

# MERCY PARTNERS NEWS

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## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

ANNE HETHERINGTON RSM  
CHAIRPERSON, MERCY PARTNERS



## Dear Partners in Mercy

THE THEME OF contrasting light and darkness is a familiar one in Christian liturgy and ritual. The symbolism was

probably more obvious in the days before the invention of electricity gave us the power to have daylight 24/7, but still there is something almost mystical about watching a candle flame flickering in a darkened room.

Last week I was at the Awards Night for St Patrick's College in Townsville. It followed the pattern of most school awards nights until the very end when, after the 2012 school captains had given their valedictory speeches, the curtain opened to reveal the entire 2012 Year 12 cohort standing on a darkened stage each holding a lighted candle. The Year 11s, the school leaders for 2013, filed on to the stage to the tune of *You Raise me Up* and each received a candle from one of the Year 12s. This 'Passing on the Light' ceremony was a very powerful symbol to me of the continuity of the life of the school, as one group ritually handed on to the next responsibility for school leadership and that undefinable 'something' called **school spirit**.

Passing on the light is not confined to schools. In various ways, each time one of the Mercy Congregations has handed over responsibility

for a ministry to Mercy Partners, lighted candles have been used to symbolise the passing over of something precious. Symbols have the power to convey in a way that mere words cannot, the total significance of an action.

This brings me to a consideration of the extravagant use of the light metaphor at Christmas time. Why do we put candles (albeit fake ones)

**Symbols have the power to convey ... the total significance of an action**

on our Christmas trees? Why do we decorate our homes and work spaces with twinkling lights? Like lots of the other symbols associated with this time of year, the original meaning is often lost in today's world with its almost complete secularisation of Christmas and its spirit.

However, the Christian scriptures have numerous references to Christ as the light of the world, or as the one who is to bring light into the world. In the Prologue to John's gospel, for example, we read that Jesus, the Word of God, is the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world. Later in the same Gospel, Jesus proclaims: *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life* (Jn 8:12).

See Chairperson's Report, page 2



EDITORIAL

# A Time for Reflection

THIS EDITION OF THE MERCY PARTNERS NEWSLETTER IS BRIMMING WITH ARTICLES THAT GIVE US SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT FOR THE SPECIAL SEASON OF CHRISTMAS!

Sr ANNE'S ARTICLE reminds us of the true meaning of the season and this is complemented by the Advent Reflection that Sr Carmel has provided. We continue also Emeritus Professor Peter Sheehan's article on Subsidiarity. As you move towards the Christmas event these articles might suggest new insights and ways to pray.

For Mercy Partners the last three months have been busy. The Leadership Formation Retreat at Robertson Gardens was very successful, and this is featured in this edition of the newsletter. We were privileged again to have such inspiring speakers and lively participants. In this newsletter we hear from two ministry leaders who relate for us their experience of participating in the Leadership Formation Program.

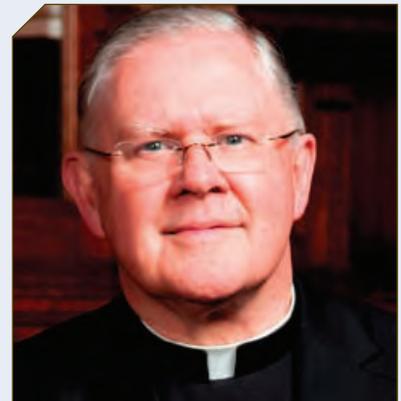
In October the Council approved the transfer of Mater Health Services Brisbane Ltd to Mercy Partners. This is an historic step for the Sisters of Mercy Brisbane Congregation. The transfer will take place in the first quarter of 2013, as will the transfer of St Rita's College Clayfield from the Presentation Sisters. Representatives of the Presentation Sisters have joined us for our Formation Retreats and the Council is very aware of the great responsibility it has to these ministries into the future.

In October also the Most Reverend Archbishop Mark Coleridge joined the Council for a discussion on the nature of Mercy Partners as a Public Juridic Person. He was interested too in the Leadership Formation Program and reminded the Council of the importance of maintaining our Catholic identity across the ministries.

