

MERCY GLOBAL ACTION NEWSLETTER

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GREETINGS FROM THE MERCY GLOBAL ACTION OFFICE!

'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens'

Mercy Global Action COVID-19 Response Task Force is pleased to launch a new report, 'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens'. The MGA COVID-19 Response Task Force is made up of Mercy Global Action staff, Sisters, and Partners in ministry from Mercy Congregations and Institutes around the world. This document is the culmination of a process of reflection undertaken by the Task Force since May 2020. The process included collecting stories and reflecting on them in the light of our Mercy Tradition and Catholic Social Teaching. The Task Force also engaged with commentary and analysis from academia, civil society, faith-based organizations, the United Nations, and other international stakeholders.

The report offers insights into the Mercy World during this time of pandemic, linking grassroot experiences, theological reflection, and critical analysis. It reveals systemic inequalities in social, economic, political and environmental areas. It also reveals the interconnectedness of people and planet and highlights stories of extraordinary kindness and resilience throughout the Mercy World. The document invites collaboration and recommends actions to individuals, Church communities, civil society partners and governments for more just and inclusive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The MGA COVID-19 Response Task Force envisages that this report will provide inspiration and hope to the Mercy World and beyond. The report offers opportunities to engage in the text and acts as a tool for further action and advocacy. We invite you to be guided by our reflection process to bring the report to life, and to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and response to this global pandemic through webinars, workshops, reading groups and other forums.

'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens' - Issue Spotlight - Physical and Mental Health

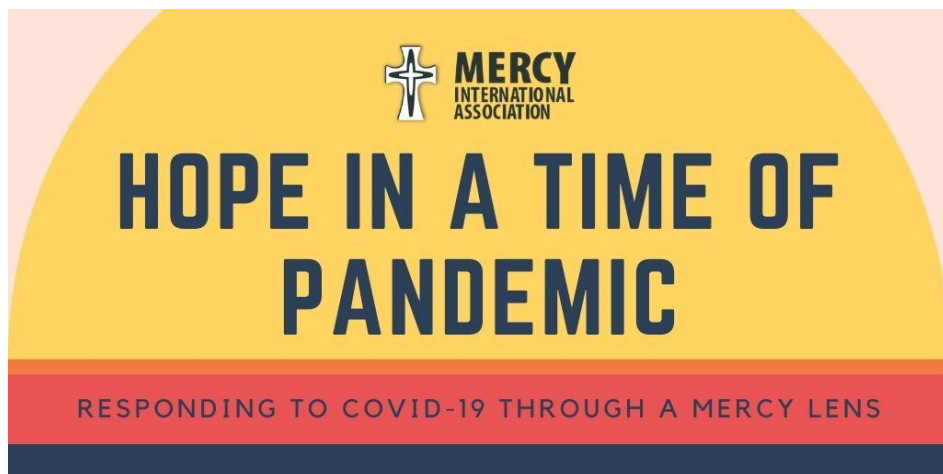
The first of many issue spotlight articles from MGA's new report focuses on Physical and Mental health.

What has been revealed in terms of physical and mental health:

- **Unjust, weak healthcare systems** - MGA's report exposes the weaknesses and lack of resilience in healthcare systems across the Mercy World. The capacities to cope with the alarming scale of infection in low- and middle- income countries are frighteningly poor and do not expand to those in marginalised groups. Globally, those in disadvantaged communities have less access to clean water, sanitation, and quality healthcare due to pre-existing systemic health inequalities.
- **A mental health crisis** - MGA's new report highlights that it is not only the health care facilities which are becoming overwhelmed but those working on the frontlines too. The Mercy World will continue to value the leadership, hard work and efforts of those on the frontline and to urge for improvements in monitoring their well-being going forward. The pandemic has "exacerbated the failures of the status quo in mental health care". People around the Mercy World continue to respond with compassion and kindness to this crisis, and to advocate for health systems that care for people's mental and physical health.

Click [here](#) to access the complete article and learn more about our call to action.

Spread the Word across your own social media platforms by sharing our [infographic](#).





THEMATIC AREAS

DEGRADATION OF EARTH

‘Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens’

Issue Spotlight - The Sacredness of Earth

The ‘Season of Creation,’ as declared by the World Council of Churches, provides an opportunity for us as Christians to ‘renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together...and to join in prayer and action for our common home’. Since the beginning of this pandemic, the Mercy World has expressed a renewed focus on Creation and the Sacredness of Earth. We have opened our minds and hearts to new relationships with nature that favour mutuality and sustainability over exploitation. Earth can regenerate itself. The Mercy World is recognising the value of stepping back from the many activities that so often distract us from the sacred.

