

# THE ROUND TABLE

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN  
FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING

LUKE 4:21



MARY  
AIKENHEAD  
MINISTRIES





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The Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries see the Round Table as a foundational document that speaks to the living story. This is created daily by those who take up the challenge of our Preferential Option for the Poor by bringing to life the values of

**LOVE, HOPE, COMPASSION AND JUSTICE**

through our ministries.

# FOREWORD

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENT

The Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries recognise that integral to the story of the Sisters of Charity, of their origins in Mary Aikenhead's call to serve the poor, of the founding Congregation and of the new mission in Australia, is the changing context in which the Congregation's call to serve the poor continues to take shape. Alongside these founding narratives are other interweaving stories, both scriptural and ecclesial, that have over the decades influenced the mission and ministry of the Australian Congregation and resulted in the generation of the new public juridical person, Mary Aikenhead Ministries. Each of these informing and shaping ecclesial stories needs to be recognised as foundational for implementing Pope John XXIII's call to listen to the changing "signs of the times."

Mary Aikenhead Ministries is an authentic lay, ecclesial and ministerial response to the changing needs of the changing world in the Australian context. Mary Aikenhead Ministries' founding value, expressed as a preferential option for the poor, enables Mary's original commitment to service to be expressed in the particularity of Pope Francis' call, shortly after his election for the Church to be a "poor church for the poor."

*"Let us take care of the fragility of every man, of every woman, of every child and of every elder, with that caring and attentive attitude of the brotherliness of the Good Samaritan."*

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– CARD. JORGE BERGOGLIO. HOMILY AT NEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION,  
ARGENTINA, 25 MAY 2003



## THE IMAGE OF THE ROUND TABLE

The round table in Mary Aikenhead's room played such an important part in the life of Mary as she wrote of her dreams and her hopes for the new apostolic ministry of the Sisters of Charity. Her call to serve was prioritised in the fourth vow of service of the poor. It was at this inclusive table, still honoured today in her room at Harold's Cross in Dublin, that Mary pondered, prayed, discerned and gave life to her call.

The round table was and will continue to be a model of inclusivity and active collaboration, where the invitation to share hopes and dreams of ongoing commitment to God's call to service will be responded to in ways both practical and inspirational.

## THE LIVING STORY

This Round Table Engagement is one where the Trustees and leaders will gather and together, through discernment and consultation on key scriptural, ecclesial and other historical and contemporary resources, continue to develop foundational documents that will articulate the Vision, Mission, Values and Identity of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. It is hoped that such documents will continue to nourish and give guidance and inspiration to all called to serve in our ministries.

*David Robinson on behalf  
of the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries*

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# 1. THE FOUNDING STORY: MARY AIKENHEAD AND THE CALL TO SERVICE

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THE FOUNDING STORY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY AND THEREFORE OF MARY AIKENHEAD'S MINISTRIES HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE NARRATIVE OF MARY AIKENHEAD, BORN IN CORK, IN 1787. IRELAND AT THE TIME WAS A DIVIDED NATION. PENAL LAWS CRIPPLED CATHOLICS WHILE THE PROTESTANT CHURCH DOMINATED THE CULTURE.

## 1.1 MARY AIKENHEAD – HER CALL, HER VISION AND MISSION

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The story of the Sisters of Charity began in Ireland with Mary's birth to a Protestant father and Catholic mother. Her poor health as an infant resulted in her being fostered to a devout Catholic couple for the first six years of her life. Subsequently on her return home Mary experienced the contrast between her own affluent family life and the poverty of the Catholic community in which she was nurtured in those early years. She also had the example of her successful and generous father, Dr. Aikenhead who modeled a life of care for the poor who came to him for treatment.

The early years of Mary exposed her both to the suffering of the poor and to her own family context of compassionate response to those in need. Her own call to service came when, after her father's death, Mary took over the family finances and consequently became exposed as an adult to the suffering of the poor. A practical as well as compassionate woman, Mary gathered some good friends with her to distribute food and clothing to those in need. At the same time, she was discerning the call to serve God in religious life, which in her day called for a dominantly monastic and enclosed commitment.

The tension she experienced between her call to the monastic life of the convent and her call to active ministry received some relief when Mary met Dr. Daniel Murray, then Coadjutor Bishop of Dublin. Their shared sense of mission and vision for a congregation of religious women who would serve the poor without being bound by the rule of enclosure came to fruition through Dr. Murray's support. He assisted Mary to found the Religious Sisters of Charity and on September 1, 1815 Mother Mary Augustine Aikenhead and Sister Mary Catherine Walsh made their temporary vows. After some delay the new Congregation, which was to have Ignatian rule and spirituality and a distinctive fourth vow of service of the poor, was formally erected by Rome and Mary and Catherine made their perpetual vows on December 9, 1816. Already on September 10, 1816 these first two Sisters of Charity had begun visitation of the poor in their homes.

It was Mary Aikenhead's vision, in response to God's grace and call, which saw the Congregation established and inspired under the motto, "*Caritas Christi Urget Nos.*"



LOVE

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*Love*

## 1.2 THE DYNAMISM OF STORIES

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### THE GOSPEL STORY AND MARY'S FOUNDING STORY COME TOGETHER IN A NEW COMMUNITY FOR SERVICE

Her Catholic faith, her love of the daily Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church were key sources of Mary's deep commitment to her God and to God's people. She also drew inspiration for her life and ministry from the scriptures and, in particular, the graphic story of the rich man Dives and the beggar Lazarus touched her deeply.

*"And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table ... The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham." (Luke 16:19-31)*

Her daily reflection on the Scriptures deepened her understanding of her commitment to her God in religious life and her service to her fledgling community.

