



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 34, March 2025

Dear Associates and Sisters,

Greetings to everyone, as we send out the first *Many Paths* for 2025!

We're now well into the Jubilee Year of Hope, a graced time for us to ponder how we personally understand hope. We live in a time when there are awful actions and situations around the world and when faced with these, it's easy to lose hope.

Yet hope is a core Christian value. The Letter to the Romans has this description: **Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.** (Rom 5:5).

Our faith guides us to trust in God, whose love for us and all creation never wavers. As you move through this year of hope, take the time and opportunity to reflect deeply on what you understand hope to be. It isn't just optimism, it's much deeper and stronger than that. It's a lot to do with how we understand God's presence and action in our world. Take some time in your Mercy Associates or Mercy Friends group to discuss what hope means to you. When the chips are down and things look grim, are you a person of hope? How do you rally your inner resources to keep living as a person of Mercy? Give yourself lots of time to reflect on this because they're really important questions!

Carmel Ross, **Executive Officer**

There are many ways, both literally and figuratively, in which we can become sources of **hope** for others. Mary Sullivan has this to say about the seeds of hope sown in 1830s Dublin by Catherine McAuley:

"If we wish to sow the seeds of real hope in our world, I think Catherine McAuley would say: This is the way we must do it – one person at a time: one answering of the figurative doorbell, one opening of the figurative door, one embrace of the stranger, one welcoming of the other, one sharing of our bread and milk – one person at a time."

Mary C. Sullivan, "Welcoming the stranger: the Kenosis of Catherine McAuley",



Confidence in God
causes us to hope,
for everything
comes from His pa-
ternal goodness.

Familiar Instructions,
p. 137



Companionable luncheon begins new year in Ballarat

Our luncheon on Wednesday the 19th of February at the Golf House Hotel was very well attended.

It was so heart-warming to sit back and listen to the many conversations, all going on at the same time, as people caught up after the long break.

The room was filled with joy and excitement.

Mary welcomed all and read the acknowledgement of country.

Mollie said Grace and Brian attended to all things financial.

There was time to move around and chat before the meals arrived. Meals were enjoyed in a relaxed manner. No need for people to be leaving their places to order.

Kathy and Jo both spoke, at the conclusion.

I would say the first lunch of the New Year was a great success!



Mary Reus

Signs of the presence of HOPE

The first sign of hope should be the desire for peace in our world.

In addition to finding hope in God's grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us.

"In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. In this way, in language adapted to every generation, she can respond to people's persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other".

Second Vatican Council

We need to recognise the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God's saving presence, ought to become signs of Hope.

Christians should cultivate a gaze filled with hope. Despite failures and setbacks, we are set on a journey to discover the love of God and, at the same time, to discover ourselves. So no one must feel excluded from this call, everyone must have the courage to get involved, in caring for those around us and for the environment we live in.

"Let us get up, therefore, and set out as pilgrims of hope, because, just as Mary did with Saint Elizabeth, we too can bring news of joy, generate new life and be artisans of brotherhood and sisterhood and peace."

Visitation,
Crighton
University,
Omaha



Jubilee 2025 Pilgrims of Hope, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, 2024, pp. 14-15.

Mercy Friends in Dagua, PNG, giving hope to Widows and Widowers

Mercy Friends, the recently born group in Dagua Parish, Wewak Diocese, have now committed themselves in mission to support families of people who are widows and widowers. They have a program themselves to visit every Friday, bringing along with them food items to share. Doing spiritual works of Mercy was the core of their mission. All thanks to Sr Racheal Waisman RSM for being that inspiration with the mission for Widows and Widowers.

Mercy Friends in Dagua are still going through Formation but are doing very well in helping widows and widowers in their village.

At right is the Mercy Friends group after one of their visitations.

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. Psalm 68:5



Mercy Friends celebrate Foundation Day

Mercy Friends celebrated Mercy Foundation Day on 12th December 2024 in an amazing way. Members and families of Mercy Friends in Wewak celebrated with a beautiful Mass, the main celebrant of the Mass was Fr Alphone from St Joseph's Parish. It was an amazing, wonderful and joyous celebration, with hymns rhythm to the sounds of bamboo drums and guitar. A powerful sermon shared, 'Friends to all and enemies to none and stewardship'. We offered special prayers for all our mission and spiritual blessing, and special prayers of blessing upon Sr Theresia Tina RSM and Sr Philomina Waira RSM who were celebrating their Silver Jubilee on that same day at Omuk Tsinsibai Parish, Nebilyer. The day ended with a big feast of food and drinks, sharing betelnuts and stories complemented the celebration.

