

REMEMBERING THE PAST, CELEBRATING THE PRESENT, MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE
120 YEAR CELEBRATION
SISTERS OF MERCY PARRAMATTA
EDITH ANGEL HALL, OLMC PARRAMATTA
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It is great for us to be here today celebrating this jubilee in this part of the Mercy world - Parramatta. As we celebrate 120 years of ministry here, we also acknowledge continuing Mercy presence on this site since 1875 when the North Sydney Congregation came here. Gathered here are likeminded Mercy people – Sisters, co-workers, friends and relatives. Each of us has been touched by the inspiration of Catherine McAuley, Founder of the Sisters of Mercy. We remember her legacy; we remember her motivation; her desire to make some lasting efforts for the relief of the suffering of the poor and the instruction of the ignorant. While we would use slightly different language today we are conscious that there is still much suffering in our world and there are many places in our world where education is a luxury.

A work of mercy for the 21st Century, one which Catherine would heartedly endorse, is to promote awareness of and work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 189 Heads of State (including our Prime Minister) firmly committed to work together to build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world by 2015. The goals represent a global partnership committing rich and poor nations to a clear set of responsibilities. Poor countries pledged to improve governance and reform policies, channelling their resources towards the first 7 goals. Rich countries, such as Australia, promised to deliver more and more effective aid, faster and deeper debt relief, more trade opportunities and fairer trade rules and increased technology transfer to poor countries, as described in the 8th goal.

We are now halfway through this period and some progress has indeed been made. For example, 15 years ago, 1 in 3 people in the world lived on less than \$1 a day. Now, there are 1 in 5. More children worldwide have enrolled in primary school and the incidence of child mortality has declined globally. The tuberculosis epidemic appears to be on the verge of decline and key interventions to control malaria have been expanded.

However, there is still much work to be done. There are only 7 years left and a billion people still live in extreme poverty. More than a billion people lack access to safe drinking water and 2 billion people have no regular access to energy services. Added to this 6,000 people die of AIDS each day and 750 million adults cannot read.

Some countries have achieved much more than others. Most Asian countries and Pacific nations are making great strides, but unfortunately, many African countries and countries closest to Australia – PNG and the Solomons are fast slipping behind.

While these statistics are stark as we listen to them we need not become too depressed. We can be encouraged by Catherine's hope that we can work together to make the world a better place. The 3rd Millennium Goal is of particular interest to Mercy people. It is to promote gender equity and to empower women. Wouldn't Catherine agree with that!

You would not be wrong in thinking that Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General when the Millennium Goals were launched, must have studied Catherine's writing when he gave this speech. He said: 'The world is starting to grasp that there is no policy more effective, in promoting development, health and education, than the empowerment of women and girls and no policy is more important in preventing conflict or in achieving

reconciliation after conflict has ended.' Surely this is an area in which the people of Mercy can have an influence.

In a short while we are going to hear from a group of people who are taking practical steps to help achieve the aims of this 3rd goal and how we can help in their efforts. Before they speak to us on the topic of Women and Trafficking, allow me mention another group who can be assisted by our support. Mercy Works, a work of the Sisters of Mercy Australia, is the Australian organisation whose aim is to address the achievements of the Millennium Goals. They concentrate their efforts in areas where Australian Sisters of Mercy find themselves. In particular PNG, one of the poorest of our closest neighbours, is a major area of focus.

So, let us enjoy our day together. Let us be well informed of some issues of importance in our world. And let us find hope in the knowledge that, like Catherine, we can make some lasting efforts for the relief of the suffering of the poor and the instruction of the ignorant.