

# Karanga Atawhai

The voice of Whānau Mercy Ministries AUGUST 2024



## In the Wake of the Royal Commission

Denise Fox RSM, Chair, Whānau Mercy Ministries

Hearing and reading the reports of the Royal Commission into abuse in state and faith-based institutions has been deeply distressing and revealed a profound breach of trust by services meant to provide care to our most vulnerable citizens.

First and foremost, as the leaders of Mercy ministries today, let us acknowledge the pain and distress this failure has caused and continue striving to prevent future abuse and neglect.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Catherine McAuley's relationships was her profound respect for the dignity of each person, regardless of their status or circumstance, strengthened most likely by her long association with Catherine Callaghan and her Quaker belief that, *"There is that of God in every person"*.

Early in Catherine's adult life, while she was still living at Coolock House, a young servant girl came to her door seeking protection from the master of the house where she was employed. Catherine tried every avenue she knew of, to find the young woman a safe place to stay but found her efforts blocked at every point by the rigid procedures and delay of the organisations set up for that purpose.

Sr Mary Harnett, who later recorded the incident, noted that the waiting proved a "calamity" for the young woman and that Catherine herself, never forgot the incident. It is likely that the lasting memory was a powerful influence in her decision to build the House of Mercy in Baggot Street.

Three extraordinary elements came together in Catherine – her innate love and concern for people, her faith belief and conviction that she encountered Christ in every person in need and her imagination that envisioned an alternative society.

This serves as a reminder that the focus of Mercy people is the wellbeing of those we encounter, and that rules and regulations are designed to serve people, not the other way round.

As Jesus said to those who criticised his willingness to heal on the sabbath *"The sabbath was made for people. Not people for the sabbath"* (Mark 2:27)

To ensure our ministries are places of safety and to prevent future abuses, we are guided by our values *Aroha, Whanaungatanga and Kaitiakitanga*, respecting the innate dignity of all as we:

1. **embrace transparency and accountability**
2. **reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding**
3. **foster a culture of respect and dignity**
4. **strengthen our faith and commitment.**

For Whānau Mercy this is a call to action to review safeguarding and ensure it is at the heart of everything we do. On 24<sup>th</sup> September, we mark the 197<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day Catherine McAuley opened the doors of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street to provide shelter for women and children in distress.

As we celebrate Mercy Day 2024 may our response to the Commission reports reflect our faith and commitment to protecting and uplifting the most vulnerable, ensuring a society where the dignity and safety of every individual are upheld.

# Welcome to St. Mary's College, Auckland

Sarah Dwan, Principal, St Mary's College

St Mary's College is located in Ponsonby, Auckland. We are surrounded by Mercy being on the same site as the Sisters and the Hospice. St Mary's College was established in 1850, which means the College will turn 175 years old in 2025, something that we are very excited about. We are a Year 7-13 school for girls with a maximum roll of 1,000.

There are special things about each Mercy school, two of the things that make St Mary's different are our diversity and love of music.

St Mary's College does not have a zone, so students come from all over Auckland. Many students have a historical connection to the College with other members of their family having also attended. Currently there are 74 ethnicities at the College.

*We recently held our cultural evening where 445 students performed in 14 different cultural groups performing to an audience of 2,000!*



St. Mary's College Tongan Cultural Group performing at Cultural Evening 2024.



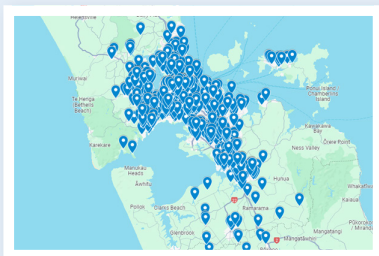
St. Mary's College Kapa Haka Roopu performing at Cultural Evening 2024.



*Assembly at St. Mary's College.*

Like any school we are managing the multitude of changes in education but are very proud of our high academic achievement, across all levels. Our students do particularly well in the NZQA Religious Education scholarship. Each year students are also awarded a wide variety of tertiary scholarships. We have a very special learning support department at the College who support students with a variety of needs.