The problematic state of her health was a constant issue for her and it was in sharp contrast with her energies for mission. Her personal motto for her religious life was drawn from the words of St. Paul, *"I can do all things in him who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13). This was surely also influenced by her own family motto: *Rupto robore nati*, which translated as: *"We are born with weakened strength."* Mary's accomplishments, her hopes and her efforts for the flourishing of the Congregation when it faced the inevitable struggles of a new initiative in church and society are evidence of her faith-based paradoxical conviction: *"When I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor. 12:10).

In 1821, a new area of apostolic work was opened up to the Congregation, when the Governor of Kilmainham Goal in Dublin requested the sisters to visit two young women who had been convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Mary and Catherine willingly and frequently visited the unfortunate girls, helping them to acquire peace of mind and reconciliation with God before their execution. The Governor was so impressed by the Sisters' good influence that he asked them to continue their involvement in prison visitation. The prison ministry has been a constant in the works of the Sisters of Charity.

The outreach and diversity of ministries has been in contrast to the numbers of Sisters and their co-workers over the decades. In 1833 Mary described the focus and expanse of the Congregation's mission:

*"... the object of our Institute is to attend to the comforts of the poor, both spiritual and temporal, to visit them at their dwellings and in hospitals, to attend them in sickness, to administer consolation in their afflictions, and to reconcile them to the dispensations of an all-wise providence in the many trials to which they are subject." (Bishop N. Donnelly, Mary Aikenhead, Her Life, Her Work and Her Friends, Preface, 3rd edition, May 8, 1911)*

No words could better illustrate Mary Aikenhead's deep concern for the whole person, body, mind and spirit, in her apostolic call to service of the poor.

*"Her Catholic faith, her love of the daily Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church were key sources of Mary's deep commitment to her God and to God's people."*

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## 1.3 NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE CALL TO SERVICE

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### FROM THE NORM OF MONASTIC LIFESTYLE TO THE NEW CALL OF APOSTOLIC RELIGIOUS MISSION AND MINISTRY

There was no question that the deep commitment to serve God through service of the poor was integral to the vocation of the early Sisters. Fundamental to their call was the choice of an appropriate spirituality for mission. Mary recognised that the normative monastic model was not appropriate for the apostolic life style. Her own formation at York with the members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary opened Mary to Ignatian spirituality, with its focus on discernment and commitment to ministering for the greater glory of God. Further integration of Ignatian spirituality came through the friendship and mentoring of Jesuits who worked with Mary to develop the Founding Constitution and Rules of the Sisters of Charity. In her discernment in regard to new foundations and new directions Mary drew on the Scriptures and on her own practical wisdom and compassion. Mary found God in all things, and in turn she experienced herself being led by God in all things.



**Sisters of Charity**  
of Australia

## 1.4 SPIRITUALITY FOR MINISTRY AND THE IGNATIAN STORY

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### FINDING GOD IN ALL THINGS

As the Congregation became established, as more people became aware of the work of the Sisters and as new initiatives in healthcare and education of the poor were commenced, Mary had to make decisions that would have significant consequences, not simply for the present but for the future of the Congregation. The benefits of Mary's commitment to Ignatian spirituality were foundational for her decision-making, particularly in these early years. Her reflection on the life of Ignatius, himself called to discern the ways in which God was calling him and his Society to do God's will in the particular context in which the Jesuits were ministering, continued to influence Mary's responses to those in need.



IGNATIAN "DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS" WHICH TOOK THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF IGNATIUS AS THEIR STARTING-POINT FOR FINDING GOD'S WILL CONTINUED TO BE THE BASIS OF FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE CONGREGATION.

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❧ A.M.D.G. ❧

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# 2. THE STORY RESONATES: THE CALL TO THE AUSTRALIAN MISSION

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## 2.1 THE CALL TO SERVE OPENS UP

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### THE CHURCH'S CALL TO SERVICE OF IMPRISONED WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

Amongst the many requests made to Mary Aikenhead for worthy causes for the Sisters to be involved in was a call from Australia, where the penal colony housed numbers of Irish convicts, both men and women. The situation of vulnerable and suffering women in Australia was made clear by Dr. Ullathorne in his requests for Sisters to minister to their needs:

*"I went off to Ireland, and met its Bishops ... from none of them did I obtain more earnest co-operation than from Archbishop Murray, of Dublin, ... I arranged with Mrs Aikenhead, the Foundress of the Sisters of Charity, for a filiation of five Sisters to accompany me to Sydney, for which the approval of Archbishop Murray was readily obtained."* (Extract from the autobiography of Dr William Ullathorne csb).



THE SISTERS WHO OFFERED AND WERE CHOSEN FOR THE AUSTRALIAN MISSION, THE EIGHTH FOUNDATION, WERE: MOTHER (MARGARET) JOHN CAHILL, SISTER (JULIA) LAWRENCE CATER, SISTER (CATHERINE) FRANCIS DE SALES O'BRIEN, SISTER (ELIZA) FRANCIS XAVIER WILLIAMS AND SISTER (ALICIA) JOHN BAPTIST DE LACY.

That Mary Aikenhead agreed to send five members of her fledgling Congregation to the penal colony in New South Wales indicated her concern for the marginalised and desperately needy. It was Mary Aikenhead's courage, hope, empathy and enormous trust in Divine Providence that motivated her to send five sisters to Australia in 1838. Her willingness to invite volunteers from among the Sisters when the Congregation was still establishing its own identity in face of difficulties was surely both deep commitment to the poor and the fruit of careful discernment.

Descriptions of the provisions that Mary Aikenhead sent with the five sisters who volunteered for the new mission indicate her care for their spiritual life in the books and other resources sent as well as her practical mind. In particular, she saw to it that they had all the requisites for opening a school on their arrival in New South Wales. Significantly, knowing that their service to the poor would include Australia's Indigenous peoples, Mary Aikenhead also sent a black crucifix. After a four months journey the first women religious to come to Australia disembarked from the merchant ship, *The Francis Spaight*, on December 31, 1838.

