



Reflection: Companions – stronger together

On November 11 each year we remember two distinct but connected events within our global Mercy family. Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, died at the House of Mercy in Baggot Street Dublin on this day in 1841. Seventy-seven years later, in 1918, the fighting on land, sea and in the air ceased in World War 1, the day we commemorate as Armistice Day. Tinged with sadness and with joy, both events signal an end but also anticipate a new beginning. We remember those who have gone before us, acknowledging and giving thanks for their particular contribution to the fabric of life we now hold in our hands. In looking back and knowing the story they helped to tell, we come closer to knowing our current story and drafting the next chapter.

As ministries within Mercy Ministry Companions (MMC), a newly formed Ministerial Public Juridic Person in the Mercy tradition, we continue to shape a world where dignity and respect, peace and justice, compassion and love are the hallmarks of our endeavours in community service, education, health and aged care. Each local ministry has its heroes, founders and their companions, who helped 'get things off the ground'. They left their mark, embedding a vision of hope that things could be different. Today, our challenge is to reimagine and rekindle that vision, so we can offer fullness of life to those we encounter.

Our inaugural Annual Conference for MMC held in October explored the theme '**Companions: Stronger together.**' Early in the Conference process, we considered aspects of the MMC family story and timeline of significant events which have led us to where we are today. As each of the 100 participants identified when they came into the MMC story, or in and out of the story a few times in some cases, the fabric of MMC began to reveal itself.



Brian Keane from MacKillop Family Services and Tony Bidstrup from Mercy Services helping to shape the MMC story.

Each of you reading this Reflection has a place in the current and ongoing story of MMC. As you read more about the Conference in the following pages, give thanks for the people supporting you and mentoring you in your workplace, your place of ministry, and try to do the same for someone starting their MMC journey. Let us be mindful of the many blessings we receive.

God of all blessings, we remember the many good things with which you sustain and nurture us. May our confidence in your goodness lead us to share our gifts and resources with others. Inspire us to be generous and hospitable, gladly sharing the resources with which you have blessed us. Help us to recognise the opportunities which arise for us within MMC to work together for the well-being of others, Amen.

Annette Schneider RSM

Inaugural Mercy Ministry Companions Conference

Over two days in October (27th–28th), 100 Mercy Ministry leaders took part in the inaugural Mercy Ministry Companions (MMC) Conference, held at Catholic Leadership Centre in Melbourne. The conference, themed 'Companions: Stronger together – Bringing God's mercy to life', gave attendees the opportunity to hear from a range of guest speakers and panellists, and to take part in a number of very productive workshops, including the opportunity to articulate and better understand MMC's mission, vision and values.



(L to R) Esmail Manahan, Annette Schneider RSM, Anna Negro, Sacred Heart College Geelong.

The conference was opened with an Acknowledgement of Country led by Esmail Manahan, Director of Aboriginal Service Development at MacKillop Family Services. Esmail shared with participants the purpose of the Message Stick, which she symbolically presented to Annette Schneider RSM, MMC Formation Coordinator, at the conclusion of the conference, to place at the MMC offices.

Feedback from participants has been very positive, with appreciation expressed for the time and effort of those involved in the planning and implementation of our rich and varied Conference program. We look forward to continuing in person networking and sharing of ideas and resources across MMC.

Guest speakers

Bishop Vincent Long - Keynote Address

Attendees enjoyed a Keynote Address by Bishop Vincent Long, entitled 'Embodying God's mercy for the world: reimagining mission, identity and esprit de corps today', followed by a short panel discussion with Eveline Crotty RSM (Institute Leader of ISMAPNG and Chair of the Members of MMC), Cathy Jenkins (Executive Director, Mission Leadership, at Mercy Health Australia) and Dr Maeve Heaney VDMF, (Director of the Xavier Centre for Theological Formation at Australian Catholic University).

Bishop Long spoke of:

- the need for Mercy Ministry Companions to reimagine the future in a way which enables the long tradition of ministry service to be looked at with fresh eyes.
- exploring new ways of engaging with the people we are called to serve and discern new ways of working together.
- the need to reassess our measures of success to include ways of being and decision-making, which clearly align with our mission or purpose and our values.

A video of Bishop Long's address will be posted to the MMC website shortly, along with the text of his address and a Resource Guide for engaging with the material.



(L to R) Margaret Bounader, MMC Chair; Eveline Crotty RSM, Institute Leader of ISMAPNG and Chair of the Members of MMC; Cathy Jenkins Executive Director, Mission Leadership, at Mercy Health Australia; Dr Maeve Heaney VDMF, Director of the Xavier Centre for Theological Formation at Australian Catholic University; Gabrielle McMullen; Bishop Long.

Dr Maeve Heaney VDMF- Falling into Leadership



Dr Maeve Heaney VDMF speaking on Falling into Leadership.

