



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 21, March 2022

Dear Associates and Sisters,

It's good to be preparing the first edition of **Many Paths** for 2022. The year has been dominated by two issues locally: floods and the ongoing impact of COVID. Internationally, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia some weeks ago continues to distress us as we see the killing of innocent people and the destruction of the infrastructure and heritage of this sovereign nation, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands as refugees in other European countries. We have much to pray about...

Earlier this month, the Mercy Associates Leadership Group met over a weekend in Sydney. Our focus was to reflect on what has happened within the Mercy Associates movement since the first working party was formed in 2013, through to our most recent years where new groups have formed during the COVID era whose total contact has been via Zoom. We also pondered what future directions and options might best suit the Mercy Associates movement. In the next edition of **Many Paths**, in May, we will update you on our deliberations from that gathering.

The liturgical calendar currently places us in the middle of Lent, yet March is a month with some major feast days—St Patrick, 17th; St Joseph, 19th; and the Annunciation, 25th. Most parishes provide opportunities and resources for Lenten reflection and prayer, so we have not included reflection material on Lent in this edition. We have included, right at the end, an inspiring reflection on the Annunciation by an American Sister of St Joseph—it begins on page 7 and continues on page 8. She reminds us that the annunciation was not just something that happened to Mary 2000 years ago, but that God continues to communicate with us in myriad ways, throughout our own lives.

In this edition we have included some prayer and reflection resources that may be of benefit to you individually in your prayer or for your group as a formation and prayer resource.

Also in this edition are articles submitted by groups around Australia—thank you to those who contributed something.

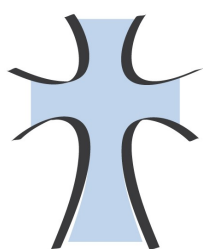
When times are challenging, faith also can be challenged. I'd like to share some words from Rowan Williams, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, in *Candles in the Dark: Faith, hope and love in a time of pandemic*. His theme is 'All times belong to him'.

The challenge of faith is—among lots of other things, of course—the challenge to believe not just at times when life feels 'meaningful', but at times when the climate is overshadowed, the temperature is low and the future obscure. 'All times belong to him': there is nowhere and no-when that is simply 'waste' because the living Jesus is present and active wherever we turn.

This doesn't cancel the pain and anxiety: it simply tells us that each moment is grounded in the divine act that creates and heals. Even if all we can do is—through gritted teeth—acknowledge that God in Christ has promised to be with us to the end of time, we shall have turned just a little way away from the idea that for time to be meaningful it has to be packed solid with productive human activity. Just for a moment, we have recognised that the time we live through is lived through with us by our Creator; its meaning is in his constant presence and his unceasing giving, inviting, welcoming. Our times are in his hand, and all our history is pervaded by the light of Easter.

Chris, Anne, Marg and I wish you rich blessings during Lent, and hope that at Easter you are filled with joy at the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Carmel Ross
Executive Officer



MERCY
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths



Mercy receives the ungrateful again and again, and is never weary in pardoning them.

Familiar Instructions, p. 137

Mercy Associates Honorary recognised in Ballarat

In late February Mary Moran, Val Allan, Jean Cherry, Doreen Donne and Billie Roach all became Mercy Associates Honorary. This is a new group that has been formed for Mercy Associates who, due to illness and/or infirmity, cannot attend a local group. They retain their blessings as a Mercy Associate without needing to make a recommitment every three years or attend meetings. They continue responding to their call to mercy by 'offering prayerful support for the flourishing of the Mercy charism'.

Each of our Honorary members received a certificate from ISMAPNG confirming their Honorary status and may continue to wear their badges if they wish. Congratulations to Billie, Doreen, Jean, Val and Mary.

Anne O'Connell, Helen Smith and Monica McKeegan



Balancing Action and Contemplation

Ron Rolheiser omi

Balance among 'being' and 'doing' is like looking for the Kingdom, a question of searching for a narrow door that few find.

I know only of two kinds of persons: those with too much to do and those who do not have enough to do. I know no one whom I can look at with genuine envy and say: 'He or she has it just right!' Everyone I know, myself included, is either over-pressured or is frustrated because they would like to be doing more. Balance ... to have just the right amount of

work coupled with the right amount of prayer, to have a healthy combination of pressure and leisure, is a thing rarely seen.

