



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 15, November 2020

Welcome to Many Paths!

We will soon enter the season of Advent, when the Church's liturgical year commences. It's a time when we are looking ahead, waiting for the good news of the birth of Jesus that we will celebrate at Christmas.

Yet 2020 is a year that we can't help but look back on, even as our hearts are facing the future. In January, when fireworks were welcoming in the new calendar year, no one could have foreseen the year we were welcoming. From horrendous, destructive bushfires in the eastern states early in the year, to the onset of COVID-19 that has been a pervasive presence in our lives all year—and it's not over.

As you reflect on 2020, what will you cherish among your memories? When did you rise to the occasion and find strengths within yourself that you didn't know you had? When did your family and friends rise to the occasion and provide support and encouragement to you? On the following page, **Sr Maureen Sexton** shares a reflection about strengths, drawing on a beautiful poem by Mary Oliver. Maureen is the Mercy Associates representative on the Institute Leadership Team, so it's great to receive her contribution to this edition of *Many Paths*.

With the variations among the states regarding restrictions emanating from COVID-19, some Mercy Associates groups have been able to meet, others have not. For Mercy Day, some groups did meet to celebrate, and this edition contains accounts and photos of their gatherings.

And of course, we have some content about Advent and Christmas, to help you prepare for this joyful period in the life of Christians. Anne, Chris, Marg and I wish you and those dear to you a joyful, peaceful Christmas. May the reassurance of God's presence, always and everywhere, strengthen you as you celebrate the wonder of the incarnation and all that it means for humankind.

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer

*The eternal birth which God bore
and bears unceasingly in eternity
is now born in time,
in human nature.
St. Augustine says
this birth is always happening.
But if it does not happen in me,
what does it profit me?
What matters is that it shall
happen in me.*

Meister Eckhart

Source:
Meister Eckhart from Whom God Hid Nothing (edited by
David O'Neal)



MERCY
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths



**It is not sufficient that
Jesus Christ be formed
in us – he must be recognised
in our conduct.**



‘This World’

Maureen Sexton rsm

Recently I was in a break out group in a zoom meeting and we had been asked to brainstorm responses to various questions, one of them being “What are the strengths in our current world reality?” Our responses are not relevant here however it is a question that has popped into my consciousness a number of times since. Different people have come to mind who I believe give a human face to strength in our current world reality. People who have the capacity to expand our minds and hearts from simple to complex concepts ... for example poets ... so for today’s reflection I’d like to share ‘This World’, by Mary Oliver, a poem which does this for me.

I would like to write a poem about the world that has in it nothing fancy.

But it seems impossible.

Whatever the subject, the morning sun glimmers it.

The tulip feels the heat and flaps its petals open and becomes a star.

The ants bore into the peony bud and there is a dark pinprick well of sweetness.

As for the stones on the beach, forget it. Each one could be set in gold.

So I tried with my eyes shut, but of course the birds were singing.

And the aspen trees were shaking the sweetest music out of their leaves.

And that was followed by; guess what, a momentous and beautiful silence

as comes to all of us, in little earfuls, if we're not too hurried to hear it.

As for spiders, how the dew hangs in their webs even if they say nothing, or seem to say nothing. So fancy is the world, who knows, maybe they sing.

So fancy is the world, who knows, maybe the stars sing too, and the ants, and the peonies, and the warm stones,

so happy to be where they are, on the beach, instead of being locked up in gold.



Consider your response to the question -

What are the strengths in our current world reality?

Announcing a new Online Mercy Associates Group

Mercy Associates is delighted to welcome two new Associates, **Mandy Bosson** (*upper right photo*) and **Natalia Pecherskaya** (*lower right photo*), who together with Anne Pate, Mercy Associates Network Facilitator (Victoria), will form a new Mercy Associates group meeting online. Catherine McAuley's words – "*It began with 2, Sister Doyle and I*" – reveal the small beginnings of what has now become an international association of Sisters of Mercy. Inspired by her pioneering spirit, the Mercy Associates movement continues to grow and adapt to new challenges, such as how to facilitate membership for people living in places where there are no existing groups. In this case, Mandy lives in Adelaide, while Natalia lives in St Petersburg, Russia. They each approached Mercy Associates in 2019, and after some discussion with the ILT, we decided to offer them formation online with a view to setting up an ongoing online group. The conversations during formation have been rich and interesting; we have shared from our different church and cultural contexts as we explored the life and ministry of Catherine, and what it means to live out the charism of Mercy today. After the online Commitment Ceremony on 26th November, the journey will continue, as we form a faith community in which we engage with mercy and support one another's ministry. The story of the new online Mercy Associates group is unusual and owes much to the willingness of Mandy and Natalia to venture into the unknown, just as Catherine did when she opened the House of Mercy in 1827. Mandy and Natalia, welcome!