This is a time to reflect on the year that has passed – the many achievements, the good work our ministries undertake, fulfilling the mission of the Church. We've had people in the ministries retire and others join us. For Mercy Partners this has been the first full year with responsibility for ministries previously sponsored by the Congregations. This has meant developing relationships and establishing ways to communicate and govern. This is the nature of Sponsorship.

This time of year also is a time to plan for the year to come – for the transfer of other ministries, retreats and gatherings, special events.

May I extend to everyone a safe, happy and holy Christmas, filled with the blessing of family and friends.



Most Reverend Archbishop of Brisbane, Mark Coleridge

## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Continued from page 1

Many Christian hymns and works of Christian art have Christ the Light of the World as their theme.

So, as we come to one of the most important feasts on the Christian calendar, the birth of Jesus, it would be good to reflect on how we, as Christian organisations, celebrate the coming of Christ, the Light of the World. Do we decorate our classrooms/wards/offices with holly and tinsel, sing *Jingle Bells*, and send commercialised Christmas cards to our business colleagues, or do we really try to incorporate into our community celebrations some symbolism which indicates we understand the real meaning of Christmas? It can be a challenge in a world where the sacred and the secular are woven and blended together in a complicated tapestry and even nominal Christians have no understanding of this important event, but I know Mercy Partners ministries can rise to the challenge.

This is the final Newsletter for 2012, so on behalf of the Council members and staff of the Mercy Partners office, I wish you and your families the peace, joy and happiness that this season is meant to bring.



### A quick prayer as you open your gifts on Christmas Day

"Let me just for a moment, Lord, hold this time in my heart. It is about mysteries and gratitude, unknowing and wrong sizes, snippets of ribbon and screams of delight. Help me to remember the immense love you have for each of us in this room. With each gift that is opened, no matter how perfect or not, let me feel again the many ways you gift us each day, especially with your presence in our hearts and the presence of each other in our lives."

Source: <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/>. Used with permission.

# THE PRACTICE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

by Emeritus Professor Peter Sheehan,  
Mercy Partners Council

In this article, Emeritus Professor Peter Sheehan continues his reflection on the value of Subsidiarity.

There are wonderful examples of the practice of subsidiarity in the Bible, the Gospels, and the work and teachings of Jesus Christ. I name just one to illustrate my point.

LET ME CITE from the Book of Apocalypse to illustrate some of the features of Subsidiarity that I have tried to outline:

“I saw the Holy City, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven... Then I heard a loud voice calling from the throne, “You see this city? Here, God lives among men. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone. Then the one sitting on the throne spoke: “Now I am making whole creation new” he said. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will

**An appreciation of the seamless web of life should infiltrate all of our decision-making**

give water from the well of life free to anybody who is thirsty; and I will be his God, and he a son to me”

I particularly resonate to the concept of “His name is God-WITH THEM”, and the notion of “giving water from the well of life FREE to anybody who is thirsty.”

For my own part, in this reflection, I want to appeal to an inspiring Leader in the Catholic Church who was, in my opinion, a model of the Practice of Subsidiarity both in thought and in action. That person is Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, the late Cardinal-Archbishop of Chicago.

Cardinal Bernadin died on November 14,

1996 after a profoundly Christian battle with pancreatic cancer. He chaired the American Bishop’s 1983 pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace” and is best known for his seminal advocacy of the “Consistent Ethic of Life.”

He is arguably the most powerful Catholic prelate in American History, and led the Bernadin Era, as some have termed it, which is now in decline. The moral pillar for Bernadin was *Humanae Vitae*. His concept of the CONSISTENT ETHIC, is rooted in the Catholic Social Ethical Principles of the dignity of the human person. In 1985, he established an AIDS Task Force in his Archdiocese to determine the best way of caring for AIDS, and was the first high-standing prelate to say a public Mass for divorced and separated people.

His concept of the CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE is sometimes called the “Seamless web of life”. It was a metaphor for Christ’s Seamless Garment. Bernadin’s life was dedicated to the consistent application of moral principles that value the sacredness of human life. In his mind, all threats to life are equal, from a societal or political standpoint – a belief, which lies, I think, at the core of the Principle of Subsidiarity.

