



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 11, November 2019

Welcome ...

As I sit and assemble this edition of *Many Paths*, devastating bushfires are raging in New South Wales and Queensland. In the last two days I've had emails from Central Queensland and Northern NSW from Associates who are sufficiently close to bushfires that they are on alert to evacuate.

We live in worrying times and it's hard to separate these bushfires, so much worse and more in number than is usual for this time of year, from the issue of the damage to our planet that is playing out in the form of climate change. Each of us needs to reflect on our own environmental footprint—what we use, how we use it and how we dispose of it, so that we do not contribute to the worsening of this awful threat to the future of our planet.

The prayers of all of us are needed for the people of Australia who are affected by these bushfires. Even once the fires are extinguished, it's not over... That's when the often overwhelming task of rebuilding homes, lives and communities needs to get underway, and that's a very long-term undertaking. Please pray for them, now, and for a very long time into the future...

This edition...

Because we send out only four editions of *Many Paths* each year, the contents comprise a mixture of 'looking back' at what groups have been doing over the last few months; and 'looking forward' at what will be coming up in the next few months.

In this edition, we have accounts of some of the Mercy Day celebrations and commitment ceremonies—occasions that are of immense importance to the individuals involved and to their groups.

A sincere thank you to the groups who have submitted articles and photos. Sharing what's happening often provides inspiration and encouragement to other groups and the importance of this should never be underestimated.

I hope you enjoy the poem beside this article—a heart-warming account of a child's perspective on Advent and Christmas.

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer

A Balloon for Jesus

Three days after her birthday
Shanequa held two balloons
each one decorated in bright colours
festooned with 'Happy Birthday'
one for the baby doll just liberated
from the wrapping, the packaging,
the other for the baby Jesus
born to save us all.

The babe whom we celebrate,
who we waited for during the long days,
the darkening days of Advent
preparing for last night's pageant,
the service of joy at the baby's birth,
our king in the manger.

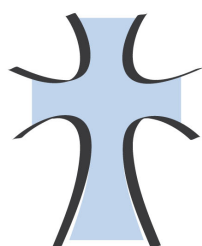
But it was in the simple joy,
the loving remembrance,
the sharing of her balloons
with her new baby doll
and the baby Jesus

I will remember
as this day fades.

Remembering our Saviour
amid the toys and games
the noise of the modern Christmas,
room in her heart too
for the holy Christ-child.



© Raymond A. Foss, 2007



MERCY
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths



*Mary...
Her dignity is
expressed in one title:
Mother of God.*

Gunnedah—Mercy Day

The Sisters of Mercy were honoured in Gunnedah, with Mass in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Chapel and morning tea prepared by the Mercy Associates.

Sr Gabrielle Foley, Sr Christine Belling and Sr Regina McInerney cut the Mercy Day cake, later shared with Mercy Associates and parishioners.

Members of the Mercy Associates renewed their commitment to the works of Catherine McAuley, deepening their spirituality and relationship with God and living the 'charism of mercy' in their daily lives.

Celebrated on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, Mercy Day is a time of reflection and a renewed sense of mission, looking forward and looking back with great respect for the commitment and devotion of the Sisters of Mercy and people of Mercy.

Meanwhile, Year 12 students at St Mary's College, established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1879, held a fun day after finishing their formal education, raising funds for Mercy Works, which supports local and overseas relief and development activities that are part of the vision and mission of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and New Guinea.

Marie Hobson



Gladstone—Mercy Day

On the evening of Tuesday, 24th September, those of us who could be present, came together to celebrate Mass and to reaffirm our commitment to Mercy Associates.

At Star of the Sea Parish we are currently undergoing changes, as the Marist Order prepares to withdraw and hand priestly leadership over to the Diocese. For this occasion, our celebrant was Fr Kevin Redmond SM, who generously delayed attending his retreat in order to celebrate with us.

