



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 32, September 2024

Dear Associates and Sisters,

For most parts of Australia, some delightful spring weather is occurring. I suspect though that for Papua New Guinea and tropical Australia, it's beginning to become quite warm. September and early October are the **Season of Creation**, a time when we are asked to reflect on the wonder of God's creation and of human impact on it, especially negative impact. We are also asked to consider how we can personally live as responsibly as possible, so that we generate less waste than we might have done in earlier times. **Sally Neaves**, Integral Ecology Animator for ISMAPNG, has contributed an article about a recent gathering in Cairns focusing on environmental issues.

Our staffing is undergoing a period of transition. **Christine Convery**, who has been Network Facilitator for NSW since late 2016, is retiring in a week's time. Chris's service to the Mercy Associates movement has been outstanding. We wish Chris good health and happiness as she moves to the next stage of her life and we thank her deeply for the wonderful gift she has been to Mercy Associates.

We welcome **Phil Billington** to the NSW role, and Phil has already commenced so that she and Chris have some overlap time for a handover. Phil has many personal and professional gifts to bring to the role and we hope she finds it fulfilling.

Each of these women has penned an article in this edition, and these are well worth reading!

September is the month when the **feast of Our Lady of Mercy occurs, on 24th**. The monthly prayer and reflection resource for September is about Mercy, prepared by Anna and timed to provide a resource for you personally or your group when it meets. This has already been sent out separately.

But I'm not a leader...

Mercy Associates and Mercy Friends are generally humble people, not given to big-noting their efforts to help others in their communities. They want to simply make a contribution and serve those in need. When they gather in their groups, they share prayer, formation and hospitality, along with the friendships that naturally form in groups like these.

We live in an age where social media are a dominant factor in shaping opinions, and often in shaping behaviour, especially our opinions and what we buy. We have access to more information and opinions than we can possibly process, and there's little sign of this going away.

The word 'influencer' has become part of our language. These are the people on Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc., who have developed the knack of seeming to be more important than others, to the point where they 'influence' the opinions and buying choices of others – sometimes millions of others. When they become good at influencing (i.e., have a huge number of followers), they will be contacted by corporations wanting to sponsor (pay) them, especially to promote the purchasing of their products.

You could argue that this is a form of leadership. We tend to think of leadership as a force for good. We think of politicians and community leaders who are strong in their public comments about causes we care about, such as human rights. But leadership is a generic word. Though we might find it unpalatable to admit, Adolf Hitler was an exceptionally effective leader.


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Carmel Ross, Executive Officer



Our charity is to be cordial. Now cordial signifies something that renews, invigorates and warms. Such should be the effect of our love for each other.
Cork manuscript





Article for September 2024 Many Paths Newsletter

by Christine Convery

NSW MA Network Facilitator, until end of Friday, Sept. 27.

Mercy Associate in the NSW East Coast MA group, and group contact person.

Email: healthnharmony1@gmail.com

Dear Mercy family:

It is with mixed feelings that I bid farewell to my role as the NSW MA Network Facilitator, after so many years. I will miss visiting the wonderful MA groups across NSW, as they are such compassionate and hospitable mercy folk. In bidding farewell, I would like to sincerely thank all NSW Mercy Associates for their kindness and hospitality when I've been with them. I will also miss being with my fellow MA Network Facilitators when we meet via Zoom each month; pray together and discuss many and varied matters concerning the MA movement across the Institute. I will remember the many MALG meetings I attended in Sydney each year and loved being involved with this talented and mercy-filled leadership group. However, there has come a time in my life when I need to retire from the workforce and enjoy spending lots more time with my extended family, in particular; some of whom I feel I've neglected in recent years.

I would especially like to thank Carmel Ross who is a wonderful executive officer for our MAs across the Institute, and a committed Mercy Associate in Perth. Carmel has also been a loyal and trusted friend whom I will endeavor to keep in contact with often. Her steady advice and counsel I have come to rely on over these many years in which we have served the MA community together.



