuhi) is CEO of Tira Tūhāhā Prison Chaplaincy Aotearoa New Zealand. Highly experienced leader of transformation. Has held senior leadership roles in the vocational education sector, including Chief Executive of Te Matarau Education Trust, Chief Executive of Hanga-Aro-Rau Workforce Development Council General Manager Education for the Ngāti wai Trust Board and Director of Development for Tai Tokerau Wānanga (NorthTec). He is a current board member of Whānau Mercy Ministries Trust.

Dr Michael Belgrave is an award-winning New Zealand historian who has published on many aspects of New Zealand's history, much of it since the 1980s connected with the work of the Waitangi Tribunal since. His latest book is a general history of Aotearoa New Zealand, but one of his most enjoyable books was a history of Mercy Hospital, Auckland, to mark the hospital's centenary in 2000.



Dr Philip Fountain is an Associate Professor in the Study of Religion at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington. An anthropologist, his research focuses on transnational Christian humanitarianism and community development. His most recent book, *The Service of Faith*, is an ethnographic study of the Mennonite Central Committee.



Dr Rocio Figueroa Alvear is a Peruvian Catholic theologian and Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the Catholic Theological College in Auckland. She holds a doctorate from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Her current research focuses on theological and pastoral responses to Church sexual and spiritual abuse.



Dr Michaela Richards is a Teaching Fellow in the Study of Religion programme at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington. Michaela's research investigates the intersections of religion and the environment, particularly focusing on conservation in Aotearoa, and how religious 'nones' form meaning through connection with the land.



Dr John Kleinsman is the Kaitohu / Director of the Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics. His background includes working in the drug rehabilitation and disability sectors. He serves on a number of advisory committees. John's doctoral research used the notion of 'gift' to focus on and frame the ethical issues generated at the interface between technology and human reproduction.



Dr Kathleen Sprows Cummings is the John A. O'Brien Collegiate Professor of American Studies and History at the University of Notre Dame, where she is also a concurrent faculty member in Gender Studies, Italian Studies, and the Nanovic Institute for European Studies. She is a fellow of the Keough Institute for Irish Studies and the Ansari Institute for Global Religious Engagement. She serves as the Director of the Provost Office's Global Catholic Research Initiative.



Other Confirmed Presenters

Rayne Aldridge is a postgraduate student in the Study of Religion at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington. Rayne has a particular interest in the porous boundaries between religion and secularity.

Libby Blom from Brisbane, Australia, is a formator, facilitator and writer with over 20 years' experience across Catholic ministries, education, health and community services. Founder of Still Listening, her work focuses on contemplative leadership. As a Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship participant, her research explored homelessness and systemic injustice.

Hannah Edwards has an Honours degree in the Study of Religion, completing an honours thesis about Christian attitudes to debt. She is currently working toward a Master's degree in the Study of Religion at Victoria University of Wellington, focusing on the impacts that religious and spiritual beliefs have on investment.

Dr Denise Furlong has served learners and educators of New Jersey for nearly 30 years and currently is an assistant professor of education at Georgian Court University. In this role, she empowers educators in meeting the needs of striving readers and multilingual learners. Her activism for social justice and mercy-driven education led her to write and publish four books to build educator capacity in educational equity and amplification of student voice.

Professor Peta Goldberg rsm is the Foundation Chair of Religious Education at Australian Catholic University and the current congregation leader of the Sisters of Mercy Brisbane Congregation. Peta works extensively with Catholic Education authorities across Australia. Her research interests include Religious Education pedagogy, Jewish-Christian relations and Catholic Identity. She is currently working with UNESCO and the La Salle Academy on an education program to address rise of antisemitism in Australia.

Dr. Fozia Gulab is an educationist from Karachi, Pakistan, with more than 25 years of experience in teacher education and a participant in MELF Cohort Four. Guided by the values of Catherine McAuley and the Mercy Sisters, she is dedicated to mentoring youth and supporting underserved children. Her research interests include values and peace education, social justice, ethics of care, and curriculum development.

