

WHĀNAU MERCY MINISTRIES

Formation Strategy Approach

Te Ara Atawhai – The Whānau Mercy Way



February 2026



Why formation matters for us as leaders

Whānau Mercy Ministries carries the mission entrusted to us by Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa, Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. As leaders within this mission, we do more than oversee organisations, we safeguard and animate a Catholic and Mercy enterprise.

Formation is therefore not an optional addition to leadership. It is essential to how we think, judge and act.

Te Ara Atawhai – The Whānau Mercy Way ensures that our governance, leadership and decision-making are:

- Faithful to our Catholic identity
- Grounded in the charism of Mercy
- Responsive to Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Attentive to the cry of the earth and the poor
- Practised with professional excellence and integrity

Formation sustains the deeper why behind what we do.

2. What formation seeks to cultivate in us

As Trustees, Chairs, Directors and leaders, formation invites us to:

- Lead with hearts shaped by Mercy
- Exercise authority as service
- Govern with discernment rather than reaction
- Strengthen Māori voice and leadership in our ministries
- Safeguard the dignity of every person
- Hold together faithfulness and professional competence

Formation shapes our inner disposition as much as our external skill.

It deepens belonging to the Mercy whānau and connects us to the global Mercy family and the wider Church.

The five formation anchors

Te Ara Atawhai is structured around five interconnected formation elements. These are not abstract themes, they are leadership foundations.

1. Catholic Identity

Understanding our canonical responsibilities as an MPJP, the theology of mission, synodality and Catholic social teaching.

2. Mercy Charism

Deepening our understanding of Mercy in scripture, tradition and contemporary expression, and practising Mercy-shaped discernment.

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3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi & Tikanga Mercy
Leading in ways that honour whenua, strengthen Māori leadership and embed relational accountability within governance.
 4. Cry of the Earth and the Poor
Responding to Laudato Si' and Laudate Deum, and governing with an integral ecology lens.
 5. Good Governance & Leadership
Exercising reserve powers wisely, maintaining robust risk and safeguarding frameworks, and continuing professional development.

Together, these anchors ensure that our leadership is both faithful and future-focused.

Formation across roles

Formation is progressive and cumulative. The depth of engagement reflects the responsibility carried within each role.

- Trustees engage formation at the deepest level across all five elements.
- Chairs are supported to animate Mercy identity within their boards.
- Directors deepen their understanding of Catholic governance and Mercy discernment.
- Senior leaders integrate Mercy values into operational culture and decision-making.
- Staff and volunteers encounter Mercy through orientation and lived practice.

While the extent of formation differs, the commitment to formation unites us.

How formation is delivered

Te Ara Atawhai includes:

- Induction and ongoing formation programmes
- In-meeting formation sessions
- Hui Whānau and pilgrimage opportunities
- Digital resources and shared reflection materials
- Discernment tools
- Institute of Directors development pathways
- Collaboration with the wider Mercy network

Formation is designed to be engaging, relevant and realistic for leaders with significant responsibilities.

Shared responsibility

As leaders within Whānau Mercy Ministries, we share responsibility for cultivating a culture of formation.

This includes:

- Participating actively in formation opportunities
- Encouraging formation within our boards and leadership teams
- Integrating Mercy values into governance processes
- Modelling reflective and discerning leadership

Formation is not something delivered to us. It is something we practise together.

Looking forward

The need for Mercy remains as urgent today as ever. Our task is not to replicate the past but to discern what Mercy calls us to do now. Te Ara Atawhai ensures that we remain rooted in our whakapapa while responding courageously to the realities of our time.

In this way, formation strengthens not only individuals, but the future of Mercy in Aotearoa.

Leadership formation framework

The following formation framework outlines the depth of engagement expected across roles. Formation is progressive and cumulative. As leaders move between roles or deepen their tenure, formation expectations correspondingly deepen.

Formation elements <i>Roles/programmes</i>	Catholic Identity	Mercy charism	Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Tikanga	Cry of the earth and the poor	Good governance & leadership
Trustees <i>Purapura Whetū</i>					
Ministry chairs <i>Tōtara Atawhai</i>					
Ministry executive & WMM Trust staff					
Current directors <i>Māhuri Atawhai</i>					
Aspiring directors <i>Puāwaitanga Atawhai</i>					
Ministry operational staff <i>Ki Uta Ki Tai</i>					

Ministry volunteers <i>Paiaka Atawhai</i>					
Shading Key	Light introduction - mostly online	Deeper exploration - some F2F	Higher proficiency - more structured	Highest proficiency - some academic-like	

Formation Pathways – Named in the Spirit of Growth

Each formation programme within Te Ara Atawhai carries a name drawn from imagery of growth and flourishing. These names reflect our understanding that formation is progressive and organic, deepening as responsibility increases and as commitment to Mercy matures.

The titles are not indicators of status. Rather, they symbolise stages of growth within the Mercy whānau and the leadership responsibilities entrusted at each stage.

Each pathway integrates the five formation anchors, Catholic Identity, Mercy Charism, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Care for Creation and Good Governance, with depth appropriate to the role.

Kākano Atawhai – The seed

Kākano is the seed, small, full of potential, carrying future life within it.

This pathway nurtures young leaders who are discovering Mercy through action and justice. It recognises that the future of Mercy begins with seeds of courage, compassion and hope planted early.