## 2.2 THE EXPANDING MINISTRY TO THOSE ON LIFE'S MARGINS

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### WOMEN IN PRISON AND THE NEW EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY

The Sisters were soon given the use of a cottage in Parramatta near the Female Factory, the prison housing some 600 convict women. With the Governor's permission, the Sisters visited the prison and soon gained agreement to exchange the women's hard outdoor manual labour with laundry duties and needlework.

Through caring, persistent effort, they were able to win the hearts and minds of the convict women, a triumph of both their compassion and their competence as adult educators. The Governor was so pleased with the Sisters' influence on their charges that he granted the women the privilege of receiving wages for their work. The opening was also given for the Sisters to commence religious instruction at schools then in Sydney.



THE PARRAMATTA FEMALE FACTORY WHICH HOUSED OVER 600 CONVICT WOMEN.

In these early years the Sisters encountered many difficulties in seeking to establish other ministries. In particular, the Benedictine character of the local Church hierarchy of the time was not sympathetic to the Ignatian Rule and spirituality of the Congregation founded by Mary Aikenhead.

## 2.3 THE CALL TAKES SHAPE IN DIVERSE MINISTRIES

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### HEALTH, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CARE

It was some 20 years before the Australian Sisters were able to open their own primary school on the premises of the present St Vincent's College in Potts Point, Sydney. Their efforts in education were soon rewarded and their schools, both primary and secondary, prospered and gained Church and State recognition. As in Ireland, so in Australia, from small beginnings the Sisters' ministries grew and expanded to New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland and, in later years, the Australian Capital Territory.

The Sisters' health ministry also began with the foundation of St Vincent's Hospital Sydney that began on the Potts Point site in 1857 and was transferred to its present site in 1870. In the next decades other hospitals and hospices opened in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania in response to the growing need and the success of the established institutions.

OPENED IN 1844, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ORPHAN SCHOOL WAS AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PURPOSE BUILT ORPHANAGE.



Sisters of Charity community care had its origins in both the orphanages established in Hobart and Liverpool and in the establishment of a "Good Shepherd" refuge in the 1850s in Sydney for those women who suffered from the poverty and abuse of the penal origins and its consequences. Over time the orphanages gave place to group homes and refuge support became support services for families and women at risk. This was a ministry where the Sisters worked collaboratively with their lay co-workers in order to enable maximum support and expertise for those under their care.



# JUSTICE

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## 2.4 THE SISTERS OF CHARITY BECOME ESTABLISHED IN AUSTRALIA

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### INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND MINISTRIES EXPAND

As the Congregation's institutional ministries developed, the importance of lay collaboration became ever more essential. The early years of the Congregation were also characterised by Mary Aikenhead's capacity to involve others in her work. Her own early experiences of both Protestant and Catholic family members and friends enabled her to engage freely with any people who shared her care for the poor. The Congregational story reveals a history of the Sisters responding to need, interpreting the signs of the times and engaging with lay collaborators in order to meet the constant and changing needs of the time. These have developed both in terms of ministries and in relation to governance.

*Over the past 35 years, that is between 1972 and 2007, there have been three distinct evolutions in the governance of the Congregation's ministries – these are:*

- 1. The Journey to Incorporation Which Began in 1972.*
- 2. The Journey to Evolving Forms of Governance.*
- 3. The Journey towards the Public Juridic Person.*

The establishing, operating, administering and governing of ministries in health and aged care, education and community care has taken shape in collaborative ways that have led to those ministries being continually revitalised, always with the realisation that their mission, which is the mission of the Church, is vital, responsive, courageous and always reaching out with the love and tenderness of Christ to all. In the spirit of Mary Aikenhead these ministries have always had a strong focus on social justice and outreach to the disadvantaged.

# 3. THE STORY IS TRANSFORMED: CHURCH AND LAITY IN THE POST VATICAN II ERA – NEW DIMENSIONS OF BAPTISMAL MISSION AND MINISTRY

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## 3.1 A CHURCH IN TRANSITION

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### THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS AND THE RE-VISIONING OF BAPTISMAL IDENTITY

It was Pope John XXIII in 1959 who ushered in the major impetus for the changes that took place afterwards in the decades that followed Vatican II. Shortly after his election he called for the Church to move on from its dogmatically focused identity, a consequence of the polarisation of the Reformation era, to become a Church, which would offer a pastoral response to the changing needs of the changing world. In the opening Mass of the Council Pope John called for an *aggiornamento* – bringing the Church “up to date” and being responsive to the “signs of the times”. A key document that impacted relationships between priests, religious and lay people was *Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, particularly Chapter V, “The Universal Call to Holiness”. The hierarchical and relational structure of the Church came under scrutiny when terms such as “The States of Perfection” language began to disappear and to be replaced by affirmations of the role of the People of God: “*The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth.*” (LG V: 33) Radical questioning of the meaning of vocation and of ministry for people of all walks of life began to have an impact on church leaders, the governance bodies of ecclesial institutions and their communities.

Deeper awareness of the integrative and collaborative understanding of God’s call for all the baptised was raised in Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes – The Church in the Modern World*. Its expansive and inclusive focus on the “Solidarity of the Church with the Whole Human Family” opened new horizons and understandings for religious women and men and also for those dedicated people who worked with them in their diverse ministries:

*“The joy and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joy and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” (GS 1)*

A major consequence of these two key Church documents was the increase of tense relationships between church and religious leaders, particularly in the Western world. During the post-conciliar decades, ongoing discernment of congregational and diocesan priorities re mission and ministry took place in ecclesial settings. This re-prioritising impacted religious women and men particularly as they questioned their understanding of their founding mission. They saw themselves as accountable to the Council mandate of reading and responding to the “signs of the times” while maintaining or reviewing their traditional roles in educational or healthcare institutions.