What has been revealed in terms of the Sacredness of Earth?

1. A stillness and openness to the Sacredness of Creation.

In MIA’s recent publication, ‘Hope in a Time of Pandemic – Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens’, we hear that one impact of the ‘stay at home’ orders and social distancing, has been a stillness and openness to the Sacredness of Creation. A Mercy sister from Ireland reflects:

“This is a Kairos moment when we need more than ever to trust in the gracious love present throughout the Universe. Perhaps this is best experienced through the natural world, now liberated from carbon emissions, vehicular noise; hustle and bustle.”

Likewise, a Mercy partner and Indigenous Activist from Peru states: “This pandemic is an opportunity, a challenge, and a warning – to stop what we have been doing...to find real answers...It is causing us to slow down in many ways in order to listen to the inner, not the outer voice. This Pandemic is causing us to slow down to Mother Earth based pace, so that we can hear what she is saying.”

2. Human Actions have disturbed the balance of Earth’s eco-systems.

COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, which means that the virus was transferred from animals to humans. Another zoonotic disease is bird flu. Scientists have suggested that the increase in this type of disease can be attributed in part to climate change and environmental changes due to human action. This is a startling reality - that we as humans have contributed to the emergence of this pandemic due to our actions, which have disturbed the balance of our ecosystems. Such actions can be witnessed through the activities of extractive industries who “remove a natural resource from its natural surroundings for industrial purposes without provision for their renewal in a social, economically, or environmentally viable timeframe.”

[A/HRC/21/48.(2012)]

Over the years, the Mercy World has tried to raise awareness and influence public policy in relation to extractive industries. We recognise that it is better to leave fossil fuels in the ground.

(continued on page 4)

An earlier report produced by the UN NGO Mining Working Group, of which MGA is a member, highlights a rights based approach to resource extraction in the pursuit of sustainable development. This report, along with a Water Justice Guide have sought to advocate for the rights of water and of Earth.

3. The need for Global Contemplation and an Integral Ecology

In addition to these advocacy steps for a sustainable future, COVID-19 has provided the opportunity for the Mercy World to step back from the many activities that so often distract us. A Mercy Sister from Guyana makes the following call:


“A global pandemic can only be countered by a response that is grounded in global contemplation. Among the fruits of our global contemplation are wisdom, energy, new directions, new language, courage and new hope.”

This speaks of an integral ecology, one in which we recognise our interdependence with all of creation. We are all called to ecological conversion as articulated by Pope Francis in his social encyclical Laudato Si'. In his address for the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in 2016, Pope Francis states;

“As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our Common Home calls for a ‘grateful contemplation of God’s world (LS 214) which ‘allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us’ (LS 85). As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires ‘simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness and ‘makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. (LS 230-31)’”

What are we being called to?

- **Advocate for the integrity and unity of all earth systems and the reduction of fossil fuel consumption** in light of the lessons learned during lockdown.
- **Commit to an Integral Ecology** in which we care for our Common Home
- **Recognise** this time as an opportunity for regeneration.
- **Promote resilience** and a resolve not to return to ‘normal’.
- **Spread the word** across your own social media platforms by sharing 'Hope in A time of Pandemic' and MIA Global Action's infographic on COVID-19 and the Sacredness of Earth.


HOPE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC
RESPONDING TO COVID-19 THROUGH A HOLISTIC LENS

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: SACREDNESS OF EARTH

COVID-19 presents us with the opportunity to recognise our vital relationship with Earth; prioritise the health and stability of Earth; promote sustainability and green economic transformation; and prevent the emergence of new infectious diseases

A STILLNESS AND OPENNESS TO THE SACREDNESS OF CREATION

The pandemic has offered us a chance to:

- Stop and appreciate the presence of God;
- Revise our lifestyle;
- Reflect on the importance of our relationships with one another and with the planet;
- Be reminded of traditional knowledge and wisdom about the land and water, and our relationship with them.