Cardinal Bernadin practiced and believed passionately in the profound dignity of the human person, regardless of the particularities of his or her human need. He reached out to embrace the human person, especially through his concept of the “Seamless Web of Life.”

An appreciation of the seamless web of life should infiltrate all of our decision-making. As Council Members we should never lose touch with the dignity of the human person, and always respect the human person. Never should our decision-making deny or abrogate trust in the resourcefulness of human capacity or effort. At all times our decision-making should reflect prayerful appreciation of the essential

humanness of persons. Never should we endorse interventions that take away that humanness, or attempt to deny it. Beliefs in all these salient features of Subsidiarity should constantly lie at the basis of our decision-making.

## INVITATION

I now invite you to give some of your own reactions to your experiences of the practices of the Principle of Subsidiarity, as you have experienced them, and to reflect on the meaning of those experiences to you in your decision-making. I conclude by offering you this prayer, which takes its meaning directly from the Principle of Subsidiarity.

“God our Creator,

You have created us social beings, part of a human family.

You have given us the intelligence and the capacity to solve the problems that affect us.

Give us the strength to actively participate in the political and social life of our country.

Show our leaders the limits of their governing competence.

Through your son Jesus, you have also shared in the public affairs of a concrete history and country.

Continue guiding our history Through the paths of justice and peace.

Let the wounds of separation and division be healed

by opening our hearts to listen to the truth on all sides,

Allowing us to find a higher truth that includes all;

May we learn to honour and enjoy our diversity and differences as a people, even as we more deeply touch our fundamental unity

May we, as a people, undergo a transformation

We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen”

FORMATION REPORT



CARMEL DWAN RSM  
MERCY PARTNERS  
FORMATION CO-ORDINATOR

# From the Formation Corner

## 2012 HAS BEEN A YEAR OF CONTINUING THE POSITIVE ACTIVITIES OF FORMATION FOR MERCY PARTNERS

**OUR FORMATION PROGRAM** which has been operating since 2007 has for the past two years been operating within the National Framework for Mercy Formation.

Our recent Retreat on “Leadership and Governance in a Catholic Ministry” at Robertson Gardens Brisbane once again maintained a high standard of input and reflection with 35 participants. Projects were presented and certificates presented to **Robyn Hunt, Judith Gardiner, Dr Lee-Anne Perry, Margaret Dixon rsm, Grace Bartolo rsm, Anne Hetherington rsm** and **Peter Pearce**.

2012 saw a shift in membership of those participating in the program from Sisters of Mercy to a significant number of lay

people. Each session has at least 35 attending and this year nine participants graduated upon completion of their project.

Those who are and have been involved include Mercy Partners Councilors’ and Executive Officer; Directors of Boards, Committee members or Senior Executives as well as employees from the Ministries. It has been pleasing to see the willing take-up of the formal program by Directors since the program is seen as key to promoting strong and respectful relationships throughout the organisation. The breadth and depth of people throughout the ministries also leads to a firm understanding at all levels of the role of Mercy Partners.

A significant influence on the program this year has been the inclusion of attendees from the Presentation Sisters and members of their educational facilities. Our program will now expand to include the story of Nano Nagle and reflection on the charism of the Presentation Sisters.

Another significant event was the visit by the new Archbishop of Brisbane, Archbishop Mark Coleridge DD. The Archbishop’s main priority was the content of the Formation Program and how this is being carried out. He was very positive in his evaluation and comments.

The formation program has just completed its third cycle. To date 83 have completed the three Retreats with 29 also presenting a project. The number of people attending each session averages about 30 each time and there are a continuing number of people requesting to undertake the formation program even beyond those involved with Mercy Partners.

The quality of presenters, the sense of community, and the integrity of the formation framework has led to a successful leadership formation program for people who are invited to participate. The common thread of Mercy (Mercy articulated in the broader sense of the Mercy of God) pervades all of the gatherings and this year has now expanded to

include other charisms as other Religious Orders become involved.

Stages 2 and 3 of the program are currently being developed in response to requests for further follow up local gatherings to include graduates as well as current participants. There seems to be a need for further connection after participants have graduated. These Stages will aim at ongoing formation as well as the opportunity for community building. The sense of community is very strong both in local and the State-wide group.

