



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 31, June 2024

Dear Associates and Sisters,

Greetings from a rather chilly Bindoon in WA, where we've recently experienced overnight temperatures of 1.5 degrees. I know we have Mercy Associates in even colder locations, but at this time of year I am at least slightly envious of Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends groups in Queensland and Papua New Guinea, where winter barely exists—by comparison!

As I assembled this newsletter, I was struck by the final words of the delightful poem on page 9, by American poet Anne Sexton (1928-1974). Her poem ends with:

**The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.**

These words have stayed with me since I read the poem on the Jamberoo Abbey Facebook page a couple of weeks ago. We often speak of the importance of sharing our troubles with others (a problem shared is a problem solved, etc...), and it's certainly true that we benefit from speaking with trusted others about the things we are grappling with in our day to day lives.

But what about the things that bring us joy? Catherine understood the importance of joy, writing to Frances Warde rsm: **This is your life, joys and sorrow mingled, one succeeding the other** (May 28, 1841). She also wrote the oft-quoted phrase: **Dance every evening**. And we would understand that dancing is an expression of joy and fun.

Gaudium et Spes, one of the key documents arising from the Second Vatican Council held in the 1960's, commences with: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are

the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts." Though this document is known as the **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World**, it's interesting to note that the words 'Gaudium et Spes' mean **Joy and Hope**.

Catherine's letter to Frances Warde was written over a century before the Second Vatican Council, yet the authors of *Gaudium et Spes* drew on a similar description of human experience. Joy and sorrow both come and go from our lives. During times of sorrow, our faith supports us, so we trust in Divine Providence, as Catherine certainly did.

But Catherine also knew, with her own deep wisdom, that our well-being relies on us experiencing and sharing joy—an experience that is life-giving and nourishing to our spirit. Without this, and without being aware of the importance of sharing joyful times, Catherine knew that she and her Sisters would be at risk of being overwhelmed by the desperate poverty and illness they encountered daily in their work.

When Chris, Marg, Anna and I visit groups, we often hear people comment on the life-giving experience they have through participating in their Mercy Associates or Mercy Friends groups. **The experience of friendship and companionship, sharing a cuppa or meal, praying together, all bring them joy** and give them new energy and hope to take home into their daily lives as they live with God's Mercy at the centre of their being.

And just as we place our sorrows and concerns before God in prayer, it's equally important to give thanks and praise to God, who is the source of all joy...

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer



There is nothing of greater importance than the perfect discharge of our ordinary duties.

Catherine McAuley



Young donation to Ronald McDonald House

On 20th May 2024 a good roll-up of Young Mercy Associates was in attendance for a great presentation from Lisa Simpson, CEO of Ronald McDonald house in Wagga.

Lisa spoke about how the house works, has volunteers, charges no fees to stay and relies on donations of food and money to survive. Ronald McDonald house is a home away from home that provides comfort, support and resources to families who travel for the medical care their child needs, including families from Young.

The meeting concluded with Joy presenting Lisa with a donation for her cause, and of course the obligatory cup of tea and scrumptious morning tea.

Joy Cameron



Above, Joy presents the donation to Lisa.

Below, the Young Mercy Associates group—with a scrumptious morning tea!



What's a Mercy Associate?

When someone asks you:
What's a Mercy Associate?
What's your answer?

Right now, we're looking for a short answer to this very question. Everyone has their own perspective, yet there must be some core understandings we all share.

What do you think? Suggestions to date:

Mercy Associates live and share the mercy of God.

Mercy Associates are called to live and share the mercy of God.

Mercy Associates are co-creators of peace, justice, compassion and mercy in the world.

We are keen to encourage more people to become Mercy Associates and want to develop a small resource, possibly a business card, that includes a short description of what a Mercy Associate is. We invite you to submit your idea on how to briefly describe what a Mercy Associate is. **If you'd like to contribute, please email your input to mercyassociates@ismapng.org.au by the end of July.**

Regardless of whether you submit some input, this is a question your group might find interesting to discuss during a meeting. Everyone values being a Mercy Associate, but we might benefit from listening to what each of us sees in this calling that makes us want to be part of it.

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer



Merciful Make my Heart

Merciful make my heart,
O God,
Mercy full as Yours,
with space for need and time to pause,
right for love and pledged to good.
Merciful make my heart.

Mary Wickham rsm

Mercy Friends in Papua New Guinea visit Correctional Services facility

I am blessed to share stories with you of our visit to the Correctional Services on the 1st of April 2024.

We brought along packed lunch and toiletries to share with the 32 Juvenile only boys aged 18 and below.