Anne Pate, Network Facilitator, Victoria

Mercy Associates Zoom Prayer Group—Come and see...

The COVID period we are living through this year has had an occasional unexpected blessing.

One of these has been the commencement of an online prayer time that happens each month, on the third Friday. Mercy Associates from all over Australia join in, and one of the Network Facilitators leads the prayer. We listen to scripture readings, music, poems, other writings and we talk with each other, either as a whole group or in small break-out groups. One surprise has been how serene and prayerful this time is—something we were in doubt about when we were all in different places and just seeing each other on screen.

It would be wonderful for more Mercy Associates to participate. All you need is to learn a few basics about using Zoom, the software we use. It's a free service, so your only task is to show up each month and listen, pray and reflect.

You might not be familiar with Zoom and that can be a little daunting. The Network Facilitators are happy to help you get yourself set up, so you're ready to participate in future prayer group gatherings. Contact Anne, Chris, Marg or myself for some help—you'll be surprised at how straightforward it is!

Our nexr prayer meeting will be Friday, 18th December—11.00am VIC & NSW; 10.00 QLD; 10.30 SA; and 8.00 WA. We'd really love you to join us!



Mercy Day celebrations

Gunnedah

The Sisters of Mercy were honoured by parishioners and students from St Xavier's School and St Mary's College Gunnedah on Mercy Day.

The Mass was con-celebrated by Fr John McHugh and Fr Vince Amaro in St Joseph's Church, with members of the Mercy Associates presenting flowers to Sr Gabrielle Foley, Sr Regina McInerney and Sr Christine Belling.

Senior St Mary's College students also made a floral presentation on behalf of the two schools. The Mercy Associates hosted a morning tea in St Joseph's Hall after Mass.

The arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Gunnedah in January 1879 was a blessing for the parish and the wider community. Within a year the sisters had built a convent, opened two schools and welcomed boarders from around the region. In the following years, branch convents were opened all around the north west to provide education to one and all.

The Sisters opened Gunnedah's first secondary school, the town's first business college, the first nursing home at the convent, and Gunnedah's first hostel for aged care - McAuley.

Marie Hobson



We prayed and enjoyed the day.

Griffith

We had Mass at 5.30pm, combined with the parish community Mass. It was good all could join in - our four Mercy Associates with Sr Trish and myself. Lunch in middle of day while we could be outside. It was at my house and all brought the goods. We prayed and enjoyed the day.

Sr Therese Foley



Young

The Young Mercy Associates celebrated Mass in Mt St Joseph's Chapel on Mercy day. Fr Allen Crowe was the celebrant. We all enjoyed lunch at the Young Services Club afterwards. SPECIAL thanks to Sr Rita Savage for making the occasion more special for all her preparation. Covid 19 sure has impacted on our Associates this year and hopefully in 2021 we will be able to meet more often and carry on Catherine's works of mercy.

Joy Cameron



Rockhampton

Greetings from Rockhampton!

Being such a different year for us all, we had to think differently about our gatherings, however, our progressive committee kept us united with regular emails and prayerful reflections.

Mercy Day was celebrated with a liturgy and light lunch hosted by St Mary's School. Those who were able to attend enjoyed celebrating with this community.

As it was impossible to host our annual High Tea, it was decided to have a multi draw raffle with the major prize being a large, patchwork quilt made and quilted by our president Ailsa. Other prizes were kindly donated also.

Tickets were sold by our members and The Cathedral College were wonderful in promoting the raffle and selling tickets. An amazing amount of \$3,040.00 was raised. Sister Stancia Cawte won the quilt and to say she was overjoyed when we delivered it is an understatement. All other prize winners were also very happy.

The money has been forwarded to *Mercy Works*.

On 14th November, we are having our Christmas gathering, beginning with Mass at St Joseph's Cathedral and then we will proceed to the Kevin Castles Centre for a COVID ap-

proved morning tea.

Sister Joanne Molloy rsm is to be our guest speaker and her topic, 'A Quantity of Extra Luggage. Early Foundations of the Sisters of Mercy' is sure to be enlightening and entertaining.

Because of COVID 19, we are not donating goods for a hamper this year, however, we will donate money to be distributed locally to charities, who will make Christmas happier for those less fortunate in our community.

Wishing you all, a very happy, holy and peaceful Christmas.

Kathleen Winters



Townsville

The Townsville Mercy Associates have been meeting three times per year for a few years. This year we met twice due to restrictions on numbers. In recent times we have undertaken to write and send cards and messages of hope and love to Sisters in the southern states who have been impacted by the lockdowns. This exercise will continue into the future and as well, we have also undertaken to remember our local Sisters during this time, with cards and messages for their birthdays sending them our prayers and blessings.

