



MERCY
PARTNERS

Theological Framework

*Mercy Partners
Theological
Framework*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2015 the Council of Mercy Partners commissioned Dr Christiaan Jacob-Vandegheer to work collaboratively with them to develop this theological framework for the mission of Mercy Partners.

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IMPRIMATUR

Most Reverend Mark Coleridge BA DSS, Archbishop of Brisbane,
June 2016.



Mercy Partners Theological Framework

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A white marble statue of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child. Mary is depicted with a serene expression, her head slightly bowed, wearing a long, flowing robe and a head covering. The Christ Child is seated on her lap, looking down at his hands. The statue is set outdoors, with a building and some plants in the background.

*“Cultivating
partnerships
in response to
the life-giving
reality of
God’s mercy
in the world.”*

Introduction

This document offers a theological framework for understanding the mission statement of Mercy Partners within the vibrant context of Catholic tradition.

It amplifies the unique language of mercy that the mission speaks within the life of the Church, and thus underscores the Catholic cornerstone of Mercy Partners' hope for healing and justice in the world, its experience of compassion and respect, and its ongoing commitment to cultivating partnerships in response to the life-giving reality of God's mercy in the world.

The Council commends this document to you for reflection personally and within ministries, strengthening this community which the Holy Spirit has drawn together as a new expression of Church in Australia.

Mercy Partners Theological Framework unfolds in four parts (see below).

1

A Theological Framework for the Mission

The first part briefly introduces the mission statement in the context of this document

2

The Experience of God's Mercy

The second part elaborates on the experience of God's mercy in this emerging world, drawing on biblical and theological resources as well as the lived example of the Church.

3


Relation of Mercy Partners to the Mission of the Church

The third part delves more deeply into the unique vocation of Mercy Partners within the life of the Church, explaining the theological import of its legal, canonical status as a public juridical person.

4

Living Mercy in Partnerships: Towards a Spirituality

The fourth and final part of the document outlines a spirituality for Mercy Partners; a way of cultivating its distinctive way of living mercy in the world.



*The mission of Mercy Partners is
to contribute to the emergence of a
world where the **healing, liberating**
and **life-giving** mercy of God is
experienced.*

PART 1

A Theological Framework for the Mission

Mercy Partners aims in all of its activities ***to contribute to the emergence of a world where the healing, liberating, and life-giving mercy of God is experienced.***

This statement of mission expresses a deep, binding value. Members of Mercy Partners discern their way forward in diverse ministries according to their shared desire for people to know the experience of God's mercy. And because they are partners, their relationships rely more on the formative value of friendship and collective vision than on inflexible institutional structures.

The building of partnerships cultivates a diversity of gifts and charisms, embracing lay leadership, and creatively responds to the changing needs of many ministries. Mercy Partners stands within the Church's long history of communicating mercy in the world. Since the earliest days of the Church, Christians have gathered in communities of different kinds, expressing their faith in liturgy

and sacrament, in friendship and service, whether in households, hospitals, prisons, schools, or church buildings. Drawing on the gospel for inspiration, these communities still today express the presence of Jesus in the world in unique ways. Each anticipates a new order of personal relations in living out a gift and vision of community that imitates its foundation in Christ, embodying self-giving love and gratitude (*eucharistia*, "thanksgiving") to "the God of lights" (James 1:17). Each Catholic community and organisation hands on (*tradere*/tradition) a Eucharistic way of seeing that animates its distinctive mission, activities, and place in the world.





PART 2
PART 2

The Experience of God's Mercy

Drawing on Scripture and tradition, this section of our document discusses the experience of God's mercy in human living. The gospel teaches us that our experience of mercy reveals our inmost heart in our relations with God and others.

If we know mercy, we know it because we affirm the life-giving presence of another for us. Mercy always arrives as a gift. It does not signal an obligation or a mere duty because it intimately addresses us as persons in responding to our most pressing needs. Nor does mercy speak a false word, or try to save us with something less than the truth. Many misunderstandings of mercy emphasise caring for others in ways that surrender reality to a misguided sentimentality.

