

WORDS AT THE OPENING OF THE MERCY HUB 3 APRIL 2016

Taking part in the lovely liturgy we have just experienced, and moving around this beautiful complex has given me a deep sense of seeing a dream come to life. For me the dream originated in the discussions at our 2011 Chapter about the wish of the delegates to see Mission Centres established in this new Institute we were founding. Given that no one really knew what was being envisaged it was amazing that the concept gathered great energy and enthusiasm. At the heart of it seemed to be a deeply founded wish to express in very tangible ways that the Institute was being founded for Mission – Mission was to be at the heart of what it was all about and this was to be obvious. While I am recalling these experiences from Chapter, it was only expressed at Chapter because it had already been born of the hopes and wishes of the sisters who gathered in preparation for Chapter.

I don't recall hearing that the centres were to be about stimulating among the sisters an enthusiasm for mission and ministry. That energy was already present as a primary commitment for every Sister of Mercy even when we fail to live in complete fidelity to this commitment. A similar commitment had also blossomed in the hearts of many who worked with and accompanied Sisters in works of Mercy. But it seemed that sisters were convinced that this energy could be better harnessed, better directed, if there were places where they and their co-workers in a variety of ministries could come together to strengthen each other and generate even more energy as they caught fire from one another.

The wish to see Mission Centres established was not a denial that such places and such opportunities already existed. It would be possible to argue strongly that each of our existing established ministries – a school, an aged care facility, a refuge – is or has the potential to be a ministry centre. However, many of our sisters were no longer engaged in these sorts of ministries and felt the need for structural support. Out of this sort of thinking was born the idea of this particular Mercy Hub here in Melbourne.

It seems very relevant to let ourselves become aware today that we are in an area of Melbourne which would have been very familiar to Ursula Frayne. This year it is 170 years since Sr Ursula Frayne, companion of Catherine McAuley, arrived in Fremantle, West Australia, leading the first group of Sisters of Mercy to come to this continent. The same Ursula Frayne would, in 1857, bring a small group of Sisters to Melbourne at the request of Bishop Goold for a Victorian foundation. There she set about establishing Mercy ministries in the State of Victoria. Ursula was a great builder and I am sure she would be pleased and proud to join us today. She would have been entirely at home where we are today, only a short distance from the Academy on Nicholson Street where she is buried. May Ursula's spirit of commitment to ministry inspire all who will come here for nourishment in the spirit of Mercy or take the works of mercy out from here.

The Mercy Hub has had a gestation period of nearly four years! The development has not been smooth but I think it is possible to say that the false starts, the frustrations, the stumbles, the prayer, the discernments, the decisions, have been a significant part of what is now available. Because this is an opening and a blessing it is easy to think of the new Hub primarily in terms of the bricks and mortar. This is a fitting spot at which to take time to congratulate and thank Blake and those who worked carefully and creatively with him to achieve a bricks and mortar setting which combines beauty and a welcoming comfort with practicality. Every room seems to speak of thoughtful care.

Yet those who have worked to make this a lovely place would be the very first to acknowledge that the centre will primarily be created, sustained and developed through the energy of those who are already ministering from this spot and who will find here a place of ministry in the years to come. I think it is a particularly helpful feature of this place that a wide variety of ministries are already calling

this home. The variety is just so characteristically Mercy and in an age which recognises that diversity is a gift essential to life, it really helps to experience this diversity as integral of the Hub.

While not wanting to set up a false dichotomy between reflection and action, I do think it is a special blessing for this place that sisters who are accomplished theologians will be working alongside sisters whose primary work is in the field of Mercy action. I think the Mercy International Reflection Process in which we are invited to engage during this Year of Mercy, is a powerful reminder to us all that authentic Mercy Ministry is never action only. We have a special responsibility to bring into our cycles of experience, planning and action, the particular wisdom of our Christian and Mercy traditions. To do so is not an add on, it is intrinsic to who we are and what we are, and we live in times when the message of God's Mercy was never more needed by our Planet and its people.

I want to congratulate all who have worked so hard to bring about this Mercy Hub. I mentioned the building which is indeed very important and I know that many of our ISMAPNG staff supported the development of the Mercy Hub in a whole variety of ways. I thank them for that. Leading the overall effort was Faye Kelly who, as Community Leader in South C, led the group of sisters who worked at one level to imagine and create the concept and then at another level to consider and find answers to the many practical questions that needed to be addressed. I hope they feel today that their dreams are fulfilled and their efforts rewarded. We congratulate them all.

I ask you to join me in a prayer of blessing by answering Amen to the following three prayers:

May the God of Mercy bless this Mercy Hub and make it a place of blessing for all who enter. Amen

May the God of Mercy move the hearts and minds of all who come to this Hub to see God in each other and in all they hope to serve. Amen

May the God of Mercy send the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide all who will find in this Hub a source of inspiration and support for their works of Mercy. Amen.

Berneice Loch rsm
Institute Leader