



Sabbatical Report

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Principal St Catherine's College

Term 3 2019



Statue of Catherine McAuley, Mercy International, Dublin

Background and Rationale

In May 2018 I proposed in my MOE Principal's Sabbatical application that, 'I wish to travel to Dublin, Ireland and engage in a programme at the Mercy International Centre. I also wish to visit and work in a secondary school in Samoa; offering my services to support and understand leadership, administration, and teaching and learning.'



Catherine
McAuley
1778 – 1841
Foundress of
the Sisters of
Mercy

In support of my sabbatical application I stated, 'St Catherine's College is a school founded by the Sisters of Mercy rsm whose foundress was Irish woman Catherine McAuley. 'Mercy and Wisdom' is the motto of the college; an amalgam of the virtues of compassion: love and kindness, with learning: enquiry and understanding. I wish to visit the Mercy International Centre in Dublin and immerse myself in the Mercy charism for both my own spiritual benefit and for the leadership of and sharing with the staff, students and stakeholders of St Catherine's College.

The roll of St Catherine's comprises over 20% Pasifika, of which the majority identify as Samoan. By spending time in a Samoan school environment I hope to develop my knowledge and understanding of the transitional and institutional challenges that these students face in a NZ secondary school.

Both aspects of my sabbatical are aligned to 2019 school goals.

- To raise the profile of 'Dignity' (Te Tapu o te Tangata) at St Catherine's College and to implement Dignity through classroom teaching and FAITH and Mercy values in action.
- To set achievement targets for priority learners viz Maori and Pacific Island students in all learning areas which are appropriate and relevant for each cohort.

Mercy Ethos Programme
Mercy International Centre
Dublin, Ireland
July 29 – August 2, 2019

En route to Dublin we spent time in New York. This provided a special opportunity as I had emailed the Mercy Global Action office in New York and queried whether there might be an opportunity to meet. This was arranged and an insightful morning was spent in Sr Angela Reed's office learning of the vision and work of Mercy Global Action.

The 'Mercy Ethos Programme' in Dublin allowed me to live on site at Mercy House for 8 days thus absorbing the spirituality and atmosphere of the house Catherine McAuley built in 1831. With 27 other participants from Ireland (3), Canada (1), Australia (21), and New Zealand (2) the week was spent with presenters in seminars, on a walking tour, and on 2 bus trips. All activities focused on the life and times of Catherine McAuley, the realization of Mercy work in education, health, and social services today, Mercy Global Action, and the future vision and plans for Mercy; 'Mercy Global Presence'.

The life and times of Catherine McAuley

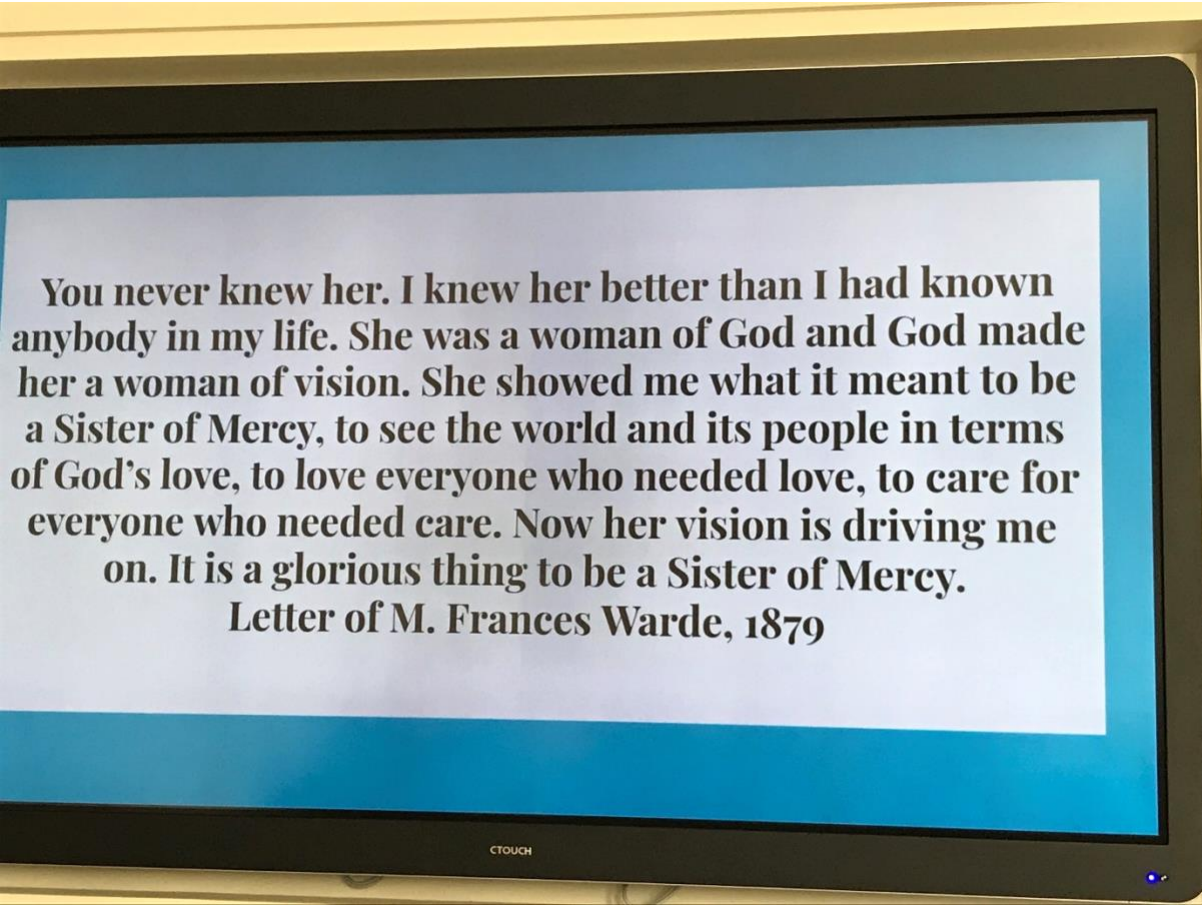
The programme started by providing the important context of Catherine McAuley's life and times. Her life spent in the harsh existence of Dublin in the early 1800s was an amalgam of social, religious, and political factors.