Rather, true mercy creates new beginnings by our seeing one another in the light of the truth about who we are, our deepest identities both given and hidden in God's unwavering love for us (1 John 3:1-2). The meaning of mercy points to God's initiative in our concrete circumstances and in the context of our desire for a fuller personal and communal life.

The Old Testament speaks powerfully of God's mercy in relation to deep, human need. The very act of establishing the people of God occurs as an act of divine mercy in the liberating exodus of the Hebrews from their captivity in Egypt. The experience of being delivered from the dehumanising totality of slavery profoundly informs the Scriptural understanding of God and community. No longer can the oppressiveness of a worldly power define God's people, for even in times of suppression and apparent defeat, God's love gives an oppressed people a new identity and the promise of redemption (Ex 6:7).

And yet the gifts of identity and promise elicit a personal response. The redemption of the human family requires collaboration. The God who creates the world also invites people into becoming fully human in their togetherness, embodying right relations with God and

neighbour and thus creating a truly human community (Gn 18:18). But this creation does not happen in an instant. It develops over time according to an ever-deepening conversion of peoples' minds and hearts in their openness to God (Ez 11:19-20). The story of this creativity and development, this ongoing conversion, describes a history of salvation.

Of course, faith does not guarantee our safety in this world. Most people experience times when mercy seems far and distant, when through no fault of their own they feel helpless, as with the Psalmist: "How long Lord? Will you forget me forever?" (Ps 13). And yet the experience of exile and humiliation gives way to return and exaltation throughout the Old Testament. God rescues God's people from oppression, and this rescuing reveals the identity of God as "gracious and merciful," a God whose "steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 136). "To repeat continually" notes Pope Francis, that "God's mercy endures forever," as the psalm does, seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love" (MV 7).

The New Testament exemplifies this pattern with an unexpected difference. Remarkably consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures, the early Christian community announced

something profoundly new about God, telling the story of Jesus as the story of God's own obedience, humiliation, and exaltation. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God undergoes the pattern of humiliation and exaltation that defines the historical experience of God's people. God truly is Emmanuel: God is with us.

Mercy arrives then as both gift and command: a new life for a new way of living. The New Testament declares that God willingly enters disordered and violent human relations in the most heart-rending way, revealing the meaning of mercy as "the willingness to enter the chaos of another."¹ In Jesus, we encounter a God who heals the sick, feeds the hungry, befriends outcasts, and forgives, and asks all others to join in this way of living mercy in the world. The experience of mercy in relation to Jesus offers a new vision for community and thus a new way of structuring human relations. By his teaching, death, and resurrection, he gives life to a being-in-community that no longer secures identity and allegiance according to rivalry and scapegoating violence, and that in turn forms communal relations according to a different way, namely: friendship, mutual understanding, forgiveness, and self-sacrificing love (Eph 4:32-5:2).

¹ This definition of mercy comes from James F. Keenan's *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

The gospel announces that God makes the story of each and every human victim God's own story, and that we truly know God only in life giving friendship and solidarity with people who suffer the de-humanising forces of culture and society. Any practice of mercy that somehow sidesteps or stands apart from the perspective of those most in need fails to recognise the lived meaning of mercy in Jesus.

The whole history of the Church thus begins with the most profound experience of mercy. It begins with the appearance of the risen Christ to those who had tragically lost him, their broken hopes for God's mercy astonishingly restored and fulfilled, and his commissioning of them to embody mercy in every corner of the world. The apostolic experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost dramatically communicates the meaning of ecclesial life: being church means being sent, an assembly and communion that go forth, making Jesus present by loving others throughout the changes of human history. And this implies that ecclesial mission in the world prioritises interpersonal relations in the midst of labouring for the material and social changes that satisfy real human needs. The pastoral and social ministries of the Church receive their identity by Christians' personal love for others in Christ. Such love gives the highest meaning and deepest value to the

vital, social, and cultural functions of their ministries. In this way, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, their labours are truly sacramental, visible signs of Jesus' presence.