Given this perennial struggle for balance, it can be useful to lay out some general principles which, while not necessarily all that practical, at least help show us where, theoretically, the balance lies. I offer these somewhat apologetically, knowing that, in this area, I can hardly present myself as a paradigm.

Nonetheless, for what they are worth, here are **some principles for balancing our lives:**

- Have enough interiority in life to make for mysticism but have enough family and disruption in life to make for healthy displacement.
- Have enough interiority in life to make for soul but have enough obligations and involvements to make for a sense of the corporate.
- Have enough solitude in life to make for enjoyment but enough dutiful work to identify you with the poor.
- Have enough withdrawal and self-care in life to safeguard health, but enough conscription and duty to let you know your life is not your own.
- Have enough of God's agenda to let you know that this world is not ultimate, but enough of the world's agenda to let you know that your task here is to help God shape the earth.
- Be enough at home to realize that your family is primary but be enough in the world to let you know that the world is your ultimate family.
- Have enough involvement in prayer and church groups to be considered pious, but enough concern about politics and justice to be considered radical.
- Be enough Mary to sit, passively, at the feet of Jesus, but enough Martha to not have a privileged escape from the everyday, mundane duties of life.

<https://ronrolheiser.com/en/>, published 9 March 2022

Bathurst Mercy Associate receives Bathurst Local Woman of the Year Award

Below is an article published in January in the *Western Advocate* in January, celebrating the contribution of Bathurst Mercy Associate Joan Sweetnam. Needless to say, the Mercy Associates in Bathurst are proud of Joan and appreciate how richly she deserves to be acknowledged. Special thanks to Sr Patricia Powell RSM for sending this to us, at the request of the group.

A sweet moment as Joan's honoured

AFTER dedicating more than 40 years of her life to working in aged care, Bathurst resident Joan Sweetnam has been honoured for her commitment.

Ms Sweetnam has been named 2021 Bathurst Local Woman of the Year after spending more than half of her life caring for residents in aged care facilities.

Ms Sweetnam worked at Opal, previously known as Bathurst Nursing Home, and then spent 25 years with the St Catherine's Aged Care team before retiring last year at the age of 77.

"I'm honoured, but there's millions of people better than me to receive awards; even at the nursing home the girls work so hard," Ms Sweetnam said.

"St Catherine's is a top nursing home; you wouldn't find a better nursing home. It's a lovely, lovely place.

"I've loved my job. I've been very lucky to be given the privilege to actually share the residents' lives and I've always been ac-



RECOGNITION: Catherine Bennett, her mother, Bathurst's woman of the year Joan Sweetnam, and MP Paul Toole. Photo: AMY REES

cepted into families."

Ms Sweetnam said she misses having a routine and it probably wasn't a great time to retire given the COVID restrictions that came into play shortly after.

However, she still does her best to keep busy.

Since retiring, Ms Sweet-

nam has continued to keep her foot in the door by volunteering at St Catherine's as well as Daffodil Cottage when COVID has allowed.

She also visits a few elderly ladies in the community and enjoys spending time in her garden.

"There really isn't any

other place on earth I'd rather work than in aged care," she said.

MP Paul Toole presented Ms Sweetnam with her award and thanked her for her contributions to Bathurst's aged care system.

"Joan's outstanding achievements over the

years of volunteering and supporting the community has been acknowledged with this prestigious award," he said.

During her time working in aged care, Ms Sweetnam said she has gained some great friends and memories that will last a lifetime.

With her husband having passed away and her children not in Bathurst, Ms Sweetnam said St Catherine's was more than a job to her, it was her whole life.

While honoured to receive the award, she said she felt she was just doing what she loved.



TOGETHER WE

Pray for Peace

We pray for the power to be gentle;
the strength to be forgiving;
the patience to be understanding;
and the endurance to accept the consequences
of holding on to what we believe to be right.

May we put our trust in the power of good to overcome evil
and the power of love to overcome hatred.

We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe
in a world emancipated from violence,
a new world where fear shall no longer lead men or women to commit injustice,
nor selfishness make them bring suffering to others.

Help us to devote our whole life and thought and energy
to the task of making peace,
praying always for the inspiration and the power
to fulfill the destiny for which we and all men and women were created.