The early loss of her parents, the fostering of a number of children, and her companionship to a well-regarded family were major influences on her young life. During these years her faith in God, personal resilience and determination, and strong sense of kindness and devotion all contributed to the strong constitution of her personality. When her gentleman companion of many years, Mr Callaghan, died he left to Catherine the means for the development of her vision for change and a better life for women and children of her time.

Catherine's vision in setting up a religious congregation was subversive to Protestant laws and practices of the time. The Penal Laws of Henry VIII had marginalised and victimised Irish Catholics. The role and stature of a woman was considered secondary to the standing of any male and so Catherine faced huge challenges to enact her vision of care of the poor, the sick, and the ignorant.

However Catherine McAuley was no ordinary woman. Her resolute and determined nature in the period of penal reform of the 1830s provided opportunity for emerging apostolic congregations eg Christian Brothers, Mercy Sisters. Catherine's business acumen and influential networks, established over the years of service to William Callaghan, were assets to her fledgling congregation and in 1831 she founded the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine possessed three extraordinary qualities i/ her innate love and concern for the poor ii/ her faith iii/ her fertile imagination for change. At the core of the Mercy charism is connection to bring about change, and change it was which Catherine gave her life to; change through visitations to the homes of the poor in order to clean, tidy, medicate and care for the sick and dying. Providing women with a good character through training and upskilling and education of the young were the means for the growth and futures of women and children.



You never knew her. I knew her better than I had known anybody in my life. She was a woman of God and God made her a woman of vision. She showed me what it meant to be a Sister of Mercy, to see the world and its people in terms of God's love, to love everyone who needed love, to care for everyone who needed care. Now her vision is driving me on. It is a glorious thing to be a Sister of Mercy.
Letter of M. Frances Warde, 1879

In the final session of our programme we all shared insights we had gained about the world of Mercy. One participant described a 'merciful perspective' as one which sees beyond the immediate conditions and imagines or visualizes something better. That was the quality of Catherine McAuley which set her apart, encouraging her to persevere through the challenges of the day for a better life for those she served. This is the message I have tried to share with my school community and particularly with students who have a passion for environmental issues, justice for the oppressed, and equality for the marginalized.

Mercy Global Action

Since Catherine McAuley and through to relatively recent times her vision and work was carried out by the Mercy Sisters of her congregation. However changing times have reduced significantly the number of Mercy Sisters world-wide to a situation where hundreds of thousands of people operate as partners in mercy Ministry across the globe.

Mercy Global Action was established 25 years ago as the justice arm of Mercy International Association. Based in New York it has consultative status with the United Nations (along with 5000+ other registered NGOs). Its major themes: *displacements of people* and *degradation of the earth* are the cornerstones of all Mercy outreaches world-wide. Angela Reed rsm described this, "We believe we can influence the agenda; change is incremental".