All Catholic schools are required to have special character (formerly tagged) teachers and this is a strength of St. Mary's College. We have a number of past pupils on staff. One of the events for tagged teachers is karakia, kai and kōrero, an opportunity to come together to reflect on what it means to be special character teacher, how Special Character Teachers can be involved in the Special Character of the school and what has led me here, with some kai. A number of years ago we implemented a cycle of retreats for different staff groups (as all students have an annual retreat). We have had successful retreats for all staff, Religious Education teachers are looking forward to a Special Character Teacher retreat later this year.



*St Mary's College does not have a zone, so students come from all over Auckland.*

*Each year we focus on a particular Mercy value so that in their seven years at the College the students experience all of them.*

This year the Mercy value is Panekiretanga or excellence. Students and staff think about how this is put into action each day. Last year the prefects had us "Display, Portray and Slay" the Mercy value of Te Tapu o te Tangata, respect and dignity!

Students in Years 10 and 12 have a service programme that they complete. For Year 12 students their Retreat is also about Service, with them assisting in the Catholic Primary schools throughout Auckland for the day.



*Easter Liturgy 2024.*

Many things at St. Mary's College are student led, including from a mission perspective. It is the students who organise Mission Monday to raise funds for their chosen mission. It is the students who lead reflection at school events about the Gospel, their faith journey or whatever it may need to be! Young Vinnies is a popular group within the College. This is something that we hope that they take with them when they leave the College.

Our Mercy Charism is a very important part of who we are, the vision of the College is 21st Century Women of Mercy.

***You are always more than welcome to come and visit the College.***

## Haere mai, haere

Almost sixty years ago, the Church released a profound document titled *On the Church in the Modern World*. The opening line declared:

*“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.”*

In our present moment, various global and national events can bring to light these joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of people everywhere.

As Denise Fox has already highlighted, Aotearoa New Zealand’s Royal Commission into Abuse in Case recently delivered its final report. This report has revealed deep griefs and anxieties while also giving voice to survivors’ hopes.

On the international stage, the upcoming U.S. presidential elections will undoubtedly evoke a wide range of emotions. Among the many statements made, one from Kamala Harris, a former prosecutor of sexual abuse crimes, resonates with the heart of this inquiry: *“A harm against any one of us is a harm against all of us.”*

There is no way to describe the impact and effect of harm, especially when it occurs in the context of a faith organisation or is perpetrated by a religious figure. It impacts us all and therefore we all must stand, as Kamala Harris also says, for the people. Too often people worked to protect the institution rather than care for the people.

Ministerial Public Juridic Persons or MPJPs, the formal Church description of what WMM is, are collections of ministries. People might even call them institutions. The challenge the Inquiry presents to us is that we must not be so focused on matters of institutional concern that we fail to care for the very person standing in our midst. The person who may be vulnerable, suffering, needing care.

I had the privilege of representing WMM alongside Phil Alexander-Crawford at a meeting of 13 similar organizations based in Australia—the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (AMPJP). Through a few brief presentations, we shared and heard about the many wonderful things the MPJP ministries have accomplished, are doing, and will continue to do. At the core of all this work is an unwavering commitment to the care and safety of everyone involved in our ministries.

As Denise has said, we must ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do. Let us never waiver from that commitment, a commitment to stand, for the people.

**Dave Mullin, Ko te Hāpai Ō**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2000, the Sisters of Mercy gifted this statue, designed and cast by Sister Gael O’Leary to the city of Auckland to mark their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The statue depicts a Māori woman and child emerging from the waves recalling how Māori women asked Bishop Pompallier for wahine tapu to come to Aotearoa to teach their children. Sister Gael O’Leary said the waves symbolised the journey by ship which the first sisters made in 1850, as well as the journey today’s sisters are undertaking in their efforts to honour the Treaty of Waitangi. The child is holding a globe symbolising Whanaungatanga atua ki te whenua ki te tangata / God is with the earth and with people.



**Te Ngākau Atawhai – Heart of Mercy:** In Aotearoa, the Mercy Cross, central to Catherine McAuley’s spirituality, is supported by a pair of koru. The koru represent the unfolding of new life and link our Mercy story to the spirituality of Māori and the ancient lore of this land.

*Karanga Atawhai is the newsletter of Whānau Mercy Ministries, a Ministerial Public Juridic Person (MPJP) under Canon Law.*

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