



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 9, June 2019

Welcome ...

In a period of six days in late May and early June, I visited Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns. As we've had a few mornings of frost here on our farm already this winter, the warm weather of central and north Queensland was a welcome break from the cold of the WA Wheatbelt. These Queensland cities all have a Mercy Associates group, and the purpose of my visits was to conduct the **Safeguarding seminars** mentioned in previous newsletters.

I am mindful that these visits to groups took place in the week in which the feast of the Visitation is celebrated – May 31st.

The **Visitation** is one of my favourite feast days. Our source for this is Chapter 1 of Luke's gospel, in which the angel Gabriel appears first to Zechariah to let him know that Elizabeth will become the mother of John the Baptist, then he appears to Mary, to let her know she will become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. The joy of these two women, each unexpectedly pregnant with babies of immense importance in salvation history, was about sharing good news with each other. Franciscan priest Richard Rohr ofm, has described their meeting this way: *Mary becomes the first missionary to take Christ out into the world*. As well as sharing their good news, Mary and Elizabeth then pray together – the beautiful yet radical prayer we know as the *Magnificat*.

*Mary becomes the first missionary to take
Christ out into the world*

Visiting the five Mercy Associates groups in Queensland certainly was an inspiring and rewarding experience. Each group is unique, prayerful, committed to the well-being of the group and each other, and open to extending

hospitality to others – which included welcoming me to their gatherings. I am grateful for the warm hospitality I received from each group and their ongoing commitment to being a Mercy Associate. Equally, I am grateful to the local Sisters of Mercy in each city for their ongoing mentoring and encouragement of these groups.

Additional to the feast of the Visitation, the other significant event while I was travelling through central and north Queensland was the release by Catholic Professional Standards Ltd of the approved set of ten **Safeguarding Standards** that will apply across the Catholic Church. These standards underpin the seminars I delivered to the five Queensland groups. They apply at all levels of the Church, from the bishops through to those of us 'in the pews', including ISMAPNG and Mercy Associates.

Just a week later, we celebrated the feast of **Pentecost**, and the six themes for the Plenary Council 2020 were released. With the challenge to *Listen to what the Spirit is saying...*, the themes will be important to all Mercy Associates as the Church seeks to renew and reinvigorate itself. The Plenary Council is still some distance away, but the process of reflecting and discerning will be underway over the next several months. Whether they are of the Catholic faith or another Christian tradition, Mercy Associates are connected to the Catholic Church through their association with the Sisters of Mercy.

For this newsletter, we've given a 'holiday' to the Mercy Associates groups who loyally send in articles to publish in each edition. We'll ask you for input for the next newsletter but this time we've included articles about the ISMAPNG Safeguarding seminars; the national Catholic Church Safeguarding Standards, the recent NSW Mercy Associates retreat, the Visitation, Pentecost and the Plenary Council's six key themes.

Carmel Ross, **Executive Officer**

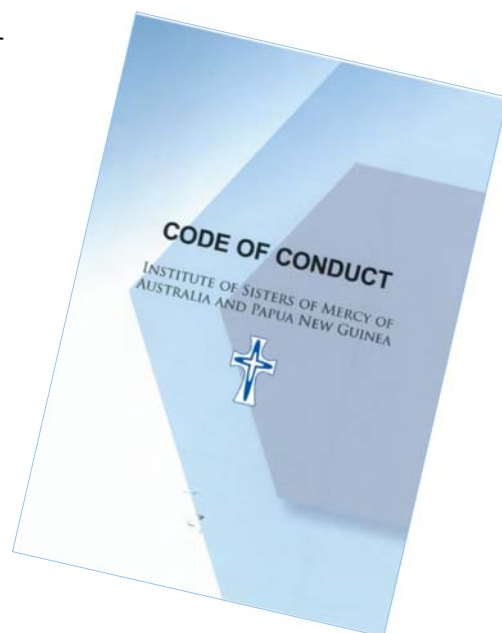


*The tender Mercy of
God has given us one
another.*

Safeguarding for Mercy Associates—the ISMAPNG Code of Conduct

The five Mercy Associates groups in Queensland—Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns have participated in the first Safeguarding seminars run for Mercy Associates. These are focussed on the recently approved ISMAPNG Code of Conduct and a copy of this document is given to each Mercy Associate at the seminar.

Attendance at a seminar to learn about the Code of Conduct is mandatory for all associated with ISMAPNG—Mercy Associates included. During the seminar, participants are briefed on the background of the Code of Conduct and its contents—the four commitments. Some sample scenarios are then presented for discussion, so that participants can have some experience in using the Code to address dilemmas and difficult situations that might arise in their Mercy Associates group or in the ministries their group is involved in. As well, reporting requirements and procedures are covered, with some printed information provided to guide participants on who to contact if a problem arises and a matter needs to be reported.