Sister Beryl travelled from Rockhampton to accept our pledge of recommitment and to present us with certificates. Marya and Renate joined us as new Associates while thirty-four members will continue their association for the next three years. We also acknowledged

with thanks, two associates, Betty and Kath, who are in care in nursing homes.

Our Mass was a prayerful expression during which we reaffirmed our devotion to Mary, and our choice to follow Jesus guided by the example of Catherine McAuley.

The evening continued as an opportunity to gather socially for a very enjoyable meal at a local venue.

Thanks must be extended to all who contributed to this very special event, especially to our organising team, the two Annettes.

Marie-Ann Martin



Sr Beryl and Fr Kevin with Associates Ida and Kusum at the Mercy Day celebrations.

Network Facilitator contact details

NSW: Christine Convery

mercyassociatesnsw@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0414 627226

VIC: Anne Pate

mercyassociatesvic@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0407 908729

WA, QLD & other locations: Carmel Ross

mercyassociates@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0408 124404

Rockhampton—High Tea Fundraiser for MercyWorks

Members of the Mercy Associates, with invaluable assistance from The Cathedral College (TCC) students and staff, hosted a High Tea in September as a fundraiser for Mercy Works as well as a way to raise awareness and appreciation of the people they assist. Following the success of our previous High Tea in 2018, this afternoon did not disappoint!

The historic Range Middle Hall rang to the sounds of laughter and chatter as those who gathered enjoyed entertainment provided by TCC students who also served the refreshments to 120 thirsty guests! This is quite an accomplishment for a Sunday afternoon in Term Time and our appreciation of their skills and efforts is great.

Donations of a variety of quality prizes for our Multi draw Raffle saw many people head home with big smiles but the best gift of the afternoon was the presentation that Kingsley Edwards, Donor Development Manager of Mercy Works, shared – the stories of just a few of those whom Mercy Works is assisting.

He spoke of **Samuel in PNG** who is a fourth year Med student now on a Mercy Works scholarship. Samuel had managed to study for the first 3 years of his degree using his sav-

ings but would have been unable to continue his studies without the help of this scholarship. Kingsley shared that Samuel is committed to completing his degree so he can return to his home town and provide much needed life-saving medical attention which he knows will save many of their lives.

Batool is part of the **Mercy Connect program** in Sydney where she studies as a mature age student and is mentored by caring volunteers. Her story tells of living as a refugee as part of her family's experience of fleeing from war in Afghanistan to Iraq, deportation to Syria and fleeing to Iran as a third generation refugee, finally making to Australia after being separated from most of her family and where she is now considered 'stateless' ie not having a country to call home.

The stories of these, and a variety of others, touched the hearts of those gathered and it was with great joy that the proceeds, tallying \$3530, were handed over to Mercy Works so they can continue their ministry to so many who deserve our admiration and our assistance.

Jennifer Loscher



Kingsley Edwards (centre) gathered with the Rockhampton Mercy Associates Executive and students from TCC.



Kingsley with students and a teacher from TCC.

Timor Leste Mercy Associates

Late in September, we met up for Mercy Day. Tuesday was not possible, for a gathering but some were able to attend Mass at a later time. Our time together was one of prayer, reflection and a comfortable cuppa.

The Associates' reflections were so sincere and moving. One Associate commented that whenever he offers Mercy to another he is always so surprised how he receives Mercy in return. Another young Associate has told me (not at our gathering), that from his meagre salary \$100 per month, he pays school fees for four students every month. What an extraordinary gesture of Mercy!!!

Whilst we may do things a little differently here, I really believe the Mercy Spirit is becoming stronger.

May the rich blessings of Mercy enfold each of you on your life's journey.

Mary Anne Dwyer RSM

One Associate commented that whenever he offers Mercy to another he is always so surprised how he receives Mercy in return.