At a recent meeting we were able to view the latest video recording of Catherine McAuley's life. The Associates found this enjoyable viewing and later shared discussion about the video and indeed about Catherine McAuley's life and times. We have awesome members who absolutely love spoiling us at each meeting with delicious food. We are all hopeful that 2021 will see us together again with renewed vigour and trust, knowing that God is always in control.

Rita Tomba



Network Facilitator contact details

NSW: Christine Convery

mercyaassociatesnsw@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0414 627226

VIC: Anne Pate

mercyaassociatesvic@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0407 908729

QLD: Marg Trevethan

mercyaassociatesqld@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0419 677469

WA & other locations: Carmel Ross

mercyaassociates@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0408 124404

Gladstone

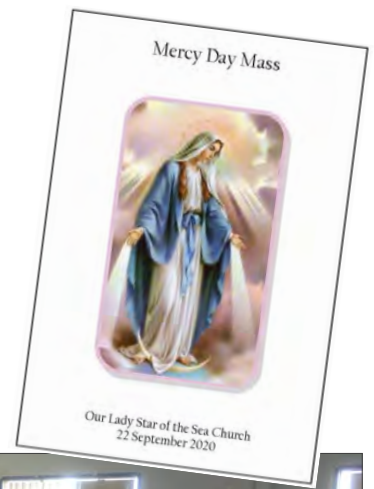
Parishioners were welcome to join us for our Mercy Day Mass Tuesday afternoon 22nd September at our Parish Church. All ministries were 'undertaken' by Associates.

Our welcome was taken from Sr Berneice Loch's Mercy Day message for 2020. We knew her personally, for she had taught at our Chanel College some years ago. Partial quote:

'The Feast of Our Lady of Mercy is a special day for everyone within our Mercy world. On September 24th 1831, the seed that was planted through opening the House of Mercy by Catherine McAuley, continues to bloom some 189 years later ... As so eloquently put in our Constitution, *'Whatever work we do, our is of mercy and fidelity, justice and peace. Because of our God, to whom we sing our song, we join in the search for justice and love wherever we are'.*

We began with the hymn *Come As You Are*. At Communion, we sung *Circle of Mercy* and concluded with *Mother of Mercy*. During the Mass, we all stood and recited Catherine's *Suscipe* and the *Prayers of the Faithful* focused on our Mercy history and present works. It was a mercy filled reflective time together.

Leonie Johnson



Tuart Hill, Perth

At long last St Catherine's House of Hospitality has reopened, and, to our great joy, we will hold our first gathering since the lockdown earlier in the year, on November 29th. It has been a very long journey throughout this time, and the loss of the actual physical connection with those whom we see as our Mercy family, has been very real.

However we are grateful to our network facilitators from each state, who have helped to sustain us with significant and thought provoking reflections. Also the Zoom reflections, for those who were able to participate, are both enjoyable and productive.

I'm sure I speak for our group in saying that the spiritual input from all of the above sessions has helped to keep the Mercy Associate connection alive, and has also helped to 'feed' us with spiritual food, necessary during what could have been a very lonely spiritual journey.

Many thanks to Anne, Chris, Carmel and Marg.

Vale Beryl

It is with great sadness that we note the recent death of Beryl O'Connor. She and her husband Brian, who went to God earlier in the year, were very loyal and faithful Mercy Associates over many years. They were both ever generous with their time and support, whatever the activity. Beryl had a beautiful singing voice and was always ready to share her gift, particularly when it came to fund raising for Mercy Works, such as our concerts. She will be sadly missed at our gatherings and as a member of our Mercy Family. *Well done good and faithful servant*, rest peacefully in the arms of the God you served so well.

We look forward to getting back to some kind of 'normal' in the New Year.

Jan O'Connor Tuart Hill, Perth

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.



Education making a difference—Ruth's story



MercyWorks

SISTERS OF MERCY IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Ruth considers herself blessed. She went to school beyond Year 8, unlike most of the other girls she grew up with in a remote part of Papua New Guinea.

Because of support from Mercy Works, Ruth had the opportunity to receive a formal education and is soon to complete her studies in Community Health Nursing.

This has changed Ruth's future by opening up a whole new world of possibilities. This is what access to educational opportunity does. It offers young people the helping hand they need to realise their full potential and lead a very different life.

Ruth's parents are subsistence farmers in Iowara. They fled across the border from West Papua in 1984 and were settled in the camps established for these refugees in East Awin. Her mother and father worked hard to feed and clothe Ruth and her four brothers and two sisters. But they barely survived.

Ruth liked going to school in Iowara, but when she finished Year 8, there was no further formal education available there. She was determined to continue learning because she wanted to be a nurse to help people like her mum and dad and sisters and brothers living in isolated villages.

She would need to move to Kiunga so that she could improve her literacy and numeracy skills to be accepted into nursing school. Coming from such a poor family, Ruth could not afford to pay for a safe place to live while she studied.