Members of the Formation Committee, **Marie Melville rsm, Margaret Endicott rsm** and **Carmel Dwan rsm** wish to thank the Councillors for their continued support during the year as well as their attendance at events; we wish to thank you for your continued enthusiasm and generosity in responding. As we prepare for the season of Advent may we all look to Elizabeth and Mary in our longing for peace in our hearts and in our world. May you and those you love experience this peace this Christmas.



Left-right: Keynote Speakers Dr Maureen Cleary and Dr Robert Fitzgerald AM address the group. Sr Berneice Loch rsm presents during the gathering.

2013 DIARY DATES



**Catholic Identity – March 13-15**  
 Venue: Robertson Gardens, Kessels Rd, Macgregor (Brisbane)  
*Understanding the significance of Catholic Identity and the role of the Laity within present Ministries”*

**Annual Gathering – July 26-27**  
 Venue: Rockhampton (venue to be announced)  
 The focus of this gathering will be the value of “*Compassion*”

**Theology of Mission and Sponsorship – October 16-18**  
 VENUE: The Mercure Townsville.  
*Understanding the Biblical Foundations of Catholic Ministry and the Theology of Mission*, identifying the need for Prophetic Role of Leadership in ministry today, Understanding and applying the Theology of Sponsorship with Mercy Partners, and understanding and being able to apply an Audit of the Mission to ensure Mission effectiveness.



Carmel Dwan rsm and Anne Hetherington rsm



Anne Hetherington rsm and Peter Pearce



Robyn Hunt and Carmel Dwan rsm



Anne Hetherington rsm and Lee-Anne Perry



Anne Hetherington rsm and Judith Gardiner

Above from top: Graduates of Mercy Partners Leadership Formation Program receive their certificates. Left: Lee Bickley, Michael O’Sullivan, Peter Maher, Maria Jean Rhule rsm and Rosemary Grundy pbvm participate in a session.

# In this edition we feature the personal stories of formation from two ministry leaders from the Sisters of Mercy Brisbane

## FORMATION IN MERCY

by **Bob Campbell**



**Bob** is General Manager at Holy Cross Laundry

**I COMMENCED EMPLOYMENT** with the Sisters of Mercy in 1998. What was originally work on a voluntary basis at Bridgeworks Personnel became an accidental career in the works of the Sisters of Mercy. At Bridgeworks the name Catherine McAuley seemed to be mentioned a few times but it was in a conversation I overheard rather than being directly involved in the discussion. I remember asking someone about Catherine McAuley and what was it we needed to do to get her a job!

I was advised that Catherine had in fact helped a few disadvantaged job seekers and perhaps I was one of them through a long line of succession planning. I mention this to show that my understanding of the traditions and values of the Sisters of Mercy was more contemporary than historical. I did not think I needed to know much about the Sisters of Mercy. My view was that the more jobs we found and placements we made that was all that was needed.

From a practical perspective this was probably right but it was not the full outcome. For me, a major part of the reward for working with the disadvantaged is sharing in their success. I had the shared success with the individual, the shared success with others in the ministry. However the full ambit of success past and present, the fact that success extends across congregations, across states and across countries was not evident to me. Being a part of the Mercy Formation

program amongst many other benefits gave me a bigger picture of our successes. The level of success we achieve as individuals in mission may seem to be little. However, the combining of little successes can and does lead to great advances in overall mission.

I attended the first information session provided to ministries concerning the formation of Mercy Partners. At that point in time I viewed it from purely an operational perspective. Being a part of the Mercy Formation program however, has shown me that Mercy Partners is also about culture, traditions and values. Where we come from, who we are, will significantly impact upon where we go to, who we become and how we get there in the future. It is therefore critical to have this understanding as it will shape all of us.

When I first heard about the Mercy Partners Leadership Formation program I was somewhat skeptical:

### **It [is] a motivational and rewarding experience at both a personal and ministry level**

- > How much praying would we do?
- > Would I be challenged by the program?

