



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Deep Social Change

Julia Upton (Americas)

Ever since I entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1981, I have been fascinated by two things: the extent to which Catherine McAuley's foundations circle the globe; and the similarity I have found among the sisters. For 30 years I had to be content with chance encounters with sisters, mostly Australians, who passed through New York on their journeys, or more recently reading about them on the Mercy International Association's website and the weekly Mercy eNews. A sabbatical year, however, enabled me to begin visiting with our sisters around the world—meeting the Global Mercy Community.

On the first leg of my year's journey I met Mercy in the Pacific, which took me to New Zealand, Tonga, Australia, Guam and the Philippines. I visited many ministries and came to know many sisters along the way, which confirmed what I had long suspected—that the Sisters of Mercy thrive as a Global Community today even without benefit of a central government or common constitution. Sisters of Mercy around the world do not have to *become* one to *be* one. We already are one—daughters of Catherine McAuley, steeped in the charism of Mercy.

The Sisters of Mercy globally have always been about social change, the deep social change that alters both minds and hearts. For sure that does not happen overnight! It requires both patience and perseverance, along with a measure of good humor as we have seen so often in Catherine McAuley's letters and poetry. Good strategy rooted in understanding human behavior is also helpful. Take, for example, the very basic AAA principles of **A**gency, **A**ccess and **A**ction in approaching any of the enormous problems confronting us today: extreme poverty, racism, climate change, or any of the 17 sustainable goals identified by the United Nations.

Agency means having or nurturing the understanding that we *can* do something about these global concerns.

Access means that we become educated on the issues, their root causes and core concerns.

Action means doing something about them within our particular sphere of influence.

As a high school student in New York City I was active in the Civil Rights Movement. When Civil Rights legislation was signed into law in 1964, we thought a great victory had been achieved, and it had. However, the struggle against the racism so endemic in our country might just be longer than our lives. It requires deep social change.

As we approach the season of Advent and see again the vision of the peaceable kingdom sketched in Isaiah 11: 1-9, longing for peace in our times, I find it the perfect season to renew efforts to root out racism. Ibram X. Kendi's book [How to Be an Anti-Racist](#) (One World, 2019) has re-energized me, rekindling my agency, giving me access to this web of issues by sharing his own story, and demonstrating ways in which to take action, some quite simple. Not being a racist is ineffective; I must become an anti-racist. My theological imagining this season is for Sisters of Mercy globally, along with our associates, friends and partners in ministry to recognize their agency, expand their access to the issues, and take actions to Bring Forth the Kingdom (Haugen) deeply, as described in Isaiah. Marty Haugen has given us a wonderful, energetic hymn, but I hope this season we do more than sing to bring forth the City of God.