



Mercy Global Action: New Foundations in Mercy

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The thread of Mercy through history stitches together accounts of sisters traveling to new lands to serve new peoples in totally new ways. But today's invitation to new foundations in a post-pandemic world likely requires no long-distance passage. The journey begins with opening our eyes, minds and hearts to what is happening around us.

We entered the year 2020 with varying levels of understanding about entrenched interests, embedded injustices and violence of all shapes and forms buffeting people who are poor, immigrants, marginalized women and Earth herself.

Then the coronavirus pandemic laid bare all the inequities that only the willfully ignorant and blind can fail to see. Poor air quality and lack of healthcare put some people at greater risk for dying from covid-19 than others. Violent enforcement of stay-at-home orders most threaten poor families who need to go search for food or face starvation. Some of us obsessively wash our hands throughout the day while others don't have access to clean water. Some of us continue earning an income in home offices; others lost jobs and wages or hold onto high-risk jobs in health care and food production plants. Mining and other extractive industries are deemed essential services and continue operating despite pleas of indigenous communities fearing the influx of workers bearing disease. And the list could go on.

At this point in the journey, we can look back at where we've come from and do the best we can to minister to the people most tossed about by the pandemic storm. We're feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, attending to the sick and advocating for more compassionate government responses for the most marginalized among us. Just as we've always done.

At the same time, we can hear voices inviting us to something new beyond this present moment, on the other side of the pandemic. Voices that refuse to accept that the only route is a return to the old "normal" that left too many destitute and exploited and Earth herself degraded. Voices that insist we push forward to shape a more just and environmentally sustainable world.

"The crises of the Covid-19 pandemic are rooted in human and systemic sickness," several international Christian organizations, including the World Council of Churches, wrote in a statement. "{We} call upon the Christian community, governments, and international financial institutions to responsible action that addresses the root causes of the crises that are now exposed before the world."

This requires imagination and relationships – relationships with young people crying out for climate justice, with racial and ethnic minorities seeking equity, with indigenous peoples seeking protection of their land and way of life, with immigrants seeking rights and dignity. It requires casting aside old thinking grounded in slavery, suspicion of newcomers, considering natural resources as objects for exploitation.

Mercy International Association has established a COVID-19 Response Task Force to explore these challenges and opportunities. And it is not alone.

The Vatican's COVID-19 Commission is developing new approaches to ecology, economics, healthcare and security during the pandemic crisis and beyond. Suggested actions include strengthening calls for a global ceasefire, advocating for a guaranteed income to minimize social disparities, and putting the climate and nature at the center of post-pandemic reconstruction.

Hundreds of organizations around the world have signed onto the environmental organization 350.org's principles for a "just recovery." The principles include prioritizing health care for everyone, directing economic relief to communities and workers not corporations, and building resilience for future crises like climate change.

Dozens of faith groups in the United States, including about 130 Catholic religious orders and other organizations, signed a letter to Congress calling for rebuilding the economy with investments in clean energy industries and job training. They also advocated for investments in public transportation and clean-water infrastructure, improved air pollution standards and oversight, and redirecting some of the excessive US military budget to foreign assistance.

As we consider Mercy's role in shaping that new world beyond the coronavirus pandemic, the Prophetic Voice Commission of the sisters and associates of the Caribbean, Central and South America within the Institute of the Americas offers some words to guide us.

"Let us release our creativity to organize ourselves, support one another and continue walking with our people. Changing inside out can stop the resurgence of this authoritarian, inhuman and biocidal global system," they wrote in a letter that opened with an analysis of the current crisis. "It is a time of asking ourselves questions to break the rules of normalcy and cleaning our minds and hearts; it is a time of love and solidarity."