Dr Maeve Heaney addressed the group on day two, where she explored *“Falling into Leadership: Theologising Mission through the Lens of Mercy”*. Dr Heaney focused on Theologising, Mission, Leadership and Mercy. Some insights included:

- ‘Theologising’ enables a bridge between Church and culture. Our faith seeks an understanding of itself so that bridges can be built between the faith we share, the values we espouse, and the culture we inhabit. This connection helps us to articulate why we do what we do in our various ministries.
- We exist for mission. Our hallmark is ‘relationality’, a way of being together which enables everyone to live life to the full. The Church grows at its ‘mission points’, of which MMC has many.
- Each of us leads in our specific areas of ministry and location of service. We have been led, or called, to our particular ministry involvement, and encouraged to use our gifts in the service of others.
- We must recognise the gaps in our gifts and capabilities and give thanks for those gaps because they provide spaces for personal growth.

Conference workshops

Six concurrent workshops were conducted on each day of the Conference, providing very productive opportunities for cross ministry engagement on a range of topics.

Thank you to facilitators Sally Bradley RSM Executive Director, Mercy Works; Emma Constantine Head of Innovation, McAuley Community Services for Women; Margaret Endicott RSM; Cathy Jenkins Executive Director Mission Leadership, Mercy Health; Esmail Manahan Director Aboriginal Service Development, MacKillop Family Services; Gabrielle McMullen AM Trustee Director, Mercy Ministry Companions; Felix Pintado Chief Executive, Residential Aged Care, Home Care and Seniors Living, Mercy Health; Felicity Pringle Head of Advocacy, Fundraising and Marketing, McAuley Community Services for Women; Annette Schneider RSM Formation Coordinator, Mercy Ministry Companions.



(L to R) Alison Moran, Company Secretary at Mercy Health thanking Facilitator Felicity Pringle, Head of Advocacy, Fundraising and Marketing at McAuley Community Services for Women.



Facilitator Sally Bradley RSM Mercy Works.

Conference workshops (cont.)

Articulating the Mercy Ministry Companions Story

Margaret Endicott RSM led a session on each day of the Conference, helping participants to begin to articulate the MMC story: who we are, what we do and how we do it.

At the conclusion of the Conference, Margaret symbolically and literally passed on the beginnings of this work to Margaret Bounader, Chair of the Trustee Directors, so that the many suggestions can be used to craft the MMC purpose and values.



Crafting the MMC story.

MMC Conference – the faces of our ministries



Annette Schneider RSM and Caroline Ryan RSM.



(L to R) Judy Sailors, Karen Jongbloed, Anne Hunt and Georgina Smith of Mercy Education.



Participants enjoying one of the many presentations throughout the conference program.



Margaret Endicott RSM facilitating MMC story development workshops.



Margaret Bounader MMC and Eveline Crotty RSM.



(L to R) Eveline Crotty RSM, Bev Strong RSM, Anne Keim RSM.



MMC Conference Choir.



(L to R) Amanda Robertson, Sacred Heart College Geelong; Anna Negro, Sacred Heart College Geelong; Gabrielle McMullen AM.



Trent Dean Mercy Connect and Amanda Robertson MacKillop Family Services.



Participants hard at work.

Wisdom Circles building solidarity for MPJPs

The third Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJP) Stewards Wisdom Circle was held in Melbourne on 20 October at the Mercy Ministry Companions office in Brunswick.



The state-based Wisdom Circle gatherings aim to build MPJP Stewards' understanding of their role and to build solidarity, by sharing the faith and experience of current and former MPJP Stewards.

Attendees reflected on a busy year and discussed the broad range of opportunities and challenges facing their roles. Jack Moore, former MPJP Steward with St John of God Australia gave a thought-provoking presentation on his experience.

(L to R) Jack Moore (guest speaker); Dr Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegheer, AMPJP Formation Committee; Margaret Bounader, Mercy Ministry Companions; Gabrielle McMullen AM, Mercy Ministry Companions; Susan Pascoe AM, St John of God Australia and AMPJP Formation Committee; Julianna Drobik OP, Dominican Education Australia; Lawrie Hallinan, AMPJP Formation Committee. Missing from photo Rosemary Copeland, Kildare Ministries.

MacKillop program resonates with the crowd

In October, MacKillop Family Services was thrilled to take part in a hugely successful, live crowdfunding event sponsored by Woodards Foundation with support from Macquarie Group.

The event highlighted the work of three Australian charities, each presenting a pitch to attendees on how they help the community and why they need funding. Attendees then pledged their support for the charity or charities that most resonated with them.

The event raised a total of \$36,150 for the MacKillop Family Services Therapeutic Life Story Work program, which helps young people in care, piece together the puzzles of their past in order to build a positive pathway to their future. [Learn more about the Therapeutic Life Story Work program.](#)

McAuley launches new long-term crisis accommodation

In late October, McAuley Community Services for Women expanded its critical crisis accommodation for women and children fleeing family violence, with the opening of [Heywood House](#).



Jocelyn Bignold OAM, CEO of McAuley.