With three hours allowed to us we prayed, sang songs and had short reflection. We shared the food and toiletries, and had one-on-one conversation with the young boys.

Our team had an experience and stories to tell of what they encountered.

The Officer in Charge shared the struggles and needs, they have and requested another visit.

Therefore, we plan for a bigger visit in September.

It was a significant and blessed experience for us.

Grace Lalio, Mercy Friends, Papua New Guinea

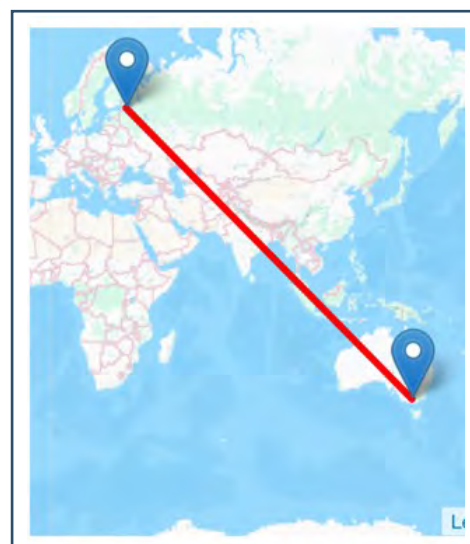


Mercy Zoomers expanding horizons

After a few technological hiccups, we finally had our first online group (using Zoom) where every member could actually attend in mid-June. With attendees from various states of Australia, Russia and Papua New Guinea, we can now proudly declare that our group is an international group! The photo shows the direction from Melbourne, Australia to St Petersburg, Russia – a distance of 14 909 kilometres. We had a very thought-provoking discussion on the foundations of our faith and how important it is for both our lives and our mercy ministries, that we build on the right foundations.

Our group meets approximately once a month. If you are currently isolated and would like to meet regularly for spiritual encouragement and friendship, and you have internet access, then send an email to mercyassociatesvic@ismapng.org.au.

Anna McGookin, Network Facilitator, VIC and SA



Ballarat Reflection Day

Twenty-two Ballarat Mercy Associates gathered on Tuesday, 18 June for our annual reflection day. Our very accomplished facilitator, Jo Russell, guided us through a series of activities that allowed us time for reflection, contemplation, movement, prayer, mindfulness and gratitude - in light of the life of Catherine McAuley. We began the day with self-introductions, enjoying each participant's reflection on his/her early connection to Mercy Associates.

A period of Tai Chi followed, learning some simple movements and breathing techniques, and allowing participants to prepare our minds, hearts and bodies to be open to and engaged for what the day would offer.

Becoming seated again, our facilitator shared a beautiful poem about one person's ordinary day before encountering two homeless people, which, along with the poet's later reflection, became an *extraordinary* gift of insight and good deeds. The poem was very mindful of Catherine McAuley's practical works of mercy.

Scripture taught Catherine to respect the unique dignity of each person. Conscious of her life's work, we undertook a period of scripture reflection (*including Luke 19:1-6; Luke 19:29-37; Luke 14:23; Luke 15:11-32; Matt 7:7-8; James 2:14-17; James 5:7-11; and Romans 12:7-8*). Each quote reflected the importance of works of mercy. As with the earlier poet, this scripture reflection time, and the subsequent participant sharing, allowed our day to become extraordinary.

After lunch and experiencing the joy of gathering with friends to share a meal, as Jesus so often did, we began the afternoon, by popular demand, with more Tai Chi.

Our final activity was a very open invitation to all to write a letter to Catherine, who so often wrote letters to her friends/Sisters. This gave each of us the opportunity to walk in Catherine's footsteps and allowed all participants to write with gratitude what had been his/her experience and reflection throughout the day.

Our final blessing prayer was taken from *Boots Cracked Pots and a Place at the Table*:

Blessed be Mother Earth who nourishes and cares for her children.
Blessed be the fruits of earth that I often take for granted.
Blessed be the eyes that see what is truly happening around us.
Blessed be the heart of mercy whose crack enables deeper seeing.
Blessed be the 'saving element' hidden deep within despair
that can gently transform all darkness into light. Amen.



Van Gogh, *The Good Samaritan*—one of the scripture passages selected for reflection.

Joanne Rix



We must try to be like those rivers which enter into the sea without losing any of the sweetness of the water.

Catherine McAuley

Retirement leads to enriched life of faith and service for Tuart Hill Associate

Over the last six months I have managed to retire - after three attempts. My nursing career has been a great one for me. I have loved the interaction with people and the opportunity to be life giving, in more ways than one, to the sick, injured and all varieties of humanity.