HUMAN ACTIONS HAVE DISTURBED THE BALANCE OF EARTH'S ECOSYSTEMS

- Unsustainable Agriculture Practices
- Extractive Industries
- Urbanisation and Overcrowding
- Land Degradation
- Pollution
- War
- Industrialisation of animal production

INCREASE HEALTH RISKS FOR HUMANS AND ECOSYSTEMS

"WE BELONG TO ONE ANOTHER... WE ARE DISCOVERING THAT OUR INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS DO HAVE CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBAL PROPORTION"

THE NEED FOR GLOBAL CONTEMPLATION AND AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

- People, creatures and resources are all integrally connected - the way in which we relate to the Earth is a test of the way we relate with one another and with God

"AS A CORPORAL WORK OF MERCY, CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME REQUIRES 'SIMPLE DAILY GESTURES WHICH BREAK WITH THE LOGIC OF VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND SELFISHNESS AND MAKES ITSELF FELT IN EVERY ACTION THAT SEEKS TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD.'" - POPE FRANCIS

CALL TO ACTION

- Advocate for the integrity and unity of all Earth systems and the reduction of fossil fuel consumption in light of the lessons learned during lockdown.
- Commit to an Integral Ecology in which we care for our Common Home
- Recognise this time as an opportunity for regeneration.
- Promote resilience and a resolve not to return to 'normal'.





THEMATIC AREAS

DISPLACEMENT OF PERSONS

'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens '

Issue Spotlight - Human Mobility

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought most of the world to a stand-still and has fundamentally changed global human mobility. Governments around the world have introduced measures to “flatten the curve” of infections including travel restrictions, border closures, the suspension of labor migration and the slowing of migration processing and assistance to asylum seekers.

While the COVID-19 virus knows no borders or immigration status, the impacts of the pandemic have highlighted the systemic inequalities that persist in our society. This is particularly true for many people on the move: migrants in irregular situations; migrant workers; victims of trafficking in persons; internally-displaced persons; refugees and asylum-seekers.

What has been revealed in terms of human mobility:

1. Exclusion from social protection systems and vulnerability to socio-economic shocks

Around the Mercy World, exclusion from social protection systems has negatively impacted many migrants' ability to take preventive measures against COVID-19 and to receive medical care if they contract the virus. Undocumented migrants are particularly affected because they may be reluctant to enter medical facilities or other public services for fear of being reported to immigration authorities.

Migrants are among the hardest hit by reduced incomes, increasing unemployment, increasing expenses and price hikes for basic commodities. The pandemic's socio-economic consequences are affecting, in particular, those migrant workers and refugees in the low-wage, informal economy who are excluded from decent work and social protection measures. Migrant workers were among the first to be affected by lay-offs and lockdowns that closed businesses. In many countries, migrants are ineligible for government-provided unemployment benefits, welfare or stimulus programs. Layoffs could also trigger the expiration of visa or work permits, forcing migrants into undocumented or irregular status or to return to their home countries.

A Mercy Sister from Peru shared in the report: *“Migrants are the most vulnerable population during this pandemic. What a paradox life is. They left fleeing hunger and misery and now a virus, minuscule in size... The most painful thing is to see families with their small children, walking for days without access to a hot meal, eating only soft drinks, water and cookies. Frequently they tell us, ‘We haven’t had hot food in over a week.’ A nine-year old little girl said, ‘I haven’t had a shower for a month.’”*

2. Migrant workers are the backbone of our economies

Migrant workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic run many critical sectors, including our healthcare systems, our food production and distribution, and our care economies. Loss of livelihoods for migrant workers not only weakens these sectors and negatively impacts the lives of migrant families in their countries of destination, but also their families in their countries of origin. The World Bank estimates that in 2020, remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are expected to drop by around 20 percent, crippling the economic lifeline to migrant families and communities.

(Continued on page 6)



While many have lost their employment and their livelihoods, other migrant workers have been deemed “essential workers,” putting their health at risk. Because of their vital work, these workers, especially informal and undocumented workers who lack basic labor protections, are exposed to higher risks of contracting the virus. Frontline workers have been celebrated as heroes during the pandemic, but their work has always been essential - they are the backbone of our societies and economies. The COVID-19 pandemic offers opportunities to evaluate the positive contributions of people in these essential jobs and to adequately value their work.

3. A new opportunity to shape migration policy

Across the world, people on the move and their families have experienced policies and public discourse, including rhetoric from politicians, that seek to keep the virus—and especially the people who carry it—away from “us.” We can expect even more of an “us first” approach in politics: “our” vaccines, “our” PPE, “our” health, “our” borders, “our” people first. This betrays the fact that the COVID-19 virus does not discriminate based on nationality and does not care about political borders. The report calls on governments to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Migration. The pandemic offers governments an opportunity to regularize the status of irregular migrants and expand regular pathways for migrants in low-wage and informal employment, acknowledging the contributions of migrants and refugees to economic prosperity and ensuring they are included in public health strategies and social protection systems.

In the face of the pandemic, rhetoric must change from discrimination to solidarity. Around the Mercy World we need a conversation about the future of our economies and societies so that care workers, fruit pickers, nurses and all people on the move are recognized and valued for the contribution they make regardless of their country of origin or ethnicity. Together we can advocate for policies that actively counter xenophobia and discrimination and measures that facilitate migrants’ access to labor markets, social protection and basic services.

