

# A merciful response within us all



By Lindy McNamara

As the plight of refugees and asylum seekers continues to worsen around the world, there are no “quick solutions”, but Australians can make a difference by looking through the “lens of mercy” and treating those affected as their brothers and sisters.

That’s the view of Dr Maryanne Loughry AM, a Mercy Sister originally from Adelaide who has spent much of her life working in refugee services both at the coalface and in policy formation. Her involvement has included appointments as a researcher and psychologist, as well as providing humanitarian training in the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, South East Asia and United Kingdom.

As the Year of Mercy draws to a close this month, Sr Maryanne visited her old school Mercedes College in September to present its Mercy Oration and reflect on “what a merciful response looks like in today’s world”.

Currently a member of the Minister of Immigration’s advisory council on asylum



**INSPIRED:** Mercedes school captains with Sr Maryanne Loughry at the Mercy Oration from left, Emma Von Bardeleben, Millie Edwards, Henry Baker and Jacob Rigoni.

seekers and detention, Sr Maryanne told students, teachers and parents attending that while some of the problems facing the world might seem “huge”, everyone had the capacity to become “islands of mercy” and help in some way.

“Mercy is not an abstract idea, it is something that is real and tangible, a concrete reality,” she said. “When we think about being merciful, what does that mean? One of the calls for us is to be drawn to engage with poverty; to respond to new forms of poverty that we are seeing in our times – refugees, the homeless, the addicted.

“There are lots of problems in the world, but the refugee crisis is of the magnitude not seen since World War II and it presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. They are not just numbers but they are also people and we

need to respond in a way that is humane and just. They are our brothers and sisters and we must avoid the temptation to discard what is troublesome.

“We should remember the golden rule – do unto others as you would have done to you.”

Sr Maryanne described Pope Francis’ compassion towards refugees as “pretty outstanding”, saying that his visit to Lampedusa in 2013 to meet with boat people coming from Libya was a powerful reminder that a merciful response to asylum seekers was possible.

At the time, the Pope said the “globalisation of indifference” meant those people were seen as “other” and he urged Catholics to look at how they were living when others were suffering.

“Just as the Pope asks us, in a world where there is a lot of hatred and fear,

there is a space for us who are merciful people to be islands of mercy – where people can go and know they will receive a merciful response,” Sr Maryanne said.

She went on to outline the “concrete” works of mercy (such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, looking after the homeless) and the spiritual works (what needs to be done, instructing the ignorant and working with people).

When questioned by some of the attendees about what they could do to help, Sr Maryanne reassured them everyone had the capacity to show mercy.

“We are part of a much larger group and people will respond differently to different groups, with their different strengths. We don’t have to be the answer to everything and respond to everything, but if we truly say we are part of the tradition of mercy we don’t have many options.... we will respond!

“Today the challenges are more and more, but the messages we receive are more pronounced and if we ignore them, it is because we are not listening. You have got to work where you are and to play to your own strengths, but to see what is being called for us.

“The Year of Mercy is an extraordinary year, given to us because we are extraordinary people of the Gospel. We might not always fully embrace it, but there is a grace given with this. It is something extraordinary we’ve been invited to do because we are merciful people.”

Sr Maryanne also encouraged everyone to respond to Pope Francis’ eighth “work of mercy” which has been added to the Catholic tradition, namely caring for creation as outlined in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*.