Townsville—Commitment Ceremony

Townsville Mercy Associates held a commitment and recommitment ceremony on Thursday 31 October at the House of Prayer. Hosted by the Associates with a moving liturgy prepared by Townsville Community Leader Sr Bev Strong and Mercy Associate Fiona Williams, seven associates recommitted and Gail Cooper, previously an associate with the Townsville Sisters was welcomed. Around twenty people gathered at the House of Prayer for afternoon tea at 4.30pm which was held on the verandah in the shade of the beautiful rain trees and looking out on Anderson Park. The Associates were delighted to have present nine Sisters of Mercy including Northern community Leader Sr Bev Whitton. It is almost two years now since the last commitment ceremony. Seven new Mercy Associates who have journeyed with their mentors made a commitment at the ceremony: Gayle Pollard, Karen Cribb, Louise Doolan, Joy Henderson, Loraine Peach. Unable to be present but still committing in a private ceremony with a Sister of Mercy: Laurell Miller and Sue Luckel. The Sisters of Mercy present made the new Associates most welcome.

Joan Neal

*Joan Neal, Trudy Clarke, Fiona Williams, Anne Henderson, Marcia Chock Man, Gail Cooper.
Absent Sheerah Tait, Rita Tomba, Laurie McEwan*



Sr Bev Whitton, Gayle Pollard, Karen Cribb, Loraine Peach, Louise Doolan, Joy Henderson, Sr Bev Strong



Gladstone—a busy year and a distinctive ministry!

Our 2019 activities have once again focused on our 'being' Mercy Associates for our Parish and City community through meeting the needs of both. We met for 10 first Saturdays for a cuppa and reflection. This year we have focused on completing our Formation booklet to refresh all our spirits ready for our recommitment. Although a number are in Prayer Ministry, most are involved in volunteering in all different aspects of Parish and City life. For example, three of our Associates are V.I.Ps. **What is that?**

Sharing from **Dorothy Leech**: *I have been a Volunteer in Policing [V.I.P.] since 2014. My late husband was a VIP and I saw how much he enjoyed helping at the Courthouse and other responsibilities. When he passed away, I decided I needed more volunteering to occupy my time and to enjoy new friendships.*

We help the Prosecutor with various jobs. We take the names of people who are not represented by the Duty Solicitor or a private Solicitor. When Court commences, we assist by taking up documents to the Magistrate and if documents are needed from the Police Station, we collect them as well. We assist people going to Court on the protocols of attending Court such as: no phone on, drink or sunglasses and no talking in Court.

I enjoy being a VIP as I feel I am putting something back into my community. On Police Remembrance Day, we hand out the order of service books and take up the collection. I am proud to be a VIP as it enables me to fulfil my calling to the Mercy Associates. I thank the Queensland Police Force for their friendship to my husband and myself. We have two other Mercy Associate VIPs, Barbara Anderson and Judy Munt.

Annette Rowe

At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern. Mother Teresa

Mercy Day for Mercy Friends in Papua New Guinea



Mercy Day at Mercy Secondary School in Yarpas, with the Mercy Friends celebrating Mercy Day in the convent.

Young and Griffith Mercy Associates join together for Safeguarding seminar and luncheon

On 16th September 2019 fourteen women, eleven from Young and three from the newly formed Griffith group gathered in Young for the mandatory in service including the code of conduct for all members. The presenter was Christine Convery. A lovely luncheon followed at the Young Services Club where a getting to know you continued. Sr Theresa Foley accompanied the women from Griffith.

Present were Joan Wall, Marguerite McGlynn, Helen Fowler, Ann Murphy, Joy Cameron, Ann Symons, Val Patterson, Koala Hard man, Barbara Hislop, Laurelle Green, Mary Kearney, along with our fellow Associates from Griffith.