When the time for retirement loomed, I found it very hard to let go. I didn't realise at the time that the Lord was placing a different road before me.

I suddenly had time to attend some Scripture classes - an area of interest to me, which is steadily growing in understanding and fulfilment.

I can now put more time into being a more committed Mercy Associate and to grow in my faith through prayer and discernment.

I've also grown into a member of the Joan Chittister fan club.

As part of my Mercy commitment, I'm now looking at doing some volunteer work. So I may become a member of St Catherine's Apron Club.

Finally, with new growth and understanding coming from my newly discovered 'retirement perspective', I'm even more aware of my blessings, through time with family and friends and the great joy of spending time together.



Sandra Atkinson, Tuart Hill, Perth

TOWNSVILLE ASSOCIATES LEARN ABOUT MERCY FRIENDS MINISTRIES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Mercy Associates and Sisters gathered at the House of Prayer Townsville in May on a beautiful Winter's evening (temperature 20 degrees), a welcome relief after a very hot, humid summer. Hospitality was central in true Mercy tradition thanks to Gayle, Joy and Rita. Marg Trevethan, our Queensland Network facilitator led us in Prayer and Formation. Marg spoke about the work of Mercy Friends in Papua New Guinea as a step in building connections with Mercy Associates. Slides prepared by Grace Lalio Anep from New Ireland and East Sepik (who had spoken at the Mercy Associates Leadership Group meeting), outlined the Friends' activities ranging from local community groups, hospitals, working with prisoners, and involving whole family groups. The scope of the work was humbling and inspiring and caused us to reflect on the work of the pioneer Sisters in PNG, many who came from the Townsville Sisters of Mercy.

We took some time to respond to Marg's question about Mercy in Action in our local community recently. Trudy mentioned the Vietnamese refugee family who came with no English and were helped by the Garbutt community into accommodation, a job for the father, school for the children, and girls now preparing to attend the local Mercy Secondary college, much to the joy of the parents. Trudy has been working with a small group of young women in formation on Mercy. It was encouraging to have Ava attend our meeting and share something of her Mercy journey.

Rita spoke about the MALG meeting she attended as our representative and her work as a committee member



of the World Day of Prayer Committee Sr Helen Mary distributed the letter and prayer from Sr Caroline Ryan RSM. Caroline is involved in the move to have Catherine McAuley canonised. Sr Judy Redden RSM has a terminal cancer diagnosis, and prayers are sought for her. The letter invites participation in a period of prayer, during the month of June, specifically aimed at seeking recovery from cancer for Sr Judy. The meeting acknowledged the upcoming Diamond Jubilee of Sisters Cath Cuddihy and Carmel King with members invited to the Mass.

Joan Neal

Gladstone links with Mission to Seafarers



Cheryle Naylor is an avid knitter in our group, and she has been knitting beanies (*photo at right*), jumpers and blankets for an orphanage in Timor for 30+ years (since one of our Chanel College teachers took her first group of senior college students on what was to become an annual excursion to Timor).



Cheryle has now reached out to our Mission To Seafarers. Our Curate Fr Ashwin Acharya began his ministry here after his ordination in St Joseph's Cathedral three years ago. Soon after his arrival he became aware of the need for Mass to be celebrated at the centre for our visiting seafarers when in port. The Seafarers Centre manager mentioned that the sailors were often cold at night when on duty and so Cheryle has been knitting beanies to be given to them when they visit the Centre. Also when there, they write 'prayer requests' on forms which are emailed onto a Team of Prayers including a number of our Mercy Associates. These Associates also attend this monthly Mass, when available.

Fr Ashwin was our Guest Speaker at our May meeting, and he blessed all our members by ministering to us through his music, he being a VERY accomplished musician and composer. It is not often that a priest will tell the story of changes in his life through the changes in his composition styles of music. It was a very rewarding morning and one we will not see again for many a year. He further blessed the whole parish with a farewell concert the night before he left to take up his new appointment in Rockhampton. He retraced his teenage years and adult life through his music, showing us how his performances of Rock music styles changed and became more Ballad like as his life progressed through his teaching years at St Ursula's College Yeppoon and then into the Seminary. Every age group was much rewarded with his 'thank you' concert to us, his parishioners, which finished with a rock rendition finale!

Before Ashwin was transferred Cheryle knitted a beanie for him in our Marist blue colours (Gladstone was previously a parish run by the Marist Fathers) and one for Fr Alex Varghese, his new parish priest (in his Indian national flag colours). Ashwin was quite touched as he thanked her for her gifts.

We wished Fr Ashwin well in his many endeavours through music and prayer as he continues his ministry throughout the diocese.