The Church must always proclaim this presence in word and action. As Pope Francis says: "The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (EG 114). Here we can recognise that the Church experiences an ongoing conversion in the life of mercy, for the Spirit continually moves us, shaping the concrete patterns of our lives in imitation of Christ. The grace of conversion – God's plucking our heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh (Ez 11:19) – enables us to love others more fully, and this transformation looks more to our collective relations than to us as individuals (LG 9). The New Testament and early Church never imagined salvation in individualistic terms. The new creation of which St. Paul speaks connects the Spirit of Christ to as broad a context as possible, the dynamic emergence of the natural world, and places the life of the Church at the heart of it (Rom 8:18- 25). That life charges the history of the world with the meaning of the body of Christ, the meaning of mercy.



Relation of Mercy Partners to the Mission of the Church

The Holy See approved Mercy Partners as a public juridical person (PJP) in November 2008.

Having received this identity by the Holy See's authority, Mercy Partners in its very constitution participates uniquely in the life of the Church. Its canonical, legal status has significant theological implications: it gives Mercy Partners a distinct participation in the Church's relation to Christ and his mission. If Mercy Partners affirms its most essential purpose with its mission statement, still it pursues that purpose within the ecclesial context of being sent. In other words, Mercy Partners understands its mission in terms of its identity within the Catholic Church. In its many labours, it anticipates the expanding experience of God's mercy as a constituted body, a public juridical person, which canon law defines as "aggregates of persons (*universitates personarum*) or of things (*universitates rerum*) which are constituted by competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the purposes set out for them, they fulfil in the name of the Church, according to the norm of the prescripts of the law, the proper

function entrusted to them in view of the public good..." (CIC 116.1).

This section of our document discusses the theological import of Mercy Partners' ecclesial identity for its mission. It focuses on three phrases from canon law's definition of a PJP:²

- ① "Constituted by Competent Ecclesiastical Authority",
- ② "Fulfil in the Name of the Church", and
- ③ "Entrusted to Them in View of the Public Good".

2 Can. 116 §1. Public juridic persons are aggregates of persons (*universitates personarum*) or of things (*universitates rerum*) which are constituted by competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the purposes set out for them, they fulfill in the name of the Church, according to the norm of the prescripts of the law, the proper function entrusted to them in view of the public good; other juridic persons are private." <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGLI04/40.HTM>. Mercy Partners is an aggregate of things (*universitates rerum*) not an aggregate of persons (*universitates personarum*).



CONGREGAZIONE
PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA
E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA

Vatican City, 17 November 2008

Prot. n. B 256¹/2008

Dear Sister Berneice,

This letter comes in response to that of 1 September 2008 which you forwarded to us on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy of the Congregations of Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville, petitioning the concession of public juridic personality on *Mercy Partners*, together with the canonical Statutes and other pertinent documents regarding the petition.

In the Congresso, of 14 November 2008, this petition was approved. Therefore, with this letter we are pleased to send you the Decree granting public juridic personality to *Mercy Partners* and a signed copy of the approved canonical Statutes. We ask that you communicate the same to the other Congregational Leaders.

It is evident from the Statutes and other documents, that both the Sisters of Mercy in Queensland, and the Councillors who will take over responsibility for directing *Mercy Partners*, intend to maintain a positive and collaborative relationship in continuing the mission of Jesus Christ in the Church through the ministries of health, aged care, education and community services, building on the charism and sound traditions of the Sisters of Mercy.

With personal best wishes and prayer for God's continued blessings for these important ministries, as well as the other works of the Sisters of Mercy in Queensland, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ,


Sr. Enrica Rosanna, F.M.A.
Undersecretary

(Enclosures)

Sr. BERNEICE LOCK RSM
Congregation Leader
Sisters of Mercy
Rockhampton Qld



“Constituted by Competent Ecclesiastical Authority”

Authority and authorisation are essential to mission. The “pilgrim Church,” as Vatican II declared, “is missionary by her very nature,” drawing “her origin” from the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit (AG, 2). If the Church exists according to the intention of Jesus, still also the Son comes to do the will of God, as he says: “not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). And the Holy Spirit moves similarly. Though active in the world prior to Jesus’ birth – and most profoundly in his

life, death, and resurrection – the Holy Spirit is also sent by Christ from God to continue God’s saving work. The duality of the divine missions only strengthens the unity of salvation.