Dr Tania Hicks is a Senior Lecturer with the Catholic Institute of Western Australia and teaches at Western Australian universities in the field of Catholic education. She is an educator passionate about fostering student spiritual growth and holds a doctorate in this area from the University of Notre Dame Australia. Tania's career includes extensive teaching and leadership experience in the Catholic and government school sectors. Her research interests include: spirituality; faith formation; pastoral care; student and staff wellbeing.

Alanna Jacoby is Chief of Mission for Mater in Queensland. Alanna has implemented a new strategic direction that focusses on elements of mission that protect and promote the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy. Alanna holds strategic oversight for pastoral services, volunteer services, catholic ethics, heritage and archives, community outreach and the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Daniel Luey comes from a fourth-generation New Zealand Chinese family. Both sides of his family whakapapa to Guangdong Province in China. His family has been worshiping and serving at the Wellington Anglican Chinese Mission for 3 generations. Daniel is a postgraduate student at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington studying a postgraduate diploma in the Arts, majoring in the Study of Religion.

Professor Gabrielle McMullen AM is a Trustee Director of Mercy Ministry Companions, an MPJP with community service, education and health and aged care ministries across Australia. She is also Deputy Chancellor of the national University of Divinity, a Council member of the Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea, and Chair of the Australian Catholic Council for Pastoral Research.

JP O'Sullivan is an accomplished Social Worker who began his career in South Asia, focusing on Child Protection, addressing complex issues affecting children at risk. His commitment to creating lasting change led him to join MECPATHS in 2017 where he has played a pivotal role in Strategic and Action Planning. JP has been instrumental in elevating the issue of Child Trafficking into mainstream discussions and supporting statutory and non-profit organisations in developing and implementing robust, multi-disciplinary responses in the fight against Child Trafficking.

Dr Michael J. Pawlish is an Associate Professor of Management at the School of Business and Digital Media at Georgian Court University in New Jersey. He holds a Ph.D. from Montclair State University. He completed an MBA from San Francisco State University and an MS in International Environmental Science from Lund University in Sweden. His research interests are in organizational culture and the intersection of business and sustainability.

Maria Teresa (Mayte) Ramos is Lecturer in Church History at Te Kupenga – Catholic Theological College and a doctoral researcher at the University of Notre Dame Australia. Her research examines the visitation letters of Fr Victor Poupinel SM and the governance of the nineteenth-century Marist mission in New Zealand.

Dr Kathleen Rushton rsm (Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand) works as an independent biblical interpreter. Most recently she has been teaching part-time for the Pacific Regional Seminary, Suva and works in spiritual direction. She holds a PhD (Griffith, Brisbane), an M.A. and S.T.B (Leuven) and B.A. (Canterbury). In 2025, she was Denis Edwards Visiting Scholar at the Laudato Si' Research Institute, Oxford.

Dr Annette Schneider rsm is currently the Formation Coordinator for Mercy Ministry Companions, an MPJP established in December 2021. A secondary and tertiary educator for nearly 50 years, with a background in educational leadership, Mercy ethos and culture and formation for mission, she gains energy from working alongside Mercy women and men, encouraging and supporting them in their role as mission leaders.

Dr Susan Smith rndm began teaching in primary school in 1961 and finished in 2007 at the University of Auckland's School of Theology. She has also taught online for Broken Bay Institute, Sydney, the provider of theology degrees for the University of Newcastle, and modules in Rome and the Philippines for Duquesne University, USA. She lived and worked for five years in Ruatoria, involved principally with Ngati Porou.

Dr Lynne Taylor is the Jack Somerville Senior Lecturer in Pastoral Theology at the University of Otago (Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka). She teaches and researches in the areas of contemporary faith formation; spirituality and well-being; congregational studies; pastoral care; chaplaincy; and research methodologies in practical theology and missiology.

Dr Steven Torres' work intersects with mission-driven leadership, organisational life, and the Church's ongoing commitment to education and social justice. He currently works for several Catholic nonprofit organisations, including Commonweal magazine, Religious Formation Conference and serves as a professor of Education at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and Lewis Universities. Steven's doctoral degree examined the role women religious played in educating and advocating for marginalised communities.

Dr Michael Toy is an assistant professor of practical theology at Moravian University in Pennsylvania, USA. He recently completed his PhD in Religious Studies at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, where he studied the ways that Indigenous Māori, Samoan migrants, and Rainbow Christians navigate the complexities of the digital world.