The Mission To Seafarers will miss him being the celebrant of their monthly Masses and we will miss him too. May God continue to bless his ministry wherever he is placed in our diocese.

Shaneen McAuliffe



NEW MINISTRY PLANNED FOR GRIFFITH

A much needed new project is planned for development in Griffith. The Sisters of Mercy have paid for a block of land, not all that big but in a good convenient area and are partnering with St Vincent de Paul. The Vinnies housing project manager has applied to the government for a building grant to build seven social supported units for much needed accommodation in Griffith. Griffith is one of the highest needs locations in the state for any type of accommodation.

Griffith Mercy Associates will help with the project.

Sr Theresa Foley rsm



The Nameless Dance



What I drop, you will pick up.

What you lose, I will find.

And where you close, I will open.

Where I stumble, you will dance.

And what I struggle to know, you will assume.

So don't feel guilty if you should know joy while I suffer.

We take turns being light to each other's dark, being the gold to fill each other's cracks.

We take turns catching each other when we fall.

After hours in the café struggling to know the path of my soul in a jagged world, I leave, the anonymous seat of truth now warm, for you, about to arrive.

Ma rk Nepo

Resources for Mercy Associates—available online

Mercy Associates prayer resources (the one you receive each month by email) and past newsletters are available to download from the Mercy Associates page of the ISMAPNG website. Also there is the Formation Resource and the Administrative Handbook, plus the Prayer Booklet for Mercy Associates. The web address is:

<https://institute.mercy.org.au/become-involved/become-a-mercy-associate/>

Mercy Associate Honorary

is an option available to Mercy Associates who, because of age, frailty, illness, etc., are no longer able to attend meetings of their local group. It enables them to remain Mercy Associates, with their ministry being prayer for others. A formal acknowledgement is provided through the issuing of an 'Honorary' Certificate. Contact your Network Facilitator (Chris in NSW; Anna in VIC & SA; Marg in QLD; Carmel in WA) if there are Associates in your group for whom this option should be considered.

Network Facilitator contact details

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Leadership in the Mercy Way

As I start to pack my bags for my final immersion in Dublin as part of my Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF), I find myself regularly pausing to reflect on how fortunate I am to be part of this program.

I am one of nine women from nine different countries participating in this 12 month journey led by Sr Angela Reed RSM and the Mercy Global Action team.

This journey has provided me with many challenges, many opportunities and a greater inner strength to tackle both challenges and opportunities. With the help of my mentor, Sr Liz Callen RSM, who has been by my side during the 12 months, I was able to learn from these lessons and understand the deeper meanings while opening my heart to all that has come my way.

The MELF program focuses on Displacement of People and Degradation of the Earth. These are huge social justice issues, and I don't mind admitting that it was a little daunting at the start of the program.

However, as the program progressed and we were exposed to concepts and practices of leading with dignity, messages of hope and practical change towards both the environment and the displacement of people those feelings that I found daunting turned in to sparks of hope and change, helping me find my way to advocate for change on the issues that matter to me.

The program provides three immersions: one in Siem Reap, Cambodia in August last year; one in New York, USA last March; and my final immersion is coming up in July in Dublin, Ireland. In addition to these immersions, we had regular webinars with leaders in social justice advocacy in a variety of topics.

A key component of this 12 month journey is to develop my own research project which focuses on a social justice message that I feel the Mercy world needs to hear. My research project is titled, 'Free & Equal: An Australian Conversation on Human Rights'. The research pro-

ject will be presented to the Mercy world in the third immersion and graduation at Baggot Street, Dublin in July.

But as mentioned, the journey to progress to the graduation of the program, started in Cambodia. It was here we heard of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge from survivors, we met with families that are living in poverty, but we also saw how lives are changed through the simple act of giving and sharing Mercy. Ret, who was one of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge and is also a victim of one of the millions of landmines across their country, shared with us that his healing began when he started working with Sr Denise Coghlan RSM. He and Sr Denise started advocating for the removal of landmines and also developing and distributing specially-designed wheelchairs for survivors of landmines. Both Ret and Sr Denise received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work. This is one story of many that touched my heart during my time in Cambodia.

During the New York immersion, we participated in the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations. This was an opportunity to hear of the many social justice issues facing women across the world. Whilst many stories were heartbreaking, like women fighting oppression in Afghanistan, there were also many successes and signs of encouragement. I found that the common denominator for many of the issues discussed was 'education'. Not just schooling, but education on physical health, their rights and potential pathways forward. In addition to

attending this conference, we also had the opportunity to hear about the success the Mercy Sisters are achieving in different parts of the world as well as in the US.