Prayer for World Peace, 1978

MERCY INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
www.mercyworld.org

The Blessing of Compassion

Touching the forehead

May I approach all other beings with Christ-like compassion.

May I observe all with kindness and let go of all harsh judgements.

Touching the ears

May I be aware of the suffering of those around me, and throughout the whole cosmos.

May my ears be open to hear the cries of distress.

Touching the mouth

May I have the courage and wisdom to speak up for those who are wronged.

May I be a voice for those who suffer from injustice of any form.

Touching the hands

May I be open to receive from others when I am in need.

May I be ready to give when someone needs to receive my gifts.

Touching the heart

May I be willing to meet my own suffering.

May I do so with deep compassion for myself.

Touching the feet

May my faith give me strength when I stand beneath the cross with another.

May my faith enable me to walk with peace and joy when suffering comes to me.

Embracing (hugging) myself

May I always know the shelter of God when I am hurting and in pain.

May I grow to trust in God's compassion and mercy to faithfully protect me and comfort me always.

Amen.

Via Marg Trevethan and Annette Rowe

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.



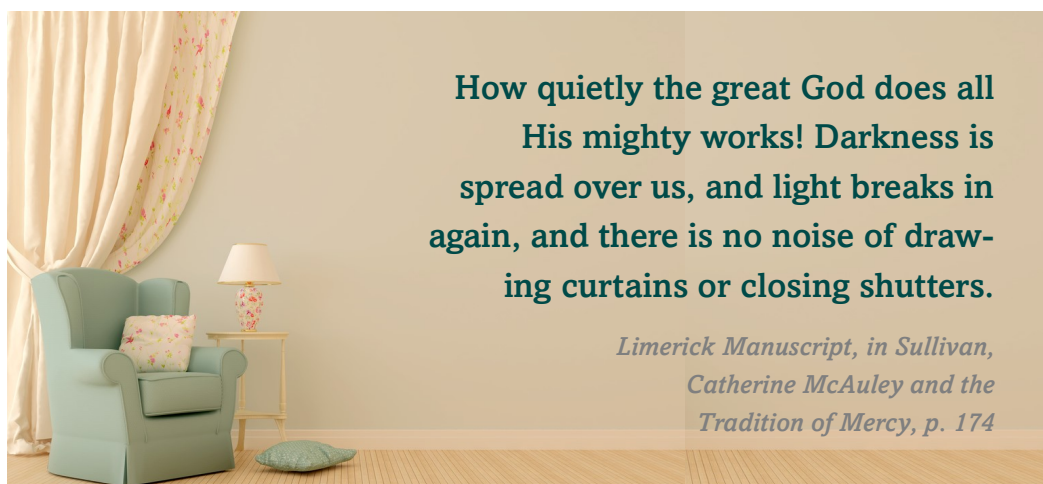
Celebrations in Griffith

Griffith parish, Sacred Heart, recently celebrated TWO Jubilees. These were the Silver Jubilee of Sr A Hosanna, a Daughter of St Anne and the Diamond Jubilee of Sr Theresa Foley, Sister of Mercy.

It is worthy to mention Sr Theresa as she was the founding voice and energy for commencing the Mercy Associates in Griffith. Three of the four Associates attended the Jubilee celebration and one unable to attend as she was away.

Bishop Mark Edwards celebrated a Mass for the two Sisters and then members and visiting friends attended a lovely luncheon.

Odette Dotter



How quietly the great God does all
His mighty works! Darkness is
spread over us, and light breaks in
again, and there is no noise of draw-
ing curtains or closing shutters.

*Limerick Manuscript, in Sullivan,
Catherine McAuley and the
Tradition of Mercy, p. 174*

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea. We pay our respect to past, present and emerging elders. We look forward to an era when all peoples of Australia and Papua New Guinea live in harmony with one another.