## 3.2 THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN TRANSITION

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### CHURCH AS “THE PILGRIM PEOPLE OF GOD”

The transformation of the traditional and established understandings of Church can be seen in the departure from the more ethereal image of church as “Mystical Body of Christ” (Pius XII) to the contemporary and grounded reality of church as “Pilgrim People of God.” In Vatican II this transformation took some time and the discussion generated conflict as well as inspiration and deeper ecclesial awareness.



The collaborative engagement between all the baptised, and the ordained and religious was surely the basis of this challenging conciliar understanding of roles and relationships:

*“... all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” (cf. Eph. 1:4–5 and 10) (LG V:40)*

The ecumenical intent of the Council was assisted by this conciliar approach which was less affirmative of boundaries and which had significant implications for effective collaboration on behalf of ecumenical and interfaith relationships.

### 3.3 THE ACCLAIMING OF BAPTISMAL IDENTITY

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#### VARIOUS VOCATIONS IN THE LAY STATE (CL IV)

The Vatican II inclusive understanding and refocusing of baptismal identity was taken up in 1988 by Pope John Paul II in his *Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity: Christifideles Laici*. He uses the image of the “People of God” and draws on the parable of the labourers in the vineyard:

*“For the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”* (Matthew 20:1–2)

This gospel parable describes “the Lord’s vast vineyard and the multitude of persons, both women and men, who are called and sent forth by him to labour in it.” The vineyard is the whole world (cf. Mt 13:38), which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God. (CL 1)



The post-conciliar ecclesiology of the “People of God,” is grounded in both scripture and tradition but it also engages with the human reality of the church. This has contributed to the contemporary recognition and integration of lay leadership in the Church. In discussing the important understanding of the priesthood of all believers, with the laity sharing in the threefold offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king, John Paul II opened up the diversity of ways in which lay people could be engaged in collaborative ministry.

*“There are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a ‘commonly shared’ lay vocation ‘special’ lay vocations flourish.”* (CL: 56)

This is certainly the case in the generative narrative of Mary Aikenhead Ministries from its beginnings as it move towards its possible future.



# COMPASSION

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## 3.4 THE FORMATION OF THE LAY FAITHFUL IN THE LAY STATE

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### ECCLESIAL LAY MINISTRY TAKES SHAPE

In the decree on the *Apostolate of Lay People (Apostolicam Actuositatem)* it was affirmed that lay people received charisms of the Spirit through Baptism. As a consequence all the baptised have the right and duty to use their gifts for the good of humanity and the development of the Church. This recognition was supported in the leadership of Pope John Paul II. A fundamental aim this Pope had for the laity was to promote the "*Vocation and Mission in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council*" In his *Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici* (1988), he proposed "*A Total Integrated Formation for Living an Integrated Life*" (CL 59). After much discussion and debate on the postconciliar development of lay ministry in various national and diocesan churches, the vision the Pope described in this Apostolic Exhortation is still coming to fruition.



A formation program for lay ministry in the Church was articulated in the 2015 USCCB document, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. This work was proposed as a basis for further national and international diocesan formation programs that have subsequently enabled lay ecclesial ministry to be formalised in the Church. This initiative was meant to enable lay ecclesial ministry to take shape in those dioceses that have embraced the Vatican II understanding of the role of all the faithful in building up the church and in assisting the fulfilment of the church's mission in the contemporary world.

*"The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one's mission."* (CL 58)

Such willingness is directed towards the enabling of God's mission for the Church.

# 4. THE CONTEMPORARY STORY

## A GLOBAL CHURCH OF MERCY: NEW DIMENSIONS OF MISSION AND MINISTRY

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### 4.1 POPE FRANCIS: A POOR CHURCH AND THE FORMATION OF DISCIPLES

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With the election in 2013 of the first Pope from the southern hemisphere, Jorge Bergoglio SJ, new ways of communicating God's merciful care in both global and local ecclesial contexts became evident in church and society. The centralised church became polycentric under Francis. Decentralisation and the empowering of local communities enabled small faith groups to work together on behalf of mercy and justice for all. Pope Francis' pastoral focus and personal presence to people from all walks of life was a shock to many who were used to a Pope set apart from the people. Stories of ordinary human connecting, of making phone calls to friends and people in need, of drinking tea with people, communicated a leader who knew his people and was open to engaging with them and hearing the real issues they were struggling with. The papal encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, conveys the Pope's conviction that the:

*"Gospel joy which enlivens the group of disciples is a missionary joy. This is the joy that takes seriously the contemporary challenges of all people from all parts of the globe and offers an alternative way of being in relationship and sharing responsibility."*

We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as healthcare, education and community care. At the same time we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. A number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 21)

This is the contemporary expansive situation of institutional care and response that faced Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity on a much smaller scale in those early days. This was the call to service beyond the comfort level. This is the challenge to groups such as Mary Aikenhead Ministries whose narrative is deeply connected to the cry of the poor to which Pope Francis awakens the world:

*"The Gospel is always inviting us to run the risk of encountering the other's face, with a physical presence that confronts us with its pain and its supplications, with its infectious joy that spreads in the constant encounter of one body with another body."* (*Evangelii Gaudium* 88)



HOPE

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*Hope*

## 4.2 POPE FRANCIS AND THE CALL TO BE A CHURCH OF MERCY

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The spontaneity of Pope Francis' ecclesial vision was in sharp contrast with the traditional ordered approach of previous popes. Francis' clarion call to his church was practical, *"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle."* (A Big Heart, Open to God, 2013) The image of a church of mercy was integral to the pastoral directions of Francis' leadership and to his calling for a Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Previous patterns of ordered curial documents and ecclesiastical communication were displaced with a new model and approach. The Pope's challenging and totally unexpected call to his own leaders was disturbing to many who had become comfortable with the established order.

