



**MERCY**  
**GLOBAL**  
PRESENCE

# Grassroots Ministry: Mercy and the Degradation of Earth

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Working with students is an absolute privilege. They are so open to new ideas and are aware of their surroundings. They are also not afraid to challenge the norms. I always like to encourage students to be champions for change through exposing them to faith, education, and opportunities for a new way of thinking. Many schools now have environmental groups where students can get together and share their ideas, passions and thoughts on all things linked to the environment. At the school where I work, we have Stewardship Leaders who run regular meetings with our environment group. These girls have a shared passion for the environment and work towards advocacy, awareness raising and fund raising to ensure that they are stewards for the Earth now and always. The “cry of the Earth, cry of the Poor” was the focus for a school wide campaign which came about as the *Laudato Si’* encyclical was explored at school.

Young people are so aware of the environment and the importance of maintaining it, respecting it, and allowing the flora and fauna time to regenerate. With the recent bushfires in Australia which have been wide spread and devastating, now more than ever we can really see that “God created the heavens and the earth... and it was good”, and so we need to work for preservation now. Our Earth provides us with the essentials for life and as a Catholic Community, we are aware that there are areas where we are not showing her the respect she deserves.

Degradation of the earth can be seen through the abuse of fossil fuels, pollution of the waterways and extinction of species. As a Mercy community, we like to integrate environmental issues into our College celebrations. We do this by making the theme of whole school days relevant to the Scripture we will hear and engage in, as well as through the activities we have available for the girls to participate in.

## **Laudato Si’**

It is timely to stop and think about the degradation of the Earth, as we are now five years on since the publication of *Laudato Si’*. Pope Francis has encouraged all people to become involved in *Laudato Si’* week from May 16-24 2020 where he urges us to live out Catholic teaching on caring for creation by reducing environmental impact, and to press for substantial measures from world leaders to curtail a rapidly warming climate.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ji1YpDcHncY&feature=youtu.be>

## **Edmund Rice Centre**

Fighting for climate change with our Pacific partners: the Edmund Rice Centre focus on awareness, advocacy and action. They are a terrific community partners who have visited the school to talk about the issue of climate change resulting in increased sea levels. One area that really resonates with me, are the Pacific islands. In particular the islands of Tuvalu and Kirabati. What happens to people when they are no longer able to live in their own country? What will we do with climate refugees?

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX7rk9PWZWE>

## **School Mass: Who will speak if you don't?**

To commence a whole school mass, we focused on three items linked to the idea of the theme and the concept of the degradation of the earth:

**Water and oil container:** Who will speak for the waters if you don't? Beautiful oceans, lakes and bays are struggling, they are suffocating. Slowly drowning in plastic and waste. Who will speak for the environment if you don't?

**Tree husk:** Who will speak for living things if you don't? The flora and fauna that God has so beautifully created are versatile and useful, providing food, medicine and materials. But they are fragile and threatened. Who will speak for the environment if you don't?

**Charcoal:** Who will speak for the Earth if you don't? How many precious resources can be removed from our Earth before we say enough is enough? Our ecosystems suffer as a result. Who will speak for the Environment if you don't?

Who will speak? We must be people of Hope. We have to speak. We have to act and we have to change because if we don't who will?

The theme could not help but remind me of the Marty Haugen song, *Who will Speak?* We used this song and I feel that one of the verses is most pertinent:

Who will care for the plants and the creatures?  
Who will care for the land and the sea?  
Who will work so their voice will be heard?  
Oh, who will work if you don't?

## **It Starts with You**

One of the teachers at school, Paul Witney, wrote a lovely song performed by a now ex-student. Although it was written as part of our 125 year celebrations some years ago, the lyrics still ring through for the topic of the degradation of the earth. 'It starts with You' looks at the

way that mercy and compassion as well as justice and equality are all essential mercy values that we need to focus on because each of us leaves a footprint on this earth. We need to ensure that it is here for generations to come, and whether we are recycling, reducing the use of plastic, or campaigning for change at a government level, it all starts with each one of us standing up and becoming an advocate for change:

*We are called to love our neighbour, we are called to be servants to all.  
We are called to bring hope to the hopeless, we are called to seek and save the lost.*

*CHORUS: It starts with you to bring mercy and compassion  
It starts with you to be a light to the world  
It starts with you to restore dignity and justice  
It starts with you, it starts with you.*

*We are called to feed the hungry, we are called to quench people's thirst.  
We are called to clothe the naked, we are called to be Jesus' hands and feet.*

*CHORUS*

*If God is for us who can be against us (x3)  
For Jesus is with us we can do all things, we can do all things, we can do all things.  
CHORUS*

We are at the tipping point right now. The degradation of the world has been happening, but the irreversible damage is becoming more and more noticeable. Headlines adorn the pages of newspapers, social media goes into melt down and the stories are here there and everywhere. However, it is not a time to think the worst. "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction" said the great Sir Isaac Newton. It is when we suffer and experience hardship that the best of humanity rises up from the ashes. People are becoming aware of the use of fossil fuels and are seeking alternatives in renewable energy sources, globalization means that we can be kept updated on what is happening on the other side of the globe. We can unify our voices to be heard as one. The Pope himself has spoken at length about climate change, and renews his "urgent call to respond to the ecological crisis" this coming year as we reflect back on *Laudato Si'*.

### **Laudato Si' Week**

There's an urgent need to solve the ecological crisis. Our faith calls us to do more together. If you would like to put your faith into action, plan an event for Laudato Si Week. More information here: <https://laudatosiweek.org/>