Chris with the NSW East Coasters in November 2021, at their first commitment ceremony. L-R: Sr Sally Bradley, Noeleen Kirwan, Margery Jackman, Chris, Sr Eileen Quade, Dianne Hanna

I am also very grateful to my fellow Mercy Associates in our NSW East Coast Mercy Associates group, which is an online group - the first online group for NSW. However, we do meet physically once a year, which we all look forward to very much. This year we will meet in Newcastle for our Commitment and Re-commitment Ceremony on November 30, followed by lunch in a nearby café, which will be a very special occasion.

In closing, I would like to simply say that as a Mercy Associate it is a privilege to live and share in the mercy of our triune God, holding and living the charism of mercy as lived by Catherine McAuley.

Blessings in Mercy, always,

Chris

Thank you Chris, may God bless you always...

The Mercy Associates community has been richly blessed by Chris's contribution over a ten-year period.

Chris has been a Mercy Associate for over two decades, and this experience provided her with a wealth of wisdom to bring to the role of Network Facilitator for NSW. In the last ten years, Chris has been involved in a voluntary capacity, and since November 2016, as NSW Network Facilitator.

During 2013-14, Chris was a member of the Working Party that developed the original *Vision Statement* as well as proposing some models of governance. During 2015-16, she was a member of the Mercy Associates Implementation Committee, the group who supported the development of the Formation Resource and Administrative Handbook. These contributions have shaped the Mercy Associates community that we have today, so we owe a debt of deep gratitude to Chris.

The NSW Mercy Associates groups have appreciated Chris's gentle, faith-filled support of them. She also is one of a small group who have formed the first online NSW group and will continue to be part of this group in the future.

Chris, we thank you for being the person you are and for the wonderful, enduring contribution you have made to the Mercy Associates movement. May God bless you always...

WELCOME TO PHIL BILLINGTON, NEWLY APPOINTED NSW NETWORK FACILITATOR

Coming Home to Mercy

I began school as a boarder at Our Lady of Mercy College Goulburn in 1960 and stayed for 10 years! Since that formative time in my life, the spirit and inspiration of Catherine has woven in and out of my life through the witness of the many women I met along the way – teaching with the Mercy Sisters in Broken Hill, giving birth to my son at St Anne's Mercy Hospital in Perth, being the first lay Principal of a Mercy Primary School in Perth and working alongside Sisters in Parish ministry!

The ebb and flow of life has led me in many ways but at the heart has always been an inexplicable heart for those who are voiceless and a call to respond! Two extraordinary Mercy Sisters, Carmel Gardiner RSM (dec'd Goulburn) and Sr Irena Kasprzyk (dec'd Perth) along with my late father, Frank have been the most influential in my journey of faith. All three loved unconditionally without judgement. In the most despairing times in my life, they were there. I am the mother of Ryan and the foster mother of Vu and Ba Phil to his wife and 4 children, all of whom I am very proud - together we have faced many of life's ups and downs and they have all enriched my life so much. So the saying of Richard Rohr ofm, '*God comes to me disguised as my life*' has been very real for me.



So, at this stage of my life, I am responding to this invitation in a world where increasingly people of all ages are feeling vulnerable and unsure and the needs of the marginalised are increasing. It is calling me to rediscover my relationship with God through community - the community of the Mercy Associates whom I know will enrich my life and stretch my thinking, feeling and doing – my way of being. In the words of a Mercy Sister in the 80's when I was preparing to be the first lay Principal in Perth – Mission is about stepping beyond what is comfortable, in God's name!

Thus following a random read of CathNews positions vacant, I discovered the role of Facilitator of Mercy Associates (NSW). It captured my attention and stirred my spirit - Catherine's spirit tapping me on the shoulder yet again. I feel that in the latter years of my life I am *coming home to Mercy!*

Philomena (Phil) Billington



CELEBRATING
THE SEASON
OF
CREATION!



Ballarat Associates enjoy a cooking demonstration followed by lunch!

On 27th August, a group of Ballarat Associates gathered for a cooking demonstration and luncheon which was presented by Mollie Cleary with assistance from her "sous chef" Frances Segrave.