*"I want a mess. We knew that in Rio there would be great disorder, but I want trouble in the dioceses! ... I want to see the church get closer to the people. I want to get rid of clericalism, the mundane, this closing ourselves off within ourselves, in our parishes, schools or structures ... Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world."*

The criticism of self-referential ecclesiastical worldviews was abhorrent to Francis:

*"Given this type of alternative, I can tell you that frankly I would ... prefer a church that might have an accident to one that might be sick. A typical kind of sickness that a closed in church might have is that of self-reference: looking at itself."* (Pope Francis' address to pilgrims at World Youth Day 2013)

Francis' first *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*, called for a more open church where all people could find welcome and comfort. Evangelisation had its foundation in the "joy" of the gospel where authentic discipleship can be found.

*"Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always 'new'."* (Evangelii Gaudium 11)

For Francis, the church is above all concerned for the people of God on their way to God. Subsequent documents such as the *Apostolic Exhortation, Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love – On Love in the Family* (2016) which brings in notions of "gradualness", of "Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness" (Ch. 8) are generating debate and dissension as well as giving informed relational directions and substance to the call to mercy and forgiveness in the Church.

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MERCY

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## 4.3 THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

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*“In seeking to establish Mary Aikenhead Ministries, the Congregation will continue to offer its guidance and support. Some Congregational members will continue their involvement at both governance and operational levels and particularly during the transition phase. In this way, the Congregation can support Mary Aikenhead Ministries to develop as a vibrant Catholic organisation serving Australian communities in the name of the Church.”*

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FROM THE PETITION TO ROME, JAN. 2008

### DEVELOPING AND EXPANDING THE CHARISM AND MISSION

When the decision to transfer the ministries from the Congregation to the public juridic person, Mary Aikenhead Ministries, commenced, this was not simply a consequence of the ageing profile of the Sisters. Nor was this lay ecclesial ministerial initiative taken up by the Sisters a retreat from governance responsibility. Rather theirs was a faith-filled response to the conciliar as well as contemporary affirmation of and call for lay leadership in the educational, healthcare and community care contexts in which the Sisters and laity have worked for many decades.

The Congregational decision represented a handing-over in trust and belief in the value of our educational, health and community care ministries to those who are prepared to continue the narrative and to foster the Mary Aikenhead charism in the present and future Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

The Sisters themselves continue to live their gospel ministry of service to the poor in the vowed life through diverse personal or communal services for and with the marginalised or needy. Some Sisters work collaboratively with other voluntary groups for service to the poor and marginalised. Some commit themselves to lives of service of the poor in urban, rural or isolated areas with various not-for-profit groups, while other Sisters are supported in their ministries to those in need by the community of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Australia.



## 4.4 MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES OPENS UP “THE NEW POSSIBLE”

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### PROPHETIC OUTREACH TO CHURCH, WORLD AND PLANET

On July 1, 2009, the Sisters transferred the majority of their incorporated works to Mary Aikenhead Ministries. The company constitutions of Mary Aikenhead Ministries' incorporated entities specify the responsibilities of each ministry to operate at all times as part of the mission of the Catholic Church, in conformity with canon law, and to offer formation programs for personnel, integrating the four values of love, hope, justice and compassion of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. Various resource documents provided by the Trustees will be the basis of both foundational and ongoing formation programs.

The educational ministry which followed the tradition of the Sisters of Charity in Ireland has continued to flourish in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. The heritage of the Sisters of Charity is now handed on in education by all those who work in diverse ways for the educational mission that is now under the mandate of the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

The legacy of the Sisters' health ministry that began on the Potts Point site in 1857 has continued with contributions to healthcare, medical research institutes and aged care through the incorporated entity of St Vincent's Health Australia, the largest Catholic not-for-profit health and age care system in Australia. In the spirit of Mary Aikenhead the health and education ministries along with community care continue to have a strong focus on social justice and outreach to the disadvantaged.



In each of the ministries of Mary Aikenhead there is respect for the past, connectedness with current developments in the particular research, clinical or professional areas, and a concern for the future. The *Papal Encyclical, Laudato Si': Praised be to you O Lord* (2016) reminds us that our planet earth, our common home “*is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.*” (LS 1)

This encyclical with its overarching concern for the planet will surely provide an ethical and directional panorama for the future directions of these ministries. The vision of the Pope for the planet is foundational for each ministry of Mary Aikenhead to initiate in their institutions and to explore with other concerned groups who share to same salvific concern for society and for the planet.

*“I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”* (LS 14)

In taking part in such dialogical engagements all those involved in Mary Aikenhead Ministries will contribute to the opening up of “The New Possible” and collaborate in the prophetic outreach to church, world and planet.

# 5. MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES: OUR HERITAGE TODAY

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Mary Aikenhead's determination that her Sisters be extensively useful forged a tradition of service of the poor that transcended the accepted social and religious structures and mores of her time, and created new ways of seeing, doing and being. Her newly founded 'walking' Sisters moved into the world to reach and stand with the poor and marginalised, to provide an example of the love of Christ to all, and to advocate for active change to overcome injustice and inequality.

In honouring our tradition and heritage we strive constantly to preserve this spirit and place it in the centre of each of our ministries. Central to this spirit is that all we do is underpinned by the love of Christ, a love which is freely available to all, which makes no distinction, and which calls us to discernment and action.

