

***“The tender mercy of our God has given us one another.”*** ~ Mercy Constitutions, 2.01

These words from our Mercy Constitutions really resonate with me especially today. I give thanks to our God of love and compassion and to each one of you, for the gift of your presence in my life and on this day of celebration of my vowed commitment as a Sister of Mercy. I feel very grateful, humbled and blessed.

Thank you to each of you for giving of your time and resources to be here today, especially since many of you have travelled from all over, including Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and different parts of Victoria, especially in the midst of the devastating drought and bushfires. I am really touched by your show of support, well wishes and prayers. Thank you also to all those who have been with us in spirit and prayer, especially our Sisters of Mercy in care and elsewhere.

Thank you so much to all who have assisted in some way with the preparations and proceedings for my First Profession – your time and talent is very much appreciated! Some have been acknowledged in the Mass booklet and some I wish to acknowledge now.

Once again, thank you to Bishop Peter Connors, a long-time friend of our Sisters, for being our main celebrant today. Thank you to Frs Barry Ryan, Tom Brophy and Binh Le for concelebrating. Thank you to Fr Justin Driscoll, Fr Jorge De Chavez OSJ, other priests, staff, Mercy Associates and parishioners of Ballarat East for your generous support, including our use of the church and hall. Thank you to the staff of Jo’s Catering for the wonderful spread of food and service being offered to us this afternoon.

Special thanks to Srs Kate Mannes and Michelle Goh for coordinating and leading the Sisters of Mercy choir (including the rehearsals) and creating such beautiful music for today’s Mass – a generous gift in itself! I also want to especially acknowledge and thank Sr Anne McMillan for her time and talent with the cover design and layout of the Mass booklet – I feel that it really captures and reflects my Mercy journey up until this point.

Thank you to all those who have been working hard behind-the-scenes to ensure that today is as special as it is, including the staff in our Mercy Community South B Office (Mary Ryan, Kirstin Holloway, Anthony “Jex” Curran, James O’Connell and Des Ryan), and so many of our local Sisters.

Particular thanks to our current Institute Leadership Team: Srs Eveline Crotty, Caroline Ryan, Gaye Lennon, Elizabeth Moloney and Maureen Sexton, as well as our current Community Leaders, including Srs Christina Aitken, Marie Ralph and Anne Ryan who are with us today. Thank you for welcoming me into the Mercy family with open arms and hospitable hearts, and for your continuing leadership of our Institute, especially during such challenging times in our Church, our country and our world. I am particularly mindful of Gaye who cannot be with us today.

I also want to acknowledge and thank our previous Institute Leadership Team, including Srs Berneice Loch, Annette Schneider, Barbara Bolster, Sally Bradley and Theresia Tina, and our previous Community Leaders, including Srs Faye Kelly and Berenice Kerr. Thank you for your initial welcome, openness and guidance when I commenced my initial discernment and enquiry with our Institute back in 2015, and then my Candidacy at the beginning of 2018.

Thank you to the past and present members of our Institute Initial Formation Team, including Srs Madeline Duckett, Anila Isaac, Joan Doyle, Carmel Dwan and Chris Coughlan, as well as and especially Sr Kathy Ryan, who have all played an important role in my formation to date. Kathy in particular has been my designated formator and a wonderful mentor to me during the past two years.

Thank you especially to Sr Liz Dowling, my first companion in community, as well as my local Mercy support group, including Srs Veronica Lawson, Helen Forbes, Berenice Kerr and Chris Coughlan, for your love, support and wisdom.

Thank you to my local Mercy community here in Ballarat – far too many of you to name – for your warm embrace, example and encouragement. Thank you in advance to my future Mercy community in Perth for your welcome and support – represented here today by Srs Janina Pascoe, Joan Buckham and Jilyan Dingle.

Special thanks to Srs Mary Moloney and Frances Baker, my very first Mercy educators and role models at secondary school and university. Thank you for introducing me to the mercy way of life, and for expanding my knowledge and faith. Thank you to all our Sisters across the Institute, in Australia and Papua New Guinea, for showing me what it means to be the face and hands of mercy in different places and contexts. And thank you to our foundress, Catherine McAuley, for recognising and responding to the needs of her time by beginning this mission of mercy in Dublin in 1831. Today I feel as if I've finally come home and it's a beautiful thing!

Last but not least, I want to thank my family and friends who have been accompanying me on this journey of life for the best part of 33 years. To my parents, Stephen and Maureen; my brother, David; my sisters, Kate and Jessie; and my brother-in-law, David – thank you! Thank you for sharing your love, life and faith with me, as well as allowing my own to grow and flourish in a nurturing environment. It's heart-warming to know that I have your continuing love and support, especially as I begin to live more fully into my commitment as a Sister of Mercy, which will mean encountering the day-to-day challenges of balancing a healthy community, ministry and prayer life. I hope that we can continue to navigate this new and unknown territory together, with hope, faith and trust.

I particularly want to acknowledge and remember my dear Nan, Betty McKee, who entered eternal life with God in 2018 (my first year of Candidacy), for her great influence in my life and my unfolding relationship with God. I know you are with us today, Nan – also praying and celebrating, with love and joy, and your rosary beads and a cuppa in hand, no doubt!

And so, finally, thank you to each one of you for your love, support, guidance and prayer. Let's continue to journey together and share in this commitment to mercy for the good of our world – and “enjoy a good cup of tea” and some cake while we're at it! Thank you, God bless and safe travels home when the time comes.

*Delivered by Emma Llewellyn on Saturday, January 18, 2020, in St. Alipius' Parish Church, Ballarat East, Victoria. Edited slightly for publication in ISMAPNG newsletter.*