God’s sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit makes possible the collective, human experience of being reconciled in communion with God and all of creation. As St Irenaeus remarked, the Son and Spirit are the “hands” of God and as they are sent, so too with the Church, which traces

its origins to Jesus, its faithfulness to the Spirit, and its purpose to God's desire for the whole human family to know God's mercy (LG 4). The very meaning of mission as being sent connects the authority of mission to the reality of our communion with its author (MV 8).

This connection between a mission's origin and its authority shapes how we think about the mission of Mercy Partners. On the one hand, the Church's authorisation of Mercy Partners as a PJP gives its activities a unique share in the authority of the Church and its mission. Since the Church's authority derives from Christ himself, and his ministry of preaching good news to the poor, giving sight to the blind, and liberating the captives and oppressed (Luke 4:18), Mercy Partners pursues its mission in faithfulness to Christ and his body, especially the poor. Its authorisation makes it accountable then both to the Holy See (i.e., authorising ecclesiastical authority) and to all the people who serve and are served by its ministries.

On the other hand, the Church's authorisation of Mercy Partners also requires us to understand the meaning of authority in terms of authenticity and human cooperation with divine intention. Authority, concretely speaking, may not coincide with worldly or ecclesial power. Exercises of power without authenticity, without poverty and charity, lack authority; they veil and block the very presence that Christ sent his apostles to tirelessly proclaim. Drawing from its source in Christ, its author, the mission of Mercy Partners expresses authority in its imitation of Jesus (LG 40). By fidelity to the Holy Spirit, all mission activity grows out of and toward a more perfect charity and communion.

The very reality of the Church brings together these experiences, for "communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion" (CL 32). This dynamic interplay ultimately invites Mercy Partners to assist in generating a communion of charisms for the fulfilment the mission.

"The mission of Mercy Partners expresses authority in its imitation of Jesus."

“Fulfil in the Name of the Church”

Being sent “in the name of the Church” gives Mercy Partners a specific authority and significance for its mission. Its identity as a PJP distinguishes its ministries from the more general category of “Christian service” within the lay apostolate, the commissioning of which has its sacramental sources in baptism and confirmation (LG 33). Living its mission “in the name of the Church,” Mercy Partners goes forth in the name of the people of God, and its ministries carry this added dimension of ecclesial identity, meaning, and vocation. Being called and authorised by the Holy See, Mercy Partners receives a specific place within the Church’s institutional reality, and in turn creates space for a distinctive contribution of the laity to the life of the Church.

The Holy Spirit gives different gifts and charisms according to the Spirit’s own “richness” and the needs of the ministries in the building of the body of Christ (LG 7). Mercy Partners depends on and seeks to nourish this diversity of gifts in forming creative, faithful leaders within the life of the Church. Hence, Mercy Partners’ vocation to living mercy in the world enables lay people to assume canonical leadership of ministries, giving the laity a new context for living out their gifts, and thus contributes in a special way to the building of Christ’s body by

expanding pathways of leadership and collaboration within the Church. The vocation of the laity entrusts laypersons with the task of renewing the temporal order; they “live in the world,” and “are called there by God ... to work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of heaven” (LG 31; AA 7).

Historically speaking, the act of discerning a positive, obliging vocation to the laity has proven somewhat elusive, the common usage of “vocation” within the tradition often referring to religious and ordained states of life. Unlike priests and religious, laypersons are not visibly leaving the world and going forth in the life of the Church. But precisely by remaining in a place, working “in the manner of heaven,” we find the laity’s unique vocation of expanding the experience of God’s mercy in the world and in the Church. The mission of Mercy Partners creates a new context for this vocation to flourish by giving laypersons a specific, ecclesial commissioning. It allows laypersons to creatively respond to the world’s need for mercy both from within the world and as going forth “in the name of the Church”.