*This spirit calls us to:*

- *be a prophetic people capable of creative, courageous and audacious action;*
- *be constantly aware of the silenced and the ignored;*
- *perceive the need where others may see only the outcome;*
- *speak with passion, strength and compassion for those whose voices are not heard;*
- *be constant in our critique of ourselves and our world,*
- *stand alongside those we serve; and*
- *do all with great joy and willing hearts.*

It is a spirit that calls us to restlessness, and to be a disturbing presence which challenges us and others, to imagine and bring to life a more compassionate and just world.

Since the earliest days of the Congregation, Mary Aikenhead and her sisters have walked in partnership with lay partners and collaborators. Those serving in the ministries today stand on the shoulders of those Sisters and lay co-workers whose names may now be largely forgotten and whose contribution may remain only in memory, yet collectively they are the 'foundation stones' of the many places of ministry in which we find ourselves today. Further, through the Sisters' response to the signs of the times, today we see the conciliar vision of lay ecclesial leadership taking shape in the handing over of the Sisters of Charity 'call to service' to Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

A photograph of two hands reaching towards each other over a body of water. The hand on top is darker-skinned and the hand on the bottom is lighter-skinned. The water is rippled and reflects light. The overall tone is soft and hopeful.

PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE

**POOR**

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The call of the Trustees is to ensure that the heritage, tradition and charism of the Sisters of Charity are taken purposefully into the future. In honouring this spirit they know that all are called to address the needs of our time, with open hands and joyful hearts, creating new realities.

*Cease to dwell on days gone by  
and to brood over past history.  
Here and now I will do a new thing.  
This moment it will break from the bud,  
Can you not perceive it?*

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ISAIAH 43: 18-19

The spirit which inspired Mary Aikenhead to found her Congregation remains alive today in the many works of Mary Aikenhead Ministries. Like Mary Aikenhead, those in these ministries continue to further Christ's ministry of teaching, healing and service of the poor and disadvantaged.

What is the dynamic tension that draws all involved in Mary Aikenhead Ministries forward in inspiration and inward in recognition of the call to service that is integral to the charism?

The Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries have chosen, and take particular inspiration from, the passage in the Gospel of Luke (4:16–22) proclaiming Jesus' ministry:

*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

*And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

May our good God teach us to value our Holy Institute and do our very best to transmit its holy spirit from age to age. Amen (Mother Mary Aikenhead)

# 6. CHARISM:

## CARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS (2 COR. 5:14)

THE CHARISM OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY IS “TO BRING TO EACH PERSON THE LOVE, TENDERNESS AND CONCERN OF CHRIST FOR THE POOR, SEEING CHRIST IN EVERYONE” (CONSTITUTIONS: RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF CHARITY OF AUSTRALIA)

“Actively seeking relevant and appropriate ways for us to proclaim this today”, the Sisters of Charity envisioned Mary Aikenhead Ministries and supported this continuity of their founding story.

The charism of the Sisters of Charity, "*Caritas Christi Urget Nos*", has been a source of inspiration and purpose for the Sisters and their co-workers from the beginning.

Jesuit Scripture Scholar Brendan Byrne reflects on this Pauline passage in a recent book on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In this passage, Byrne sees Paul's motivation of his mission.

Byrne comments that “urges us on” translates a Greek verb *synechein* which is open to at least three distinct meanings which each of which has its own strengths and limitations.

One meaning which he describes as “shaky on linguistic grounds but very attractive” is the translation in the Jerusalem Bible:

*“For the love of Christ overwhelms us.” Paul, who for a time persecuted the early believers—and persecuted Christ—has a strong conviction of Christ's personal love. As he says in the text from Galatians, “I live now by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself up for me” (2:20). It is easy to understand him saying to fellow believers, “The love of Christ overwhelms us”—not in the sense of constraining our freedom but by so catching us up in the rhythm of his unselfish love as to free us from all less worthy attachments. Here (2 Cor. 5:14), Paul is extending that very personal sense of Christ's love to the entire community of believers. The love of Christ, who died for us (literally, “for all”) should be simply the overwhelming consideration that captures us and guides our entire life and action. That Christ “has died for all” means that all who attach themselves to him, through faith and baptism, have also “died” with him – died, that is, to sin and any claims made against them because of sin. (Rom 6:3–4, 6, 11)*

*They (we) simply cannot live in a way determined by the “slavery to sin,” the radical “being turned in on self,” that characterized the old situation. On the contrary, they should “live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (see also Rom 14:7–9). That is, they should live with the self-sacrificial love that Christ displayed in his earthly life and that now, as risen Lord, he continues to live out in the bodily life of believers, those who live “in him” (Rom 6:12-13). The Corinthians should understand that it is this unselfish love of Christ that is the driving force of Paul's mission.*

*“Christ died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:15

Brendan Byrne SJ, *Freedom in the Spirit: An Ignatian Reading of St. Paul*, New York: Paulist, 2016



LOVE | HOPE  
COMPASSION | JUSTICE

# 7. VALUES

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THE FOUR VALUES ENDORSED BY MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES ARE:

- LOVE

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- HOPE

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- JUSTICE

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- COMPASSION

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EACH OF THESE VALUES IS AN INVITATION TO EACH ONE WHO IS INVOLVED WITH OR COMMITTED TO LEADERSHIP IN A MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HEALTH OR COMMUNITY CARE, TO CONTINUE TO ATTEND TO WAYS IN WHICH THESE VALUES CAN BE RECOGNISED AND NURTURED IN THEMSELVES AND IN THEIR OWN PARTICULAR CONTEXT.

Each of these values is explored in the following pages through the lens of Scripture and of the ecclesial leadership of Pope Francis in his various writings and homilies. Their implications for each of our leaders will be developed through personal reflection on their own ministerial context in the various formation processes that are part of the programs offered by the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries.