Mercy Global Action responds to issues within the two thematic areas – building a Mercy global presence through

- Research: policy, publications, case studies
- UN engagement: consultative status in New York and Geneva
- Leadership development: development of young women's advocacy
- Networking: building alliances eg other faith based organisations

- Communications and Technology: Mercy e news www.mercyworld.org
- Education and Awareness: webinars, publications, workshops
- Theological reflection: CST, Papal encyclicals

A further initiative in 2019 has been the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders' Fellowship. Ten women have been awarded a Fellowship which enables them to pursue a line of enquiry within one of the two themes which culminates with a report presented at Mercy International. The first year of Fellowship recipients did not include a Kiwi which I saw as an opportunity for a young New Zealand woman in the future.



Poster in the Mercy Global Action office, New York

Mercy Global Presence

The two houses of Catherine McAuley are described as the house she built on Baggot Street; the home of Mercy International today, and the Mercy website, <https://www.mercyworld.org/> a rich resource for spreading the vision, word, and pragmatics of Mercy in the 21st century.

Mercy Global Presence is a 16-month process of inquiry to ensure an omnipresence of mercy in the world. A different line of enquiry, each 4 months, has been planned to galvanise ideas and strategies to this end. See the timeline of segments and themes here:

https://www.mercyworld.org/f/45074/x/90ae2f2ff3/mgp_timeline-oct2019_english_a4.pdf

What is Mercy Global Presence?

Mercy Global Presence is an *organic entity* and a *countercultural sign* in a globalised world which has made more extreme the displacement of persons and degradation of Earth. Mercy Global Presence links congregations/institutes, individual Sisters of Mercy and Associates, partners in Mercy, and Mercy International Association in creative and energising ways.



Paul VI College, Leulumoega, Samoa.

The second part of my sabbatical was spent in Samoa. Through the Mercy Congregational Leadership Team I was able to make contact with Fr Fati Falaniko the Chairperson of the School Board of Paul VI College in the village of Leulumoega on Upolo in Samoa. The school had been formally under the jurisdiction of the Mercy Sisters but in recent years has been administered by the Diocese of Samoa. With my wife, a qualified and experienced secondary school teacher, we offered our services in voluntary capacities that best met their needs viz leadership, administration, teaching and learning.

We spent two weeks living on site, in a volunteer house, and working in the school. It became apparent that the best way to make a contribution was through hands on teaching. Teachers were absent and classes were sometimes left without a teacher or doubled up with other classes. There was no apparent relief system operating. We were asked by the Principal, Sister Tina (from the small Nazarene congregation, predominately based in Samoa and Tonga) to teach classes in English and Mathematics across Year 8 to Year 11. We accepted with the plan that Julie and I would team teach and plan all lessons for the period in question.

We loved the experience. The students were very grateful, polite, and lots of fun. We learnt much about schooling in Samoa and Faá Samoa, 'the way we act out our culture'. Living in a village, teaching in the school, visiting Joan of Arc Primary School next door to Paul VI College, shopping at the local store, swimming in one of the village spring pools every afternoon, attending church, driving into Apia in the school van a few times, walking along roads and meeting locals every day, were all wonderful opportunities to absorb the culture of Faá Samoa.

The people were so welcoming, hospitable, and generous. The depth and presence of religious spirituality was powerful; singing and praying at school in class, at assembly and lunch time (angelus), attending church on weekday mornings and on Sundays were important aspects of family life. Church life is apparent in every village. Churches dominate the village landscape; the Mormon Church, Catholic Church, Latter Day Saints Church, and Methodist Church, are present in most villages. Funerals are a very important ritual for all Samoans whether it is a family member or a member of the local village. It explains the desire that NZ based Samoans have to travel back home for the funerals of loved ones where they are often laid to rest in large family tombs in the front of homes in the village.

Students travel huge distances to attend the school of their choice. It was not uncommon for students to leave home at 4.30am to catch buses and return home at 6pm.

Attendance, punctuality and attention to timetable from both students and staff were major barriers to consistent teaching and learning, and the efficacy of school operations.

Samoan teaching has a strong oral delivery mode – rote and repetition are strong features across all year levels. We attempted to engage students in group work and provided opportunities for cooperative learning tasks. It was apparent to us that this required regular direction and example in order for students to engage. For example we set the task of role playing an interview between 2 characters in a novel that was being studied. We role played one ourselves to start with, and again the next day we role played an interview so the students had reference points. They were fantastic; some were natural actors and soaked up the experience. We also presented a unit on Leadership to the students of Years 10 and 11 engaging them in questions and scenarios about their future in the leadership of Samoa. Despite being told it might challenge the students we found just the opposite; they absorbed and responded to the ideas of female leadership within traditional male domains (see Appendix 1)

There was a strong competency in anything oral which reflected that strong tradition in Samoan society. It was most visible in any speech opportunity, and tangible pride from students in cultural performance and presentation of gifts.

The students loved learning traditional cooking methods; a timetabled series of classes for Yr 10 every fortnight. We were included and had great fun learning to cook using traditional Samoan foods; taro, breadfruit, and coconut. However, being made the judges for the best group's finished product was probably a wrong choice!

