



# Mercy Partners Newsletter

Issue No 2 – June 2009

## *Greetings, sisters and partners in ministry,*

Isaiah says: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do".

With our recent rains, we are reminded of this saying and of the fruitfulness of this time for our Ministries.

This second newsletter of Mercy Partners follows another very full Mercy Leaders Queensland Sponsorship Committee meeting. The implementation phase of Mercy Partners is certainly bringing with it much work.

On the first day the committee was joined by Jim Holding our Civil Lawyer and Br Brian Sweeney our Canon Lawyer, the Leadership Team Members from Townsville and Brisbane as well as the Executive Team Members from the Brisbane Office. The discussions revolved around two critical issues: Land and facilities; and the Powers and Duties of Councillors. These are very important issues with many options. When the committee has completed documenting these options consultations will be held with members of the Boards and the Congregations.

Formation has many exciting developments. Another Retreat is being organised for 22-24 July in Cairns. The focus of this Retreat is Leadership and Governance, Global Mercy, and Resourcing the Mission. The Formation Committee has worked on the setting up of a Website, which will be done through Fraynetwork using our [mercy.org](http://mercy.org) facilities. A DVD will be produced that will be used for formation in each of the ministries, with Boards and staff. This DVD hopes to capture the Catherine story, our foundations and the ministries today in Qld, Australia and globally – in 20 minutes!

Other issues discussed included:

- Location of offices for Mercy Partners
- Role of a Project worker who will work part time with the committee at this implementation phase
- Selection and Appointment of Councillors – criteria and process
- Process for transfer of ministries into Mercy Partners
- Review of the Operational Plan

Most of these issues are still in the discussion and draft development stage, but movement is being made in all areas. Hopefully after our next meeting there will be much material ready for consultation and information.

## *Constitutions of Mercy Partners*

In February 2009 we were delighted to receive approval for Mercy Partners under civil law. The Mercy Queensland Leaders Sponsorship Committee decided, after seeking canonical and civil advice, to incorporate under the Roman Catholic Church (Incorporation of Church Entities) Act 1994 (Qld).

The fact that Mercy Partners takes its primary civil existence as a church authority is consistent with many other decisions about incorporation made by Religious Congregations. Several States in Australia (and in other countries) provide special legislation to enable Church entities to be recognised as having personality in civil law. Mercy Partners, as such, is incorporated under this type of Act. Ministries within Mercy Partners mostly will incorporate for business purposes under the Company Limited by Guarantee under Australian Corporation Law.

Some important aspects of the Constitutions are in relation to Objects, Stewards and Councillors. The following is some of this information.

"4.1 The **Objects** for which this Entity is established are:

- a. to continue the mission of Jesus Christ and assume responsibility to further the aged care, religious, health, education, charitable and community service ministries entrusted to the Entity within the ministries of the Roman Catholic Church;
- b. to ensure through its governance policies and practices that each of the works and entities for which it is responsible operates in conformity with the teachings, discipline and laws of the Roman Catholic Church; and
- c. to continue to build on the charism and sound traditions of the Sisters of Mercy and other Stewards within the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church."

"The **Stewards** of Mercy Partners are the Congregations of the Sisters of Mercy of Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville; and any other public juridic person which the Stewards admit to membership in accordance with the Canonical Statute and this Constitution."

The **Councillors**, no fewer than 4 nor more than 7. Each Steward appoints a Councillor. Additional Councillors are appointed by the 4 Councillors. The Councillors of Mercy Partners hold responsibilities in canon and civil law for the ministries overseen by Mercy Partners and to ensure that the purposes of Mercy Partners are realised and fulfilled.

# Creating Sustainable Sponsorship

Women and men religious in many countries have always embraced challenges. Since the earliest days, they have sought creative, innovative ways not only to preserve, but also to strengthen and ensure the future viability of service to the sick, the uneducated, the needy, the children, the elderly, the poor – services which were organised and delivered through institutions or formal organisations.

Mary Kathryn Grant and Sr Patricia Vandenberg, in “After We’re Gone” identify four waves or developments in the evolution of sponsorship. Many have read this book or a synopsis of the book, but it seems timely to remind ourselves of this development. The following table summarises some characteristics of each of the four developments in relation to mission, culture, control and symbols.