Because the Code of Conduct is an obligation for all Mercy Associates, Sisters of Mercy, staff of ISMAPNG and its ministries, participants are asked to sign an undertaking that they will uphold the Code of Conduct. This can be done at the completion of the seminar and returned to the trainer.

Anne Pate, Chris Convery and myself will deliver this training for all groups in Australia this year.

If a Mercy Associate is not able to attend the seminar provided by Chris, Anne or myself for their group, they can attend a seminar provided in their area for Sisters of Mercy or the ministries. **It is very important to understand that this training is not optional**—we are on a journey alongside the Sisters to ensure we are committed to high standards of conduct as Mercy Associates, and our association with the Institute requires us to take our part in upholding safe and respectful standards of behaviour in all we do as Mercy Associates.

If your group has members who are housebound and unable to attend meetings or undertake ‘active’ ministries, the coordinator of your group is able to seek an exemption for them. If you have members in this situation, please notify Chris, Anne or myself, with a very brief explanation of why they can’t participate in the training.

The four commitments in the Code of Conduct are listed below—in the seminars conducted so far, participants have found that these are not ‘foreign’ to them. Rather, they are likely to be the kind of standards we all strive to apply to our day-to-day, personal behaviour. The Code reminds us, though, of how important our personal behaviour is—our words and actions, so we can be at our best in our dealings with all those we come into contact with.

Code of Conduct Commitments

1. I commit to behaving respectfully, justly, honestly and with integrity.
2. I commit to creating a supportive, safe and caring environment.
3. I commit to safeguarding all people, particularly children and vulnerable people.
4. I commit to acting within the law, carefully, diligently and as a good steward of resources.

Use Your Heart

To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart.

Eleanor Roosevelt
(Photo: Lourdes University)



NATIONAL CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS

As mentioned in the introduction to this newsletter, **Catholic Professional Standards Ltd** has just released the approved new standards for all Catholic Church organisations. This includes ISMAPNG and ourselves as Mercy Associates. Because they are so important, the standards are reproduced below. The ISMAPNG Code of Conduct, used in the Safeguarding seminars being run for Mercy Associates groups this year, align with the standards below.

What are the Standards?

The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards are designed to be implemented by all Catholic entities, ministries and organisations across Australia.

They constitute a framework which articulates requirements for Catholic entities to promote the safety of children through the implementation of policies and activities to prevent, respond to and report concerns regarding child abuse.

They are designed to drive cultural and behavioural change and promote accountability and transparency of Catholic Church leaders and their ministries and entities.

The standards require that Catholic entities, ministries and organisations have:

1. strategies to embed an organisational culture of safeguarding, through effective leadership and governance;
2. strategies to ensure children are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously;
3. strategies to ensure families, carers and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safeguarding;
4. strategies to ensure equity is upheld and diverse

needs of children are respected;

5. recruitment, screening, supervision, support and other human resource practices which reduce the risk of child abuse and ensure people working with children are suitable and supported to implement child safeguarding values in practice;

6. processes for raising concerns and complaints which are responsive, accessible and used by children, families, carers and communities;

7. training and education which equips personnel with knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe;

8. strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks in both physical and online environments;

9. processes for regularly reviewing and improving safeguarding systems and practices; and

10. policies and procedures which underpin and articulate safeguarding across the entity.

The 10 National Catholic Safeguarding Standards are taken directly from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse's final report, Volume 6.

The ten Standards work together and ensure each entity, ministry and organisation across the Catholic Church place child safety at the core of how they plan, think and act.

The information above and below is taken from [National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, Ed. 1, 2019](#)

	Standard 1	7		Standard 6	18
	Committed leadership, governance and culture			Effective complaints management	
	Standard 2	10		Standard 7	21
	Children are safe, informed and participate			Ongoing education and training	
	Standard 3	11		Standard 8	23
	Partnering with families, carers and communities			Safe physical and online environments	
	Standard 4	13		Standard 9	25
	Equity is promoted and diversity is respected			Continuous improvement	
	Standard 5	14		Standard 10	26
	Robust human resource management			Policies and procedures support child safety	

‘DEEP LIVING IN MERCY’ NSW MERCY FAMILY RETREAT

The Blessing of Mercy



St. Mary's Towers Retreat Centre, Douglas Park offers a retreat venue that is spacious, warm and welcoming, in its vast, tranquil grounds. We each enjoyed our own bedroom with ensuite, heating and electric blankets! Our every need was met. Our main gathering space was the 'Heart Room' and we also enjoyed the other prayer rooms and the nearby church. One Mercy Associate said, 'Each prayer room was individual in its own way and very welcoming – I loved the low lighting.'