I told myself I had too much to do, and asked myself:

- > Would I be embarrassed by my lack of knowledge?
- > Would I be able to stay awake?
- > How would my personal beliefs fit in a forum such as this?
- > Could I relate to other participants especially the nuns?

All of these issues and more created a certain degree of reluctance.

This is what I found:

- > I gained an understanding of Catherine McAuley which showed me a

person of leadership, strong personal attributes and faith. I also saw a person with the same human frailties as many of us

- > I was challenged by the philosophical view points put forward
- > I gained a greater appreciation of the complexity of church
- > I became aware that others also had concerns similar to my own
- > I saw the Mercy Values in practice
- > I enjoyed times of quiet reflection
- > I saw a sharing of ideas and concepts which were appreciated both in the sharing and in the content
- > I was given a wider perspective on whole range of issues, ideas and concepts
- > I had the opportunity to network with a wide range of people and learn from them
- > I enjoyed the sharing of success
- > I took consolation from others when it all didn't go to plan
- > I gained a better understanding of the word "church"
- > I found people who struggled with a

wide range of religious and philosophical church issues such as myself

- > I found new ideas and concepts to further enhance the delivery of the Ministry Mission
- > I found that the diversity of the ideas in the group which, when considered and reviewed were done so in a manner which accorded the individuals dignity and respect
- > allowance was made for my sometimes "foot in mouth" disease
- > that people were genuine and honest in putting forward ideas
- > and much more!

I could say much more about the benefits I gained through completing the program. However the real challenge for

people in Mercy Ministries is to participate in the program with an open heart and enjoy the experience. One of the factors which I found particularly appealing was the contribution of participants from a background which was not Catholic based. Their perception and individual experiences added signifi-

cantly to the diversity of the discussion and the “take away” benefits of the program.

I would encourage all people in Mercy Ministries to participate in the formation program as it will be a motivational and rewarding experience at both a

personal and ministry level. Having completed the program I have still attended a number of sessions as an opportunity to reinvigorate and recharge those more subtle and often forgotten elements of ministry.

## A REFLECTION ON OUR MERCY PARTNERS GATHERING IN OCTOBER 2012

by Robyn Hunt



Robyn is Principal of her accounting practice Robyn Hunt Chartered Accountant at the Gold Coast and a Director of Mercy Community Services

**IN OCTOBER, I** was privileged once again to be a part of the Mercy Partners Formation Program. As a matter of fact I graduated after presenting my project on the Wednesday night as part of the opening reflection. I had spent many hours, days, months reflecting, researching and praying about the topic I finally chose – **An Exploration of how the Charism of two women – Nano Nagle and Catherine McAuley – has influenced my life and**

**how similar the lives of these two women are.**

I felt very humbled and touched by the stories of Nano and Catherine, telling their life story of love of God and concern for the most vulnerable in society, the poor, examining how Nano and Catherine have become an integral part of my life but also a feeling myself of being very vulnerable in sharing some of the stories of my own life. It was in the sharing that I came to realise that I felt a deep sense of being at home with the people in the room, a sense of oneness, of support in the knowledge that I am accepted for the person I am and I thank each and every one of you for that.

There were many moments over the three days that inspired me but my most memorable moments were in the words of Robert Fitzgerald when speaking on

Creative Stewardship. His analogy of the River having the power and strength to break through barriers and our challenge as the Tributaries, stewards of the River, having the faith and inspiration to write the next chapter, to continue to infuse the ministries we serve with the Christian experience, to understand that our ministries need to continue to be life giving and nourishing, different in character from others, bringing the Christian experience into harmony with the human experience and if not then something has gone wrong.

Both Nano and Catherine’s lives were given totally to love of God and service of the poor – contemplation and action walking hand in hand, integrated not separate. So my challenge, our challenge, is to continue to ask ourselves in our lives and in our ministries: **what have we done for the poor today?**

## SR AINÉ BARRINS VISITS ROCKHAMPTON



From left-right: Megan Groves, Gerard Raven, Claire Stitt, Sr Margaret Dixon, Sr Aine Barrins, Br Mick Bible, Bernie Parle and Rob Alexander



## TWICE THE CELEBRATIONS

by **Roanne Boldery**

Mercy Health and Aged Care Services North Queensland (MHSNQ) celebrated both the Pimlico campus 50th Golden Jubilee and Mercy Day in September – unveiling a 25-year-old time capsule, revealing a new history wall and acknowledging outstanding staff for their contribution to the health service.