Rockhampton celebrates life of Mother Mary Agnes White

On the 9th November, the Rockhampton Mercy Associates held the final gathering for 2019. Mass commenced at 9.00am which was presided by Fr Brian Hanifin. Morning Tea followed then Sr Stancia Cawte shared her research and gave a brief overview of the story of Mother Mary Agnes White, the first Superior General of the Sisters of Mercy Rockhampton, now ISMAPNG.

Sr Stancia had the Associates fascinated and captivated with Mother Mary Agnes White's story. So much has been written about Catherine McAuley, her struggles in the early years and rightly so, but there is very little written about Mother Mary Agnes - she had Catherine's strength, determination and faith. It was this, which saw her triumph the various hurdles that she faced over many years, I doubt if many of us today would have the resolve to do – it would be much easier to walk away.

I am sure I can speak for all who attended, Sr Stancia had us enthralled and eagerly awaiting the publication early next year of this amazing and remarkable story of another extraordinary Sister of Mercy. Thank you, Sr Stancia, for sharing this short snippet and for giving us a 'taste' of Sr Mary Agnes White.

The Rockhampton Mercy Associates Executive Team would thank everyone who kindly donated monetary donations totalling \$750.00 during 2019. These funds have been given to Sr Rita Connor for the 'Drought affected Farmers'. Many Christmas Hamper goodies were also kindly donated to St Vincent De Paul at the November 9th gathering.

Lastly we wish everyone a blessed Christmas and look forward to meeting again in early 2020. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Sonya Franklin

MercyWorks visit to Tuart Hill an end of year highlight

How the year has flown and we've arrived at the last issue for 2019.

Our group has had a bit of an 'up and down' year in that we were plagued during the winter months with so many cases of flu etc that it was necessary to suspend gatherings for a while. However, most are back on track now.

We have had a little 'saving for Mercy Works' campaign going over the last year, where we each put at least \$2 away each week - though many chose to add to this very generously. The time frame ended around Mercy Day.

Added to this we had a successful film morning. For a small group such as ours, we were very proud to find that our total was \$1,900.

On November 3 we were delighted to have a visit from Sr Sally Bradley, the Executive Director of Mercy Works, who spoke to us about the current projects, plans and hopes for Mercy Works. We were delighted to have also a number of Sisters attend and to have them join us for afternoon tea.

One of our members, Ros Trestrail, visited Poland this year. She has shared some very interesting aspects of her visit in this issue of Many Paths, and I'm sure you will enjoy, as I did, reading about this not so widely travelled country.

We had our annual retreat day in June, entitled 'Every day Easter'. The focus was on living out the message of Easter in our everyday Mercy lives. People enjoyed the day, and the shared meal. Even though the weather was a bit cold, the sun did shine on us.

Our final gathering will include a visit from Carmel Ross to present the Safeguarding seminar.

Over the weeks prior to this final gathering we have been focusing on Advent. To complement this Carmel will complete her session with an Advent reflection.

We look forward now to celebrating the birth of Jesus with those we love and care for.

Jan O'Connor #



Making Memories

During the middle of this year, my husband and I enjoyed a holiday driving through Poland and Lithuania. Experiencing these countries now after such sad and troubled times was a testament to the perseverance of the human spirit and was personally enriching for us.

Being a Catholic certainly adds a special dimension when travelling. Sharing Masses in some of the many gorgeous churches was very memorable. Even though we spoke no Polish the ritual of Eucharist remains constant.

There were many 'God-Filled' moments during our time away and I have included a photo as part of reflection.

If you look closely at the photo at right, taken inside Poznan Cathedral, you will notice the angel is looking at a black mobile phone. This obviously would not have been in the original sculpture but maybe in modern times it could be a reminder to us— sometimes we can become so distracted by things, we neglect to notice the amazement God has put all around us.



Ros Trestrail, Tuart Hill (Perth)

God wonderfully assists the humble, and makes use of them for His greatest designs, as they never subtract from His glory by attributing their success to themselves.

