

Regional Gatherings
Reuniones regionales

May 25-27, 2021
del 25 al 27 de mayo

Mercy Global Presence ~ Regional Gatherings in Pentecost Week 2021

From 25 May 2021 to 27 May 2021, Sisters of Mercy, Associates, and partners in Mercy met in regional gatherings to reflect on the first two themes of the last segment of the Mercy Global Presence process. The themes were “Contemplative Seeing” and “A Compassionate Heart.” One hundred and eighty participants from twelve countries (Australia, Canada, the United States, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Aotearoa New Zealand, Peru, Argentina, Cambodia, Guam, and South Africa) participated in the last set of regional gatherings for the process.

This segment of the MGP process is centering on “integration.” It is grounded in the belief that braiding texts, distinct voices, different genres, and other art forms with ecological worldviews (Indigenous, scientific, and religious) can create new understanding and deepening wisdoms about the world and our place in it. The first three segments of the MGP process began that braiding which continues now through the four new themes of the fourth segment. The three regional gatherings were a living experience of the braiding of diverse voices and writings and art into new images of God, new language, new theologies, and a renewed spirituality bringing us closer to the new weaving of mercy for the second decade of this twenty-first century.

While it is impossible to capture the depth and breadth of the reflections across the three meetings, six images reflect some of the fruits of the energizing conversations:

The mirror – the lines from Laretta Rivera-Williams’ poem, “If I were a mirror,” spoke to the desire in every person of Mercy who seeks to reflect the compassionate heart of God in all our relationships – with God, with Earth and Earth beings, and with other humans. There was a renewed sense of being made in the image of God and of Jesus the Christ who so often in the Gospels “was filled with compassion.”

The krama – Denise Coughlan rsm who ministers in Cambodia shared with the group the image of the Cambodian krama which she saw as mirroring Catherine’s shawl (shown in the poignant statue of Catherine at All Hallows’ School in Brisbane. The krama is a traditional and modern Cambodian garment which has many uses (a towel, a scarf, a face covering, a blanket, a wrap to hold a baby). It is worn by women, men, and children. Catherine’s shawl is a metaphor for mercy wrapped around, bringing comfort and warmth, bringing peace and justice, bringing compassion and daring. It is worn by all, it is shared by all, it is needed by all.

The crack in everything – the verse from Leonard Cohen’s poem “Anthem” gave comfort to many of the participants, “Ring out the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That’s how the light gets in.” As we become more aware of our fragility and vulnerability globally with the pandemic, communally with the decreasing numbers and increasing age of Sisters of Mercy, and personally, there is solace in knowing that the light can only come through the cracks! We must allow our wounds to let the light in.

The eyes mirroring our past and present – the image in the centre of the “Contemplative Seeing” poster (painted by Ma. Victoria Pederanga) drew much attention and gave much hope. The heart-shaped face of the woman with the image of Catherine McAuley reflected in one eye and the child with the mask in the other eye spoke profoundly to every participant. The words accompanying the painting were “Looking through the eyes of love – embrace with Mercy and Hope.” Participants marveled at how the artist can say so much with a few strokes of the brush or words of the pen. The call was to see with the eyes of the heart.

The heartbeat of God – many were drawn to the questions posed in the reflective prayer prepared by Sandra Lupi rsm, “how do we hear God’s heartbeat?” The very invitation to listen to God’s heartbeat is gift – to listen to God’s heartbeat in the universe, in Earth, and in persons with whom we share this life’s journey. Contemplation and action come together in this image of intimacy.

Whispers becoming a chorus – these words from Julia Morisi’s essay reminded all participants that the pandemic of kindness can outweigh the present COVID-19 pandemic scouring our world. It highlighted the inspiration that each one can give the other, no matter what our age or role or personal circumstances.

In the three conversations, reference was made to every single image and every single quotation. Participants also delighted in the ways in which the images and words together created two works of art that themselves added depth to the themes. They expressed deep gratitude to Anne Walsh and Clare Locke for creating the posters which resonated with their thinking and, at the same time, called them to new ways of seeing and being mercy.

And, in several ways, there were expressions of hope and joy that Earth is finally one who is present with us in all our reflections. We no longer speak about Earth as object; she has become one with us, sharing with us the heartbeat of God.

Even though there are two more themes to complete (“Mercying” and “Creating Circles and a Culture of Mercy”), this was the last of the regional gatherings. Deep gratitude was expressed for the overall Mercy Global Presence process. The gratitude was complemented by a plea not to lose the global connections that this MGP process has allowed and, even more, encouraged. Participants rejoiced in the opportunities given to connect right across the globe, across so many Mercy communities and ministries, across so many cultures and lived experiences.

It was fitting that the regional gatherings were held just days after Pentecost Sunday. In each of the gathering prayers beginning the conversation, the words from the prophet Joel (2:28-32) said by Peter at his homily on the first Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18) were proclaimed:

I will pour out my Spirit on everyone.
Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message.
Your young ones will see visions and your old ones will have dreams.
Yes, even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in these days.

For the participants, the three regional gatherings were times for sacred conversations, for prophesying, and for truly global contemplation. Now that we have seen what is possible in connections across countries, congregations and institutes, languages, and cultures, we cannot go back. Mercy International Association must build on this process to ensure that we grow in our braiding of the new garment of Mercy for our time, for Earth, and for all Earth beings.

- Mercy Global Presence Guiding Team
(Elizabeth Davis rsm, Berneice Loch rsm, Anne Walsh)