Loving God

May we be people of faith - a faith that is based on our relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours and with our planet.

May we always be aware that everyone and everything is part of God's creation, gifted and entrusted to us.

As we acknowledge our individual uniqueness we are mindful of others, aware that we are all part of God's creation.

Today as we prepare to enjoy our brunch, in the spirit of Catherine McAuley, we ask God's blessing now and always.



Parish Centenary Celebrations for Gladstone Associates

On the weekend of 16/17 November 2024, our Parish Church will celebrate its 100th birthday. Many celebrations have been planned, beginning with a pilgrimage 'walk' through history, led by Sr. Noreen Dunne smsm. On Saturday evening a Celebration Dinner will be held in the Harbour Room of the Reef Hotel while on Sunday morning at 8.00am a Solemn Anniversary Mass will be concelebrated by Most Reverend Bishop Michael McCarthy, Bishop of Rockhampton, the Priests of our Parish and many past Priests who have ministered here. Many religious will be present. It is a momentous occasion and the fact that our wooden Church has stood for 100 years is a testament to the faith and generosity of the Catholic people of Gladstone.

Our organizing committee has arranged for memorabilia to be available in the form of wine, wine glasses, coffee mugs, tote bags and, not to be forgotten the children, handballs with the Star of the Sea Logo clearly displayed on all items.

Our Mercy Associates have supported and assisted the many Priests, Religions Orders both Marist Sisters and

Brothers as well as the Mercy Sisters. One Mercy Associate was the Parish Secretary for 20 years and is now assisting the organizing committee. We are but one of the many groups in the Parish who will actively take part in these celebrations.



Annette Plath



Sr Theresia meets with Griffith Associates

The Griffith Mercy Associates group had the pleasure of afternoon tea and meeting Sister Theresia Tina from Papua New Guinea. She is a member of our Leadership (ILT) for ISMAPNG. One of our Associates was unable to attend.

It was a most eventful meeting with Sister Theresia telling of the good works in PNG and how "Houses" have been established in various remote areas to allow the women to share time and learn new skills.

Odette Dottner



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 Friends form new group in Dagua Parish, East Sepik

We welcome Dagua Parish, who have now started their journey and joined the Mercy Friends of East Sepik. An awareness and Introduction was done on 7th July 2024. The Parish Priest Fr Marek was so delighted and in much support therefore organized a weekend Formation program. Sr Rachael (RSM), and the Mercy Friends leadership team (Rosewitha Pingin, Rita Tano and Julie) spent Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st July with those interested to be Mercy Friends.

Topics discussed at each session were the definitions of Mercy, Vision and Mission of Mercy Associates, the story of Catherine McAuley, spirituality and charism of Mercy,



Grace Lallo facilitating a formation gathering of the Dagua parish Mercy Friends candidates.

the Mercy Sisters and the Institute, the mission of Mercy Friends and the ministry with widows and widowers.

The program summed up with a leadership team in place and a short program to the year end. The Mercy Friend sat Dagua Parish will focus missions with the widow and widowers.

Fr Marek will oversee the group. We are grateful to have another Parish added to the 5 parishes existing.

To God be the Glory.

Grace Lallo, East Sepik, PNG



The newly established Mercy Friends group of Dagua Parish, East Sepik.

When's your birthday?

A reminder that **Les Stewart**, from the Ballarat Mercy Associates, prepares a prayer resource each month on which he lists the Mercy Associates who will celebrate their birthday during that month. This is a fabulous initiative by Les, and you are invited to email him at lescres1234@outlook.com. Les only includes the date of your birthday—not the year!!! We are then able to include Mercy Associates celebrating their birthdays in our personal prayer intentions each month.