<https://japingkaaboriginalart.com/articles/aboriginal-dot-painting/>

Network Facilitator contact details

NSW: Christine Convery

mercyassociatesnsw@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0414 627226

VIC: Anne Pate

mercyassociatesvic@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0407 908729

QLD: Marg Trevethan

mercyassociatesqld@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0419 677469

WA & other locations: Carmel Ross

mercyassociates@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0408 124404

Perth Associates: Uniting hearts and minds through prayer

Recently, in light of the terrible situation in Ukraine, Sandra Atkinson sent us a Peace Prayer, written by a friend of hers in the UK. While beautiful in itself, it is also thought provoking, giving us another perspective on the situation. I was particularly touched by the reminder that mothers and fathers the world over, just like ours, love their children, and that Russian parents would be crying too as they send their sons (and possibly daughters) off into a battle from which they may not return. As the prayer says: *'remind us that sorrow and mourning are not limited by borders and flags'*. Perhaps they too, like us, *'cannot make sense of it'*. So above all dear friends, committed to Mercy, please keep praying for peace. We trust in our merciful and loving God to hear our prayers.

Jan O'Connor

PEACE PRAYER

Prince of Peace, grant peace we pray.

Do not let us turn our eyes away from this.

Despite the fact that we cannot make sense of it,
do not let us avert our gaze.

Remind us of the terrible truth that aggression is never just an idea.

It is an act that dehumanises someone,
and attempts to reduce them to an idea
or a distant thing.

Prince of Peace, grant peace we pray.

Though tears blur our vision,

Anger blurs out thinking

And sorrow breaks our hearts,

Do not let us refuse to feel.

Remind us that Ukrainian mothers are just like our mothers.

Remind us that Ukrainian fathers are just like our fathers.

Remind us that Ukrainian sons and daughters are just like our sons and daughters.

And remind us that Russian parents and children and siblings are grieving tonight for those they have lost in a war they do not even know about.

Remind us that sorrow and mourning are not limited by borders and flags.

Prince of Peace, grant peace we pray.

We hold before You those whose lives are falling apart.

We hold before You those whose land is crumpled under the pounding of artillery.

We hold before You those whose hearts are crushed.

We hold before You those who have lost hope.

We hold our fragile, sinful, broken world before You.

We hold our own fragile, sinful, broken lives before You.

We hold each other before You.

Prince of Peace, grant peace we pray.

Prince of Peace, grant peace.

Prince of Peace, You are our peace.



End of year and commencement of year from Rockhampton

Greetings from Rockhampton, we pray you are all safe in our desperately unsettled world.

Our Mercy Associates have been very busy these past few months. Our final meeting for 2021 began with Mass in our beautiful St Joseph's Cathedral followed by our meeting in the Duhig Centre.

Our guest speaker was Sister Kym Harris osb and her topic was 'The Gospel God is writing in your Life', which was very thought provoking, challenging and amusing. Sister Kym never fails to inspire us. We asked Sister to draw our raffle, which, though pulled together quickly, was most successful. The

money raised was forwarded to *Mercy Works* and gratefully received. We also made a donation to our local *St. Vincent de Paul Society* from the money received at our gatherings throughout the year.

Our first meeting for 2022 included our Commitment/Recommitment Ceremony during our Mass in the Cathedral. Five new Associates made their Commitment. It was a beautiful Mass and very much appreciated. Margaret Trevelan, Network Facilitator for Queensland, was our guest speaker and her topic 'Right Relationships', was very well received. Marg had us divide into small groups for discussion and everyone was involved, including our new Associates. As

it was also Marg's Birthday, we gave her a rousing rendition of 'Happy Birthday', plus a few of us accompanied Marg and her husband, Paul, to the Leagues' Club for lunch to celebrate, before they left us to travel home to Townsville.

A big thank you to Sister Kym and Marg for being such inspiring women for us and also to Sister Beryl Amedee rsm for all the time and direction she gives to our Mercy Associates.

Until next time, Kathleen.

Kathleen Winter, Chair



Everyday Annunciations: The art of listening to a God who never shuts up

For years, I would buy a ticket to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for one thing and one thing only: 'The Annunciation.'

Ticket in hand, I would wind my way down the art-lined hallways of the museum to a gallery deep in the bowels of the American art wing. At times, it felt like I was making my way to the center of the earth, past presidential china and countless still life paintings, quilts and western landscapes, until I turned the corner into a gallery with raised ceilings and a few flat wooden benches.

And there it was: Henry Ossawa Tanner's "[The Annunciation](#)."