# LOVE

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*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

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JOHN 10:10

*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will remain—so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give you. This is my command to you: Love one another.*

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JOHN 15:14-17

YOUR PERSONAL SELECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

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POPE FRANCIS:  
PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH  
THE SAVING LOVE OF JESUS

*"The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others." (EG 264)*

# HOPE

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*Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."  
But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts  
my head high. I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy  
mountain. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains  
me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*

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PSALM 3:2-6

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous  
right hand.*

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ISAIAH 41:10

*Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him,  
pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed,  
dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."  
The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should  
come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.*

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MATTHEW 8:5-8

YOUR PERSONAL SELECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

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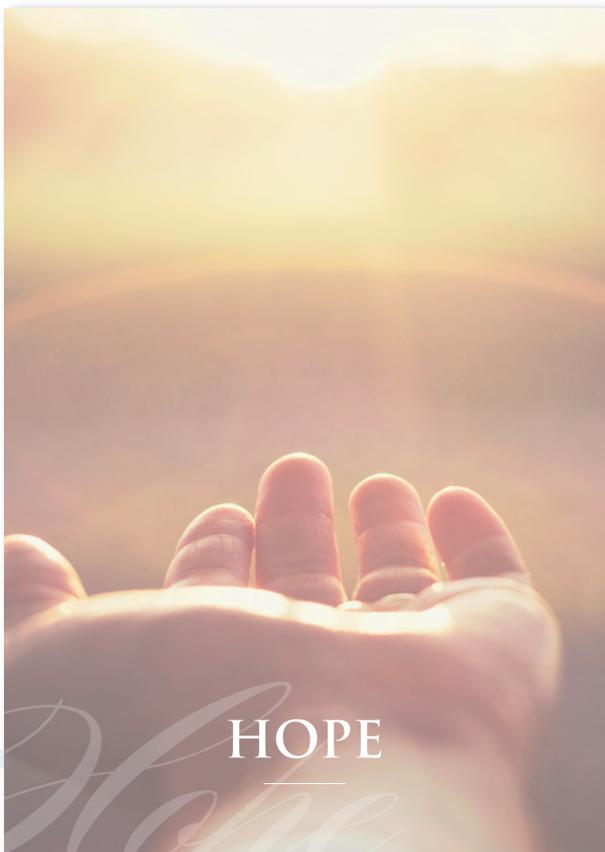
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POPE FRANCIS:  
OUR TIME HAS A GREAT NEED  
FOR HOPE

*"Our time has a great need for hope! The young can no longer be robbed of hope ... The young need hope. It is necessary to offer concrete signs of hope to those who experience pain and suffering. Social organizations and associations, as well as individuals who strive towards acceptance and sharing, are generators of hope. Therefore, I exhort your Christian communities to be agents of solidarity, never to stop before those who, for mere personal interest, sow self-centeredness, violence and injustice. Oppose yourselves to the culture of death and be witnesses to the Gospel of life! May the light of God's Word and the support of the Holy Spirit help you to look with new and willing eyes upon the new forms of poverty that drive so many young people and families to desperation."*

(Audience with Italian diocese of Cassano all'Jonio in the region of Calabria, February 21, 2015)

# JUSTICE

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*How blessed are those who keep justice,  
Who practice righteousness at all times!*

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PSALM 106:3

*You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor  
nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.*

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LEVITICUS 19:15

*The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity;  
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.*

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PSALM 99:4

*For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And  
I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting  
covenant with them.*

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ISAIAH 61:8

*What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

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MICAH 6:8

YOUR PERSONAL SELECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

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POPE FRANCIS:  
WHERE THERE IS NO JUSTICE,  
THERE IS NO PEACE

*"We are all equal – all of us – but this truth is not recognised, this equality is not recognised, and for this reason some people are, we can say, happier than others. But this is not a right! We all have the same rights. When we do not see this, society is unjust. It does not follow the rule of justice, and where there is no justice, there cannot be peace. I would like to repeat this with you: where there is no justice, there is no peace!"*

(Audience with children of the Peace Factory,  
May 12, 2015)

# COMPASSION

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*Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.*

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MATTHEW 20:34

*For you had compassion for those who were in prison.*

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HEBREWS 10:34

*Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.*

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LUKE 6:36

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

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COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

YOUR PERSONAL SELECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

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POPE FRANCIS:  
WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER,  
NONE OF US IS AN ISLAND

*"Each and everyone's existence is deeply tied to that of others: life is not time merely passing by, life is about interactions."*

*"As I meet, or lend an ear to those who are sick, to the migrants who face terrible hardships in search of a brighter future, to prison inmates who carry a hell of pain inside their hearts, and to those, many of them young, who cannot find a job, I often find myself wondering: 'Why them and not me?'"*

*"This is a question many of us face: Why are we so blessed while so many people suffer? There are so many extremities in this dualistic world we live in, and it can be easy to get caught up in them. Of course, there are many explanations like soul contracts, karmic relations, past lifetimes, or simply unfortunate circumstance, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight for equality."*

*"We all need each other, none of us is an island, an autonomous and independent 'I' separated from the other, and we can only build the future by standing together, including everyone."*

(TED talk, April 26, 2017)



# MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES' CREST

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THE MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES' CREST SEEKS TO ENCAPSULATE THE ESSENCE OF THE MINISTRIES IN A MULTI-LAYERED EMBLEM. EACH ELEMENT IN THE CREST HAS A SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANCE WHICH CARRIES THE MARY AIKENHEAD HERITAGE INTO THE FUTURE.