The MHSNQ Board and Executive members gathered with staff, specialists and dignitaries in the shade of the old Mater Misericordiae Hospital to watch as a time capsule buried inside its walls in 1987 for the hospital’s Silver Jubilee was unveiled.

MHSNQ Maintenance Manager Arthur Gleeson, who 25 years ago made the brass polished time capsule and placed it behind a commemorative plaque with the then Hospital Administrator Sister Paul Mary rsm, had the special job of once again revealing this precious part of the Mater’s history.

“It was unreal and I never for one minute expected in 1987 when I made the time capsule that I would be here in 2012 to take it out again – I felt like a real part of the hospital’s history,” Mr Gleeson said.

“It was an overwhelming event to be a part of and I was so proud because it showed how far we’ve come from a little country hospital to such a sophisticated place today.”

MHSNQ Director of Finance Mark Joyce opened the capsule revealing a letter from Sr Paul Mary to the current administrators, a list of signatures from all the staff who worked at the hospital in 1987 and a timeline of Mater history.

“The documents inside really captured the change in times over 25 years – the letter from Sr Paul Mary to her predecessor in 2012 was addressed ‘Dear Sister’ because in 1987 the hospital was run by the Sisters and they probably believed it would never be done any other way,” Mr Joyce said.

The party then moved to the modern new Mater Conference Centre – signifying the passage of time from the past to the future for the health service – with St Patrick’s College Girls Choir singing “The Circle of Mercy” and forming an arch for guests to walk through. It was here Mercy Day celebrations began with a liturgy by Townsville Diocese Bishop Michael Putney DD, procession and scripture readings by staff, a reflection by Mercy Partners Chair Sister Anne Hetherington rsm and a new history wall unveiled. Mercy Awards were announced – the Mercy Works Award was presented to ICU Registered Nurse and Hospital Coordinator Pip Earl, the Mercy Quality Award was given to Pimlico Surgical Ward and Service Awards were given to staff for 10, 20 and 30 years’ service.

The highlight of the day was a surprise Skype video call by 25-year-old Andrew Sexton who was the first baby born and special guest at the hospital on the Silver Jubilee – after he was invited back by the Sisters to attend 25 years later.

“Nobody knew Andrew would be calling in by webcam because he had given his apologies earlier in the year after marrying an American woman which meant he could not travel back to Australia due to visa restrictions,” MHSNQ Director of Mission Trudy Clarke said. “He was brilliant – he spoke so well with such respect and what struck me was when he said he always knew growing up that one day he would have to give a speech at the Mater and what a privilege it was.”

However one of the four babies born in 1987 did attend – 25-year-old Townsville girl Christie Murdoch – who was acknowledged along with Sr Paul Mary who only wished to be a spectator at the historical event.

*Roanne Boldery is PR and Marketing Manager of MHSNQ*



# PRAYING FOR PEACE IN ADVENT

## PRAYING WITH ELIZABETH AND MARY

**Changing the way we pray for peace.** All of us, at one time or another, have felt heart-sick about the war in the Middle East. Apart from all the politics, we know that war is a failure of peace. No matter how evil the enemy, or how critically necessary it might be to remove him, war is simply tragic and results in the death of thousands of innocent people, and scars thousands more - if not all of us in some way. Most of the time, if we turn to God and beg for peace, it is difficult to know how to pray it. It can seem “futile.” Can God really change the hearts of enough people to give peace a chance?

### A PART OF OUR ADVENT LONGING

Part of our Advent longing will be to grow in our desire for peace – a hunger and thirst for it. For at midnight Liturgy on Christmas Eve, we will hear the angels say to the shepherds:

*“Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*

Let’s let a desire for the Good News of Christmas grow in our hearts each day and as we make our own efforts at peace around us, let’s turn to two of the Advent guides that scripture gives us.