The facility will provide up to 35 women and children escaping family violence, a place to call home for stays of up to two months. The 14 units, including seven family suites and seven single units, each have a kitchenette and views of either a garden or courtyard. There are also a number of communal spaces, including a beautiful children's room and garden, laundry, and areas where residents can attend online meetings and court hearings, or work with the support staff, who are available 24/7.

McAuley CEO, Jocelyn Bignold OAM, said these units give women and children escaping violence a unique opportunity to live independently and with privacy, alongside access to on-site services and support. "Heywood House creates a safe haven, where women and children receive individualised support and can recover and take some time before making decisions about their next move," said Jocelyn.

[Take a tour of Heywood House.](#)

Mercy Connect breaks ground in Orange

Mercy Connect has celebrated the official breaking of ground for its latest construction project in Orange, New South Wales. The \$3 million development will soon provide a five-bedroom shared Specialist Disability Accommodation home, with a staff office and accommodation onsite, two Specialist Disability Accommodation two-bedroom homes, and a Social Hub for onsite activities and gatherings.

The Mercy Connect team were joined by Father Greg Bellamy (Catholic Diocese of Bathurst) who gave a prayer and blessing at the ceremony, Sr Mary Bennett RSM (Community Leader - ISMAPNG) and other local Sisters of Mercy, and Mayor of Orange Cr Jason Hamling.



Mercy Connect CEO, Trent Dean onsite in Orange.

“We see a great need for housing in this region,” said Trent Dean, CEO Mercy Connect. “There are vacancy issues all across Australia and one in five people living with a disability. We want to make sure we are part of that solution.”

Virtual reality to foster empathy in disability workers

A research article, jointly prepared by La Trobe University, Valley General and Mercy Connect, has been published in the October edition of the Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities.

The impetus for the study arose when Mercy Connect commissioned Valley General Hospital to custom-design a virtual reality program called IMercyVE. The program, to be used by Mercy Connect employees, aimed to improve disability workers’ awareness, understanding of, and insight into the experience of living with intellectual disability.

Mercy Connect partnered with La Trobe University to evaluate the program and to explore its utility as a training and awareness-raising tool for staff. The study examined how IMercyVE was received by end users, how easy or difficult it was to engage end users, and to explore measures of empathy for disability workers.

[Read the journal article here.](#)

Helping young people find their Superpowers

Students at the Academy of Mary Immaculate College in Fitzroy have celebrated the launch of their incredible new website, [Climate Superpowers](#).

During their research, the students found that many young people feel anxious and powerless about climate change. They discovered that most resources are created for adults, and many climate change responses are overwhelming and require delivery on a global scale.



So, together with the University of Melbourne and a number of other young people, Academy students decided to create a solution, and together they co-designed Climate Superpowers. On the site young people can navigate the challenges they face with around climate change and identify how they can use their strengths or ‘superpowers’ to take every-day action to learn more about climate change, selfcare and transforming society.

Mercy Health honoured at Victorian Public Healthcare Awards

Mercy Health has been honoured at the 2022 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards, for demonstrating how partnering with consumers can vastly improve health outcomes and experiences.

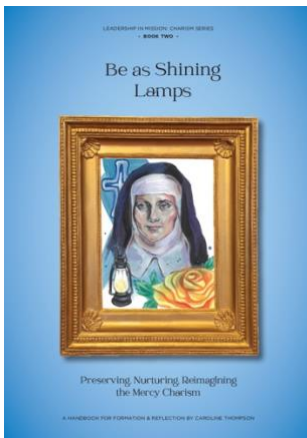
To date, resources for those diagnosed with gestational diabetes have been based on Western diets, making them difficult to understand and challenging to implement in migrant communities.

This innovative project, recognised in the category of Safer Care Victoria partnering in healthcare, was developed in partnership between Mercy Health Multicultural Services and Mercy Hospital for Women's Dietetics team. Together, they produced culturally adapted patient information for women with gestational diabetes.

Health Services Chief Executive, Professor Jason Payne, says the project is an example of teams pushing the boundaries to find better ways to care for some of the most vulnerable patient groups.

"We are incredibly proud of our Multicultural Services and Dietetics teams for their initiative and compassion in generating such a forward-thinking project," Jason says.

[Click here to learn more about the project.](#)



New resource on Catherine McAuley and the Mercy charism

Dr Caroline Thompson, Formation Coordinator with Mercy Partners, is the author of the second book in the 'Leadership in Mission Charism Series', to be launched on Thursday, 17 November. This practical handbook, called *Be as Shining Lamps – Preserving, Nurturing, Reimagining the Mercy Charism*, provides information on the life of Catherine McAuley, along with reflections, prayers, liturgies, worksheets and suggestions for preserving the Mercy Charism into the future.

[Click here](#) to order copies of this valuable formation resource.

Book One in the series contains similar detail about Nano Nagle and the charism of the Presentation Sisters.