Catherine McAuley

Safeguarding Seminar in Gunnedah

Mercy Associates in St Joseph's Parish, Gunnedah, gathered for the ISMAPNG Safeguarding Training Day facilitated by Chris Convery on October 25.

Twelve associates were able to attend the workshop which included an outline of the Code of Conduct and the opportunity to create awareness and understanding of our obligations as People of Mercy.

The Code of Conduct is underpinned in Mercy values to ensure that those with whom we come in contact are treated with respect and dignity and safety for all, especially children and vulnerable people. The new code is founded on the Gospel of Jesus and the charism of the venerable Catherine McAuley.

Small group discussions followed morning tea, with the workshop also providing contact details for reporting abuse and steps to be taken to address any type of issue covered by the code.

After the workshop, Associates joined students from the local Mercy schools - St Xavier's and St Mary's College - for the rosary in St Joseph's Church.



Gunnedah Mercy Associates at their seminar with Christine Convery

The Gunnedah Mercy Associates expressed appreciation to Chris Convery for her input and to Sr Regina McInerney rsm for organising the session.

Marie Hobson

A Code of Conduct is about placing a priority on right relationships—within our Mercy Associates groups, our families, our parishes, our workplaces, our ministries. Always, we show care and respect for each other.

Safeguarding seminars continue... almost finished!

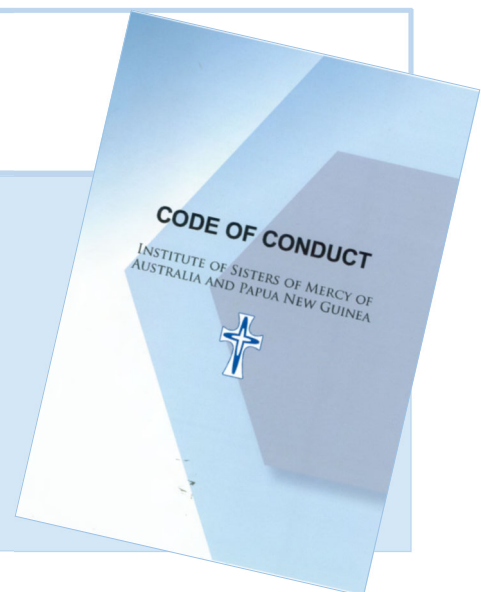
Over the last few months Christine Convery, Anne Pate and Carmel Ross have visited every Mercy Associates group in Australia to deliver Safeguarding training. The final seminar will be at Tuart Hill (Perth) on Sunday 17 November. We are grateful for the warm welcomes we have received and it's been a joy to visit each group and experience the richness of their commitment to being Mercy Associates.

In the coming months we will develop a booklet containing the training materials, case examples, etc., that can be used by the small number of Mercy Associates in many locations who couldn't attend their local session. This will be a workbook, and will need some guidance from another local Associate who has attended the seminar. We'll let you know as soon as this is ready, but it is essential that those who missed the face-to-face seminars complete these workbooks in the early months of 2020.

#Safeguarding for Mercy Associates—the ISMAPNG Code of Conduct#

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.



Friends of Mercy Works gatherings in Melbourne – To ‘Welcome the Stranger’ becomes a reality

On Tuesday 22nd October we all gathered – Staff, Board and Friends of Mercy Works from various networks. There was a buzz of anticipation in the air. We were warmly welcomed with Mercy hospitality by Sr Mary Moloney RSM, Principal, and her colleagues at The Academy of Mary Immaculate College in Fitzroy.

The theme of evening was ‘To Welcome the Stranger’. After a short reflection on our theme, our Board Chair, Kathleen Donnellon, gave a brief overview of our overseas programs to those present. We were then introduced to the local Mercy Connect Program in Melbourne, coordinated by Sr Mary Lewis RSM and Tat Singa. This program has extensive outreach to asylum seekers and refugees, with over 140 volunteers mentoring over 600 children and 24 adults.