The initials M.A. drawn from Mary Aikenhead's signature connect Mary Aikenhead Ministries to their founding story. They indicate that the ministries are relational and suggest Mary Aikenhead's affirmation of the lay ecclesial entity established to take the ministries into the future. The symbol also reflects the conviction that Mary Aikenhead's responsiveness to the needs of her day will continue in Mary Aikenhead Ministries' gospel response. It also connects the story of Mary Aikenhead to that of the Australian Congregation of the Sisters of Charity. In the post-Vatican II decades the Sisters committed themselves to the communion ecclesiology of the Council. This can be understood as a basis for the transformation of institutional governance from religious to lay leadership in accord with the conciliar affirmation of ecclesial lay ministry.

Further, the use of the initials M.A. also recalls the devotion to *Maria Angelorum* in the Congregational crest. Dedication to Mary has always been a characteristic of the spirituality of the Congregation. This connection also reinforces the link between Mary Aikenhead Ministries and the charism of the Sisters of Charity.

The gospel values embraced by Mary Aikenhead Ministries – love, hope, compassion and justice – are evoked in the crest by the heart, cross and tongues of fire, which are all integral in the Catholic tradition. The flame, symbolising the burning commitment to service of the poor, is not contained; it reaches out, embracing all those touched by the diverse works of Mary Aikenhead Ministries and all those in Mary Aikenhead Ministries whose hearts are on fire for the mission. The flame gives light and direction, warmth and comfort. The three symbols draw their strength from their alignment with inner meaning and signify both the confidence held for the future of Mary Aikenhead Ministries and continuity with the inspirational past.

The two core colours, blue and purple, are significant – blue has long been associated with the Sisters of Charity, and purple is a colour symbolic of spirituality, divinity and knowledge.

*The crest was created by Jessen Design Associates.*

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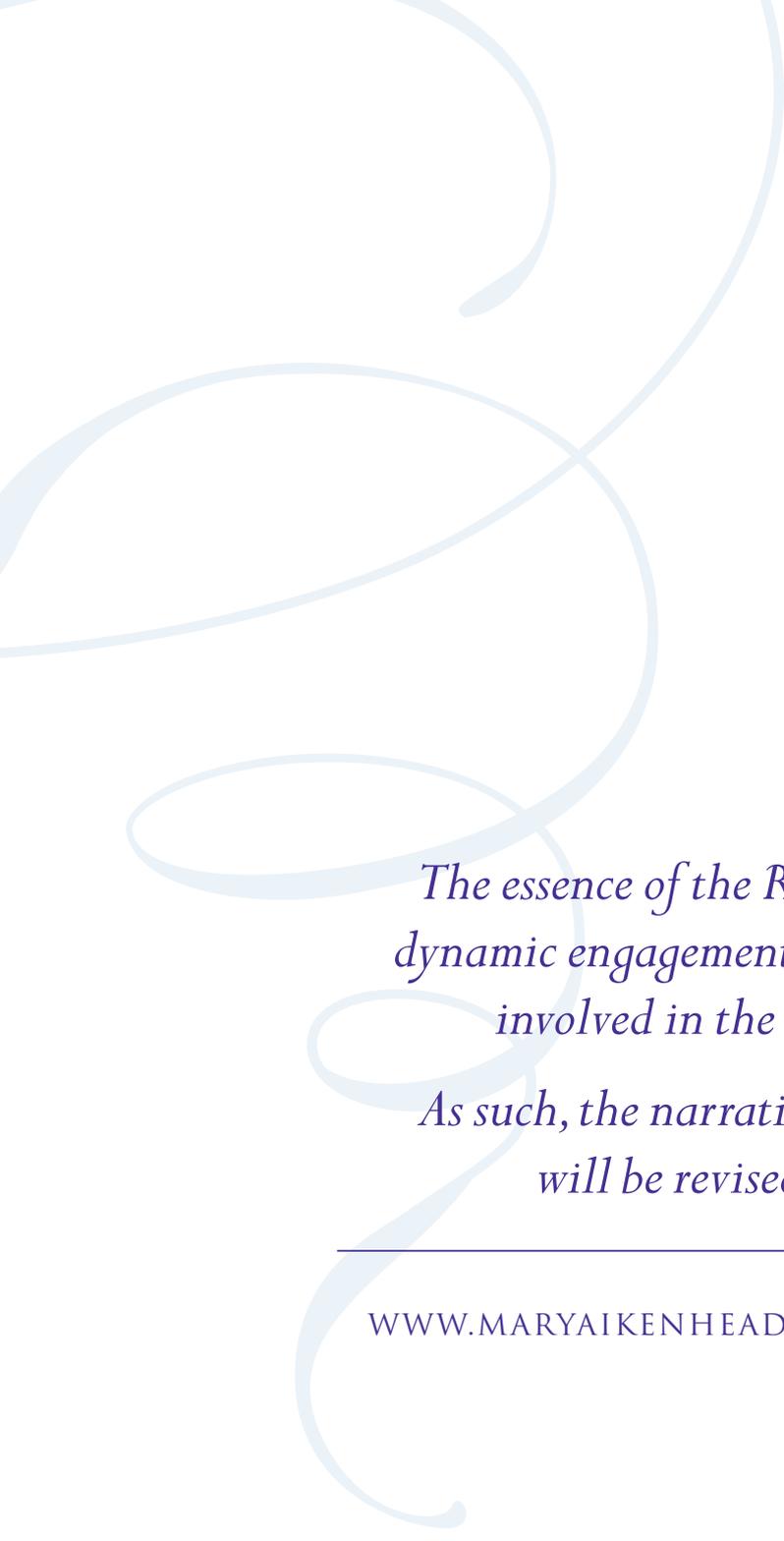
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*The essence of the Round Table is the  
dynamic engagement between all those  
involved in the Living Story.*

*As such, the narrative continues and  
will be revised in 2020.*

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[WWW.MARYAIKENHEADADMINISTRIES.COM.AU](http://WWW.MARYAIKENHEADADMINISTRIES.COM.AU)





MARY  
AIKENHEAD  
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