

## JUBILEE SPEECH

Someone once described family as being like the branches on a tree, where we may grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one. This image captures for me at least, something of the truth of our 'other' family – the Sisters of Mercy. Back in 1965 when Mary, Cheryl and I joined this other family, I suspect we were all pretty naïve about what this choice would ultimately mean for our lives. But we were young, full of enthusiasm and wanting to do everything for God, and so together with our other companions, we stepped out along the road of mercy.

Our early years of formation were confined and rather difficult at times, yet roots began to take strength in the soil, and for this, we owe a great deal to Sister Mary Annette, our then Novice Mistress, who is helping us celebrate today. In the immediate years that followed, Cheryl, Mary and I started to realise just how indebted we were to the Sisters of Mercy, in particular to visionary leaders such as Mother Austin and Mother Pius. These women knew how important it was for us to be very-well educated, and so we found ourselves at All Hallows in Brisbane where we learned our future teaching skills at the hands of a true expert – Sister Mary Julius – and then went on from there to graduate from university at different times.

Our early ministry years also meant that we experienced community living for the first time. Our lives continued to be very structured, with regular prayer, meal and recreation times fitting around our teaching days and on weekends, our visits to hospitals and private homes. Cheryl always had a deep desire to be a missionary, so it wasn't long after this that she joined the Sisters' still rather fledgling mission in Papua New Guinea, followed by years of ministry in the Kimberleys and Pakistan. Meanwhile Mary and I continued teaching in a number of Diocesan schools and our own boarding school at St Patrick's, eventually moving on to take up administrative positions in both fields. But times were changing quickly. Education was changing and so was religious life. From the somewhat limited areas of teaching and nursing, many new and exciting opportunities for ministry were opening up – spiritual direction and retreat ministry, executive positions on various boards, advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers, our own Aboriginal people and the plight of the earth itself, Parish ministry, counselling and pastoral care and supervision to name but a few. And so the branches of our mercy tree began to move out in different directions, while the rootedness in God and in our foundress, Catherine McAuley remained firm.

Major change has taken place since 2011, where from being a small Diocesan Congregation, the Townsville Sisters, and a number of other groups, made the decision to form the new international Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Since then, there have been numerous gatherings across both countries and beyond, to enable Sisters to get to know one another, so that our tap root of mercy may be strengthened for the purpose of mission in the modern world. During this time, many Sisters have had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the spirituality of Catherine McAuley by travelling to Baggot Street in Ireland, where it all began in 1827. This has been an extraordinary gift to those who have been able to undertake the journey.

Mary, Cheryl and I are currently all engaged in different ministries. Cheryl is working on her thesis which is entitled: "Towards a Model of Christian-Muslim Women Interfaith Dialogue in Australia". Mary has been a most efficient Executive Officer for Catholic Religious Australia Queensland over a number of years now, and I am in a relatively new position as pastoral co-ordinator for the Sisters in this region.

So here we are with you today, our Sisters, family and friends, celebrating 50 years of religious life. We say thankyou to God for the great gift that we have been given, and as Mary has said, we say thankyou to our family and friends, who have loved and supported us. We also say a very deep thankyou to our Sisters. Our tree has grown in different directions over the years, but its strong mercy root binds us together and will continue to do so. I wish to thank Marge, my community companion for the past twenty years. Marge, you have certainly helped me in my efforts to be a better person, and your own courage has inspired me on many occasions. May I now ask all the Sisters of Mercy present to stand. I believe the three of us can say in all sincerity, how glad we are that back in 1965, we threw in our lot with you. God's blessings everyone, and thankyou so much for your presence here today.

- Carmel Ruddick rsm