Meanwhile, some Mercy Friends from Wewak, Mt Hagen and Wabag joined all Sisters of Mercy in PNG at Omuk Tsinsibai Parish to celebrate Sr Theresa Tina (RSM) and Sr Philomina Waira (RSM) Silver Jubilee on the same day 12th December 2024. The celebration was extraordinary when the Mercy Sisters and Mercy Friends combined efforts in the preparation, decorations and motivated the processions of singing and dancing dressed in grass skirts with a lively thanksgiving procession holding baskets and betelnuts from Wewak with

other gifts to offer. The Mass was truly alive till the end. It was truly a day of celebration and they continued into feasting afterwards with local delicacies.

Mercy Friends and their families during the celebrations after the Foundation Day Mass.



Lent is a time for inner reflection, prayer and renewal

Earlier this week the prayer and reflection resource for Lent was distributed, prepared by Phil. Lent is such an important season in our Liturgical Calendar, yet we can get side-tracked about how to experience Lent as a fruitful period of reflection and renewal in our lives.

Some years ago, a very devout scripture scholar explained that we should never tire of having the same bible readings appear again and again in the three-year cycle of readings at Mass. **It's easy, when we hear a familiar gospel, not to hear it.** If we aren't deliberately focused on listening, we can easily switch off and become distracted, thinking 'I already know what this one's about'. The scripture scholar explained that yes, the words remain the same and yes, we've heard it before. Yet, **what changes year-to-year is us.** When we hear or read a gospel passage (or indeed, a bible passage), we are not the same person that we were a year ago, or three years ago, when we last heard it.

The Word of God is one of God's most wonderful ways of communicating with us. As we journey through life and remain open to learning and growing, each time we hear a familiar gospel passage, we hear it anew. God speaks to us as we are now, today, not as we were a year ago, ten years ago. I once had the privilege of attending a service in St John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Cairns. The format of the liturgy was familiar so I felt 'at home' at the service. Yet when the readings were about to begin, the reader announced the New Testament book the reading was from, then before she began the reading, the minister interjected and spoke one single word: **'Attend'**. How powerful this word was! A strong reminder to set aside the myriad thoughts that might be swirling in our minds at the time and attend with our full concentration to the words about to be read to us.

Seasons in the liturgical year can lead us into the same trap. We 'go through' Lent every year, we do our best to make some personal sacrifices (give up chocolate, alcohol, TV, etc.) and we may have the opportunity to participate in a parish or other activity to help us ponder the mysteries and events of the final period of the life of Jesus on earth, his crucifixion, then at Easter, his resurrection.

But, again, we are a different person each year as we experience Lent (or any other season). What have been the events and experiences of our life over the last twelve months that we bring into this Lenten season as a different person to the one who was there a year ago? **Part of our Lenten reflection is about our own personal journey.** Those personal experiences then interface with the scripture readings, so that Lent becomes a period of renewal each and every year.

A colleague I once worked with described his experience of Lent this way: He was an avid gardener. Living in a fertile part of Queensland (Toowoomba), everything grew abundantly ... including the weeds. His perspective on Lent was that there



is a garden within each of us. How we tend that garden is important. As human beings we are not perfect, we have the gift of freedom of choice and that gift means that we make good and not so good choices each and every day. In the garden within, weeds can grow alongside the flowers and fruit trees we so eagerly try to cultivate. My colleague's view of Lent is that it provides a privileged time to weed the garden within us. Time to reflect on how we're going in our lives, our relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbour. As we reflect honestly about these things, slowly the weeds die out and the beauty and fruitfulness of the inner garden flourishes again.

So, though we are now some weeks into Lent, there remains plenty of time to weed our inner garden. **Reflection and prayer are the tools we need to tend that garden – some quiet time away from the busyness of our daily lives – so we can strive to listen to what God is communicating to us.** Mostly, God doesn't shout at us. Mostly, God whispers gently, the God whose hope for us is that we will continue to grow into a fruitful relationship with God, the fruit of which is expressed in our daily lives of service to God and each other.

May Lent be a time of inner renewal and enrichment for you.

Carmel Ross, Executive Officer

Call to be Beacons of Hope for Townsville Associates

2025 is declared as a Year of Jubilee under the uplifting theme of **HOPE**. Pope Francis reminds of our roles as both pilgrims and prophets, called to shine as 'beacons of hope' in the world. As it often does, the environment has challenged us once again, testing our resilience. Recently, our brothers and sisters to the north and south of Townsville have been particularly affected, yet we stand united with them in spirit. Our own memories of floods and cyclones remind us of the importance of community support during tough times and how life-giving it is to receive those small and unexpected surprises of generosity and compassion.

