

## Distinct Voice: Mercying

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*‘Mercying’ - a challenge in the time of Pandemic in Papua New Guinea*

For the people of Papua New Guinea, ‘Mercying’ is a big challenge during this time of the global pandemic. The common conversation on the buses, in the shops and on the streets is all about COVID 19. People share their worries, problems, needs, concerns and fears. Some people say COVID 19 has brought to them a ‘new normal’, a new way to live and to work. The ‘new normal’ has broken down the routine, timetables, programs, plans and dismantled our normal lifestyle in all kinds of ways.

This is a time of suffering for everyone in the world in so many different forms. Therefore, everyone is in need of mercy - physically, emotionally, spiritually or mentally. ‘Mercying’ is something the world is longing for desperately at this time of the global pandemic.

I believe it is the same call that Catherine McAuley experienced during her time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century cholera epidemic in Dublin. She responded to the same desperate call for ‘mercying’. Her feeling of compassion was shown in her practical action.

In my country, Papua New Guinea, we now have the second wave of the pandemic. People are dying unknown in the villages where there are no health facilities to test and record. In the *settlements*, [people living on the edges of towns and cities] of each of the 23 provinces, people are suffering from the pandemic as well as hunger. There are increased numbers of street vendors in the main cities of the country. Innocent people are in danger of losing their livelihoods and their own money, bags and or other properties because the street vendors cut their bags off them. When the victims start screaming or talking back loudly, they can become dead bodies on the ground. This is mostly done to women and girls. It is very sad and I feel ashamed to share all this, but I feel ‘mercying’ is at risk and a challenge at this point in my country.

I would like to share two sad stories which happened last month (April) on our street in Mt Hagen town. I was full of sadness and I felt sorry but I was unable to reach out in action. The other day at 6am at our front gate (the Sisters’ house) a young man was cut with a knife and died at the front of our house. I was at home but was too full of fear to go out of the gate. I looked out through the holes in our fence. I got angry, frustrated, sad and sorry but they were only feelings, not actions. I went out and joined the crowd after the young man’s body was taken to the hospital. Everyone was shocked and in fear for their own lives.

Again, the next day at the same place a nurse was knifed by a street vendor asking her to hand her mobile phone to him. She refused to give it to him, and she was knifed. There are cases where people who are trying to help the victims are knifed to death, so people just watch while the culprit is pulling the bags and properties off the women and girls. Then the culprits walk away with them.

The rights and freedoms of the people of Papua New Guinea are being deprived by poor government services that are called to protect the citizens of their nation. There were no police at the scene to investigate these very serious situations.

I feel very challenged in what to do. The police won't help and so nobody else will when vendors are carrying knives around the towns. We all feel unsafe.

So, the pandemic has increased the rates of crime and hunger in most towns of our country. 'Mercying' is a present word of action but in such situations, I become a cocoon protected in a hard shell. 'Mercying' is at risk, and a huge challenge and often becomes only a feeling at this time of the global pandemic in Papua New Guinea.