During the retreat, time was spent practicing Centering Prayer, gathering for common prayer and reflection sessions, sharing and discussion of presentations/reflections, and quietly reading the small book, *The Blessing of Mercy – Bible Perspectives and Ecological Challenges*, by Veronica Lawson RSM. Each retreatant was gifted with their own copy of this wonderful little book.



'This is not a book that one takes up and reads in one or two sittings and then leaves aside. Rather, it is a rich source of biblical perspectives on mercy interwoven with related biblical themes. It is a book of pondering, for savouring. It will draw its readers deep into the multi-faceted mercy of God. There they will be enabled to 'gaze even more attentively on mercy' says Elaine M. Wainwright RSM, Emeritus Professor of Theology, University of Auckland.

The more formal gathering and session times were punctuated with periods of quiet, free time when the retreatants could wander in the quiet, secluded grounds and gardens, rest or read and reflect further on their reading and bible references which supplemented the input.

Another Mercy Associate retreatant said, 'The labyrinth is great and a peaceful walk. It was great to be able to do a couple of drawings. There was peace in my heart.'



On the Saturday morning our group prayer and reflection time was centred on 'Cordial Love, Something that Warms', during which we read some of Catherine's words, reflected on them and sang Catherine's *Suscipe*. Following on after morning tea we began our reading and study of the book, 'The Blessing of Mercy' – the Introduction. We ended that time with a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Saturday evening, we viewed the new video about Catherine McAuley, titled 'In God Alone' – the latest telling of Catherine's life. It's a 23 minute docudrama, featuring re-enactments of actual events in the life of Catherine McAuley, from her childhood to her last days. Filmed mainly on location in Ireland with Irish actors, the film makes for compelling viewing. After the film, our short evening prayer time centred on 'Hospitality and Great Tenderness in All Things.' We retired for the night after supper together.

On Sunday we attended Mass at 9 am in the Parish Church, which is immediately next to the retreat centre main building. It was a treat to meet with some of the parishioners after Mass.

The remainder of the retreat was spent reading, reflecting and gathering for prayer in the Heart Room, as well as some bush walking during our free time. Other Mercy Associate retreatants spent their free time silently in prayer or enjoying a rest.





Back: Christine Convery, Sandra Lynch, Helen Fowler, Ineke Nieuwland, Sandra Christoffersen. Front: Ann Ryan, Hilary Reedy. Absent from photo: Ellen Geraghty

Our retreat group was small, but intimate. We were seven Mercy Associates and one Mercy staff member from the ISMAPNG Lewisham office in Sydney. The Mercy Associate groups represented were from Young, Caringbah (Sydney), Bathurst, and myself from Newcastle.

For various reasons the Mercy Associates groups from Gunnedah, Grafton and Toronto were not able to send any representatives to attend this retreat. However, we are hoping to see many more in attendance for the 2021 NSW Mercy Family retreat.

Ineke Nieuwland (Caringbah Mercy Associate) said this about her experience on the retreat, 'The weekend was all I had hoped for. To be together with other associates was not only a pleasure but special to be enriched by the exchange of ideas. Christine was to be commended on the wonderful presentation.

Words cannot express really the overall benefit of this special time spent together. I will recommend the experience to the Associates I come in contact with.'

It was an absolute pleasure and an honour to be the facilitator for this terrific group of Mercy folk on retreat. I look forward to the next retreat in 2021.

Another Mercy Associate, Sandra Lynch (Bathurst Mercy Associate) commented, 'The company, input and meals led to a very fulfilling weekend. It was so inspiring to be sleeping next to Jesus in the 'Ironbark' Prayer Room. The venue was wonderful.'

On the Sunday we took some time to respond to some questions about each of our Mercy Associates groups. This time was most valuable in sharing of views and in the discussion that followed. If your Mercy Associates group would like a copy of these questions, please contact me. I would be very grateful for further sharing and discussion on these.

Blessings in God's Loving Mercy,

Christine Convery

Network Facilitator NSW

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Ineke

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Mother Ursula Frayne RSM



June 10th is the anniversary of Ursula Frayne, the Australian Mercy foundress. Read and appreciate her story. <http://ow.ly/VDTb50uA2pQ>
Giving thanks for the vision, generosity and courage of all Mercy foundresses and pioneers of Mercy works then and since.

