

Reflection for Month Three – People and Deep Social Change

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In month one of our exploration of “global” in Mercy Global Presence, we explored the cosmos mercified into being. In this past month, we have contemplated Earth and integral theology. Sister Mary Sullivan dared us to embrace an ecological conversion and to grow into an “Enough Theology,” following Catherine’s plea, “Let us never desire more than enough.” Sisters Margaret Milne, Cheryl Connelly and Teresa Anderson gave us a beautiful photo essay, interweaving Maori and English words, advice from diverse thinkers and awe-inspiring photographs. Sister Maryanne Kolkia showed us how she lives integral ecology through her social and pastoral ministry, advocating for creation and human persons. The young global activist, Cate Kelly, showed us in words and actions how she is grounded in integral ecology, “*My relationship with God’s creation is one of wonder, respect and comfort, and I never feel so alive as when I am interacting with the Earth.*” The Indigenous Elder, Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, walked with students around a pond created under the guidance of the elders to honour water, the energy of life, “We respect. – We connect. – Together we are one.” The profoundly touching prayer reflection created by Sister Anne Curtis called us into the presence of a God who dances in creation. The facilitators’ guide gave us wonderful links with other realities around us, including the conclusion of the Synod on the Amazon with its emphasis on listening to and recognition of indigenous voices everywhere. All the voices together, chanting the beauty of Earth and lamenting its suffering, dared us to contemplate and to respond together in passion and in hope.

Now we enter into month three of our exploration of what “global” means – **people and deep social change**. Sociologists define social change as changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions. We are living in an age which is seeing more social change than any other group of humans have ever seen in such a short time. Look at your own life and the changes in recent years in your food, your clothing, your home, your prayer, your reading, your friends, your interests, your use of social media, your ministry. . . As we name some of the marks of this age – some positive and some not, I invite you to observe the realities around you.

We are the first group of humans to experience six generations of people living at the same time, each generation formed with different values. Family has a new face: same-sex parents with children, multi-racial families, single parent families and families without children. Increasing numbers of older persons mean that by 2050, there will be more people in the world over 60 years of age than there will be under 15 years of age. Poverty and inequality continue to grow with 20% of people holding 84% of the wealth and 20% holding 1.4% of the wealth – nine men hold the same wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people. Over 60 million refugees are without a country, because of oppression or climate emergency. Violence continues in war, hate crimes against the LGBTQ community, sexual violence, abortion, mistreatment of indigenous people, ableism, threat posed by nuclear weapons, family violence and racism. Social media – facebook, twitter, smart phones, youtube – have become a dominant means of communication.

Our Church is marked by the same intense social change. We acknowledge now that our Church is flawed and vulnerable. The largest numbers of Roman Catholics are now in the southern hemisphere not the northern hemisphere. We rejoice in our new understanding that each one of us is a missionary disciple, no matter what our role or age or health or rank in the

church. We remain disturbed by the failure of our Church to free women to find our true place. Our Church has become more aware that integral ecology has spiritual and theological meaning and that we must care for our common home. After many centuries, faith and science are coming back together as we explore the meanings of the new cosmology and integral ecology. Charles Taylor describes a spectrum of members from seekers to dwellers with most of us somewhere in between. Dwellers believe in well-defined faith, obedience to church authority, moral certainty and absolute truth, and completeness of our faith tradition. Seekers seek more authentic ways of being faith-filled, accept personal responsibility for discerning our faith, believe that ethics and morals are historically shaped, and are open to enrichment from the wisdoms of other faith traditions.

The complexities in our Church and in our society invite us to rejoice in the diversity among us and to respond always with inclusion. Pope Francis told us in *The Joy of the Gospel* (#116): “In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face’.” This truth was reinforced in the recent experience of the Synod on the Amazon.

We delight in our new ways of understanding the sacred communion of all creation. This new learning gives us the hope and the energy and the trust of knowing that together we can influence social change, that together we can shape a world which truly responds to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor.

A Newfoundland writer, Ted Russell, says it well:

I'm sittin' on my stage-head lookin' out at where Skipper Joe Irwin's schooner is ridin' at her moorin' ... thinkin' about how weak are the things that try to pull people apart – differences in colours, creeds and opinion – weak things like the ripples tuggin' at the schooner's chain. And thinkin' about how strong are the things that hold people together – strong, like Joe's anchor, and chain, and the good holdin' ground below.

May our exploration this month bring us closer to finding that good holding ground! May our exploration this month bring us confidence that, well-grounded through our Mercy Global Presence, we – our Sisters, our Associates, our companions and partners in Mercy – can help shape a better world! “We respect. – We connect. – Together we are one.”