So, as I pack my bags for Dublin, put the finishing touches to my research presentation, I reflect on the powerful impact and the legacy this program will have on me. I am grateful for the opportunity to walk beside the other MELF participants, work

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Cambodia, Aug 23:

Back row: Sr Denise Coghlan RSM, Jo Thompson (UK), Sarah Dwan (New Zealand), **Cynthia Mulholland (Australia)**, Hilda Cruz (Mexico / USA), Andrea Haller (USA), Marietta Latonio (MGA), Sr Paula Anamani RSM (MGA), Sr Virgencita Alegado RSM (Philippines), Alexis Stephens (Guyana). Front row: Sr Angela Reed RSM (MGA), Dinah Mwenda (Kenya), Ret (Cambodia), Maria Pearson (Argentina).

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with my mentor and to meet the incredible Mercy women who shared their knowledge, their expertise and their passion for social justice. shared their knowledge, their expertise and their passion for social justice.

As my journey comes to an end, I wish every success for the next cohort of participants who are starting their MELF journey in September, and I am sure they will learn to lead with dignity and to advocate for justice in their part of our global community.

Cynthia Mulholland,
ISMAPNG Communications Team



MELF participants at the United Nations in New York in March 2024. L-R: Hilda Cruz (Mexico / USA), Maria Pearson (Argentina), Dinah Mwenda (Kenya), Sarah Dwan (New Zealand), Andrea Haller (USA), Jo Thompson (UK), Virgencita Alegado RSM (Philippines) Alexis Stephens (Guyana), **Cynthia Mulholland (Australia)**.

WELCOME MORNING

There is joy

In all:

In the hair I brush each morning,

In the Cannon towel, newly washed,

That I rub my body with each morning,

In the chapel of eggs I cook

Each morning,

In the outcry from the kettle

that heats my coffee

Each morning,

In the spoon and the chair

That cry "hello there, Anne"

Each morning,

In the godhead of the table

That I set my silver, plate, cup upon

Each morning.

All this is God,

Right here in my pea-green house

Each morning

And I mean,

Though often forget,

To give thanks,

To faint down by the kitchen table

In a prayer of rejoicing

As the holy birds at the kitchen window

Peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it,

Let me paint a thank-you on my palm

For this God, this laughter of the morning,

Lest it go unspoken.

The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.

Anne Sexton



God of Love,

You walk with all your people.

You welcome the neighbour and the stranger.

May we do likewise, acting for justice so that all people know peace and freedom, at home and far away.

God of Care,

You feed the hungry and make room for all who are displaced.

May we do likewise, acting with compassion so that all people fleeing poverty and fear find what they need to live well.

God of Freedom,

you meet us where we are and make the way for life.

May we do likewise, acting in solidarity with all people, especially migrants and refugees, to realise hope together.

Amen.



Flooding in West Papua New Guinea

Two months of continuous rainfall in the remote Western Province of Papua New Guinea has caused terrible flooding in the area. Communities living along the Down Fly River and in the lowara region, two areas supported by Mercy Works livelihood projects, are seriously affected.

Water levels have remained high, causing long term flooding damage. Communities have been cut off by the high-water levels and washed-out roads, making it difficult to access health services and supplies. Businesses, that serve these communities, are unable to operate. Food sources, such as vegetable gardens, have been destroyed by the rains.

A recent report to the Fly River Provincial Government has noted an increased number of people being treated for waterborne diseases including malaria. A local engineer George Neiman, quoted in *The National*, said the water colour of the Lake Murray swamps and rivers, located in the Middle Fly District, has turned a reddish brown affecting the sago making process which needs clean water. Sago is a staple food in this part of the world.

Mercy Works is collaborating with the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga and Bishop Joseph Durero SVD to give Emergency Relief funds to the villages. Small dinghies are being loaded up with food, such as rice and noodles, to take to the displaced villages.

“We have been working in the Western Province since 2003 to deliver sustainable development. Last year we started a new project partnering with West Papuan refugees to improve their living standards by addressing the root causes of poverty. But right now, the situation there has become very desperate. Our focus today has shifted to just supporting these communities to survive day-to-day and then to help them return home.



Kuyu village: Communities receiving support from the Parish team



Mapruam Village: Fr. Mateus, St. Gerard Parish Priest and the team distributing relief supplies to the Communities.



Mapruam village under water

Membok Village: Teachers and students receiving relief supplies from the Parish team.



These communities have already experienced so much hardship. They are a resilient people and we are determined to help them.” said Sally Bradley, RSM, Executive Director of Mercy Works.

Danielle Hayes
Fundraising and Marketing
Manager