

In these very uncertain times, one thing is certain- The Mercy community is flexible and finding ways to stay in communication during this time of social distancing.

About a month ago, Mercy Fellows from around the globe agreed that things really looked “Alright” and that it would be safe to meet in New York to discuss leadership strategies, as well as focus on social justice concerns that are related to our individual projects. I am so thankful that we arrived and were able to connect, especially as we are now spending so much time apart from so many loved ones.

Obviously, with many things closed in New York, this became a great lesson in flexibility. It was also a great reminder that this visit to New York wasn't just about seeing sights, it was about reconnecting with our global Mercy community. My spirit is thankful for the team that brought us together to reconnect after so many months apart. While our 10 day journey was condensed into about 2 days, and we will be doing more online learning formats in the coming months, those 2 days were full of laughter, tears, elbow bumps, and enlightenment.

The truth is, our connection as a group is almost like a “Sisterhood”. The connections we formed in Cambodia keep getting stronger with each webinar we join, and each email we share. While we are now back in our respective towns we are now adjusting to life while social distancing, and finding times to meet as a group online several more times in the coming months. I'm so appreciative of everyone's flexibility- getting up at 5am in Papua New Guinea for a zoom meeting, or at 10pm in Ireland. While we live in different time zones, we have drawn closer to each other during this unique time in our world's history.

And that is the lesson I am taking with me, as I have now learned I will be working from home for “at least” the next two months- possibly even more. While we obviously know to keep our social distancing (This will be the word of the year, I guarantee it), it does not have to negatively affect our connections. If anything, I'm talking to these women more now than I did in previous months! And I'm hopeful that as months continue, and our world settles into a “New Normal” that what we have learned from this time will carry with us into our physical connections with people. We will communicate more effectively, give the best hugs, and truly be able to share with others how much we love and appreciate their place in our lives.

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**AMY THOMAS (MELF 2019-2020)**





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AMY THOMAS



Some say the world is built from the stories we tell, and one such story for our times is that of the great turning. This story is the essential adventure of our times. “It involves the transition of a doomed economy of industrial growth, to a life sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world”. As one of the recipients of the Mercy emerging leadership fellowship, I feel a calling to participate in the healing of my own community here in the small regional town of Bathurst. A place strangely obsessed with car racing and Elton John.

To be honest, I never thought of myself as a leader. I have always been passionate about issues around sustainability, education, community and the arts and have always volunteered my time to causes I thought worthy on top of trying to do meaningful work as an artist and art teacher. But for my entire adult life, I have struggled with quite serious mental health problems. As far as I was concerned with my diagnosis, holding down a job and maintaining a home has been an achievement. So, it has been an unexpected honour and a blessing to be given a place in this truly incredible Mercy Emerging Leadership Program (MELF).

The program is helping me to value my experience, knowledge and passions to become a woman of Mercy in the world responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor in a way that meets the needs of my local community. The most valuable part of the program for me has been the reflection process and meeting the most inspiring fellows who have already become steadfast friends and allies in our search for ecological and social justice. We are the great turning





Being able to take these past 6 months to reflect on the climate emergency, social justice issues and leadership has allowed me to realign with my core values and to work out a more measured, less frantic way of responding to the environmental and social crises I see unfolding. I have a tendency to see a problem and jump in headfirst and volunteer my time and money to try to work on that issue but struggle to keep focused, as there are so many problems in the world and so much work to be done. The MELF program is helping me address what my strengths are and how I can be more effective in finding solutions to social and environmental problems, as well as developing my capabilities as an effective leader for ecological and social change.

Our recent immersion in Siem Reap, Cambodia last year was an incredible whirlwind of 10 days. Meeting like-minded social and ecological justice warriors and being able to spend time with them, brainstorming, creating and learning alongside them about the history of social justice in Cambodia, was a beautiful way to start the fellowship. The team at Metta Karuna, who were so hospitable and welcoming taught us much about dedicated commitment to making change happen. Their achievements have led to a commitment from over 100 countries in ending the use of landmines and their story of hope is one that needs to be told and heard.

The research project has also been a fascinating experience and I have used this time to study art therapy, eco-arts and how to help communities become more ecologically sustainable through creative projects. This study has culminated in a project that brings art workshops to Bathurst women and helps them connect to ecological issues through visual art and it has been running with the assistance of the Bathurst Women's Health Centre. Reflecting on this process and working with these women, I have made considerable adjustments to my original plans for the project and feel grateful for the materials that the fellowship leaders have provided. As they have been a fantastic resource to keep returning to. I have had positive feedback from the participants who love the art-making process and it seems artmaking is therapeutic in and of itself.

Us fellows are very soon headed to New York and Mercy Global Action headquarters. We are all very much looking forward to this amazing opportunity and are sure that it will help us in our journeys as women of Mercy in this exciting time of the great turning.

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**ANASTASIA FREEMAN (MELF 2019-2020)**





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ANASTASIA FREEMAN



As the only Jewish fellow in the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship, I think it is important to share a bit about my journey that led me to this moment. In 2017 I was invited to participate in a gathering called, "Nuns & Nones," where I spent two days at Cranaleith Spiritual Center with a group of women religious and millennials sharing stories and discussing our commitment to social justice. Coming from the field of interfaith community education, I was curious to spend time with women religious, a group of people I hadn't encountered much before that moment. My friends playfully teased me, a queer Jewish atheist, spending her birthday weekend with a bunch of nuns. Little did they know, I credit the two days I spent with Nuns & Nones with radically influencing my outlook on social justice, inter-generational learning, and the valuable, often underappreciated role women religious play in the fabric of the city I call home. Among many of those women were Sisters of Mercy. During these two days, and through interfaith programming I lead in Philadelphia, I was able to deepen my relationship with the local community of the Sisters of Mercy.

Two years later, I am now part of the inaugural group of Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship. Without the support of the local Sisters of Mercy I developed relationships with, I most likely would have not become such a unique candidate for a catholic women's leadership program. Nor would I have been as inclined to devote a year of my life to being deeply connected with women religious. The MELF program has continued to offer such a layered and deeply meaningful experience.





The combination of local Mercy mentorship, monthly webinars and readings on important social justice topics, the experiential learning opportunities with an international group of fellows, and the freedom to explore and execute a personal project have all created a very important space in my life. I am able to devote more focused time to increasing my awareness of important issues and explore my own personal growth as a leader.

One aspect of the program I have valued is the access we have been granted to Sisters of Mercy and other female experts who are embedded in policy and grassroots work within the topics we are exploring each month. I believe there is something quite unique and special in learning about this issues solely from a woman-centered perspective. Adding to that nuance, I have appreciated hearing how each woman has connected her work to the Mercy charism and their catholic identity.

A huge gift of the MELF program has been simply becoming connected to the fellows around the world and the Sisters who are all engaged in incredible work. I was struck by the vulnerability and openness of all of the participants. During our time in Cambodia, the program leadership were able to create an open and supportive space for us. I often facilitate dialogue but rarely do I get to participate in or benefit from such an intimate space where everyone went deep quite quickly. I deeply value the mini community and the special liminal space of vulnerability between our lived realities that our group was able to create. I have learned so much from the other fellows so far and I greatly look forward to how we can grow this special community.

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**ANNEKE KAT (MELF 2019-2020)**



The background is a watercolor painting of two flowers. The top flower is in shades of pink and orange, while the bottom flower is in shades of purple and pink. To the left, a white paint palette is visible with various colors of paint, including yellow, red, and blue. The text "FREEDOM" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and slightly tilted upwards. It is set against a thick, black, brush-stroke-like background that follows the curve of the text.

**FREEDOM**

**TO**

**EXPLORE**



Hello, I am Carmen from Peru, and I want to share with you about a wonderful program that Mercy Global Action is developing with 10 women; emerging leaders from different countries, cultures, ages and languages. This program has five areas: a) Experience of being accompanied by a Mentor throughout the year; b) Immersion experience that allows us to meet face-to-face on three occasions; c) Virtual classroom available to interact with other Fellows and program facilitators; d) Resources for reading and videos with very valuable content on various topics that have broadened and deepened our commitment to the defense of Mother Earth, the topic of non-violence, the topic of reconciliation, leadership, anti-racism, etc. and e) Finally, the presentation of a research project, which has the purpose of making a valuable contribution to the actions of MGA. This program throughout this year has allowed us to strengthen our leadership skills.

In this program something that touched me deeply is THE EXPERIENCE OF IMMERSION IN CAMBODIA, I consider it as one of the foundational experiences. Because it led us to a deep coexistence, full of learning and challenges. Experiences that allowed us to recognize the value of team leadership. That Sr. Denise with her team from the Spirituality and Reconciliation center; who as a team have been recognized and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The recognition is not to a person, the recognition went TO THE TEAM for promoting reconciliation and developing a culture of peace. We have celebrated life and deep connection with nature, from its circular dances, dances for peace, community celebrations, tasting delicious food full of fresh vegetables and fruits.

Cambodia led us to revere stories of pain, sadness, and death. But at the same time stories of struggle, perseverance, hope, organization and reconciliation. Above all, learning so that so much violence and genocide that this country experienced is not repeated.

Here I want to revere the capacity of RESILIENCE that Cambodians have, many had lost an arm, a leg or both legs, but they are "happy", their faces radiate a lot of light, a lot of peace and dignity. They are proud of who they are, such as Mr. Ret, leader and member of the spirituality center team, who had lost both legs in the minefields. I remember very well the day we went to a town to build toilets for some families and he had no difficulty building. On the other hand, once again we revere Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, who left us as a legacy the ability to create bridges between rich and poor, to turn difficult situations into learning opportunities to promote a dignified life.




Today, Cambodia holds a special place in my heart. And this program is like having a comforting cup of tea, my Sisters of Mercy would say, or it is like sharing sacred stories around the well or around a campfire as the women of our indigenous peoples do... THANK YOU, ANGELA AND COLLEEN FOR MAKING IT REAL. DREAM THAT ONE DAY THEY STARTED TO DREAM.

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**Carmen Rosa Ccallomamani rsm**





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CARMEN ROSA CCALLOMAMANI RSM



We are still at the beginning of our journey, but the first couple of months of the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship have been challenging and compelling. We have been confronted with difficult realities - poverty, trafficking, statelessness, oppression and environmental degradation - and while I have struggled at times to confront or 'be present' with these realities, I know that my struggle in merely being confronted with them is nothing compared to the struggle of those who experience these realities everyday. I knew this Fellowship wasn't going to be easy, but I already feel like it's going to be one of the greatest learning curves of my life. And we know that genuine leadership always has to begin with learning and discomfort.

For me, the greatest strength of our Fellowship lies in our group. We have an incredible group of women who come from many walks of life and bring their own experiences, wisdom and sense of humour. Led by the kind and visionary work of Sr Angela and Colleen, we have become a tight-knit group that is buoyed by the encouragement and patience we share with each other. Together, in Cambodia, or on our webinars and weekly discussions, we often find ourselves saying 'I never thought of it that way', or 'What can be done about this?' It's rare to have the opportunity to work so closely with a group of people who are so like-minded in their hope for justice. I feel like I have found my 'tribe', and for that I am truly grateful. I'm really looking forward to seeing what the next year brings, and what we can all do together.



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JEMIMA WELSH (MELF 2019-2020)



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JEMIMA WELSH



The Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF) has provided an important opportunity for me to develop my interests and perspectives through a global and multidimensional platform. The women in this fellowship hail from the United States, Papua New Guinea, Ireland, Peru, and Australia. They also come from a wide variety of professional and educational backgrounds and span a range of ages. This is truly a diverse group of women who each bring their unique experiences, opinions, and outlooks. The Mercy Fellowship has helped me expand my views, deepen my thinking, and has caused me to think more globally.

Following our first meeting in Cambodia, our cohort has continued to explore— but instead of by airplane and tuk tuk, it has been through readings, webinars, podcasts, and discussions. Each month, there are new topics of study, some of which are mostly new to me and others with which I am more familiar. I have been a feminist since my childhood, and I have always been keenly interested in the experiences of women and girls. However, it has actually been the MELF topics related to gender which I have found the



most illuminating and informative. Our readings on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action all focus on the experiences of women around the world. The stories and perspectives that my colleagues share bring life and substance to these readings and initiatives. Our conversation and dialogue allows for a complex look at how women from different contexts strive for Mercy and justice. Engaging with my colleagues has caused me to think more deeply at my own beliefs, opinions, and context. I am grateful to have this opportunity to develop friendships with women from countries I have never before visited, to engage in dialogue with women from cultures different from my own, and to share new experiences with women who teach and inspire me. It has truly been the women in the fellowship with whom I have found wisdom and achieved new progress, while still encountering the familiar face of Mercy.

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**JULIA MORISI (MELF 2019-2020)**



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JULIA MORISI



I am just over three months into my Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship journey and I am really enjoying every experience of it! I am so grateful to Sr Angela Reed and Colleen Swain for their support and encouragement, as I extend my knowledge on issues of Social and Environmental Justice through the Mercy lens.

My MELF journey began last August in Cambodia. This was an incredible trip which truly touched my heart. I met the other nine fellows and a strong bond formed among us regardless



of age, ethnic or racial background, as we share the same vision for Mercy and Justice. A strong sense of empowerment grew as we learned that together we can create change and advocate for Mercy and justice. It was a very special time. I am still in awe of the generosity, openness, hospitality and wisdom from Sr Denise Coghlan and the Cambodian community.

Our MELF circle has remained engaged through the use of our online platform and monthly webinars to communicate. Each week, there are core readings and materials for us to examine. They focus on the different themes of justice that we concentrate on each month. These resources guide me with my critical thinking, as they touch on many complex dimensions, such as how to use your privilege to create change. The monthly webinars are a great online resource for learning and are always very inspiring. We are joined by amazing panelists who offer great wisdom about working towards justice ...



and dismantling oppressive systems. This, along with their intimate nature, rekindles the sense of empowerment and our shared vision for Hope and Justice that we created in Cambodia.

On top of this, I have been assigned Sr Suzanne Ryder as my mentor for the year, who has grass root experience achieving Peace and Justice, as part of a strong group of women. I am very grateful to be connected with her. I hope to follow in her footprints!



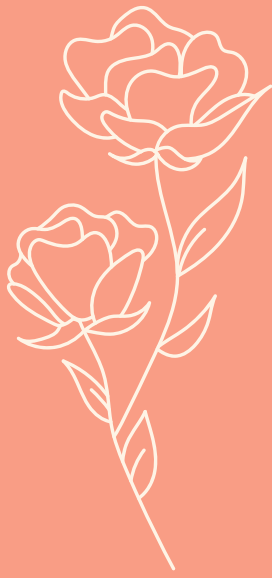
I am carrying out my MELF research project on Homelessness in Ireland. I am focusing my project on women and the impact being homeless can have on their health and well-being. MELF supported my attendance to a

regional conference which focused on 'Youth Homelessness: Practice, Policy and Campaigning'. Attending this event deepened my knowledge on the homeless crisis and the fundamental need for measures of prevention instead of only focusing on emergency aid.

I am looking forward to advancing in Social Justice Work and Human rights while continuing to look at the world through a lens of Mercy. I am so excited for our next international encounter in New York in March 2020 and to continue to learn, laugh, share and grow in this sisterhood and with the huge support that MELF has received from around the world."

- SIOBHAN GOLDEN (MELF 2019-2020)





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SIOBHAN GOLDEN (MELF 2019-2020)



# Theresa Tina

It is now about two months into the fellowship program but it feels like we have walked on this journey for much longer. The Fellowship has linked us together, women of mercy, from many miles across the world. We come from the countries of United States, Peru, Australia, Ireland, and Papua New Guinea. It has enabled and engaged us to link social justice issues which are affecting the earth community, beginning with the various countries from which we all have come. Our passion for justice for all individuals has united us to journey together on this fellowship. So far, it has been a great experience of uniting us as one in the name of mercy and justice within self, family, community and society.

We are all aware that there are many people on this planet who care about others and our earth, but painfully, there are also those who care only about themselves but not about others or our common home. For some people there is no realisation of a growing change in human behaviour or the environment around them. However, those that are connected by the touch of a web of justice are united because their hearts are disturbed by the displacement of people and the displacement of the resources of our earth.



The fellowship is like a spider web that connects us - the fellows - in a web with our leadership team and our mentors; while we the fellows then connect with other Mercy people building on the web by making more connections.



By reading and reflecting on the monthly resources and the webinars, we deepen our connections, as well as connecting with others in the world when we are sharing and reflecting with them. It is an invisible, yet tangible and alive connection. Each of us has gone beyond our doors for the sake of the displacement of our earth and the displacement of people. So often this happens due to a self-centered hunger for power, wealth, and greed. The monthly resources affirms, strengthens, supports, and motivate us, as well as giving us insights about the effects of change in the world and how these affect our whole earth, all human beings, and all life forms. All of this encourages and gives us hope for a more just world.

The other fellows, our leaders, and the different panelists on the webinars, as well as most of our other resources, all reveal that women have a lot of power to influence and to lead. It is women who care about others in practical ways such as caring for the whole household. We join with other justice women in the world crying and longing for a just world that allow each individual to be respected and enable them to live life to the fullest. It is a challenge for us when we don't always see immediate effects of change in community and society. It is easy to feel disempowered when whole systems are imbalanced and corrupt in some countries. It is always the ordinary person and family who are most effected at the grassroots level.

For example, in my own country of Papua New Guinea, people are dying from curable diseases due to lack of proper medical facilities, or not enough specialised doctors. Poor roads full of potholes mean many do not have access to good health care and local hospitals or aid clinics. It is those who are vulnerable and marginalized who cannot afford to go somewhere else for the better health treatment. And so mortality rates are high.

It is my hope that one day the cry of the 'displaced persons' and 'the earth' will be heard by the people in power so that there is peace and justice in the world."







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-THERESIA TINA





As a little girl, I never imagined becoming a part of a program like the Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship. My life was full of oppression racially, systemically and socially. That environment created doubt and uncertainty about who I could grow up and become as a black woman in our world. Luckily for me, I had a mother, though not educated, instill in me a phrase that kept me in the race to be my best self. She always told me, “Go for great”! My Mom fostered a spirit to do and be more than what the world expected of me.



When the fellowship opportunity came to my attention, I was intimidated by the requirements for application. With encouragement from loved ones and colleagues, I decided to “Go for great” and was accepted as a member of the program. Thus far, the experience has been nothing short of amazing. MELF has cultivated my confidence in ways that are life changing. It provides educational resources that empower me to lead amongst leaders. MELF cultivates the heart of Mercy charism by affirming and encouraging female leadership. As we ponder who Mercy is to our suffering world, this platform offers many possibilities for the charism to broaden Christ love throughout the world.

Today, because of this program, I partner with nine brilliant women from around the world who want to champion for justice through a lens of Mercy. After meeting them in Siem Reap, Cambodia, I knew that these women would become lifelong friends and professional collaborators. International immersion is a teacher that can’t be learned through books or documentaries. Being with and hearing the stories of the people of Cambodia was the best instructor of the generational impact of oppression. It was my first-time understanding oppression systemically from an international perspective. The immersion also helped me dig deeper for greater understanding of how to be an agent of change with a broader world view. As a spoiled American, I saw world affairs through a singular lens. Being engrossed in this program has created a desire to learn more about world view perspectives and how they connect with local realities.

Believe it or not, my experience thus far is only 1/3 of the fellowship offering. Next month, participants are preparing to spend two weeks in New York to attend the United Nations 2020 Commission on the Status of Women. I have a feeling that being surrounded by 9,000 women at the conference will cultivate my confidence, establish more connections and promulgate grassroots justice engagement.

This opportunity has been a blessing in my life, upholding my desire to be more than society expected of me by extending my sphere of influence as a young woman in Mercy.

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**TYLIA BARNES (MELF 2019-2020)**





# 'women from around the world who want to champion for justice through a lens of Mercy'

TYLIA BARNES