As Mercy Associates, our call to be *beacons of hope* and *lanterns of light* prompts us to reflect on what Catherine McAuley would do in these circumstances. The answer is simple yet profound: she would make a cup of tea, welcoming and comforting those in need, sharing whatever was available. The group shared personal experience of pilgrimage and addressed the difference between pilgrim and tourist. Sister Ros Carr refreshed these themes in her reflection prayer which concluded with a Facebook response from one experiencing difficult times. We cannot know the ripple effect of our actions.

Our first meeting of the year attracted a group of 18 and was chaired by Rita Tomba who gently quelled the many conversations so we might address our simple but relevant agenda. Thanks too to Gail who, quietly in the background, steers our ship and keeps us on track.

Margaret Trevethan (*who was celebrating an important O Birthday*) guided our Associate Renewal of Commitment ceremony, where the Sisters presented Associates with a candle (*symbol of hope*). We remembered also those who can no longer make the outing, but remain forever a person of Mercy. Marg also updated us with news of other groups and happenings coming up.



Gladstone connection with Chanel College flourishes

The Mercy Associates in Gladstone again this year will be supporting and involved in small ways at Chanel College which was established in 1966 by the Sisters of Mercy who were later joined by the Marist Brothers. We attend weekday and full school Masses, providing a presence of Catherine McAuley and her charisma.

The Sisters of **Mercy Leadership Award** was presented at the end of 2024, to the College Captains Ava Bourke and Carter King and College Vice Captains Charlotte Spearing and Izaak Glass. This special Award has a long history at the College. It recognises

At the Opening full College Mass this year, the theme was announced as ***Mercy in Action***. I now quote the words of the opening address by Lily, College leader:

"In 2025, let us be reminded of the words of **Catherine McAuley**, *'The simplest and most practical lesson I know is to resolve to be good today, but better tomorrow.'* We are called to be people who embody mercy through our actions, offering kindness, compassion and support to those around us. Let us strive to live and learn together this year with hearts full of mercy and hands ready to serve."

In his homily, Fr Peter Doherty shared with the stu-

dents how they could put into practice the ***Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*** in their College and home lives. He shared with them practical ways of how to live out simply each 'Work of Mercy'. For example – 'offering to cook a meal at home' to 'standing up for someone who is being bullied'.

For the 'World Day of Prayer' service held in our Star of the

Sea Parish Church, once again the **Mercy Associates** joined with the Chanel College students in prayers, Bible readings and joining in the hymns chosen by the College. One student also read the story from a 15yr old girl from the Cook Is, where the women had prepared the service.

Annette Rowe

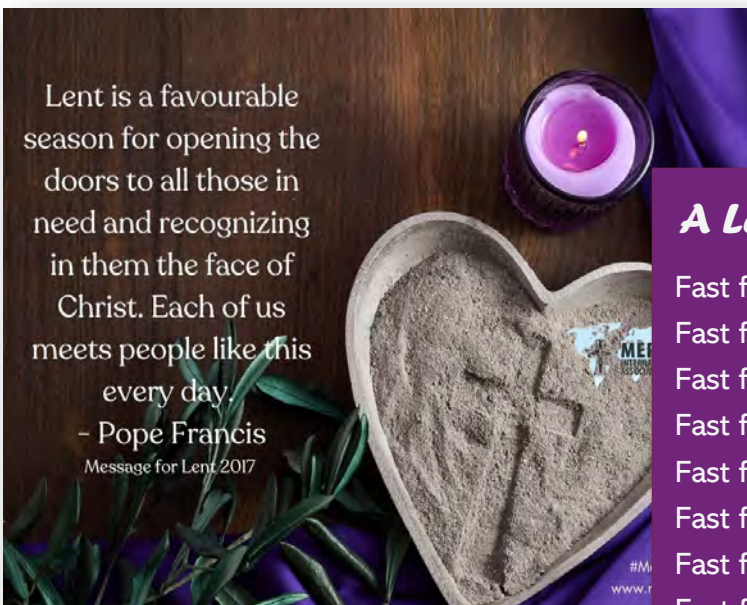
young women and men who have demonstrated outstanding leadership qualities through their involvement in a wide range of College activities. The Award was presented to the students by **Mercy Associates** Dorothy Leech, Geraldine Laird and Annette Rowe.

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey which connects us with the essence of our story. In June this year, students and staff from Chanel College in Gladstone will be embarking on our first ever pilgrimage to Europe. This pilgrimage will see our pilgrims visit places that are pivotal to our story as a Catholic College with both a Mercy and a Marist Heritage.