A bronze statue of a woman, likely a historical figure, standing outdoors. She is wearing a long, flowing dress with a high collar and a headscarf. The statue is positioned in front of a building with a red roof and green foliage. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*“The Church’s
apostolate
strives for the
public good in
labouring
to serve
the world.”*

“Entrusted to them for the Public Good”

As a PJP, Mercy Partners lives out its mission in the name of the Church and in view of the public good. A public good benefits everyone in the community. In fact, we call a good “public” in virtue of its inclusivity, its ability to fulfil a common or shared need among otherwise diverse groups. Our common humanity effectively makes a particular good “public”. The Church’s apostolate strives for the public good in labouring to serve the world.

It does not accommodate the social pathologies that devalue human persons on the basis of difference (e.g., race, sex, sexual orientation). Nor does it accede to the individualism that abandons the poor by shirking personal and collective responsibilities for others. Rather, the Church strives for the public good. It strives to realise cultural and social values for all members of the community, and pursues this realisation according to its understanding of the human person as unfathomably loved by God.



“Just as the founders of religious congregations responded to the needs of their times with love, respect, compassion and mercy, so too are we called in our age to respond.”



PART 4

Living Mercy in Partnerships: Towards a Spirituality

In seeking *to contribute to the emergence of a world where the healing, liberating, and life-giving mercy of God is experienced*, the mission of Mercy Partners also seeks to cultivate the baptismal vocation of its members, supporting their commitments to the ongoing process of growing in active response to God's steadfast, redeeming love. This section of our document discusses the shape of a spirituality that arises out of the mission statement. It unfolds in three distinct themes:

- 1 **Mercy as Joy**
- 2 **Mercy as Gift and Forgiveness, and**
- 3 **Mercy as Transforming Truthfulness.**

Mercy as Joy

The gift of mercy makes joy central to Mercy Partners' way of living (MV 2).

The joy that we experience has its source in the Mystery of the Trinity and in the communion that frees us to love God and one another. This joy does not always coincide or agree with popular ideas about happiness and satisfaction, for joy in Christ moves our centre in life from a focus on self-satisfaction to an awareness of God's presence to us, calling us to live for others. This presence and call is the experience of joyful communion.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus opens us to this joy. It may seem counterintuitive to describe the experience of living mercy as somehow joyful and fulfilling. How can we find joy by entering the chaos of another, by being with the poor and those who suffer physically and mentally? The common understanding of joy in a consumerist culture assumes that material things fulfil us, presupposing a notion of freedom that privileges the ability to do and have what we want. But the love of Christ instructs us in a different and much deeper kind of freedom. In Christ, we discover a freedom from fear, doubt, despair, and pride, and a freedom to love others more fully.

For Christ's love liberates us from all that separates us from God and one another and gives us God's presence even in the darkest of situations.

In John's gospel, Mary recognises Jesus at the empty tomb after he calls to her by name. The gospel teaches us that knowing Jesus means being called to the reality of new life by his presence. Jesus meets Mary in a place of broken-heartedness and emptiness. He restores her hope in the most unexpected way and sends her on a mission: "But go to my brothers and say to them: 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Mercy fills us with a joy that is not a possession but an imperative to action. It refuses our possession and demands that we share it with others by the very presence of our lives. In this way it differs dramatically from the pattern of desiring that seeks to possess and own the objects of our interest. Mercy orients us to a fuller and deeper communion with God and all of our neighbours, especially those in need. Thus, the joy of mercy begins and ends with the fullness of life that we find together in Jesus, for in Christ we are all "members one of another" (Rom 12:5).



PHOTO: © ST URSULA'S COLLEGE, YEPPON

Mercy as Gift and Forgiveness

If we embrace the spirit of mercy, then we must also grow in our awareness of being ourselves unrestrictedly gifted and forgiven. Gift and forgiveness go together because of the deeply rooted temptation to hold on to the sense that we deserve what we receive and earn, the good things in life. Such a mentality can lead to a paternalistic attitude toward those in need. It can distort mercy into something “we” do for “them,” implying that unlike us they rely on the good graces of others for things they could otherwise do for themselves.