Many areas of the curriculum are under resourced eg art, PE, music, and dedicated classrooms designated bore little resemblance to a NZ specialist classroom. Having said that any opportunity for creative arts and culture, sport and PE were passionately taken up. Technology limitations were apparent across the whole school and students' personal provision of a calculator or mobile phone were usually the best outcomes. Village employment centred on fishing, plantation crops, and work in Apia. Standards of living were simple but the richness of family, church, and village life are the most compelling ingredients for happiness and wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

To the Mercy Sisters – Sr Katrina Fabish and the Congregational Leadership Team for all their generous support towards my sabbatical; thank you.

To Sister Teresa Anderson who tour guided us around the Mercy sites of Auckland for a day before we departed; thank you.

To the leaders and presenters of the 'Mercy Ethos Programme' – Sr Mary Reynolds, Sr Anna Nicholls; thank you.

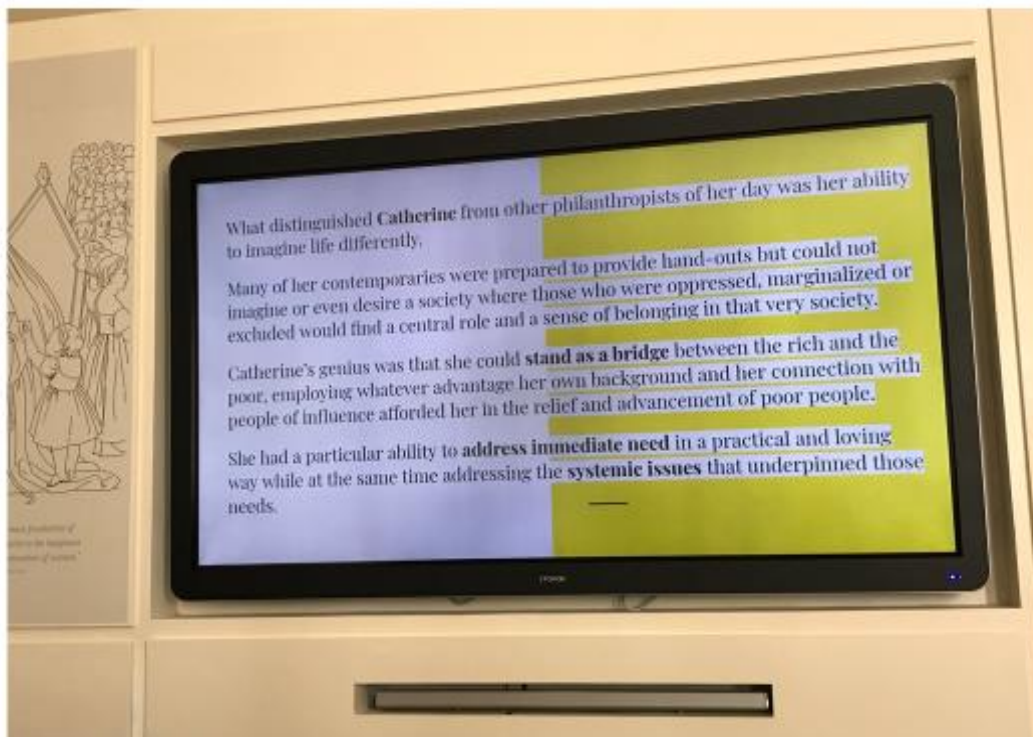
To the staff and volunteers of Mercy House for their generous consideration of our needs; thank you.

To the administrators of Paul VI College for their welcome and hospitality, Fr Fati and Sr Tina; thank you.

To the Mercy Sisters and supporters who made our stay in Leulumoega and Paul VI College so very special, Sr Marieta, Sr Malia, Sula; thank you.

To my mentor and great supporter for all her guidance and help, Sr Stephanie; thank you.

To my Senior Leadership Team at St Catherine's College for their dedication and hard work throughout my absence, Mandy, Halina, Ilana; thank you.



Appendix 1

Faá Samoa – My Future

- ❖ What are your hopes and dreams for leadership in Faá Samoa?
- ❖ What are the challenges/concerns you have for Faá Samoa?

Who are the important leaders in Samoa?

- In your family
- In your school
- In your church
- In your village
- In your country

Factors which affect my life

Age	Year	Stage of life	Factors which affect my life
23-25	2029	Job	social
33-35	2039	Married	cultural
43-47	2049	Family	environmental
53-57	2059		political
63-67	2069	Retirement Grandparents	religious

What are your hopes and dreams for leadership in Faá Samoa?

What are the challenges/concerns you have for Faá Samoa?