Sera Vatuloka is a senior education leader, Pacific practitioner, and doctoral researcher at the intersection of indigenous knowledge, tertiary education, and holistic wellbeing. Sera's career has consistently centered the mana of Māori and Pasifika communities. A board member of Whānau Mercy Education Ltd, she embodies the conviction that indigenous wisdom illuminates far beyond university walls.

Call for papers

Other workshop and paper presenters will be finalised in the coming months.

If you are interested in presenting a paper or workshop, please follow this link: [Symposium – Call for Papers](#)

Potential change of format

Due to uncertainty in the current global political and transport environment, circumstances may arise that affect the accessibility for some participants to attend the symposium.

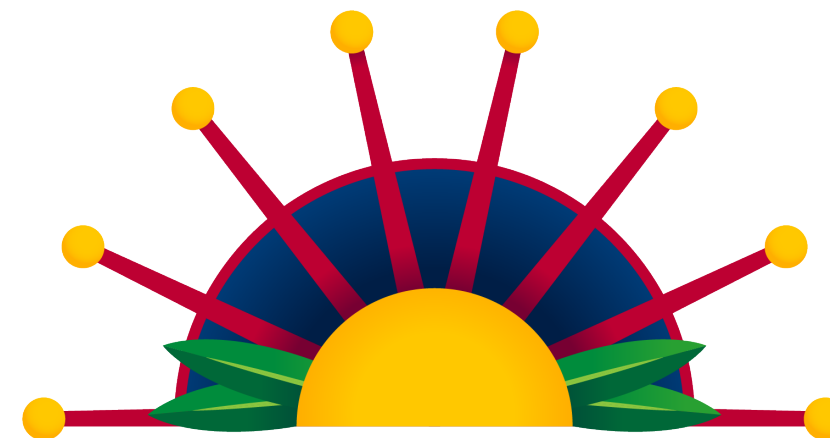
At present, the symposium is planned as an in-person event only. The Symposium Committee will review the situation by **Friday 2 October** and reserves the right to convert the event to a hybrid in-person/online format at that time, if deemed necessary.

In the event of a change to a hybrid format a communication will be sent to all event sponsors and participants to review their method of participation.

The symposium will not be considered cancelled solely due to a change in delivery format.



Symposium Logo



Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga

13 – 15 December 2026

The pōhutukawa blooms in demanding coastal landscapes, holding fast against wind and salt, yet bursting into colour. In this way, it reflects the life of faith communities today: grounded deeply and yet called to flourish in a changing and often uncertain environment.

The sweeping arc that anchors the design draws from the fanlight of the Georgian doorway in the house Catherine McAuley established in Dublin 200 years ago, a motif shaped by history and carried into the present. A doorway is more than a structure; it is a threshold of encounter, hospitality, and transformation. This visual reference honours origins, traditions, stories, and foundations handed down through generations, while reminding us that these origins are not static. They are openings, inviting movement outward into new contexts and new relationships.

Together, these elements express the Symposium's vision. The outward-reaching lines of the pōhutukawa are not contained; they extend generously into the world. So too, religious organisations are invited to move beyond familiar spaces, to grow and adapt in response to the realities around them. In a changed environment, thriving is not about retreating into what is known, but about embracing growth with courage and imagination.

At the heart of this growth is a call to mercy. Just as the pōhutukawa offers shelter, nourishment, and beauty wherever it stands, communities of faith are called to embody compassion in every place they dwell. Mercy becomes something lived, expressed in welcome, care, and justice, and in presence among others. It is not confined within walls, but carried outward into neighbourhoods, relationships, and the wider world.

The logo reflects the Symposium's invitation: to honour our heritage, embrace the wisdom of First Nations peoples and local contexts, and imagine together how the Mercy mission can continue to flourish for generations to come.

Grounded in traditions, shaped by enduring design, and reaching forward with life and purpose, this logo expresses a vision of faith that is alive, flourishing where it is planted, opening doors to others, and showing mercy in every place, it calls home.

Thank you to our sponsors

We are grateful to the following sponsors
who have contributed generously to the Symposium.

Platinum Sponsors



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Sisters of Mercy New Zealand*



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Brisbane Congregation



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