	<b>Family Business Before 1970s</b>	<b>Franchise 1970s</b>	<b>Partnership 1980s &amp; 1990s</b>	<b>Lay Sponsorship 2000s</b>
<b>Mission</b>	Assured through members of the family (the Sisters) in all roles in the ministry.	Assured through standards set by the Congregation. Mission Director role usually held by a Sister.	Lay people were involved in the articulation of and accountability for mission and values. Mission role more integrated into a number of leadership roles.	Integration and accountability prime areas of responsibility. Mission Leadership with skills for the true integration of mission into the strategic thinking and planning.
<b>Culture</b>	Return to the spirit of the founder within the Congregation. Stories, culture, history and heritage preserved and passed on from generation to generation.	Congregation sharing the story of the founder and the spirit of the Charism with others. When family members over-identify with the ministry the ‘letting-go’ is complicated and difficult.	Influence of Congregation rather than control enables new competencies, stories and rituals to emerge.	Spiritual maturity with everyone striving to be involved to embody mission and values. For Congregation members, spirituality grounded in hope, fidelity, and integrity.
<b>Control</b>	Strong identification with the business/ministry. Family (Congregation) members in management and governance roles – all major decisions made in the family. Heavy responsibility on the few in leadership roles.	Fewer sisters available for management and institutional leadership roles. Appointment of lay leaders selected by the Congregation Leadership.	Formal governance roles given to lay Boards. Management and governance became more formalised. More complex and formal channels of decision making and information sharing.	Lay people as sponsors with oversight of the authenticity of Catholic ministry and responsibility for property and other assets owned in the name of the Catholic Church.
<b>Symbols</b>	Keys: sisters had access to services, personnel, equipment. Unlimited use of facility for “family” affairs, Congregation meetings. <i>Privileged Information:</i> “Family members” with access to decisions and decision makers.	Incorporating language and spirit of mission and values in documents. Weaving values and mission into job descriptions. Brochures, newsletters, symbols around ministry proclaiming what the organisation stands for.	More time reflecting on the meaning of the mission and values in the daily work life. Spiritual retreats for leaders or staff. Those delivering formation programmes begin to stand in the place of the sisters.	Symbols created by the new sponsors. Leadership development decided and delivered by the new sponsors. Invitation to the Congregations to attend specific events of the new entity.

<b>Your reflections on this journey</b>	<i>What was your connection in this period of time?</i>	<i>Recall events from the past that signalled these developments.</i>	<i>How well have you dealt with loss and grief thus far?</i>	<i>What are your hopes &amp; fears about the future of sponsorship? How can these be addressed?</i>
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## The Story of Mercy Partners

This article is an attempt to explain not so much the *what* but the *why* of *Mercy Partners* which, in November 2008, was approved as an ecclesial public juridic person with Pontifical approval. Telling the story of how this happened might give the best insights into why it happened at all.

During 2005 the Leaders of the four Queensland Mercy Congregations, Sisters Sandra Lupi from Brisbane, Faye Kelly from Cairns, Moira Truelson from Rockhampton and Helen Mary Peters from Townsville, began talking to each other about how they might deal with "sponsorship" into the future. They were not talking about trying to negotiate sponsorship deals for their many facilities in the style of "The Fosters Melbourne Cup" or similar! Rather they were following the lead of Catholic health providers in the USA and using the word as a catchall word to describe their canonical responsibilities for the many ministries under their care. These canonical responsibilities can be briefly summarized as oversight of the authenticity of Catholic ministry and responsibility for property and other assets owned in the name of the Catholic Church.

Those who have been closely involved in the development of *Mercy Partners* attach great importance to the *Statement of Vision and Intent*, in which the leaders of the four Congregations made a formal commitment to collaborate in the matter of future sponsorship. One leader sees it as "enabling the group to bring energy, perseverance and commitment to a process we knew would take some years to complete". The hope expressed in this statement was "to see our ministries continue to exist to grow strong and to flourish in the name of Jesus and true to the vision of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy who founded and developed them."