Tupu Atawhai – The growing shoot

Tupu speaks of growth and development.

This pathway supports emerging leaders as they begin to grow into responsibility. It honours the stage of learning, stretching and discovering one's leadership voice within the Mercy tradition.

Māhuri Atawhai – The young tree

Māhuri is the young sapling, established, but still strengthening.

For Directors, this symbol reflects leaders who are firmly rooted in governance yet continuing to deepen in understanding and discernment. It recognises growth within responsibility.

Paiaka Atawhai – The Roots

Paiaka refers to roots, the hidden structure that anchors and nourishes the whole.

For staff and volunteers, Paiaka Atawhai recognises that lived Mercy at ground level sustains the entire ministry. Without roots, there is no flourishing.

Tūāpapa Atawhai – The Foundation

Tūāpapa means foundation or grounding.

For Ministry Executives and Trust staff, this pathway reflects the responsibility to hold structure, ensure alignment and integrate mission into operational reality. Tūāpapa leaders stabilise and support the living system of Mercy.

Tōtara Atawhai – The Strong Tree

The tōtara is a tree of strength, endurance and significance in Aotearoa.

For Chairs, Tōtara Atawhai symbolises leadership that provides shelter, stability and direction. Chairs shape board culture and stand firm in stewardship of mission.

Puāwaitanga Atawhai – The Flowering

Puāwaitanga means flowering or coming into full expression.

For aspiring directors, this pathway reflects discernment, a stage of readiness, alignment and potential leadership emerging into visibility.

Purapura Whetū – Seeds of the Stars

Purapura means seed; Whetū means star.

For Trustees, Purapura Whetū symbolises stewardship that looks beyond the present generation. It speaks of leaders who hold the long horizon — planting seeds that will flourish in times they may never see.

It carries a sense of visionary responsibility, grounded in faith and entrusted to future Mercy leaders.

	Formation elements Roles/programmes	Catholic Identity	Mercy Charism	Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Tikanga Mercy	Cry of the earth and the poor	Good governance & leadership
Logo tbc	Trustees <i>Purapura Whetū</i>	Canon law Synodality Theology of mission Intentional Christian community Catholic social teaching	Mercy in scripture, doctrine, tradition Mercy modern & global New mission opportunities Pilgrimage	Leading our Te Tiriti kaupapa Te reo, tikanga, te ao Māori Tikanga Mercy	Governance for an integral ecology – Charlotte’s resource Laudato Si & Laudate Deum IoD Chapter Zero	Our foundational documents and reserve powers IoD Four Pillars & CPD Risk and policy frameworks

						M-theory discernment for decision Safeguarding
	Ministry chairs <i>Tōtara Atawhai</i>	Leading MPJP Catholic identity Catholic social teaching Ministry-specific social & ethical norms	Leading Mercy spirituality Pilgrimage	Leading Tikanga Mercy	Same as directors	Leading Mercy discernment Ministry/Trust relationship and reserve powers IoD CPD
	Current directors <i>Māhuri Atawhai</i>	Understanding MPJP Catholic identity, belief and practice Ministry-specific social & ethical norms	Intro to Mercy spirituality Hikoī Atawhai	Practising Tikanga Mercy Governing for Te Tiriti at each ministry	Governing with laudato si' and integral ecology	Ministry foundation documents, reserve powers & policies Using M-theory IoD CPD
	Aspiring directors <i>Puāwaitanga Atawhai</i>	Intro to Catholic identity & belief and to social & ethical norms	Mercy origins, people, values, symbols & celebrations Mercy ministries	Intro to Te Tiriti & Tikanga Mercy	Intro to Laudato Si and integral ecology	Intro to Ministry/Trust relationship Intro to M-theory Safeguarding
	Emerging Leaders <i>Tupu Atawhai</i>	Catholic identity, belief and practice	Mercy origins, stories, people, values, symbols & celebrations Mercy values in practice	Intro to Te Tiriti & Tikanga Mercy	Intro to Laudato Si and integral ecology	Mercy values and practices in Mercy organisations
	Young Mercy Volunteers <i>Kakano Atawhai</i>	Catholic identity, belief and practice	Mercy origins, stories, people, values, symbols & celebrations Mercy values in practice	Intro to Te Tiriti & Tikanga Mercy	Intro to Laudato Si and integral ecology	Mercy values and practices in Mercy organisations
Logo tbc	Ministry executive & WMM Trust staff <i>Tūāpapa Atawhai</i>	Same as directors, plus Church in NZ Ministry-specific social &	Same as directors, plus Mercy in NZ and the world Mercy resources Pilgrimage	Same as directors, plus leading for Te Tiriti at each ministry	Same as directors, plus implementing integral ecology at each ministry	The Mercy way of leading and managing people, relationships & resources

		ethical norms				Safeguarding
	Ministry operational staff and volunteers <i>Paiaaka Atawhai</i>	Catholic identity, belief and practice	Mercy origins of my ministry Mercy origins, people, values, symbols & celebrations Mercy values in practice	Intro to Te Tiriti & Tikanga Mercy How that applies to my ministry	Intro to Laudato Si and integral ecology How that applies to my ministry	Intro to Ministry/Trust relationship Mercy values and practices in Mercy organisations