That is how she found herself at the La Sagesse Hostel. This was an environment where she could live safely in the company of other young women from remote areas of the Western Province. There she felt a real sense of belonging. She flourished with the support of Sr Adeline who helps the students with their studies and more than that, she plays a crucial role of being their mentor.

Without the chance to live there, she would never have gone to the Rumginae School of Nursing to be trained as a Community Health Nurse.

Ruth already knows what she will do when her training is finished as she explains in an excited and animated tone, 'I hope to be able to work in our own village in Iowara by helping train Village Health Volunteers, or I might get a position in a Health Outpost'.

The experience of living at the hostel provided by Mercy Works, in those first couple of years away from home, became an essential part of her educational and life journey, as she reflects: 'I feel more confident in myself. I feel like I can be relied on and I feel good to be able to contribute to my community, and our society for a better Papua New Guinea'.



Lauren Stariha

Gladstone prayer...

This prayer was prepared by **Josh Ariens** and prayed at the conclusion of our October gathering on *Mercy in Marriage, Families and Communities*.

The Lord delights in those who wait for his love.

Let Us Pray:

Gentle God, help us

To live slowly: trusting in your Grace;

To move simply: aware of our needs for you;

To look softly: seeing the need for love in others and in our world;

To allow emptiness: pouring out ourselves for your Spirit to fill us;

To let the heart create for us – so we can deepen our love for you, for our families and for others.

Therefore, *The Lord is waiting to be gracious to you, to rise and take pity on you; he exalts himself to show mercy to you, for Yahweh is a just God: happy are all who hope in him.* {Is 30:18}

Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me.

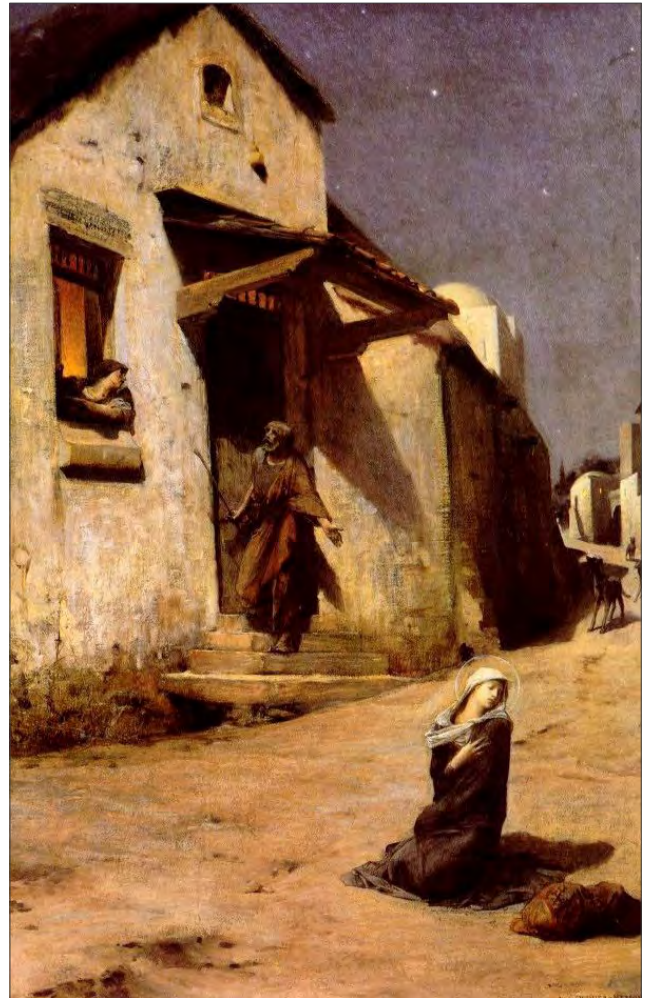
Mary, Seat of Mercy, pray for us.

Amen

CHRISTMAS

From the rich nutriment of Rahamim,
womb of God,
from Hesed,
the inmost being of God,
from the secret radiance of mercy
in which the eternal Three
thrive and delight in their threeness,
at calm and supreme in their oneness,
is given to the unseeing world
the mystery of Jesus.
From the amazement of a woman's womb
the unspeakable Word is uttered.
Mercy made human
grows to see the cost and the wonder,
knows in his depths the depths of all terror,
is at home in the kindest deeds,
endures in his heart the paradox of being creature-
beloved and victim,
servant and Lord.
Jesus, mercy,
in the wideness of the world,
in the hidden strictures of our own hearts,
Your face is found.
Your gaze will meet ours.
Lead us to look in the right places
this year of years,
O Emmanuel,
God with us.

Mary Wickham rsm



Seeking lodging. Merson Luc Oliver

John 1:1-5; 14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Image: Salvador Dali, *The Birth of Jesus*