### TWO WOMEN OF FAITH

Whether we are a man or a woman, a little child, a teen, an adult, or aging, we can look to Elizabeth and Mary in our longing for peace – in our hearts and in the world.



**This photo of an Afghani mother** can help us bring together our longing for peace and our turning to Elizabeth in our prayer. Elizabeth suffered doubly. She was growing old and people judged her. People would have assumed that her “curse” of being child-less was a punishment from God. She deserved this suffering, because she was a sinner, they would have thought.

When Elizabeth could not bear a child, she bore her suffering with faith. She had trust that God loved her and that, if it was God’s desire, her marriage with Zachary would be fruitful with a child. In the meantime, her life and her marriage were fruitful with hope. Oh, how she must have prayed for her husband’s faith and consolation. She knew his pain. He would have no son to continue his priestly work.

When God’s message came to Zachary, inspiring him to hope that he would have a son, he was unable to speak, to say the child’s name, because part of him still could not believe God could be that faithful. When he saw his child, Zachary’s mouth could finally proclaim, what Elizabeth had longed for him to know: “His name is John.” In Hebrew, “John” means, “God is a gracious giver.” Could they ever imagine the child their trust in God gave birth to? How could they have dreamed of how John would prepare the way for a peace the world could not give?

What is that place in my life that is like a barren desert? What seems dry and incapable of growth and life? Where am I guilty of the critical eye that presumes to judge the soul of another? Where can I grow in trust of God’s desires for me – to place my life, as it is now, in God’s hands? How can my heart and my mouth proclaim that God is faithfully gracious? How can I place my trust in – dream of – the barely imaginable?



This photo of an Iraqi mother can help us turn to Mary in our Advent longing for peace. Mary was innocent in every way. Yet, her very fidelity to God would cost her the understanding of others. They could never understand her pregnancy. How could she tell them that “the holy Spirit of God has overshadowed me”? But, Joseph knew. And, together, they formed a community of incredible faith in God’s way. They would be at God’s service – suffering, as all servants do.

**Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me!**

Mary’s trust in God was so deep that she gave birth to the Prince of Peace. The intimacy between this mother and her child was so profound, that the lance that pierced his heart on the cross, would pass through her heart first. This humble mother trusted that nothing would be impossible with God. Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth, to help and support her, but also to be

strengthened herself with Elizabeth’s faith. Oh, how we need each other to be in service of Jesus’ mission!

In what places in my life do I ask, “How can this be”? There are impossible barriers to peace. How do I say that I just can’t see how it is possible to believe in the power of God – here in my heart, in my home, among my family and friends, at work, among these peoples? How am I being invited to respond, “May it be done to me according to your word”? How can I be faithful to being in God’s service – and not be so worried about what people think of me? And in my growing desire to be more intimate with Jesus in my everyday life, in what concrete ways, with what particular persons, can I let the pattern of his life transform my life? How can I hurry to support others, while finding the community of faith I need to be a faithful servant in Jesus’ own mission?

#### **LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH!**

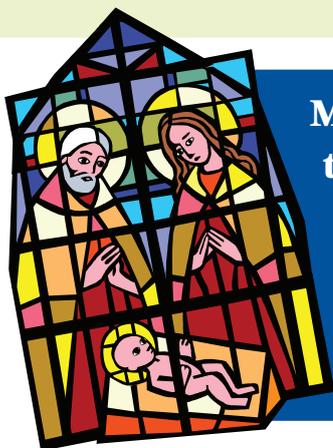
The angels announce to the shepherds:

*“Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour  
rests.”*

Let us all continue to pray for peace in our world. Let’s pray that hearts might be transformed, to find the path of peace together. But, as we pray, let’s let peace have a chance in our own hearts, in our own world, close at home. The peace-making begins with God’s work in us. This is truly Advent longing.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me!

Source: *Praying Advent*, Creighton University’s *Online Ministries* website at [onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html). Used with permission.



**Mercy Partners wishes you and those dear to you a fulfilling, peaceful and safe Christmas.**

Mercy Partners corporate offices will be closed from Monday 24th December, opening again Monday 7th January 2013.

We look forward to serving you and working with you in 2013.

COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE