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 (Phil 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

NSW: **Phil Billington**
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Phone: 0428 593191

VIC & SA: **Anna McGookin**
mercyassociatesvic@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0411 462485

QLD: **Marg Trevethan**
mercyassociatesqld@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0419 677469

WA, PNG & other locations: **Carmel Ross**
mercyassociates@ismapng.org.au

Phone: 0408 124404

Season of Creation: A time to take on big questions

As you will be aware, we are currently celebrating the Season of Creation which runs from 1 September (World Day of Prayer for Creation) until 4 October (Feast of St Francis of Assisi). Since 2015, Pope Francis has been urging all Catholics to celebrate this and take seriously the call to care for our common home, hearing the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor as one cry.

In a recent Convocation for Season of Creation, organised by Catholic Earthcare, Archbishop Mark Coleridge described Season of Creation as important to us all as “there are these great questions that demand the attention of the disciples of Christ” and that we must “*understand* what we hear, not just hear” the cry of Earth and those rendered poor.

One way our Mercy Institute is responding to these cries is through the **Mercy Integral Ecology Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF)**. This group of 11 emerging leaders has recently completed their third and final immersion for the program in Cairns. It included contemplative time in the rainforest at Seville and the Cairns Botanic Gardens, eco theology/Laudato Si’ sessions, advocacy and media training, prayer and ritual, and a day on Fitzroy Island to visit the Cairns Turtle Rehab Centre. There we met a 70-year-old Green Turtle named Rain who was being rehabilitated from ‘turtle float’, a condition that occurs when turtles eat too much plastic, thinking it is jellyfish, and are no longer able to dive deep into the water due to gas build-up in their stomachs.

Learning about global issues impacting the Great Barrier Reef inspires our bioregional actions locally, wherever we are. The Fellows will now be working on their projects which are all bio-regionally (locally) scoped. The scale of the bioregion is the scale in which our species has been able to thrive and reach

all provisions for 99% of our existence. Many experts have documented the need to return to this scale for most of our needs and actions to care for the environment.

The projects of our Mercy Integral Ecology Emerging Leaders will be presented to a general audience on Zoom at 5pm AEST on 21, 25 and 27 November on Zoom. **All welcome.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85392650952?pwd=tWlbFwhi7AqMSR8aLeu9qUMRNaDBUU.1>

Meeting ID: 853 9265 0952

Passcode: 2024

Sally Neaves, Integral Ecology Animator, ISMAPNG



The MELF group with accompanying personnel in Cairns.

Thank you to **Geraldine Mugavin** rsm of Ballarat, for providing the wonderful photos of Australian and exotic flowers that feature in this edition of *Many Paths*.

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude the original peoples of the nations and lands from which we come and their cultures.

Acknowledgement of Place and People

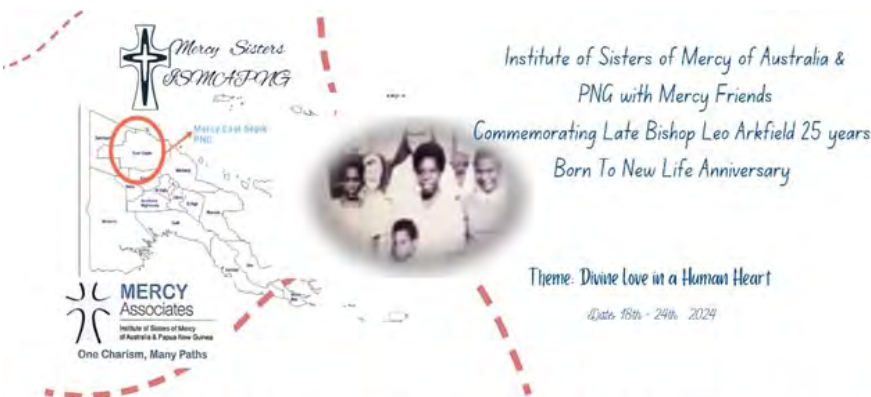


A special celebration for Mercy Friends in East Sepik Diocese

Celebrating Late Bishop Leo Ackfield 25years Born to new life Anniversary

Late Bishop Leo Ackfield initially invited the Sisters of Mercy of Brisbane to East Sepik back in the late 50s early 60s. The Mercy Sisters and Friends in East Sepik joined the Wewak Diocese celebrating his 25 years Born to new life Anniversary from the 16th - 24th August. Theme of the celebration was **Divine Love in a Human Heart**.

