

OUR DEEPER STORY

“A sower went out to sow some seed ... some seed fell on good soil”

(Luke 8:5, 8)

Our deep, deep story began when seeds of Mercy were scattered on fertile Irish soil. We stand on the shoulders of our Mercy ancestors who followed the path of the poor, in particular, by alleviating the plight of women and girls at risk. Our Ballarat East Mercy story has been shaped by women who believed strongly in the providence of God and who drew on the inspiration of Catherine McAuley and Agnes Graham. Immersed in the earthiness of a rural culture they displayed extraordinary courage, resilience and generosity, and a deep respect for the dignity of those amongst whom they ministered. Our Mercy forebears worked tirelessly in partnership with the Diocesan Church and parish communities.

“God will multiply the seed you sow and increase your generous yield”

(2 Cor 9:10)

We build on our Mercy legacy. Presently we are an ageing community with diminishing numbers, yet we continue to be enlivened by our shared energy for mission and our passion for justice. Historically, our main focus of ministry was education in the Ballarat Diocese. In recent decades, the call for ‘mercy’ has drawn us beyond our diocese and beyond our shores. Opportunities for further education and renewal have opened us to new awakenings expressed in a wonderful diversity of ministries. In this way, we continue our tradition by stepping beyond our boundaries and welcoming others into our Mercy community. We appreciate and support each other and enjoy working, praying and celebrating together. By sharing responsibility for decisions that affect us and our mission of Mercy, we participate in leadership.

An important journey for us has been the discovery and exploration of ‘transformation through the shadow’ which has helped us to own our frailties and failures and to learn from them. We have come to acknowledge and appreciate the traditional owners of this land. Owning our need for forgiveness and healing gives us the strength to connect with a world in need of healing. Our journey also empowers us to move towards forgiveness of past hurts. It serves as a catalyst in deepening our relationships. This enables new ways of planting seeds of Mercy, destined to flourish within God’s transformative dream.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain”

(John 12:24)

Our expanding cosmological understanding calls us to a ‘radical communion beyond all borders’, to an awareness of and a living out of our interdependence with all of creation. Standing on the threshold of a new structure for Mercy religious life in Australia, we are beginning to relinquish our fears and to trust in new possibilities in order to reap a rich and bountiful harvest for future mission.

We carry this, our deep story, with faith in God’s steadfast love and compassion, with hope in the power of the God of Mercy to sustain us on our journey, and with hearts fired with love for God, for one another, and for all of God’s creation. We are empowered to move into new realities as there *“comes a time for each of us to break out of who we have been”* (Noel Davis).

A REFLECTION ON OUR STORY

*It was with Catherine our story began,
seed borne by sea,
by land, from afar,
planted in soil, rural and rich,
in goldfields of wealth, East Ballarat.*

*At Sacred Heart Convent foundations were set.
Brick upon brick the building took shape.
Education evolved,
teaching, the core,
culture and art, whilst embracing the poor.*

*Buildings arose from Murray to sea,
seeds scattered Mercy
where harvest meant growth.
Doctrine and learning in scholarship grew,
the pursuit of excellence
the aim and the goal.*

*Whilst at home, domestic scene,
prayer and action ever blending,
chapel, laundry, kitchen chore,
walking nuns
along the streets
on mission bound
to suffering poor.
God's work it was in Mercy tending.*

*Chapter by chapter over the years,
leaders elected
to companion and share
in leadership role
and consultative task,
Leaders with vision, promise and hope,
encouraging all
to make a response
in renewal of purpose for our changing world.*

*Came the time to willingly let go,
break from the chrysalis
pre-Vatican II
open our wings, feel freedom and fly.
New ways of living opened the doors,
new missions evolved,
new methods were tried,
fresh seeds were sown to blossom in time.*

*Beyond the boundaries of homeland and sea
to Darwin in north,
to countries beyond,
Chile, Timor Leste
and Papua NG.
Our story flows on, more seeds are sown,
for Catherine's purpose
in serving the poor
was to plant tenderness, compassion and love.*

*We've sat around tables in prayerful discussion,
embracing the difference,
learning to trust,
polishing statements
for future mission.
Wildfire we chose
to engender new life.*

*We're learning to forgive mistakes of the past,
responding to Mercy
in our changing world,
the vast global vision,
ecology, earth,
our part in creation and technology's worth.*

*We stand at the crossroads, the twixt and between,
the was and the will be,
the past, the future,
the yet unseen.*

*Mercy mirage looming ahead
the vision unfolding
softly in sight.*

*We hold the moment, the moment of truth,
the daring to let go,
the familiar, the tried.*

*The memories we hold are deep inside
as we forge our way
to the yet untried.*

*God, give us the courage, the hope and the trust
to break open anew
and fly from cocoon,
to gather in Mercy, covenant renewed,
colours of rainbow,
freshness of dawn,
broader in vision, embracing the new,
companions in Mercy,
each other to trust,
commitment to God's reign,
with justice in view,
fresh seed to be scattered
o'er broad Southern Land del Espiritu.*

*The future holds promise, should we gather as one,
one Mercy corps,
in canonical form,
differences enriched by each other's gifts,
seed to bear fruit in rich Mercy soil.
Our heritage and memories, treasures we hold,
afame with the Spirit,
in faith and in hope,
guided by trust in the Mercy of God.*