From Mercy International Centre, on Facebook, 10 June 2019

Queensland-style hospitality...

The welcome I received in each of the five cities I visited in Queensland to deliver the Safeguarding seminars there was warm and heartening. The commitment of the women and men I met in Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns was a delight to encounter. In each location, those who organised my visit (arranging a venue, contacting local Mercy Associates, arranging refreshments, etc. and I am very grateful for their efforts.

Carmel Ross, **Executive Officer**



Photos: Above—Rockhampton seminar May 29

Top right—Mackay seminar, May 30

Centre and lower right—Cairns, June 2



The Visitation Icon—Theology and Symbolism

<https://www.printeryhouse.org/ProdPage.asp?prod=M07>



This simple composition focuses on the greeting embrace of the two women, Elizabeth in the red cloak and Mary in the blue. They are surrounded not by scenery but by a background of gold leaf. Gold, because it reflects light differently from pigment, is used in iconography as a symbol of Divine Light. The inscriptions on the background are Greek and read from top left; 'The Greeting,' 'Elizabeth,' 'The all-holy,' and 'Mother of God.' Saints are frequently labelled in icons so that no confusion can arise about who is being portrayed.

Mary's cloak, called in Greek a homophorion, has three stars on her head and shoulders. They are symbolic of her perpetual virginity; before, during, and after Christ's birth. The gold embroidery around the face reflects her special importance as Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. Halos surround the heads of Mary and Elizabeth and these are symbols of their sanctity. Both women's faces are painted in iconographic style, with little attempt at realistic portraiture. The noses are long and narrow in the Byzantine ideal of nobility. The mouths are small and closed in the silence of spiritual contemplation. The eyes are overlarge windows to the spirit. Neither saint makes eye contact with the other or with the viewer. Their gaze is

Pentecost... the gift of the Holy Spirit



Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ , St Petersburg

Come Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of
your faithful, and
kindle in them the
fire of your love.

Send forth your
Spirit and they
shall be created.

And You shall re-
new the face of
the earth.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit...

In the Book of Isaiah 11:2-3, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are described. In the passage the gifts are considered ones that the Messiah would have possessed.

Wisdom helps us recognize the importance of others and the importance of keeping God central in our lives.

Understanding is the ability to comprehend the meaning of God's message.

Knowledge is the ability to think about and explore God's revelation, and also to recognize there are mysteries of faith beyond us.

Counsel is the ability to see the best way to follow God's plan when we face choices relating to God.

Fortitude is the courage to do what we know is right.

Piety helps us pray to God in true devotion.

Fear of the Lord is the feeling of amazement before God, who is all-present, and whose friendship we want to cherish.

Adapted from: <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/scripture-and-tradition/catholic-basics/catholic-beliefs-and-practices/gifts-of-the-holy-spirit>

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit...

These are the observable behaviours of people who have allowed the grace of the Holy Spirit to be effective in them. The tradition of the Catholic Church lists 12 fruits:

Charity	Joy	Generosity
Gentleness	Peace	Patience
Modesty	Chastity	Faithfulness
Kindness	Goodness	Self-control

Adapted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church



Joan Chittister in her book 'In Search of Belief' writes that the 'Spirit of God is a wild thing, breathing where it will, moving as it pleases, settling on women and men alike ... The Spirit of God leads us to new heights of understanding, to new types of witness, to new dimensions of life needed in the here and now'.

Plenary Council 2020—National Themes for Discernment

From: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/about-the-themes/> with some editing and additions.

After some months of analysing the thousands of submissions to the Plenary Council 2020, on Pentecost Sunday the six themes identified were announced. These invite us to *Listen To What The Spirit Is Saying...* as we search for responses to the question: *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church* that is:

Missionary and evangelising

Inclusive, participatory and synodal

Prayerful and Eucharistic

Humble, healing and merciful

A joyful, hope-filled and servant community

Open to conversation, renewal and reform

The **six National Themes for Discernment** are inspired by the data and call us toward the future. As we move into this second stage of preparation for the Plenary Council, we continue to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

In coming months, through **the discernment process** and drawing on the six National Themes for Discernment, we will develop the agenda for the first session of the Plenary Council.

This discernment process will involve establishing **Working Groups** for each National Theme for Discernment. Also, people in faith communities across Australia will be called to participate locally in their own communal Listening and Discernment encounters.

The fruits of what is discerned during this time will shape **the agenda of the first session** of Plenary Council in October 2020.

Mercy Associates groups may find it valuable to consider these themes at their meetings. It is especially encouraging that the first theme includes the word *Merciful*—the heart of the charism of Catherine McAuley, drawn from God, who is the source of all mercy.