Sitting on the bench directly in front of the massive painting (over 6 feet tall and 7 feet wide), I would simply gaze on the glimmering canvas. On it, an adolescent girl in the humble dress of a peasant sits reservedly among the crumpled sheets of her bed. Clasping her hands, she looks at the beam of light before her. Her eyes reflect its glow, which illuminates the whole room with a gentle warmth. She has no halo, no shoes and, seemingly, no fear. This young Mary sits and looks intently. Her eyes are fixed on the light that we come to realize is Gabriel. The moment is sacred and still, speaking volumes.



From my seat on the bench, I would scan every inch of the painting. *What, God, are you trying to say? What must she have felt, said, heard?* Instinctively my hands would come together like Mary's, my fingers intertwining with hers in prayer. *Were you scared or startled? Had you known all along there was something more meant for you? Was Gabriel's voice familiar like one you had heard a thousand times before? The light and its glow, a gentle reminder of the God who filled every day of your young life?*

.... / to page 8

Shifting my focus from the light to Mary and back again, the minutes would fade into hours as my prayers filled the sanctuary of the gallery. Before I became a sister, this sacred space could hold the questions of ‘what if,’ and after I had entered into the process, there was a clandestine comfort in being hidden away in the cloister of culture the art museum provided. The what ifs continued and, in time, transformed. ‘What if *this* is what I’m being called to?’

I would think as I looked at the shimmering canvas. The ‘this’ was not just religious life but encounter with God. What if that call to encounter could be found in this moment? **What if the annunciation was not a past occurrence or a beautiful work of art but a daily experience of living?**

For, as comforting as that gallery was, I knew that the true annunciations of life took place out on the street level. There amidst the pressing demands of work and the noise of every conceivable need in the world, God was speaking to my heart. I just needed to stop long enough to let myself listen.

So often, that is the case. We rush from place to place, moment to moment, person to person, without pausing to recognize the light right in front of us. The temptation is to assign meaning to our doing rather than our being. I need to help one more person, encounter one more thing, accomplish one more task before the day is complete ... I don’t need to stop and listen. I already know what God is saying.

Or, perhaps consciously or unconsciously, we think: If I don’t stop, I won’t have to listen to what God might be trying to say. If I flood my day with news and noise, I can be concerned about that rather than truly bringing those things and my heart to prayer. Then when I pray, I will clasp my hands and eyes as well as my ears and heart, keeping the light at bay and holding on to control.

Unfortunately (or fortunately), that’s not how annunciations work. God never shuts up and any crack can let the light in. Thinking of Mary poised on her messy bed I think of the image Beth Knobbe offers in her book [Finding My Voice](#) as she talks about not trying to hide anything from God. ‘God is like the girlfriend who stops by unexpectedly when my apartment is a mess,’ she writes. ‘Whether I am ready for company or not, she really doesn’t mind.’ We don’t need to make a perfect setting, Knobbe insists. God will come in

anyway. ‘God is the one who comes over and sits on the bed, while I rush around picking up clothes ... she is more concerned about the conversation at hand than the dirty dishes in the sink.’

This is the God who offers us everyday annunciations.

Even if we are unresponsive or preoccupied, God continues the conversation at hand, be it through the people we encounter, the words we hear ourselves say, the nagging thoughts or feelings we return to, or the sense of unease that invites us to stop and sit for a little while.

From time to time as I sat before ‘The Annunciation,’ a tour group would make its way into the gallery. ‘Here we have

‘one of the greatest American paintings ever,’ the tour guide would declare. Drawing my attention from the painting, the tour guide would motion toward a painting directly behind me: ‘The Gross Clinic’ by Thomas Eakins.

Soon the tour group would surround me on my bench, their backs turned on the magical realism of ‘The Annunciation’ to



take in the gruesome testament to medical history and artistic realism the tour guide pointed out. Sitting with my hands folded, I wanted to shout: ‘Do you see what you’re missing?!’ — but I couldn’t. Annunciations beg our attention on their own. Like shafts of light breaking into the gruesome reality of life, they invite us to something more. They invite us to recognize that, indeed, we are on holy ground, called and blessed, met by God in this very moment, messy as it may be.

With all that is going on in the world, it is the everyday annunciations that give us pause, to stop long enough to look intently and to say yes to the God who never stops speaking (or hoping) that we might open our hearts and our lives to listen and respond accordingly.

Colleen Gibson is a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, Colleen Gibson is currently pursuing graduate studies at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Published in **Global Sisters Report**,

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