What are we being called to?

- **Advocate for human rights-based migration policies and for inclusive, non-discriminatory policies for COVID-19 response and recovery**, ensuring migrants and refugees are protected, and that their contributions are valued.
- **Share gratitude for essential workers now and beyond the pandemic.**
- **Combat xenophobia and misinformation** about the spread of COVID-19 online and in conversations with family and friends.
- **Spread the word** across your own social media platforms by sharing ‘[Hope in a Time of Pandemic](#)’ and MIA Global Action’s [infographic](#) on COVID-19 and Human Mobility on social media. Please engage with us on Twitter @MIAGlobalAction and @MercyWorldwide.

At the United Nations **THROUGH OUR ECOSOC EYES...**

As the United Nations turns 75, the global community reflects, recommits and looks for revitalization

The United Nations will be commemorating its 75th anniversary on 21 September, the International Day of Peace. Official ceremonies will take place mostly online and include remarks by UN officials and world leaders from UN Member States. Amid the ongoing global pandemic, governments agreed not to plan international travel for Heads of State or organize large events at UN Headquarters. The one-day, high-level meeting and the general debate of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), which begins on 22 September, will center around the theme 'The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism - confronting COVID-19 through effective multilateral action.' Leaders will adopt a "Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations" negotiated in advance and agreed in July 2020. The text contains 12 commitments, stating "we will":

- Leave no one behind;
- Protect our planet;
- Promote peace and prevent conflicts;
- Abide by international law and ensure justice;
- Place women and girls at the center;
- Build trust;
- Improve digital cooperation;
- Upgrade the United Nations;
- Ensure sustainable financing;
- Boost partnerships;
- Listen to and work with youth;
- Be prepared.



The UN is marking its 75th anniversary at a time of great disruption and inequalities, with profound health, economic and social impacts for people around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic is an urgent reminder of the need for international cooperation. The global response will determine how fast the world recovers, whether we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and how well we handle pressing challenges: from the climate crisis to inequalities, new forms of violence, and rapid changes in technology and demographics. These global challenges require global solutions, but just when we need collective action more than ever, support for international cooperation has been weakening. In many countries, public trust in traditional institutions is in decline and relations between countries have been under strain.

This commemoration invites Member States, civil society, and people around the world to reflect on the progress the international community has made since World War II in areas such as human rights, conflict prevention, climate action and sustainable development, as well as the future of multilateralism and what needs to change in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Will we emerge stronger and better equipped to work together? Or will distrust and isolation grow further? What are our priorities as a human family, and how we can build a better future for all?



You can participate in this process of reflection and help inform the UN's global priorities by taking the United Nations' UN75 One Minute Survey.

Over the past year, civil society organizations have come together to generate support for a process of stocktaking and strengthening of the UN system. Civil society dialogues and consultations around the world have emphasized people-centred multilateralism and advocated for opportunities to revitalize the UN. Civil society representatives from 75 countries around the world joined the 14-15 May People's Forum, which launched the UN75 People's Declaration and Plan for Global Action, entitled "Humanity at a Crossroads: Global Solutions for Global Challenges." This document reflects the principles and values of stronger international cooperation, human solidarity and global citizenship. The Declaration also proposes a 'Call for Global Action' and an annex of proposed reform proposals.

Individuals and organizations are invited to endorse the UN75 People's Declaration and Plan for Global Action between now and 21 September.

At the UN's 75th anniversary, it is clear that we must start shaping our post-COVID-19 world now, and must accelerate action towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Attempts at meaningful reform have not failed due to an absence of good ideas, rather, these ideas are never allowed to succeed due to an absence of political will and implementation. We must work towards a more effective global system, by giving "we the peoples" a more meaningful role in decision-making and helping to create the conditions required for the transformation we need, including strengthened participation of civil society, increased accountability, and bold and committed leadership. Together we can make the future of the UN more inclusive, open, fair and responsive to the needs of people and planet.

HAVE YOUR SAY. SHAPE YOUR FUTURE.

International Literacy Day

By Amy Thomas (MELF 2019-2020)

Are you able to estimate how much reading you did today? For me, I read and responded to over 120 emails at work today. I then read my calendar and wrote out my to-do list for the week. I looked up about 20 phone numbers that I needed to reach out to- so I called all of those groups and made follow-up notes about how to respond to them in the coming weeks as well. This was just one day in my life at work. Some days I may do a little more, or possibly a little less. But the reality is, none of the work I did today would have been able to be accomplished very well without the education I received over many years of schooling. I was fortunate to take classes at a young age to help me learn to not only read- but to enjoy it. I even had the chance to take a class to learn “Accelerated Reading”, which means that I can look at a paragraph and typically understand the main point without having to even read the whole thing. It is a privilege that I have, that I often don’t dwell on all that much. But in reality, it is an incredible gift that I have been given- and it is extremely important that I have had this opportunity to learn to read and also to enjoy it.