Beginning in Ireland, the pilgrims will visit **Catherine McAuley House** and a **Mercy school** in Dublin. They will spend time on retreat at Marcellin Champagnat's monastery, Notre Dame de l'Hermitage in Saint Chamond, France. Their final stop will be St Peter's Basilica in Rome. May God bless our pilgrims as they walk paths sacred to our founding stories.

Dr Susan Bunkum PhD, Principal





A Lenten Fast from Pope Francis

Fast from hurting words and say kind words
 Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude
 Fast from anger and be filled with patience
 Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope
 Fast from worries and trust in God
 Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity
 Fast from pressures and be prayerful
 Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy
 Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others
 Fast from grudges and be reconciled
 Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

2024 Lenten Message

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/>

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

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WA, PNG & other locations: **Carmel Ross**

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A new Associate and a change of name for NSW online group

Last November 30 our NSW East Coast Mercy Associates group met at the Tighes Hill Mercy Centre. This was a wonderful gathering with our Commitment/Re-Commitment Ceremony taking place. Gemma Spradbrow-Hunt, from Newcastle, made her first Commitment and we enjoyed the company of many of Gemma's friends and family. Following the Ceremony, we enjoyed lunch together at the MEX club nearby.

Since then we have met online, as usual, last month. It was decided that we would change our group's name to the **NSW Providence Mercy Associates group**. This is to enable anyone from across NSW to join our group. We are no longer restricted to just those of us who live along the NSW East Coast.

Our group may be a small one, however, we feel it will continue to grow in numbers as time moves on. Our meetings are normally held every two months, via Zoom. We take it in turns to chair the meeting, prepare and lead the Acknowledgement of Country, prepare and lead Prayer/Reflection time, and to take the minutes. We are looking to invite some guest speakers from time to time and have a period of formation at each meeting.

May 2025 be a blessed Jubilee Year of Hope to us all and those we serve.

Christine Convery



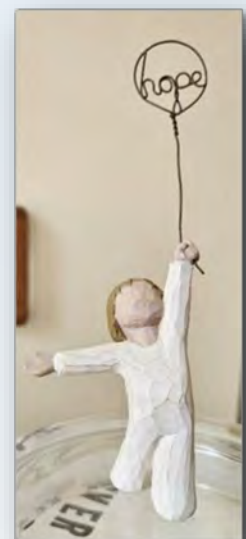
Upper: Sr Judith Murphy RSM present Gemma with her Mercy Associate certificate.

Lower: Gemma, her family, the NSW Providence Associates and Sisters after the ceremony.

Hope

Hope is the thing with
feathers that perches in the
soul—
And sings the tune without
the words,
And never stops at all.

Emily Dickinson



Gunnedah welcomes Phil as she visits

Mercy Associates in Gunnedah warmly welcomed our new NSW Network Facilitator Phil Billington on February 26.

Although some members were unavailable, our small gathering began with morning Mass in St Joseph's Church which was attended by Year 6 students from St Xavier's School, established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1879.

Morning tea followed in the church hall which was the original church built in 1875.

After praying the Jubilee Prayer, where we are called to be tangible signs of hope, and discussing ways of sharing the final verse where we are "called to have the courage to get involved in caring, for those around us and for the environment we live in".

Phil introduced herself and spoke about her background in teaching and service at higher levels. She also explained her new role and members were able to

discuss ideas for growth in the parish.

Mercy Associates, St Vincent de Paul and the parish council are the only support groups operating in the parish and it was agreed that people lived very busy lifestyles these days with both parents in a family generally in the work force.

Phil said Gunnedah had the advantage of two strong Mercy Schools operating in the parish and later visited St Xavier's to speak with long-serving principal Jen Honner. Both schools celebrate Mercy Day each year where the story of the founding Sisters is kept alive.

Our Mercy Associates were saddened when two of the remaining Sisters moved to be closer to their families last year but are also grateful for the presence of Sr Regina McInerney among us.

After offering several suggestions across a variety of topics and encouraging us to continue to lead the way in the charism of Catherine McAuley, the meeting closed and those who were available gathered for lunch at Club Gunnedah.



**WE JOURNEY THROUGH
THE JUBILEE YEAR OF
HOPE AS PILGRIMS...**

**AS PEOPLE OF
FAITH AND MERCY,
WE JOURNEY
TOGETHER.**

"The Lord is not looking for perfect Christians who never doubt and always flaunt a steadfast faith. No, the adventure of faith consists of lights and shadows. Otherwise, what kind of faith would that be?"

– Pope Francis

#MercyMoment
www.mercyworld.org