A group of primary students, (some were refugees) called ‘Harmony Strings’ from nearby Sacred Heart School Fitzroy, provided moving entertainment with violins, cellos and a song (photo at right). Stories from a representative of the Catholic Education Melbourne office and a volunteer gave other very positive perspectives.

Our second gathering was held the next day at the Mercy Hub in North Carlton. It was attended by Sisters of Mercy and lay staff. Again, it was a very moving afternoon. By the end of each gathering the supporters were chatting over a

light supper or afternoon tea. Watching our supporters, staff and board interact with each other you could feel there was real sense of warmth and energy in the room. Catherine McAuley’s words “The poor need help today not next week” had come to life in the wonderful stories shared from Australia, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste.



Sally Bradley RSM

Caringbah—a group closes

It was with sadness that the Circle of Mercy Associates concluded as a group. This is due to ageing, ill health, caring for children and grandchildren. Unfortunately today the demands on all families are mammoth. The group has been operating for 22 years but it was time to address closure and celebrate all that has been. We celebrated well. Our litany included the following petitions:

- ◆ During this time we have experienced enrichment and growth in the understanding of Catherine McAuley and our spirituality.
- ◆ We have received strong affirmation of our faith journey and encouragement to continue with deeper faith commitment.
- ◆ We have come to a letting go of the rigid ideas which have oppressed us and our families.
- ◆ We pray for our families and loved ones that your blessings of love, peace and joy will enrich the lives of our children, grandchildren and their families.
- ◆ Deep friendships have been made and support given to each other in times of grief, difficulties, struggles and sorrow.
- ◆ All were made welcome at our table and many enjoyable and memorable times will be cherished in our memory.

**For all that has been, and all that will be,
we give you thanks God of mercy and love. Amen.**



The Shepherds and the Angels

Luke 2:8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'



The Wisdom of the Little Drummer Boy

Carmel Ross#

The *Little Drummer Boy* is one of our most popular Christmas carols. It's charming, involves a child, and involves his presence at the birth of Jesus (*and no, before you race to the gospels to work out why you hadn't noticed his presence before, he wasn't really there – it's just a fable*). The tune is the kind that keeps playing in your head for hours after you've last heard it, and as someone has noted, well over half of the lyrics comprise 'pa rum pum pum pum' – nothing too complex for the ears or the mind.

Yet, perhaps there's something to think about in these lyrics.

Life presents us with plenty of situations where we somehow feel unable to rise to the occasion. Someone is cleverer than we are, more important than we are, wealthier than we are, more powerful than we are. How do we respond? Personally, within myself I cringe and struggle to think of what to say or do to avoid embarrassment. If things go well, I might have an opportunity to remove myself from the situation sooner rather than later, and retreat to places and people with whom I feel more comfortable.

The little drummer boy seems to be faced with the same predicament. Responding to a call to visit the newborn king, he finds himself in the presence of one who is far greater than he despite his vulnerability as a newborn. Others have brought their finest gifts – the account in Matthew's gospel speaks of three wise men who followed a star to the newborn king and opened their treasure-chests to present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gifts well beyond the means of a little drummer boy.

Yet he has the courage to state his situation – *I am poor, I have no gift to bring*. He is not among equals and cannot respond as the situation might require. But the little drum-

mer boy knows who he is and what his gift is – he can play the drum, and this gift of music is what he can offer to the infant king.

How wise of him.

To have the courage, humility and wisdom to be himself. To know his gifts and to generously offer them, an expression of himself, to the newborn king. Mary nods to accept the gift on behalf of her son, and the drummer boy plays better than he ever has before, earning a smile from the infant Jesus.

My intention is not to analyse a beautiful carol to within a millimetre of its life. Rather it's to admire the simplicity of a carol that in so few words can express and celebrate the gift we should all be to each other all the time – people who know ourselves and our gifts and willingly offer to share the best of our gifts with those in our lives.

Merry Christmas!