On September 8th, we will be celebrating International Literacy Day. According to UNESCO, “Globally, 773 million adults and young people lack basic literacy skills, and more than 617 million children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading.” As someone who has worked with youth for over 10 years now, I have been seeing students go through “Summer Slide” every single year. This means that the gains that were made during a school year, fall back during those summer months when students are on a break. As could be expected, the recent Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated this problem even more. With schools shutting down in more than 190 countries during this crisis, this has disrupted the education of 91% of the world’s student population. Students that were already falling behind in their reading proficiency are continuing to fall back further again.



The question I have been asking is, what can be done about this? Part of my work involves matching students with volunteers in the community that can assist in their academic development. Each day I receive more names of students who need a tutor or someone to read with. I would urge you, if you have an hour each week, to reach out to local organizations in your community. There is bound to be an organization that is looking for volunteers to instill in students a love of reading. However, the reality is, this need is not only based in time, it is also heavily tied to financial realities. So many organizations would love to bring on volunteers, and the people are there ready to assist. However, our non-profits and school systems often require that volunteers undergo thorough background checks for the safety of each student. This is critical, and unfortunately due to many of the financial pitfalls that the coronavirus has brought, many organizations cannot afford to pay for the background checks of each person that would like to volunteer. For example, where I work, a thorough background check may cost \$75 USD, and that is not money that is readily available at most organizations.

So here is our call to action- there are so many ways to be of support during this time:

- **Reach out to a group in your area that may need volunteers to read with students over virtual platforms such as Zoom or Skype.** Recognize however, that there may be a financial cost involved with your time, as the organization may not be able to afford to do background checks on volunteers at this time. If you are able to cover that cost, assume that it is needed.
- **Reach out to people in your neighborhood.** There may be families nearby that could use help with reading to their children for an hour or two each week. With families returning to work, and many students completing school-work online, the need for online tutors is high. And parents want someone they can trust to really assist in this time. If you are a trusted neighbor, you are likely needed.
- **Look for books that you can donate to organizations that work with youth.** I remember growing up reading “Amelia Bedelia”, “Nancy Drew”, and “Twilight”- but it is important to note that the books I read focused on female characters that matched my personal reality. Many non-profits would love to have books that are written by people of color, as young students deserve to read and see characters that look like them. If you are looking for help finding books that would be beneficial in this area, reach out to a local bookstore- they absolutely need your business more than ever at this time.

The key word here is need. You are absolutely needed. The fact that you can read this very small section of your email, shows that you have a capacity that many do not have. And that is what I come back to- I finished my day at work with all those emails. I came home to respond to emails on my personal account, and to read the physical mail that came through the post. I read the recipe for my dinner, to ensure that I made it correctly. And I read the texts that came through my phone. To end my night, I read a few chapters of a book that will help me decompress.

What are you reading?

How are you reading?

Why are you reading?

Who are you reaching?

Resources:

- <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ild2020-concept-note-en.pdf>
- <https://www.epicreads.com/blog/ya-books-poc-writers/>
- https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/124900.2020_YA_MG_Books_With_POC_Leads



“USEFUL RESOURCES

'Hope in a Time of Pandemic - Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens'



HOPE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

RESPONDING TO COVID-19 THROUGH A MERCY LENS

Webinars with Season of Creation



SEASON OF CREATION

Pax Christi International - 'Between COVID-19 and Extractivist Policies: Impacts, challenges and alternatives to resisting communities in Latin America and the Caribbean'



UN Environment Programme and The Ocean Agency - #GlowingGone Campaign



UPCOMING EVENTS AND INTERNATIONAL DAYS

- 8 September - International Literacy Day
- 9 September - International Day to Protect Education from Attack
- 16 September - International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer
- 17 September - World Patient Safety Day
- 18 September - International Equal Pay Day
- 21 September - International Day of Peace
- 24 September - Mercy Day
- 26 September - International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
- 29 September - International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste
- 2 October - International Day of Non-Violence
- 5 October - World Habitat Day
- 10 October - World Mental Health Day

Mercy International Association (MIA) maintains a comprehensive and up to date website and produces an informative weekly e-newsletter (MercyNews).

Visit our website to discover more about MIA and our global activities: www.mercyworld.org

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