This attitude misses the mark. Mercy does not patronise, shame, or belittle another. It does not memorialise failure in the name of charity or prop up one leg only to kick out the other. Rather, mercy marks the beginning of new life, as Jesus says to his disciples, who, having abandoned him, huddle in fear: “Peace be with you.” He does

not chide or ask for explanations. He forgives them completely, without acknowledgement or expectation, and thus loves them into a way forward, a new beginning. Quite profoundly, mercy is God’s justice (MV 20). It takes no part in the “us and them” mentality, for its source and goal is our communion with God and one another. Mercy is never transactional but always transformational, by growing in our awareness of how Jesus’ life giving nearness to us arrives as true gift, we become a healing presence for others.

Mercy changes how we spontaneously respond to others, especially when they need us. And this change begins with our awareness of the healing gift of mercy in our own lives. “In short,” as Pope Francis says, “we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us” (MV 9).

“Mercy changes how we spontaneously respond to others, especially when they need us.”

Mercy as Transformation

Entering the chaos of another in actions of true mercy entails seeing with the eyes of faith. Mercy does not ask us simply to cast our lots with those who struggle or are in pain. Nor does it at all suggest some form of “misery loves company.” Rather, its spirit quickens a way of relating to people that loves them into a new way of being, that sees in them and for them what others cannot see – and what they perhaps struggle most to see for themselves. Mercy grounds us in faith, hope, and love because it asks of us to relate to others in this uncommon way and in the midst of conflict, division, and struggle. It does not ask us to get knocked around or to knock around others in the name of justice, no matter how righteous. Mercy begins with seeing a truth too seldom noticed.

The difference that mercy makes then is the difference in us between focusing on the causes of a chaotic situation – the personal and social sinfulness and perhaps the unfortunate randomness at play – and focusing on those same causes in a different light. The absence of mercy in a confrontation with sinfulness can lead to debilitating guilt and shame for personal failings, or resentment and furious anger toward those who, either directly or indirectly, harm us (e.g., by imposing chaos on us or by perpetuating or

defending social structures and policies that create chaos). But with mercy we see our own and others’ sinfulness in the light of a deeper truth about who we all are and to whom we all belong. It does not blind us to the reality of the situation, but rather opens our eyes to it: we labour for the healing and liberation of the world, in solidarity with those who are most in need, and at the same time invite those who oppose our labours to join us, because we see communion in Christ for all of us as the victory of reality over chaos in any situation.

The spirit of mercy forms us into a way of being with people that honours the truth about who we all are – as created in the image of God and filled with the Spirit, as entrusted by Jesus to a God who loves us and who, as with the lost son’s father, runs out to greet us before we can even speak (MV 9). The parable reminds us that we need not fix everything before God embraces us: “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). God’s mercy is God’s justice. God restores us to who we truly are by inviting us into communion with the divine life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

On a final note, the three themes of this spirit of mercy – joy, gift and forgiveness, and transformation – are experienced in the context of partnership. Living out the mission of Mercy Partners entails collaborating with others at every turn. It requires creativity and enthusiasm from many members, seeking always to create for every situation the conditions for experiencing the healing, liberating, and life-giving mercy of God.

If we look to the group of four who brought a paralysed man to Jesus, we find a model for our partnership:

“Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an

opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:4-5). Though the members of this group are not named in the gospel, their collaboration, boldness, and creativity (“digging through it”) made them partners with Jesus in his mission of healing. Like this faithful group, members of Mercy Partners work together in living out the meaning of mercy in a world that very much needs them.



“Living out the mission of Mercy Partners entails collaborating with others at every turn.”

Conclusion

The mission of Mercy Partners ties the activities of its members to the very heart of the Church.

It encourages them to see their labours and relationships as both drawing them more deeply into the very reality of God and as contributing to the emergence of a world where people truly experience God's mercy. By embodying mercy in spirituality and mission, members of Mercy Partners join all Christians in expanding the body of Christ.

The Christian life includes no greater gift or responsibility: "The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope" (MV 10).