We prepared and presented on the first evening a slide show showcasing where and when the Mercy Sisters came to East Sepik, where they settled to continue their journey of ISMAPNG in PNG especially in East Sepik Province. The presentation captured the settling of the Mercy Sisters and building institutions which are very successful today (Mercy Girls Secondary School Yarapos and St Benedict's Campus Divine Word University) and the mission in the work of Mercy by the Mercy Sisters and Friends. A banner, pictures, books, stories, prayer and brochures were prepared but couldn't be displayed at the celebration due to timing.



Mercy Sisters and Friends attended the closing Mass celebration in a beautiful outfit. We offered prayers for our Sisters of Mercy past and present, for taking the step of faith and mission in very remote part of our Province, country and around the world. For every lay man and woman who uphold the values of Mercy and are in the mission of Mercy Works.

Grace Lalio

Mercy impels us to extravagant HOSPITALITY, COMPASSION and JUSTICE in the earth community, being shattered by displacement.

Left: Banner for the celebration.

Psalm 65—in praise of God's creation

Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.

By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows
clothe themselves
with flocks,
the valleys deck
themselves with
grain,
they shout and
sing together for
joy.

vs 1-2; 6-7; 9-13



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In the 1930's, he was able to whip up support from otherwise intelligent and caring people for Nazism, with devastating results for Jews, Romany people and others he disapproved of in the early 1940's. The same is true in our time for social media influencers – there is an alarming number who use their online communication skills to stir up hatred, prejudice and violence, such as the radicalization of young people to become terrorists. **Whether it's for the good or evil, or something in between, leadership is about being able to influence people.**

Ponder the life of Catherine McAuley. Whatever she thought of herself, Catherine was a leader, and most certainly, an influencer. Her personal conviction, driven by her faith, that the poor and disadvantaged needed support and opportunities was so strong that others paid attention and chose to become part of what she was doing. Over time, she established the House of Mercy in Dublin, founded the Sisters of Mercy as a religious congregation who were 'walking nuns', and attracted many lay women and men to work with her and the Sisters, donate to their programs, etc.

The words 'leader' and 'leadership' are not part of Catherine's writings, which are mostly her letters to the Sisters in other Mercy congregations. Nor, of course, is the word 'influencer' in her writings.



So what about you?

Our world faces monumental challenges, presented to us on TV news and in newspapers every day. We look at the 'smallness' of our own daily lives and can be tempted to despair that we could ever make a difference to anything. Yet our Christian faith is founded on hope, that the God who sent his Son to redeem us showed us how 'right living' is conducted. Jesus deliberately loved everyone, served and healed those in



most need, was critical of those who exploited power, and eventually, gave his life so that we all might live.

When we choose to adopt a deliberate, mindful approach to right living, as Catherine did – living our daily lives according to our faith and its values, we make a difference. Often, the impact of our actions on others is invisible to us, but there is an impact because the Holy Spirit works with good hearts to 'influence' our world for the better.

In reality, each of us is an 'influencer'. And each of us is exercising quiet, unobtrusive leadership in our day to day lives when we choose to speak and act in life-giving ways that nourish others. Our trust in God reminds us that we can rely on God to bring light out of darkness, whether we see the impact or not. Our serving God in our day to day lives allows glimpses of the reign of God to become visible, an outcome that tends to prompt better behaviour from those around us.

So perhaps you're more of a leader and influencer than you realise, albeit a humble one. Annette, from the Gladstone Associates, recently wrote 'it is 'how' we are living that is of the greater importance – a life that is inspired by Catherine'.

We absorb our values and life habits from those around us, that's why influencers have become so important. Catherine suggested to her Sisters that they should be like shining lamps (based on Matt 5:14-16). The light and goodness you display in your own life, including in your relationships with others, will be the true legacy of your life. Know that who you are, and what you say and what you do, are important – to God and to those in your personal world.

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer