



Women, Leadership and the Future of Mercy

*Examining the Impact of the Mercy Global Action
Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF)*

Acknowledgements

The Mercy Global Action office would like to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work around the world. We honour their leadership in caring for the earth and nurturing regenerative communities. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. May we walk gently on this planet.

THANKS TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT

Specifically, we'd like to acknowledge those members of the Mercy community who participated in online impact workshops and spent considerable time spent considerable time reflecting on questions of leadership and service in the spirit of Catherine McAuley. Many of your quotes are featured throughout this report.

ILLUSTRATIONS

This report features beautiful illustrations by the talented artist, Ana Freeman (who is also a graduate of the MELF program, Cohort 1). You can view these illustrations on pages 5, 8, 14, 20, 24, 36, 39 and 43.

Anastasia lives on Darug country in Western Sydney, Australia. She is currently teaching photography and visual arts at a small, culturally diverse secondary school in Blacktown and works on her own art projects outside the classroom, when time allows. Anastasia can be contacted via email at anastasiafreeman@gmail.com.

A SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to our generous funder, Sr Mary Catherine Bunting rsm, who made this project and the MELF dream possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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OPENING RITUAL
NEW YORK IMMERSION

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO LEAD WITH DIGNITY

MERCY · JUSTICE · LEADERSHIP

MERCY GLOBAL ACTION
EMERGING LEADERS FELLOWSHIP



This report is intended for people who are interested in the foundations and impact of the

***Mercy Global Action
Emerging Leaders Fellowship***

and those who would like to support its future.



Introduction

The contribution of women to Mercy Global Action (MGA), the justice arm of Mercy International Association (MIA), is both a gift and an opportunity, providing mutual benefits to the women involved and also to the advancement of MIA at the United Nations and beyond. Women's positive responses to immersion in the ministry of MGA and their valuable contribution to the ongoing mission of the office are the impetus for developing a full and more formal leadership program in which women can have the opportunity to share their knowledge and further develop their understandings of global justice.

A few months ago, Mercy Global Action ran a series of consultative workshops with people from across Mercy World. The MGA team asked the questions, 'what is Mercy women's leadership?' and 'what is the significance of the MELF program?'. We had a huge number of deeply reflective responses that exceeded our expectations. MGA created this report as a way of acknowledging those responses. It was important that we do justice to the myriad stories, ruminations, suggestions and hopes that came out of those sessions.

Clearly, the global Mercy community is very passionate about women's leadership, and how the spirit of Catherine McAuley will be nurtured as we move towards new iterations of the Mercy charism.

Those who have graduated from the MELF Program know it is special. We have felt its influence in varying and profound ways. At its core, MELF introduces emerging women leaders to new ways of thinking about and

habitualising Mercy leadership.

Rather than focusing on attainment or achievement, MELF looks at how we are in the world - how we embody a different style of leadership that enacts dignity: for ourselves, each other and the planet.

Some have asked us why we focus on women's leadership. It's a good question. There are many men and non-binary people of Mercy throughout the world who are leading with compassion and conviction. Mercy Global Action focuses on women's leadership in Mercy and justice for two reasons. Firstly, it pays homage to the history of the Sisters of Mercy, who have long campaigned for the rights of women and girls particularly in oppressive patriarchal societies. Secondly, we recognise the persistent gender inequality that continues to limit opportunities for women around the world to embrace positions of leadership. Women show remarkable strength and courage in pushing past these norms to challenge unjust systems, and we believe this should be celebrated.

We have come a long way, but there is still far to go.

This report seeks to explore the value of Mercy women's leadership, and to envisage how MELF will nurture this into the future.



“

When more women lead in political and public life, everyone benefits, especially in crises. A new generation of girls see a possible future for themselves. Health, education, childcare, and violence against women receive greater attention and better solutions. We must find every possible way to amplify the assets women leaders bring.”

Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women

Why Women's Leadership?

At the heart of our Mercy charism is the education, empowerment, and encouragement of women. The Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF) seeks to build upon the capacities of women and provide them with tools and pathways to be agents of change in their own communities and throughout greater society.

The Fellowship Program encourages critical thinking and ethical discernment, looking at the world through a Mercy lens, and challenging oppressive systems to advance justice.

Studies consistently show that investing in women's leadership results in tangible change for local communities and greater economic stability.

For this investment to be sustainable, it must be reinforced by policies and cultural norms that work towards genuine equality.

Over the last 25 years, MGA has used its Special Consultative Status with the United Nations to seek to address the root causes of inequality and injustice which infiltrate our world. The MELF program builds on this experience, and works to expand women's capacity to influence local and global economic, political, social and environmental policies through a Mercy lens. Many graduates from the

"When you invest in women, it leads to improved access to education and health care for their families. Women's inclusion in leadership promotes stability. We know that peace agreements are more likely to stick when women involved are negotiating them. We know that when women have leadership roles in companies, they tend to be more profitable. We know that women are more likely to cross party lines and find common ground."

Holly Kuzmich, Senior Advisor, Presidential Leadership Scholars Program



Fellowship have since taken up leadership roles in their own communities and the wider Mercy network.

The MELF Program supports women to become transformative feminist leaders who share power with others, enabling creativity and mobilization around collective goals. As defined in the MELF program outline, there are three levels of transformation: at a micro-level, participants experience a sense of empowerment, capacity to create change and a flair for critical thinking. Fellows are encouraged to realise their own strengths as leaders for peace and justice in their own communities and the global arena. At a mezzo level, participants realise their interconnection with each other and the planet and experience solidarity with a range of visionary organisations working for women's rights and positive change. At a macro level, participants reach a global awareness of social and environmental issues.

Ultimately, a MELF participant has the capacity to actively respond to social and environmental justice issues in her own context for a more peaceful and merciful world.

The time for equity is overdue. Now is the moment to embrace transformation and unleash our collective power for purpose.

While we must double down on political commitments, bold and innovative thinking is required to meet today's challenges.

Ensuring women's right to political participation requires cross-cutting approaches to global, national and local issues and specific actions from key institutions.

Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners have always been committed to supporting women's

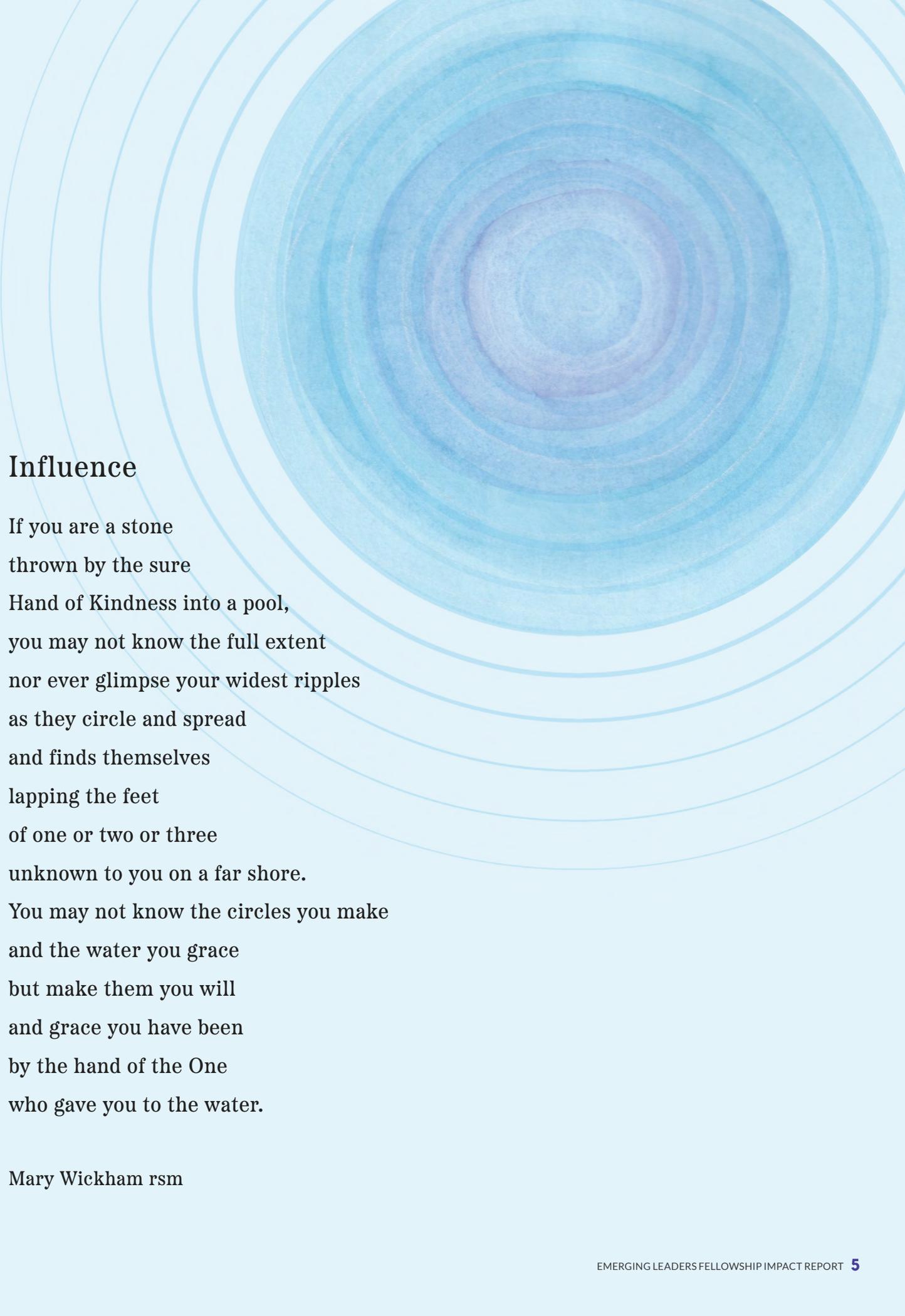
and girls' leadership. In the words of Mercy founder Catherine McAuley, 'Whatever be the station (women) are destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence.' Rather than focusing on traditional ideas of success, MELF aims to support women in developing their own unique styles of leadership to more effectively create change.

This work builds on the spirit of Catherine McAuley and helps to ensure that Mercy leadership endures in a changing world. The MELF program is open to both Sisters of Mercy and lay women of vision and purpose.

In the future it is envisaged that the leadership skills and capacities developed through the MELF program will contribute to the Mercy world, guiding new generations with discernment, dignity and hope.

"Investment in the education, empowerment and encouragement of women and girls is the best investment in the world... We are making links now between empowering women and girls and development of communities but it is so much more than that. We need to understand that women's leadership in our world really matters. Why does it matter? Because women tend to lead differently, to be more problem solving, to be more collaborative, to be less hierarchical, and more or less, to be more listening."

Mary Robinson, Keynote Address at the MELF Virtual Graduation, February 2021. *Mary Robinson is the first woman elected President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Chair of the Elders.*



Influence

If you are a stone
thrown by the sure
Hand of Kindness into a pool,
you may not know the full extent
nor ever glimpse your widest ripples
as they circle and spread
and finds themselves
lapping the feet
of one or two or three
unknown to you on a far shore.
You may not know the circles you make
and the water you grace
but make them you will
and grace you have been
by the hand of the One
who gave you to the water.

Mary Wickham rsm



What Does Mercy Leadership Look Like?

“

Mercy is a leadership style which puts most importance in grassroots listening, being agile and willing to change as a leader and put others first, especially those rendered poor including Earth and species/places under threat. The motivation comes from a deep spiritual conviction, and encouragement of this comes from being connected in a network and from mentoring.”

Mercy World workshop participant

Mercy leadership can be seen as putting dignity into practice, or enacting dignity.

This involves recognising the dignity in others and seeking always to honor it. Concurrently, we recognise the same dignity in ourselves, and work from this place of personal empowerment to create 'ripples of influence' that positively impact our communities and the world.

Donna Hicks, in her book *Leading with Dignity* (2018), says **successful leadership depends on 'dignity consciousness'**, which she describes as a 'deep connection to our inherent value and worth and to the vulnerability that we all share to having our dignity violated' (p.6). She explains that dignity is about three things: "connection to our own dignity, to the dignity of others, and to the dignity of something greater than ourselves" (p.175). This connection relies on a process of inter-relating: understanding how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to the planet.

Such a communal worldview comes naturally to those familiar with Catherine McAuley and the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy. Service was the hallmark of Catherine's approach to leadership: she worked from a place of deep personal awareness and reflection, and saw even in the most marginalised members of society **an inalienable dignity that could be honoured through practical and compassionate works of Mercy**. Unsurprisingly, the Sisters of Mercy came to be known as 'walking nuns' who shunned a life in cloisters to work actively with marginalised members of their communities.

Reflections from the Mercy world suggest that Mercy leadership looks different to traditional models of leadership marked by hierarchy and individualism. **It focuses on service, and encourages communal ways of working towards social and environmental change.**

Ultimately, MELF empowers women to see and know themselves as leaders.

It then creates spaces and networks in which their leadership is recognised and affirmed by others. While Mercy leaders around the world all lead in different ways, they are unified by a steadfast and principled determination to enact dignity through social justice. It is this understanding that underpins the creation and operation of the MELF program.



The giraffe is a symbol of great significance to MELF Fellows (Cohort 1). Gifted by Msgr. Enrique "Kike" Figaredo of the Jesuits in Cambodia, the giraffe figure represents Mercy leadership: walk gently, see the big picture, and lead with heart.

"The women participating ARE leaders; they aren't told how to be leaders."

MGA team member

"MELF becomes a circle of women sharing and listening to each other, affirming their own uniqueness as women, as leaders. There is no sense of ego or being 'more' than others – no hierarchy! Similarly, there is no sense of 'I am the best because I am a leader'. This is the most unique aspect of the program: the fact that women are able to share and be listened to and affirmed in their leadership."

MGA team member

"The problem with [traditional leadership training] approaches is that they don't address the often fragile process of coming to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as a leader. Becoming a leader involves much more than being put in a leadership role, acquiring new skills, and adapting one's style to the requirements of that role. It involves a fundamental identity shift. Organizations inadvertently undermine this process when they advise women to proactively seek leadership roles without also addressing policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders."

Herminia Ibarra, Robin J. Ely, and Deborah M. Kolb, *Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers*, Harvard Business Review, September 2013



What is MELF?

The MGA Emerging Leaders Fellowship is a transformational leadership program for women who are passionate about advancing global justice.

It provides opportunities for Fellows to establish strong links and networking across the Mercy World through international encounters, webinars, mentorship and research. The Fellowship program has been designed to stimulate creative and critical thinking, and promote collaborative leadership and personal reflection that leads to a compassionate and communal response to current concerns of our world.

MELF is intentionally cross-cultural. We seek out diversity in our participants, facilitators and guest speakers, and include traditional voices and knowledge in the content and format of the Program.

The MELF Program has five activity components:

1 *Webinars*

Webinars with guest speakers are real-time online educational presentations on topics intended to enhance the Fellows' knowledge of leadership, justice and mercy.

"I loved the opportunity for connection with, and being able to learn from, incredible women from diverse backgrounds and life experiences who are doing wonderful work in the social and environmental justice sphere."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

2 *Mentors*

Establishing strong relationships with Mercy women who can provide companionship and wisdom is a crucial element to the program. Fellows meet with mentors at least 3-4 times throughout the program.

"For us, mentoring was about knowledge sharing, building confidence in both the mentor and mentee, and serving as a support mechanism."

Reflection by MELF mentor, 2021



All components of the Program are mutually valued. The litmus test of the MELF curriculum is whether Fellows come away with a deeper understanding of their privilege and feel empowered to challenge anthropocentric and colonial worldviews.

3

Online Resources

Online resources are shared on Google Classroom to enable Fellows to undertake additional research, discussion and learning on topics chosen to challenge Fellows' perspectives and critical thinking capabilities.

"We all need to keep on top of best practice, and we need a learning community to do that."

Mercy World workshop participant

4

Field Immersions

Three Field immersions take place over the course of the program. Fellows are placed outside of their comfort zones and exposed to a variety of global justice issues. In grappling with these experiences and engaging with local communities, Fellows come to recognise their interconnectedness with others and develop a deep respect for different cultures.

"The immersions give us an inter-cultural lens, which is about global learning on a larger scale. They are also a time to get to know each other in person and connect informally, which is essentially about community building."

MGA team member

5

Research Project

Each fellow is required to undertake a research project on a justice issue connected to the Degradation of Earth and/or the Displacement of Peoples. These projects should have relevance to Fellows' own communities and extend their learning on leadership. Fellows are encouraged to seek out Mercy organisations with which they can collaborate in advancing this advocacy.

"These research projects give Fellows the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and widen their skills, and then apply these in a meaningful way that makes a difference."

Mercy World workshop participant



30 YEARS
MINE ACTION
IN CAMBODIA

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ឡើងវិញ

STOP USE

STOP THE USE OF
MINE
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Save Lives

The MELF Leadership Team

Since inception, the MELF Leadership team has comprised a diverse number of women of both religious and lay backgrounds.



Angela Reed rsm
Founder & Program
Mentor, Head of Mercy
Global Action



Colleen Swain
Founder & Women's
Leadership Development
Associate



Marietta Latonio
Facilitator and
Program Mentor



Nicole Christensen
Facilitator & Program
Mentor



Siobhán Golden
Program Manager



Tylia Barnes
Program Mentor



Jemima Welsh
Women's Leadership
Development Associate

MELF Fellows

In 2022, MELF Fellows were based in the following locations.

- *Ireland*

Siobhan Golden (Cohort 1): Research project, *'A Home is Dignity - A collection of voices and analysis of women's mental and emotional experiences of homelessness in Ireland'*

- *Canada*

Rebecca Rathbone* (Cohort 2)

- *Peru*

Sr Carmen Rosa Ccallomamani (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Itinerancia en la Pandemia del COVID-19' (Roaming during the COVID-19 Pandemic)*

- *Australia*

Jemima Welsh (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Money as Mercy: A guide for the global Mercy community on participating meaningfully in the Impact Economy'*

Anastasia Freeman (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Photosynthetic Visions'*

Dominique Marendy (Cohort 2)

Gaby Kinsman (Cohort 2)

- *Papua New Guinea*

Sr Theresia Tina (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Where have the Rivers and Forests Gone? Oamug: A Case Study'*

- *New Zealand*

Sr Paula Anamani (Cohort 2)

- *Philippines*

Sr Derby Mercado (Cohort 2)

- *Kenya*

Sr Magdalene Musau (Cohort 2)

Stellah Mathe (Cohort 2)

- *United States*

Tylia Barnes (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Cultivating Consciousness: Are you Complicit or a Coconspirator?'*





Julia Morisi (Cohort 1): Research project, *'In Search of Our Stories: Retelling and Reclaiming Women's Leadership in Religious Tradition'*

Anneke Kat (Cohort 1): Research project, *'Displacement of the Heart: A Pocket Guide to Gentrification & Community Identity in Philadelphia, USA'*

Amy Keller (Cohort 1): Research project, *'What is home and how do we get there?'*

Sarah Brown (Cohort 2)

Elizabeth MacNeal (Cohort 2)

Michelle Gorman (Cohort 2)

** At the time of this report's publication (February 2023), only Fellows from Cohort 1 had completed a research project.*



“

When we were physically together – sitting in a circle and listening to each other and each other’s stories/ideas – that, to me, is the ‘circle way.’ When people usually think of leadership, they think of someone up at the front. But Mercy looks like that circle and people listening. With more people coming on board, those circles are rippling. We see more and more women who are contributing to grassroots solutions and looking at how we solve climate change problems, displacement of people, poverty alleviation etc. So it’s drawing on the circles of knowledge to solve these problems. The more women we have involved in these circles and working at grassroots level, the better we will be able to solve these complex issues.”

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1



*Background to the MELF
Impact Evaluation Project*

This impact evaluation report is the result of a dedicated process to review, summarise and present graphically the value of MELF as a flagship program for women's leadership in the spirit of Catherine McAuley. It draws on the experiences of MELF Fellows and reflections from women and men throughout Mercy World in painting a rich picture of how and why the program operates. Rather than replacing the program's monitoring and evaluation framework, this report 'steps back' and considers the whole narrative and impact of MELF.

It explores the question of why Mercy leadership is different, and why this difference matters.

In putting this report together, MGA engaged in the following activities:

- 5 extended workshops on Zoom with MELF Fellows, NGO Partners and members of Mercy in Ireland, the UK, the US, Peru, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.
- One-on-one discussions with Mercy spirituality and leadership experts.
- Google surveys to MELF mentors and other members of Mercy World.
- Desktop research on women's leadership and the history of the Sisters of Mercy.

- Review of MELF's extensive library of resources, including journal articles, opinion pieces, YouTube videos, podcasts, books and magazines.
- Close readings of influential texts such as Brené Brown's *Atlas of the Heart* (2021) and Donna Hicks' *Leading with Dignity* (2018).

The quotations highlighted throughout this report are taken directly from the Zoom workshops, one-on-one discussions or Google surveys. They are powerful insights into what MELF means for our wider community.

Over the following pages, you will be introduced to MELF's Theory of Change. This framework seeks to illustrate how MGA works to achieve a particular set of goals that lead ultimately to a desired impact. In this case, it shows how MELF aims to provide a space of transformation for the emerging Mercy leader, to empower them in working towards global justice. In being more explicit about the intentions of MELF, MGA hopes to chart the course ahead for new iterations of Mercy charism.



The MELF Impact Statement *(Cohort 1)*

We believe that the future of Mercy will be realised through intergenerational, intercultural and interfaith leadership models that uphold the dignity of people and the planet.

The Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship nurtures confident, capable women leaders who effectively tackle issues of global injustice with Mercy and compassion.

We do this by creating ‘spaces of transformation’ in which Fellows experience greater self awareness, community support, and pathways for local and global action.



MELF and the Place of Transformation

We believe the power of MELF lies in the 'place of transformation' for the emerging Mercy leader.

A stone that is thrown into a pond creates a multitude of ripples, but it remains unconscious of those ripples - unaware of the extent of its influence. The same is often the case for those in positions of leadership in a modern society, where focus is narrowly fixed on profit, self-gain or reputation.

What makes MELF unique in the area of leadership training is its emphasis on building awareness of the impact that we create as leaders and people of Mercy. It is about

"Leading with dignity demands that we pay close attention to the effects we have on others."

Donna Hicks, Leading with Dignity

opening up channels for recognition on how our thoughts, decisions and behaviours affect ourselves (SELF), our communities (COMMUNITY), and our planet (GLOBAL). These represent the three areas of capacity building and reflection throughout the Fellowship.

As Fellows emerge from this process, they develop a more nuanced understanding of the 'ripples' that flow from what they do. They become consciously and intimately connected to the dignity of themselves, of others, and of the world around them. They sit in a place of inter-relating that becomes a 'place of transformation'. From here, they are inspired to take action: to enact dignity in a way that aligns their internal and external experience.

Understanding the transformation of the Mercy leader through MELF's Theory of Change'

A place of inter-relating in Mercy, where we grapple with the interconnected dignity of ourselves, each other and our world.

SELF

To ground our sense of self in Mercy and to recognize and nurture the spirit of Mercy within ourselves.

A conscious connection to our own dignity.

COMMUNITY

To see the world from a place of community and to experience and share Mercy with those around us.

A conscious connection to the dignity of others.

GLOBAL

To understand the context of Mercy and to build Mercy into our global systems and structures, keeping the living at the forefront of our service.

A conscious connection to the dignity of our world.

The following page shows the MELF Theory of Change. This is a high level representation of why MELF exists, what resources it needs to flourish, what activities take place, and the outcomes we expect to see for Fellows, their communities and Mercy World at large.

Our world needs confident, capable women leaders who effectively tackle issues of global (in)justice with Mercy and compassion.

MELF supports women on their journey of leadership by nurturing:

A deep understanding of, and belief in, the **SELF**



A strong connection to, and active participation in, supportive Mercy **COMMUNITIES**



Knowledge, pathways and networks to take action for **GLOBAL JUSTICE**

How does MELF do this?



What are the outcomes?

- Greater self-awareness
- A belief in one's own self-worth and capacity for leadership
- Deep connection to spirituality
- Questioning mindset & strong critical thinking skills

- Deep respect for the Mercy spirit as modeled by Catherine McAuley
- Enduring relationships with other women leaders
- Foundations of support from global Mercy community

- Active engagement in social justice advocacy, particularly for the empowerment of women
- Strong, collaborative Mercy networks working for peace and justice

What is the impact that flows from these outcomes?



Inner transformation:
Emerging leader is deeply connected to their own dignity



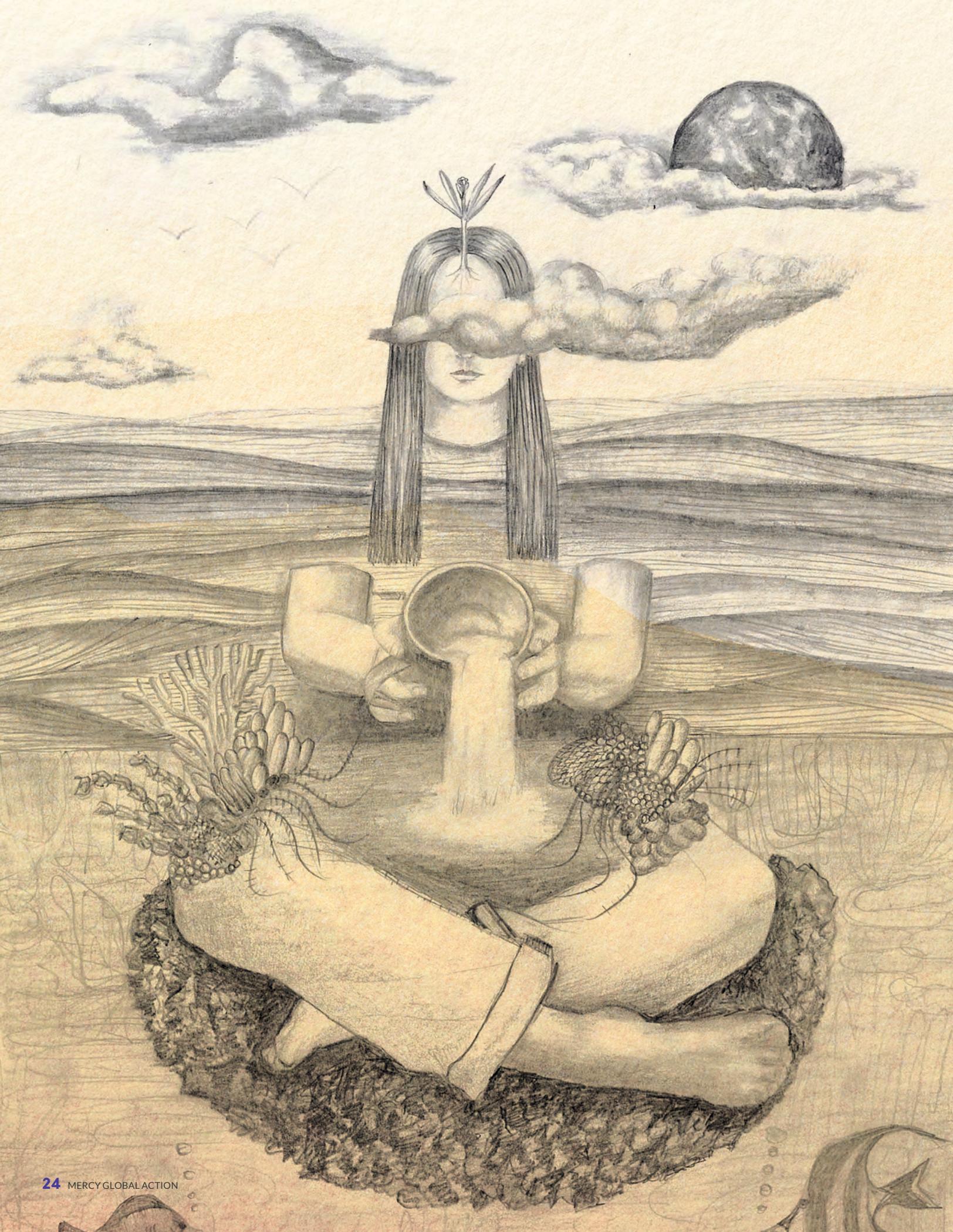
Community transformation:
Emerging leaders foster hope and action



Transformation of our world:
Women of Mercy work together to protect people and planet

And what do we hope to see in the long-term?

A world enriched by confident, compassionate women of faith who work within strong Mercy communities to uphold the dignity of people and planet.



“

True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”

Brené Brown, Atlas of the Heart

MELF's Theory of Change

CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE SELF

To ground our sense of SELF in Mercy and to recognize and nurture the spirit of Mercy within ourselves.

The first area of capacity building within the MELF program is focused on transformation of the 'SELF'. This is about developing habits of self-reflection to better understand the nature of one's own thoughts, intentions and ways of being. We believe that when the emerging leader has a deep(er) understanding of their own capabilities and potential, and has nurtured an enduring sense of self-worth, they can begin to see the extent of their 'ripples' of influence and direct these in alignment with their Mercy values. In other words, once the emerging leader is immersed in their

own dignity, they can experience a connection to, and enact, the other dimensions of dignity i.e., of others, and of the world around them.

What does this look like for MELF Fellows?

"MELF isn't just a retreat for the soul - it is a unique opportunity for women of Mercy to realise how they are differently capable and called to work for change."

Mercy World workshop participant



Many women in positions of leadership report feelings of loneliness, uncertainty and self-doubt. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of patriarchal communities and workplaces where there is a preference for more masculine styles of leadership.

For the emerging Mercy leader, on a journey of growth, it is important that they feel connected to a supportive community that reinforces their capacity for leadership and empowers them to embrace a leadership approach grounded in Mercy values.

The MELF Program offers Fellows safe spaces for exploration and mindfulness that allow them to more closely examine their limiting beliefs and embrace a strengths-based mentality. Guided by a team of expert facilitators and mentors, they are challenged to

think critically about theological and social concepts and seek out diverse perspectives on issues of cultural identity, power, privilege and race. Many of these activities take Fellows out of their comfort zones and into spaces where they are forced to grapple with their own assumptions and decision-making processes. The effect of this work is to ground the "I" in a sense of interaction with the world - to understand their interdependence and shared dignity with others and the planet.

From here, the Program equips Fellows with the tools to build confidence as well as analytical, communication and facilitation skills. Fellows are encouraged to harness the spirit of Mercy within themselves and share their deep spiritual conviction to bring about social and environmental change.

INSIGHTS

From the Mercy World on the importance of 'SELF' in the MELF Program

"Creates the vision for a different form of leadership, which stands in stark contrast to that selfish style of leadership. A way of being with people that is collaborative and generous and focused on the common good."

Mercy World workshop participant

"Empowerment of women who have a vision for a more socially just world. Ripples of change! Letting 'the stone' [in the pond] have a sense of consciousness – it's doing some good, an awareness of what's going out from it. That's the power of the program."

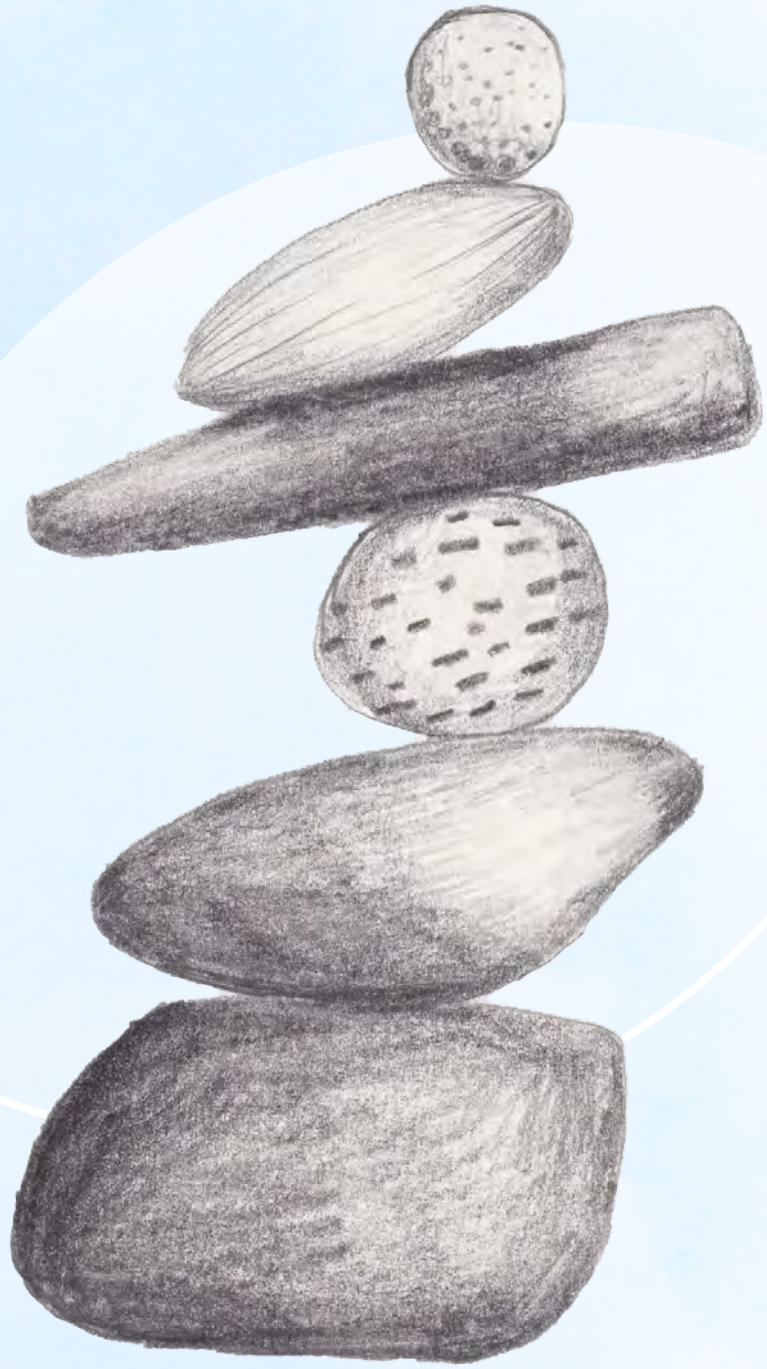
Mercy World workshop participant

"I think the primary goal of MELF is to call and gather mercy women who are inspired by God's mercy to lead with dignity. It is to empower women leadership that is critically needed at this time of global change."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

"MELF recognises the value I bring to any room that I walk into – this is important and I need to bring that with me in any job interview/ for the pay that I deserve etc. I negotiated the pay I deserved and wanted. MELF allowed me to bring that confidence into my life."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1



“

Mercy is a mode of relationship, not a momentary or sporadic feeling. It is, rather, a habit of the mind and heart, a way of organizing and interpreting the world. It is an enduring approach to the world. And, like any relationship, it is a two-way-street.”

Dr. Janet K. Ruffling rsm

MELF's Theory of Change

CAPACITY BUILDING AND COMMUNITY

To see the world from a place of community and to experience and share Mercy with those around us.

Once Fellows have a clearer understanding of their capacity for leadership and a conscious connection to their own dignity, the second area of focus within their MELF journey is 'COMMUNITY'. This area of capacity building is important for three reasons: firstly, it helps to encourage the development of strong bonds of friendship (a 'community of support') for the emerging leader; secondly, it engenders a collective worldview that helps Fellows to experience leadership with an appreciation for the perspectives and dignity of others; and thirdly, it creates pathways for further

engagement with the charism and legacy of the Sisters and ministries of Mercy.

What does this look like for MELF Fellows?

The spirit and practice of Mercy is inherently relational, and Mercy leadership depends on relationship. MELF has a particularly strong focus on facilitating authentic connections - between Fellows, within local communities, and throughout the Mercy World.

Building communities of support

When a person's dignity is honoured and they feel supported through personal and professional challenges, they are more likely to lead with confidence and take important risks to achieve lasting positive change. For the Mercy leader, who engages with momentous issues of peace and justice, this validation through community is particularly powerful.

Unsurprisingly, Fellows report that one of the most powerful components of the MELF Program is its cohort structure: the collective journeying of ten diverse women from around the world through the ups and downs of a year-long immersive experience. This model of leadership training allows women from markedly different backgrounds to learn together in a way that fosters safe and supportive exploration of challenging global justice issues.

In travelling together and sharing stories, Fellows come to recognise their shared vulnerability, which inspires the formation of genuine connections based on empathy and trust. It is a fertile ground for the development of enriching and joyful friendships that continue beyond the formal content of the program and sustain Fellows throughout their lives. For the emerging Mercy leader, this network of support creates a strong foundation from which they can walk in the world with confidence and conviction.

"MELF gives you immense confidence to go out into the world being exactly as you are because you know you have the support and love of your Mercy community. This is invaluable for women in their personal and professional lives."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

"MELF is family. This is so rare. They give unconditional love. You're accepted and able to share your innermost feelings with the group."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

"The connections you form are the most important part of MELF. I really value those connections with everyone. Everyone can be vulnerable about where they're at. The group held me at a place when I needed it. This embodies that sense of Mercy that is part of the program/ethical framework. There's so much grace and love there that other leadership programs don't have – they might be focused on a particular form of 'success' instead."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

Fostering a collective worldview

The MELF Program encourages Fellows to look beyond their own experiences to consider the realities of people who live with poverty, discrimination and climate devastation. The international immersions are deliberately designed to take Fellows out of their comfort zones and into spaces of cultural and economic diversity. Fellows spend time with community members who have personal experience of displacement and abuse. This grounds their theoretical understanding of global injustice in tangible, 'personal' ways.

Throughout the Program, Fellows are challenged to think critically and see the world from the positions of others. They are challenged to see past institutions and systems



to understand the truth of how things work and who is left behind in decision-making processes. This strengthens a collective worldview that recognises the interconnectedness of the global community.

More traditional leadership training tends to focus on building the capacity of individuals to achieve recognisable goals, such as greater profit margins, genuine innovation or better staff retention. MELF, by contrast, works to build the capacity of women to embrace the 'wisdom of the circle' - i.e. to harness and empower the capabilities of others. This communal way of looking at the world eschews transactionalism and ultimately encourages a 'web' rather than 'ladder' style of leadership.

"We are all interconnected. The advantage that young people have is that they've come into this reality and might be able to find alternative ways of interpreting reality that are needed today. The big emphasis in all of these components is about internalising the mystery of relatedness – with all of life and creation. And not just in a human centred way but earth centred as well. There is value in the relatedness of what is being presented to them."

Mercy World workshop participant



Connection to the ministries and legacy of the Sisters of Mercy

Throughout their MELF journey, Fellows are introduced to the story and charism of Catherine McAuley, Baggot St and the Sisters of Mercy. They become part of the global community of Mercy, and are encouraged to participate in local Mercy initiatives and advocacy in their various regions of the world. Each Fellow is paired with a mentor who guides them in spiritual conversation and reflection as they embark on online classroom learning, research and advocacy.

This storytelling and engagement grounds the emerging leader in the rich history of Mercy and helps to shape their identity as a 'leader of Mercy'. In effect, it prepares a whole new generation of visionary and compassionate women to take up the mantle of Mercy and build institutions of service in the spirit of Catherine McAuley.

"MELF is about bringing Catherine's vision to the fore today."

NGO partner

INSIGHTS

From the Mercy World on the importance of ‘COMMUNITY’ in the MELF Program

"The fact that this is done through Mercy Spirituality base - this is a gift. Mobilizing a group with a Mercy Charism. Already have inspiring leaders – ripple effect – we stretch the collective mission. Makes the connection with Catherine McAuley - more than the education aspect. It's about bringing Catherine's vision to the fore today."

NGO partner

"Connection with and being able to learn from incredible women from diverse backgrounds and life experiences who are doing wonderful work in the social and environmental justice sphere."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

"Establishes a network of women around the world. Like-minded women who support each other. Not just doing a course and learning theory – forming a network of friends and people who have had a similar experience, have similar input and are striving for a similar thing. It's 'who you know'! You can work together and collaborate. Education in Mercy leadership but also forming a network of Mercy support. That's how you succeed – i.e. together!"

Mercy World workshop participant



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When we focus on others, our world expands. Our own problems drift to the periphery of the mind and so seem smaller, and we increase our capacity for connection - or compassionate action.”

Daniel Goleman, cited in Hicks, D. 2021

MELF's Theory of Change

CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE GLOBAL

To understand the context of Mercy, and to build Mercy into our global systems and structures, keeping the living at the forefront of our service.

Once Fellows have a clearer understanding of their capacity for leadership and the power of nurturing a strong supportive community, the third area of focus in their MELF journey is "GLOBAL". This area of capacity building is important for three reasons: firstly, it aids in the conscious realization of the dignity of something bigger than ourselves; with this understanding and our connections the Fellow is better able to make active contributions to global social and environmental justice issues; and lastly, this global worldview fosters transformation of Mercy communities and the Catholic Church into the future.

What does this look like for MELF Fellows?

With Mercy Sisters, Associates and ministry partners located in over thirty countries worldwide, it is no surprise that Mercy's sphere of influence is wide reaching. Developing connections to form a global consciousness (and vice versa) is a relational aspect. Mercy leadership requires an expansive worldview and deep interconnection to the cries of the earth and cries of the poor.

Conscious realization of the dignity of something bigger than ourselves

In forming our global consciousness, we are challenged by Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'* which calls for an 'ecological conversion'. It is a fundamental renewal of humanity rooted in Christian spirituality. We are in need of a radical change of heart moving from our anthropocentric ways and destructive practices. Calling for humans to respond to the 'cry of the earth and cry of the poor', moving us from complacency and towards openness to our interconnectedness with all of creation.

This conscious realization is harnessed in the MELF Program, which creates:

"An ecosystem of women leaders who are willing to address the hard questions and remain global minded. Recognition that we don't speak the same language but how can we be part of an ecosystem that puts community forward in a really intentional way. Rootedness in core values, but recognition that that may look different depending on where we are in the world."

Mercy World workshop participant

There is a diverse representation of Fellows who undertake the MELF program. In reflecting on each of the different program components, particularly international immersion, research and mentorship, Fellows have reported an increased consciousness and understanding of their personal and communal role in the Mercy World.



"Immersion gives us that intercultural lens – global learning on larger scale. Time of intimacy to get to know each other in person and connect informally = essential community building."

Reflection from a member of the MGA team

One MELF Fellow from Cohort 1 emphasized that:

"International immersion is completely different for each Fellow. Mercy leadership is so similar but so different in congregations and communities across the world."

There is a collective strength in learning from other global Mercy leaders and harnessing the energy to advance peace and justice in the world. We learn that although we may come from different countries, the issues we experience are quite similar, there are just different ways of approaching systemic change. Taking the time to learn from one another and coming together in the spirit of Mercy, is what makes Mercy leadership so unique in the space of global justice.



*Capacity to make active contributions to
Global Environmental and Social Justice*

"Transform global systems of oppression with justice, active compassion and global solidarity. MELF seeks an alternative vision to: Patriarchy, Unsustainable models of development, Neoliberalism, Anthropocentrism, Gendered Violence, Racism, Sexism, Colonialism and other systems that result in people being excluded and exploited."

MELF Information Brochure

With extensive and holistic leadership training and using the Mercy Global Action Advocacy Approach, Fellows are provided the tools they need to respond effectively and compassionately to influence systemic/institutional change. As previously explored, it is necessary to consider our collective worldview and

work collaboratively with our networks and communities to enact change. Fellows create networks with global stakeholders seeking to advance peace and justice. Building is essential and it is evident that we are stronger together.

With its Special Consultative Status with the United Nations, MGA addresses the root causes of inequality and injustice which infiltrate our world. As an established and credible voice of justice at the United Nations, MGA gives Fellows the opportunity to participate in advocacy on global issues of displacement of persons and degradation of earth. Fellows can make meaningful contributions in countries in which Mercy is present and in their own local communities, responding to the ongoing need for women's participation and voices in global decision making spaces.

Envisioning the future of Mercy and the Catholic Church

The experience of a global Mercy Leader is the recognition of their inherent dignity and value they can provide to something bigger than themselves.

Mercy Global Action is leading the conversation on this inner journey of emergence through generative conversations worldwide. These conversations and imaginings explore the future possibilities and challenges as Mercy moves into its third century. MELF addresses this critical need:



"That we always consider the future generations coming forward, not just our own. It is a real opportunity to share extraordinary depth of wisdom, experience in advocacy and action making a difference in the world which comes out of an evolving spiritual tradition."

Mercy World workshop participant

MELF fellows offer the Mercy and Catholic tradition a fresh chance to learn and evolve in many ways. One NGO Partner detailed:

"All founders have been out there, in the watchtower, telling them what to do. We are mobilising people 'to do'. Not just keep our eye on the 'original mission'. Being ahead with what science is telling us - what are the 'big thinkers' thinking? We as leaders need to be pointing to the bigger picture - and coming back and acting differently. How does the MELF program ensure the direction of its beginnings AND looking at how we are being challenged?! Being flexible with the news."

This is our call, to:

"Continue to tell what is an evolving story. Develop ongoing engagement. Reflection gives rise to creativity to prayer, rose gardens and more."

Reflection from Mercy World workshop participant

INSIGHTS

From the Mercy World on the importance of 'GLOBAL' in the MELF Program

"Participants have to be intentionally listening to each other. International group of people who bring their own culture. Intentionally noticing what they are, and building collaborative ways of working. Intentional listening process."

Mercy World workshop participant

"Gain a deeper understanding of their place within Mercy and what gifts they have to bring to Mercy's engagement in the world"

Mercy World workshop participant

"Participants feel empowered to seek out practical solutions for social and environmental justice, and work for the empowerment of women."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1

"What sets young Mercy women apart is the consciousness of Women and impacts on the poor. What are the barriers? Calling out the structures that have been embedded in society. Building capacity to challenge these structures with compassion, humility and more."

Mercy World workshop participant

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When young people access and exercise their power, that power has ripple effects that can positively transform the groups and institutions in which they are exercising their power. When young people are meaningfully engaged in ways that truly dismantle barriers and break down systems of exclusion—whether based on age, gender, class, ethnicity, or other facets of identity— they change not only their own lives, but also the systems in which those lives are situated. They practise and apply skills for building a democratic society that is based on human rights. They develop long-lasting skills that contribute to greater social cohesion, less crime, more stable communities, more effective workplaces, and better decision-making regarding health. Their work ripples outward from the local to the global, from individual empowerment to collective social change.”

Meaningful Youth Engagement, Women Deliver, 2019



Mentorship

Mentorship is critical to the success of the MELF program. Many Mercy women throughout the world have valued the role of mentors in their lives. Establishing strong relationships with women who have committed themselves to Mercy values, and who can provide companionship and wisdom, is considered essential support to Fellows on their leadership journeys.

Women mentoring women is so important—it helps them gain access to opportunities and builds their confidence in male-dominated political and economic environments. Mentorship is a key channel through which to influence and guide a woman's perception of leadership.

When more women lead and mentor, it creates a diversified leadership team open to discussing multiple perspectives. This improves decision-making and strengthens organisational teams to face the challenges of the future.



Studies show that:

"Confidence is key for leadership, but it's something women struggle with throughout their careers. Confidence-building programs, networking opportunities and the encouragement of role models can offer women the support they need to believe in their leadership abilities. Connecting women is essential for the evolution of female leadership..."

KPMG, 2015

Mentorship in the MELF program

"[This is] clearly a very well thought out fellowship. It acknowledges the importance, for example, of mentorship, how many young women I've met who want to be mentored, who want that kind of support and that's built into the program."

Mrs Mary Robinson in her Keynote Address at the MELF Virtual Graduation, 20 February 2021. Mrs Robinson is the first woman elected President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Chair of the Elders.

A Mercy mentor provides an open and non-judgmental space for a woman to share her experience of the Fellowship and explore her learnings. Together, the mentor and mentee grapple with issues of global justice and advocacy, ethics, leadership and any other issues raised in the program.

Mentoring Mercy women leaders is unique.



"It is leadership with the firm basis of awareness of a chosen justice/women's issue. Another difference has to do with the friendly relationship that was nurtured among the participants. They seemed to become friends from their first meeting, and to nurture each other throughout the program. That kind of supportive relationship is not always present where people are working side by side. The absence, as far as I could note, of competition, I think is rare. Another difference is the interest in the whole Mercy world in the program. Sisters and Associates were proud of the participants in MELF."

Reflection from Mercy Mentor, MELF Cohort 1

We have heard ways in which Mercy women's leadership is different. It focuses on reflection, openness, inclusion, and shared decision making. It is about understanding the critical role in which we are interconnected and grow collectively in expertise, and then harnessing this wisdom to approach justice issues.

Mercy mentors contribute to a multidimensional approach to leadership that is cultivated in the MELF program.

"At a relational level, mentorship provided an opportunity to grow/renew a relationship within an experience and expression of Mercy Charism as a young adult. That is providing a forum and support among a 'community' of other mercy women. Tapped

the seeking for a deeper sense of self and supported an awareness that God's Mercy is unconditional. Reignited a thirst for justice and compassion through the lens of Mercy but within a global network. Allowed her to apply her skills and talents from other aspects of life in a directed manner."

Reflection from Mercy Mentor, MELF Cohort 1

Another mentor shared that their sessions with their mentee:

"Brought a deeper reflection to the research [my mentee] was undertaking. Firstly, in order to ensure she could most effectively articulate what she was seeking to do and, secondly, to be open to different perspectives and approaches to the project. I also think the time spent together and the shared engagement in the project was affirming and supportive."

During their sessions with MELF Fellows of Cohort 1 (2019-2021), Mercy mentors reported witnessing deep personal and professional growth.

"This is about qualitative rather than quantitative change. Change is a journey and I'd have to say that each time we meet there is evidence of the struggle to engage, listen to and trust one's unique analysis and synthesizing of reading or reflection."

Reflection from Mercy Mentor, MELF Cohort 1

One Mercy mentor shared that the value of mentioning sessions was in knowledge sharing and building confidence in both the mentor and mentee. Having mutual benefits within the Mercy community to develop these connections and grow together personally and professionally through shared time, values, and challenging preconceptions.



What does MELF mean for the future of Mercy?

As Mercy enters its third century, how do we continue the charism of Mercy? What value does the MELF Program bring to Mercy congregations? How will Mercy continue to be relevant in an ever changing world? What does the Mercy World need to do to stay true to its original mission? How can it change?

After our impact evaluation workshops, Mercy Sisters, Associates, partners in mission, MELF program participants and other stakeholders were left invigorated, hopeful and confident that the MELF program is an integral tool to bridging the past, present and future of Mercy throughout the world.



Building upon the Legacy of Mercy

The MELF Program provides holistic leadership training that seeks to develop both vowed and "Lay leadership [which is] critical for the future of Mercy initiatives and ministries. [It builds on the capacities of] young people who are steeped in Mercy values and faith, skilled and courageous to apply their leadership skills" (Mercy World workshop participant).

With intercultural and intergenerational diversity, we see the emergence of new generations of connected Mercy leaders who embody values and work for global peace and justice, thereby expanding the Mercy charism and mission.

"With each graduating class, MELF brings together people of all faiths and traditions to be around the table, having these conversations. Look within our own [spiritual] wisdom of mercy and witness how our feminine leadership is different. Sr Joan Chittister details that we are all called to be public prophets - it is an organic, fluid way of working. Together we can do this in new and effective ways. Not continuing the baggage we have before."

Reflection from NGO Partner

This is the new and evolving face of Mercy and our hope for the future.



Shape a new future for religious understanding

In a time in world history in which young people crave belonging, community, spirituality and social action, MELF offers something unique, especially to young women, that is not available in institutional church settings.

"[It] brings in women to a very patriarchal process and structure (i.e. the Vatican and the Catholic Church) that normally wouldn't bring about the change that is needed. We need to keep moving forward, in a new way."

Reflection from UN-based NGO Partner Representative

One MELF Mentor has stated that this program:

"Surfaced a desire to develop spirituality and life of faith while not necessarily within the formal church. It also gave rise to a commitment to Mercy and mercy in action."

The National Catholic Foundation details that the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated "so many unexpected and ongoing changes, it's hard to even think about what the Church will look like in the future. But insight from new research tells us that, while the mission of the Church will not change, the way that mission is carried out will" (Barna, 2021).

"The approach of MELF to leadership is important to religious congregations because it offers a way to help religious congregations nurture the charism they are responsible to live and share. It offers a space to help young women to reach for their dreams for a better world and to develop the unique charism they hold within themselves. It is an important contribution in the Catholic Church because it offers concrete training that integrates human rights, spirituality and Catholic Social Teaching. Passing on the faith in concrete and contextual ways is deeply part of the Catholic tradition, but not readily available to young people today."

Reflection from NGO Partner

As Mercy moves into the future, it relies on programs like MELF to connect deeply with those yearning for spiritual connection and community. It provides a space for actively engaging in spiritual commitment through reflection, peacebuilding and ways to engage with social and environmental justice. Research on the changing church community details that, "People are hungry for true community, deeper experiences, and authentic transcendence...Which is why churches that are growing are focusing more and more on creating experiences that engage more than just the head on a Sunday ... but also engage the heart and relationship" (Nieuwhof, 2021).





MELF into the Future

It is our firm belief that MELF creates a brighter future for Mercy women globally. Through the MELF Program, we are able to cultivate a greater awareness of the value of women's leadership within (and beyond) Mercy and Catholic worlds.

There are many opportunities to ensure that MELF continues to stay relevant as the world changes. We need to ask ourselves:

"What do we need to be doing locally, so women are empowered to grow in their personal leadership, before taking on the MELF program?"

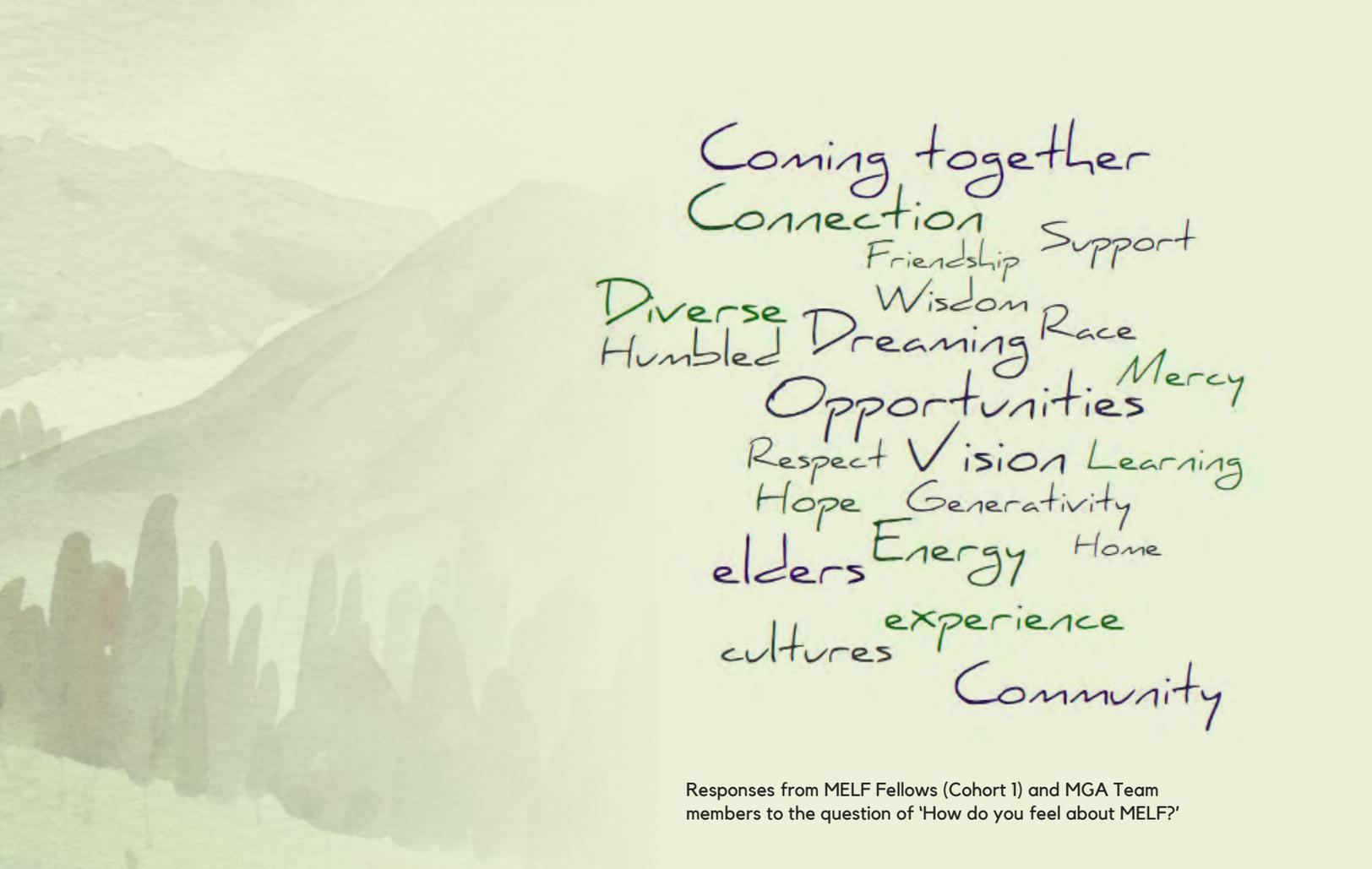
Question posed by Mercy World workshop participant

As women are powerful agents of change, it is imperative to build upon their capacities to address the ever changing needs of the world. This also involves:

"Making the program as accessible as possible to women in the global south as we are enriched by our diversity."

Mercy World workshop participant

Seeking to ensure that the learning and interactions continue post the fellowship, we must build on the idea of legacy. A member of a Mercy community in the US shared that:



Coming together
Connection
Friendship Support
Diverse Wisdom
Humbled Dreaming Race
Opportunities Mercy
Respect Vision Learning
Hope Generativity
elders Energy Home
cultures experience
Community

Responses from MELF Fellows (Cohort 1) and MGA Team members to the question of 'How do you feel about MELF?'

"The Mercy world community needs to be more proactive in engaging with the fellows and providing opportunities for them to continue to develop in mercy once the program has ended."

This could involve an active alumni network of MELF Fellows. One workshop participant noted that:

"It would be wonderful to see the group of MELF graduates network and collaborate on projects that will achieve specific goals in the social

and environmental justice sphere. For example using our influence and varied talents to assist communities at a local level, while also working with MGA at a global level."

It is our sincere hope that if we build sufficient energy and a genuine appreciation for women's leadership in the spirit of Catherine McAuley, that members of the Mercy community and related stakeholders will consider supporting the advancement of women through the MELF program into the future.

Measuring the Impact of MELF

Mercy Global Action is committed to implementing best practice frameworks for measuring and managing the impact of the MELF Program. We want to ensure that we continue to provide the best possible experience for women who undertake the Program. We do this by regularly reviewing our quantitative and qualitative indicators of progress and seeking out genuine participant feedback at multiple touchpoints.

Here, we describe the ways that MELF targets the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and performs against the five dimensions of impact.

MAIN SDGs THAT MELF TARGETS





- 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- 5.B** Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

The MELF Program:

- 1 *Builds capacity in women* who are recognised by members of their communities as exhibiting leadership skills and compassionate vision for change.
- 2 *Opens up pathways and opportunities* for women to take on new responsibilities (in Mercy institutions, UN-related Task Forces and coalitions, global advocacy, congregational work) and participate in key decision-making forums
- 3 *Connects women to UN sphere*, including forums and international events; give them channels for communication and advocacy within this sphere
- 4 *Provides opportunities for women*, particularly in developing countries, to participate in leadership training online through providing computers, internet access, specialised apps

High Level Measures of Progress:

Fellows who report increased confidence in self-worth and leadership capabilities and understanding of how their unique leadership skills are applicable in their chosen areas of impact

Fellows in positions of leadership (whether in professional, social or religious life)

Fellows involved in UN-related events, initiatives, task forces and report writing

Consistent attendance at online webinars and participation in online guided forums; completion of research project with digital presentation



"There was a diversity of participants. I really valued how open the program was to different participants (in terms of age, ethnicity, faith background etc.). This diversity offers a sense of hope to women who want to advance in leadership and justice."

MELF Fellow, Cohort 1



- 10.2** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
- 10.6** Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions

The MELF Program:

- 1** *Intentionally encourages application* for emerging leaders from developing countries and non-Western / English-speaking regions of the world
- 2** *Provides Spanish translation* for all MELF resources, webinars and events
- 3** *Focuses on race, poverty and inequality* as core global justice issues
- 4** *Prioritises self & group reflection* and provide guided facilitation to unpack limiting beliefs, bias and racial assumptions
- 5** *Highlights the voices, lived experiences and perspectives* of those from non-Western backgrounds in all content material and Fellowship immersions
- 6** *Supports Fellows* to challenge institutional discrimination at a local/regional/global level
- 7** *Leverages the recognised credibility of Mercy* (e.g. MIA's ECOSOC status at the UN) to provide pathways and connections that empower Fellows in seeking systemic change.

High Level Measures of Progress, as the Most Effective in:

Broad representation in all Fellowship cohorts, e.g. diversity of nationalities, first languages

Broad representation in Fellowship mentors

Different regional priorities represented in research projects

Reports from Fellows, mentors, facilitators and guests on inclusivity of program and ease of participation, e.g. due to translation

Fellows involved in local/global advocacy in the year following graduation from Fellowship

Fellows report feeling supported in these initiatives (e.g. with community and access to resources/contacts).



"An anticipated outcome from MELF is that Fellows are able to challenge injustice and other unacceptable behaviour, yet also be peacemakers who can build strong, fruitful relationships."

Mercy World workshop participant



16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

The MELF Program:

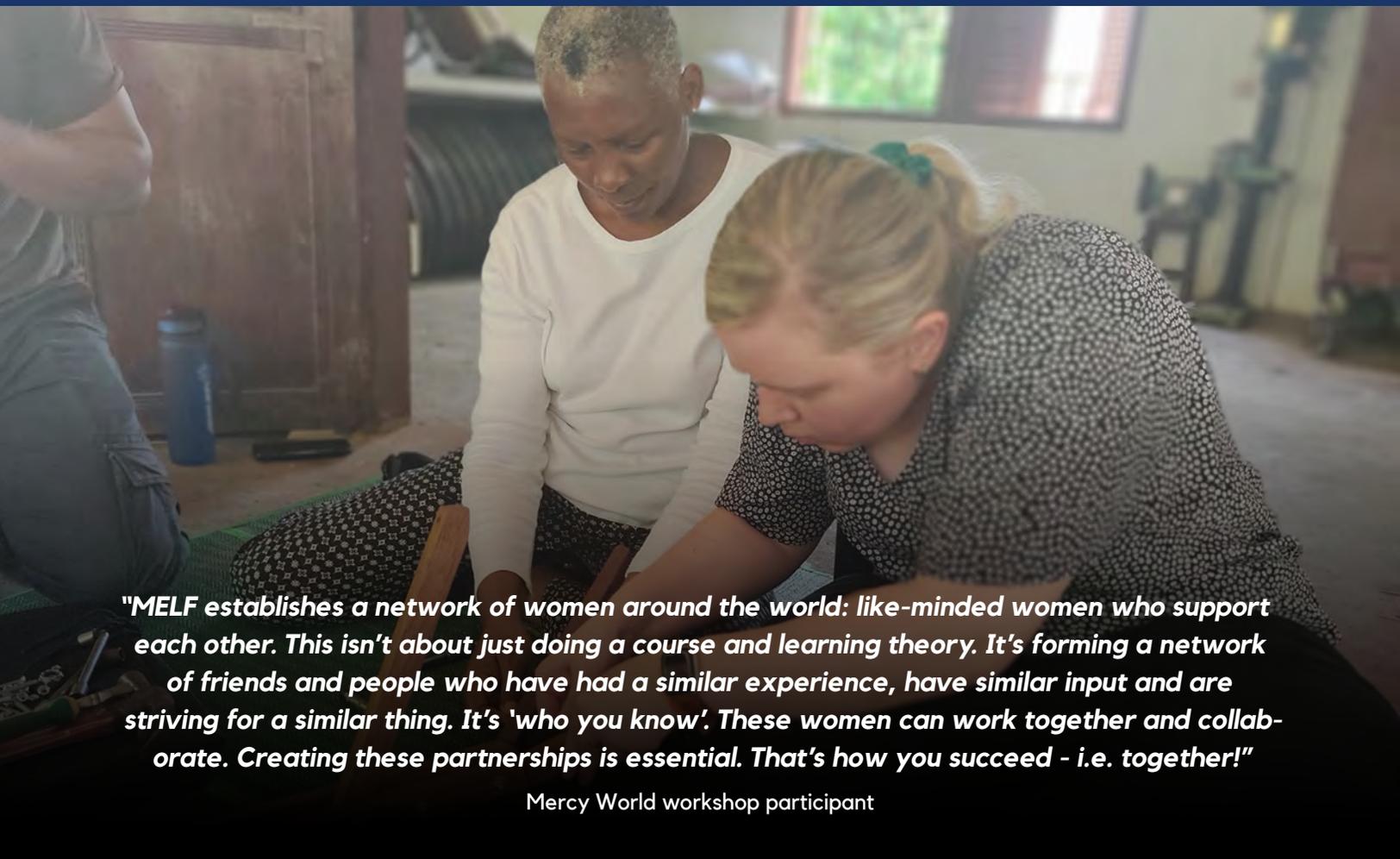
- 1** *Builds capacity in emerging leaders* to challenge injustice and exclusion, particularly as it occurs in decision-making forums
- 2** *Places Fellows in scenarios* where they grapple with communal decision-making processes
- 3** *Seeks out opportunities* to highlight the diverse voices of Fellows in global institutions, particularly on issues of governance, e.g. Mercy, UN

High Level Measures of Progress:

Fellows report feeling passionate about one or more global justice issues and empowered to take steps to make a difference, whether at a local, regional or global level

Fellows demonstrate skills of negotiation, compromise and respectful engagement in their dealings with each other while undertaking the Fellowship program

Fellows actively participate in one or more major global governance events while undertaking the program, e.g. speaking at the Commission on the Status of Women



"MELF establishes a network of women around the world: like-minded women who support each other. This isn't about just doing a course and learning theory. It's forming a network of friends and people who have had a similar experience, have similar input and are striving for a similar thing. It's 'who you know'. These women can work together and collaborate. Creating these partnerships is essential. That's how you succeed - i.e. together!"

Mercy World workshop participant



17.6 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

The MELF Program:

- 1** *Works with Mercy ministries* and other non-governmental and faith-based organisations around the world in developing relevant content and providing best practice facilitation throughout the MELF Program (including in-person and through digital channels)
- 2** *Provides opportunities for Fellows* to join UN committees and advocacy task forces to address urgent social justice concerns
- 3** *Highlights Fellows' experiences and stories* when developing advocacy materials and participating in UN events and other socio-political movements with major partners.
- 4** *Connects Fellows* with other members of the global Mercy community (e.g. mentors) who may have particular expertise or experience in a certain field, and who can provide Fellows with further networks, connections, resources or knowledge to advance key justice issues
- 5** *Supports Fellows* to maintain contact with Mercy World beyond the life of the program and to draw on networks when needed

High Level Measures of Progress:

Fellows who report feeling like they genuinely belong to networks of Mercy, including their broader cohort of MELF graduates

Genuine partnerships in place during Fellowship, with tangible engagement and collaboration during course of immersions/webinars

Points of formal communication with Fellowship partners, including updates, events and in-person or online facilitated discussions



How MELF will grow and change

The following quotations from Fellows of the MELF Program (Cohort 1) provide insight into their hopes for the future of the Fellowship, including likely challenges and areas for improvement.

ENACTING MERCY FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

"There is a lot I could say here- I think that I feel far more confident in my skills as a leader in general. I know that a few months ago, I spoke about how important the role of my mentor was, in helping me with assertiveness and recognizing that it is important to have that quality. I feel so empowered by the fact that I am more comfortable being assertive, saying what I mean, and also saying 'no' when necessary. With how I was raised, I doubted that I would ever get to a place where I could really do that. The fact that I am now more comfortable doing so, in my personal and professional life, is the biggest game-changer!"

"Keep energising people 'to do', i.e. 'to act' - for global justice / against structural injustice."

"It would be wonderful to see the group of MELF graduates as being able to network and work together on projects that will achieve specific goals in the social and environmental justice sphere."

"That we - as a group of Fellows and facilitators - stay close and draw on our collective expertise and strength to create tangible change. This group is incredibly special and I just hope we can all continue to grow together and find ways to live our Mercy leadership."

"We live in a world dominated by patriarchy and women have become some of the most significant leaders in our world. Like race, it is important to name women as such. In a world where women are valued less, it is important for this program to cultivate strong leaders who happen to be women. Womanhood should always be celebrated, and never overlooked."

"For example using our influence and varied talents to assist communities at a local level, while also working with MGA at a global level."

MAINTAINING STRONG LINKS TO CHARISM AND NETWORKS THROUGHOUT THE GLOBAL MERCY COMMUNITY

"From experience of dealing with fellows, MELF will find out the great differences between education and cultural experiences and practice. This will help them develop and change to enable leaders who have had less opportunities, through their education systems, to develop. Many leaders have little knowledge of the mission of Sisters of Mercy. MELF needs to develop knowledge and spirit of mission. The fellows then can influence their core-workers and help develop their spirit of mission."

"MELF will need to find ways to stay true to its original mission by ensuring that people who are steeped in the Mercy mission are always guiding the process. Nurturing the charism and mission needs to be ongoing. So, perhaps annual alumnae retreat days, online and/or in person is one way to help participants to be further enriched and deepening the mission in their lives. It is also a way to keep participants engaged and to be part of a support network for each new group."

"I would like to see MELF connect graduating fellows with Mercy organizations and institutions to provide an ongoing conduit of women interested in engaging in the work of justice with Mercy beyond the length of the fellowship."

"How do we keep track of everyone as time goes on and there are more and more cohorts? Need to keep this connection strong. Support and opportunities for continued growth and learning."

"Importance of developing programming or support systems for the alumna of the program."

CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

"How do we make sure that we balance that everyone who wants to participate in the program can, but we still keep the integrity and closeness? Importance of small cohort sizes – individual attention and sense of community remains strong."

"It would be good for MELF to create some ways to follow up on the research projects that each of us are doing in different places. These could be exciting stories to be shared with others. Would there be a possibility?"

"I wonder if there is space for more discussion on how to be a better coconspirator and in anti-racism work. Also perhaps highlighting Indigenous perspectives within the group or of a place visited."

"I would love to see more time spent in nature and in contemplation of the natural world - This could take the form of a gentle multi-day hike and camping or if not all in the group are able to do this kind of walking perhaps just spending time outdoors for longer periods."

"Maintain a focus on current and evolving theology/ spirituality, re-evaluate the program regularly to make sure it is meeting the most urgent needs of our time at its root causes, always reflect on whether the program itself is not contributing to a problem (e.g. if less travel was desired to cut emissions maybe localised groups/ immersions are possible). If funding is an issue perhaps the groups could be smaller - it would still have a great impact. To remain mission-led it would be good to maintain the exposure to what the Mercy world are doing at the current time mindful that this is always evolving."

"Perhaps also discussion or assistance with avoiding burnout, since many women in the program work hard and balance multiple jobs/roles and some are involved in front line action in countries that may not have access to psychological services or assistance."

APPENDIX

From 2016 to 2018, a number of the world's leading providers of impact measurement knowledge came together to convene a Practitioner Community of over 3,000 enterprises and investors with a common objective: to build global consensus on how we measure, assess and report our positive and negative impacts on people and the planet. The resulting framework for enterprises and investors became known as the 'Impact Management Project' (IMP).

Now overseen by Impact Frontiers, the IMP framework consists of **Five Dimensions of Impact**:



Image taken from [impactfrontiers.org/norms](https://www.impactfrontiers.org/norms)

One of the major benefits of this framework is that it helps to standardise the myriad impact measurement approaches out there in the global market. Investors and organisations alike can use the five dimensions of impact to assess the outcomes of their work in a way that aligns with global best practice.

In the absence of a formal, independent assessment, it is difficult for us to objectively evaluate the MELF Program according to the IMP. However, in order to help potential supporters and donors in their consideration of MELF, we attempt here to provide insight into how the Program currently meets each of the Five Dimensions.

Outcome Level in Period

The level of outcome experienced by the stakeholder when engaging with the enterprise. The outcome can be positive or negative, intended or unintended.

How MELF Performs

We anticipate that Fellows have a 'very positive' experience whilst undertaking the Fellowship. Intended.

How do we assess this?

Post-immersion & post-Fellowship surveys (kept anonymous); regular check-ins online and in-person

Outcome threshold

The level of outcome that the stakeholder considers to be a positive outcome. Anything below this level is considered a negative outcome. The outcome threshold can be a nationally or internationally-agreed standard.

How MELF Performs

We look at whether Fellows experience increased capacity in the areas of 'Self', 'Community' and 'Global'.

How do we assess this?

We assess against the points articulated in the 'Deliverables' and 'Outcomes' sections of the MELF Theory of Change.

Importance of Outcome to Stakeholder

The stakeholder's view of whether the outcome they experience is important (relevant to other outcomes). Where possible, the people experiencing the outcome provide this data, although third-party research may also be considered. For the environment, scientific research provides this view.

How MELF Performs

We consider the motivations behind a Fellow's application to the Program: how they envisage their participation in MELF will contribute to their personal and professional fulfilment and advancement. Among other criteria, we prioritise applicants who believe the Fellowship will have a significant impact on their personal development and leadership. We compare this data with feedback gathered from the Fellow throughout and post the Program.

How do we assess this?

Surveys; regular check-ins; written reflections. We specifically ask whether the Fellowship experience aligned with a Fellow's expectations.

SDG or other global goal

The Sustainable Development Goal target or other global goal that the outcome relates to. An outcome might relate to more than one goal.

How MELF Performs

We target SDGs 5, 10, 16 and 17.

How do we assess this?

Please see SDG section of Impact Report.

Stakeholder

The type of stakeholder experiencing the outcome.

How MELF Performs

Women with a close connection to Mercy World (e.g. Sisters of Mercy, Associates, people involved in ministry work) and who are recognised by members of Mercy World as being 'emerging leaders' in their particular fields/communities. Given the reach of Mercy throughout the world, the number of potential stakeholders is significant.

How do we assess this?

Written application reviewed by a panel of Mercy World leaders; interview by zoom, references by recognised Mercy World representatives

Geographical boundary

The geographical location where the stakeholder experiences the social and/or environmental outcome.

How MELF Performs

Various. To date, Fellows have come from Ireland, the US, Papua New Guinea, Kenya, Peru, Australia, Canada, Philippines and Aotearoa New Zealand. Each Fellow is recognised as an 'emerging leader' within a community - whether it is local or regional.

How do we assess this?

Recorded on application. We encourage Fellows to be engaged in local advocacy as well as social justice and Mercy initiatives in their region.

Outcome and base level

The level of outcome experienced by the stakeholder prior to engaging with, or otherwise being affected by, the enterprise

How MELF Performs

Various. Each Fellow brings diverse life and professional experiences. Some begin the program with a high level of confidence; others are looking for reassurance and validation in their leadership. Fellows are chosen based on their potential and likelihood to affect change in the Mercy World and on social and global justice issues.

How do we assess this?

Ascertained via application, interview, personal engagement and mentorship.

Stakeholder characteristics

Socio-demographic and/or behavioural characteristics and/or ecosystem characteristics of the stakeholder to enable segmentation.

How MELF Performs

Various. All Fellows are engaged with Mercy World in some capacity and occupy spaces of emerging or current leadership. Connections to Catholic faith and social justice initiatives are common. There is no age limit; all Fellows are over 18 years.

How do we assess this?

Determined on application.

Scale

The number of individuals experiencing the outcome. When the planet is the stakeholder, this category is not relevant.

How MELF Performs

10 Fellows per year

How do we assess this?

Program limit

Depth

The degree of change experienced by the stakeholder. Depth is calculated by analysing the change that has occurred between the 'Outcome level at baseline' (Who - ii) and the 'Outcome level in period' (What - i).

How MELF Performs

Increase in feelings of confidence, capability and validation. Recognition of self as a leader. Connection to Mercy community worldwide. Increased critical analysis skills and ability to understand issues of global (in)justice. Motivation to affect change at local, regional and/or global level. Recognition of pathways for opportunity and network of support.

How do we assess this?

Surveys; regular check-ins; written reflections; mentor surveys.

Duration

The time period for which the stakeholder experiences the outcome.

How MELF Performs

Immediate: 1 year (Program length); ideally the impact of this program will be long-term and influence Fellow's professional development and personal growth.

How do we assess this?

12 months + 24 months

Depth Counterfactual

The estimated degree of change that would have happened anyway - without engaging with, or being affected by, the enterprise. Performance of peer enterprises, industry or local benchmarks, and/or stakeholder feedback are examples of counterfactuals that can be used to estimate the degree of change likely to occur anyway for the stakeholder.

How MELF Performs

Various. Fellows have diverse cultures, experiences and professional backgrounds. They may be leaders in one or multiple settings. We can only make informed estimations on the effect of MELF on their leadership capacity and personal growth - informed predominantly through personal feedback.

How do we assess this?

Research on women's leadership in different industries/regions of the world; stakeholder feedback via surveys and facilitated discussions, reflections and research projects.

Duration Counterfactual

The estimated time period that the outcome would have lasted for anyway - without engaging with, or being affected by, the enterprise. Performance of peer enterprises, industry or local benchmarks, and/or stakeholder feedback are examples of counterfactuals that can be used to estimate the duration likely to occur anyway for the stakeholder.

How MELF Performs

Various. We understand that a Fellow's leadership journey may be similar in the absence of participating in MELF, but could (e.g.) take longer or be influenced differently.

How do we assess this?

As above.

Risk Type

The type of risk that may undermine the delivery of the expected impact for people and/or the planet. There are nine types of impact risk.

How MELF Performs

- Evidence risk is possible (we rely primarily on stakeholder feedback);
- External risk (e.g. COVID inhibited Cohort 1's ability to meet in-person for immersions);
- Stakeholder participation risk is medium (though regular check-ins and feedback are facilitated);
- Efficiency risk (this is a costly program due to immersions and geographic locations of Fellows);
- Execution risk (possible, mitigated with regular facilitation debriefs);
- Alignment risk (possible, mitigated with strong leadership team and regular feedback/reflection points during program)

How do we assess this?

Review of program model and operational environment; research; stakeholder feedback; partner consultation.

Risk Level

The level of risk, assessed by combining the likelihood of the risk occurring, and the severity of the consequences for people and/or the planet if it does.

How MELF Performs

- Evidence risk - Medium;
- External risk - Medium to High
- Stakeholder participation - Low to medium
- Efficiency risk - Medium
- Execution risk - Low to medium
- Alignment risk - Low

How do we assess this?

Team deliberation; partner consultation; review of immersion environments

Contributing to Solutions

In consideration of these five dimensions of impact, as well as MELF's goals and immediate performance (based on the outcomes of Cohort 1), we believe that MELF can be classified as **Contributing to Solutions** (according to Impact Frontier's ABC Classification of Impact).

Impact Frontier's ABC Classification of Impact

Acting to Reduce Harm

Does or may cause harm to the wellbeing of a group of people or the condition of the natural environment so that it is *outside* the sustainable range; and

Mitigating or reducing this harm.

Benefitting Stakeholders

Acting to reduce harm by all stakeholders; and

Maintaining the wellbeing of one or more groups of people, and/or the condition of the natural environment *within* the sustainable range.

Contributing to Solutions

Acting to reduce harm; and

Addressing a social environment challenge not caused by the organization; by

Improving the wellbeing of one or more groups of people, and/or the condition of the natural environment so that it is *within* the sustainable range.

MELF results in a positive, ideally sustainable impact for stakeholders, who experience increased levels of confidence, leadership capacity and support. One can reasonably expect that over time, MELF graduates could go on to create significant and systemic 'ripples of change' for those experiencing injustice.

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About Mercy International

Mercy International Association was founded in 1992 by the leaders of Sisters of Mercy Congregations throughout the world.

The Sisters of Mercy are an international faith-based organization founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1831 and who now have members in over 30 countries and territories worldwide. We are committed to serving those who suffer from poverty and other forms of disadvantage and to empowering women and children to live full and dignified lives within their diverse social and cultural contexts.

Mercy Global Action in New York is the international justice arm of Mercy International Association. Through Mercy Global Action, we are able to expand our advocacy capacity and re-imagine ways in which the grassroots experience can influence global policies. With Mercy contacts on the ground, Mercy Global Action is able to exchange knowledge, identify best practices and bring the two chief areas of concern (displacement of persons and degradation of Earth) to the work at the United Nations where we enjoy Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

For more information about Mercy:

mercyworld.org

To learn more about the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship:

mercyworld.org/global-action/mercy-global-action-emerging-leaders-fellowship



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