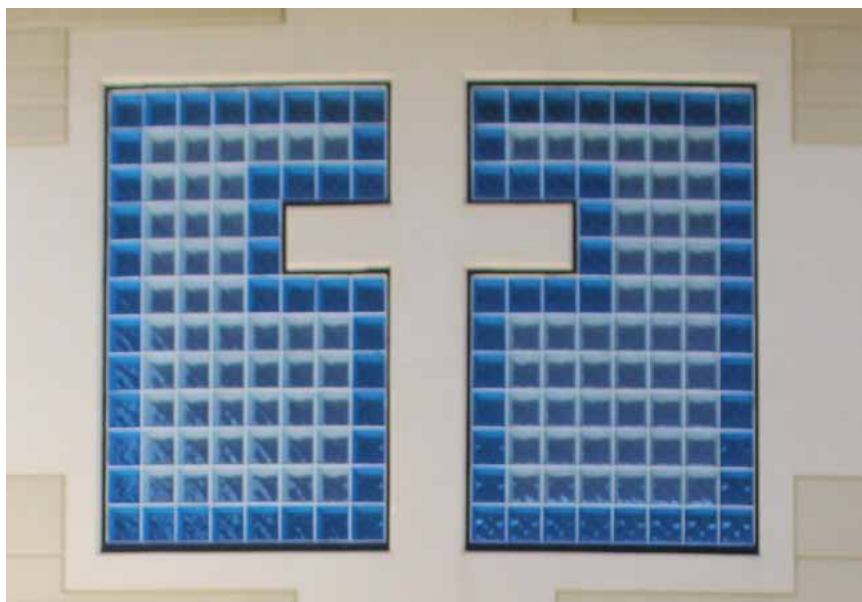


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A Note on the Images

The Council of Mercy Partners is proud to present this *Theological Framework for Mercy Partners*, a publication that presents a considered understanding of the Mercy Partners mission as it is grounded within the Catholic Church's theological tradition. It is the Council's hope that the insights in this document will animate the work of Mercy Partners and everyone who works within its ministries.

The *Theological Framework* incorporates a series of photographs and artworks from Mercy Partners ministries. These images of stained-glass windows, statuary and mosaics complement the themes of the text or represent the tradition of the Church in some way. Representing a communion of charisms, Mercy Partners is also part of the tradition of the universal Church.

The image of the Good Samaritan from **Mater Health Services North Queensland** is a stained glass window which captures a core gospel message – one of mercy for the outcast and marginalised.

The open scriptures image from **Mater Misericordiae Ltd** in Brisbane reflects Mercy Partners 'distinct participation in the mission of the Church' that comes to us through scripture and tradition. Thus, Mercy Partners

understands its mission in terms of its identity with the Catholic Church' (TF, p9).

Images are used of the founders of the charisms that make up Mercy Partners. From **Mt Alvernia**, Francis of Assisi is represented in the stained glass image of Assisi, incorporating the dove as the traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The beautiful image of Catherine McAuley from **All Hallows' School** captures the energy of this courageous woman of God, the drape highlighting willingness to both give comfort and gather in those who are in need.

The image from **St Rita's College** depicts a segment of the truly beautiful mosaic representing Nano Nagle and the charism of the Presentation Sisters.

Likewise, the images from **St Ursula's College**, a depiction of Nano Nagle teaching children in a 'hedge school', highlight the importance of educating those made poor through the injustice of an oppressive regime.

St Ursula's magnificent rendition of the Nano Nagle icon from Ballygriffin in Ireland shows the dedication to the poor, imprisoned, sick and uneducated is driven by an understanding that 'joy in Christ

moves our centre in life from a focus on self-satisfaction to an awareness of God's presence to us, calling us to live for others ... the experience of joyful communion (TF p17).

The cross from **Mercy Community Services North Queensland** reminds us that it is 'the cross and resurrection

of Jesus that opens us up to this joy (TF p17).

The image from **Mater Mackay** sensitively depicts the three themes of the spirit of Mercy – joy, gift and forgiveness, and transformation – which are experienced in the context of partnership (TF p21).



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