Collaboration was originally a strategy for addressing future sponsorship. However, it became something more; a source of enthusiasm and hope, a promise that it could be done. One leader wrote that "Working in mutual partnerships was central to the effort. What has inspired me in this process of forming a PJP is the ongoing commitment of the Queensland Leadership in this endeavour, the foresight of those who began the process and the fact that we have worked well together, acknowledging

and respecting our differences and yet always striving for unity of purpose."

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." This together with reflection on the meaning of the name *Mercy Partners* allows deep reflection on the nature and scope of our participation in God's mission of mercy. It is certainly not limited to maintaining the status quo of the ministries.

The emphasis on enabling lay leadership at all levels of Catholic ministry comes through strongly in the original *Statement of Vision and Intent*. Providing a vehicle for true lay leadership in the Church was a prime intention and a vision from which Committee members drew inspiration as the work progressed. It is an exciting development and, as one of the leaders emphasizes, "it was a visionary step, not just a practical response to a need." The participation of the Cairns Congregation which, although it has a long history of ministry in education and aged care does not "own and operate" any ministry, illustrates very clearly that this was about a foundation for the future.

Formation has held the place of a critical issue since *Mercy Partners* was first thought of. The founders of *Mercy Partners* hold deep convictions that the future depends not on a structure so much as on the knowledge, commitment and vocational understanding of those who will take these ministries into the future. Considerable work has already been done in formulating the formation programme. The core elements of this are likely to remain quite stable even if there is ongoing development in how these elements can be explored and delivered to participants. The hope is to establish a "pool" of informed people who believe in and are committed to the ministries in the care of *Mercy Partners*. It should be said that those who have already commenced formation are setting a fine example to those who will join them.

Mercy Leaders Queensland Sponsorship Committee at present has the carriage of *Mercy Partners* and is engaged in establishing the newly approved reality.

Sr. Berneice Loch rsm

# Leadership Formation Programme

## Latest Dates for Diaries:



**July 22 – 24:** “Governance and Management” - fourth Study Stream in our Formation Program. **Presenters:** Dr Maureen Cleary and Dr. Robert Fitzgerald.

**Venue:** Cairns

(Accommodation has been arranged, but please book your flights and advise me.)

**Reminder:** At our gathering in Emu Park we set Easter as our deadline for those of you who are considering a major Mercy project to have a draft outline of your plan presented by then. I have had a few responses. If anyone else is considering this please contact me before the Cairns dates. Thank you Carmel Dwan rsm.

**Reflection on “ Winter”** (Some thoughts drawn from a reflection by Noel Davis)

As we now approach a new season in 2009 – winter – I invite you to contemplate the possibilities for winter in your own life.

Winter is the season when life slows and bares to essentials. It's mood offers us a real invitation to nurture the contemplative part of our being. There are those lovely lines -

Be  
simply be  
that your heart may be  
in all you do.

Really quite a challenge but its fruits are rich indeed. At first it may seem quite strange but silence adds real lustre to our doing. We all need times of quiet and solitude for our total well-being. It is often in the quiet we encounter our God.

So often in the sacred texts stories are told of such encounters – Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Mary, Jesus.....all so human like ourselves and so awake before the Mystery Divine. The quiet is the place of encounter where we are more likely to hear the proddings and promptings of our own hearts so often buried in the clutter of business. Remember the Presence in the touch of the gentle breeze for Elijah at the entrance of his cave of retreat. Our faith tells us that God is the Loving Intimate of our every moment, the One who loves a pause in all our doing to simply be with us.

Yet many of us, in fact all of us, have at times found quiet and silence strange, difficult, even threatening. What to do? This quiet becomes too quickly crowded with multitudes of thoughts, ideas, concerns, worries, wonderings, memories, details of projects and possible ways to implement them. What's the point? Yet inside all of us there is a place of serenity, calm and clarity waiting for us to experience it. It is our place of inner solitude, our sanctuary of soul, its feel the source of our inner smile. Along the way we bear the fruits of these times of quiet intimacy with self, others and the sacred. They are the fruits of gift, encounter and not performance. Our prayer becomes one of openness to be prayed through and drawn into intimacy with our God.

**Yes, winter calls us to be, simply be.....**

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