

# Introduction: Presence in Ministry and Community

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In October 2020, we continued the third Segment of Mercy Global Presence in month two, centering our hearts and minds on “presence to Earth.” The wisdoms were richly diverse, varied, and profound. In my Introduction, I focused on four themes: creation, covenant, care for Earth and God’s steadfast love, and Earth’s response. I reflected the special perspective of the Indigenous peoples who, while diverse in their lifestyles, in their cultures and in their spiritualities, all hold in common their interconnectedness with Earth. The theologian, Mary Tinney rsm, noted that “we are present in community, alongside other creatures, with whom we have more in common than what differentiates us, and from that stance we are present in community with the living and loving God, and impelled to act ethically for the whole community.” She added, “It is timely to open our senses and our hearts and be present to Earth in her grandeur and her groaning.” The artist Carmel Bracken rsm gave us a profound poem entitled “A 2020 Vision” with excerpts below:

NOW is our jump time.  
As we emerge from this strangely surreal time  
The quality of our presence to earth  
May well determine whether we earthlings  
Make it through this jump time.  
May we learn to communicate with  
The consciousness of Earth  
And all sentient beings.  
Truly sensing that we are cosmic stuff  
embedded in the ecology  
of the Whole  
Thus becoming a gateway  
for the presencing of the Whole  
allowing the fire of creation to burn  
and enter the world through us  
Enabling the next step of evolution.

The grassroots minister, Michael Gross, used images, poetry and reflective words, delighting us as he told us: “A wonderfully exciting time for a biologist, specifically a plant ecologist like me, who needs to be outside. At 40 degrees North Latitude and 75 degrees West Longitude, Earth ‘creatures’ are re-awakening and new lives are emerging at an ever-increasing rate each day. Those of us who were trained to observe the world around us can’t bear to be inside, away from our DNA kin. . . I invite readers to think about how Earth has been present to them, and they to Earth, and how they can have more mutually beneficial experiences with ‘Earth.’”

From Mercy Global Action, Colleen Swain found hope for this pandemic time by learnings gleaned from wildfires. “During wildfires, despite mass devastation to life, nutrients from the dead trees are returned to the soil. This exposes the forest floor to more sunlight and allows seedlings that have been released by the fire to sprout and grow, a process known to scientists as ecological

succession. What I didn't realize was how relevant the wildfires and this transformation were in shaping my own ecological succession, and ultimately, my presence to Earth during the COVID-19 pandemic. . . This is our call. To be present to Earth and be reborn from the ashes in ways that are inclusive and ensure the flourishing of Earth.

Dominique Marendy was this month's distinct voice. She spoke about the rising concerns for compassion fatigue, "a condition described as emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a reduced ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring. It is sometimes referred to as secondary traumatic stress. While there are many plights that can cause us unrest one of the most common is the call to protect the earth." She gave us tips to help us cope, reminding us that reducing compassion fatigue means we have more energy to give to the causes we care about and stay present.

Judith Moroney rsm, Paula Anamani rsm, and Cheryl Connelly rsm shared with us an absolutely beautiful reflective prayer. They used music, images of their beloved New Zealand Earth and Earth creatures, poetry, intercessions, and quotations. They invited us to hear the sound of the Conch Shell, a call for us to be still and attend to the Presence of Earth within and around us. *Good Reading* continued this reflective stillness with videos, poetry, blessings, Earth meditations, and interviews with two loved poets, Mary Oliver and John O'Donohue.

### **Presence in Community and Ministry**

We now begin month three with "presence in community and in ministry." Our wisdom gained from our first two themes – presence to and with God and presence to Earth – will be a firm foundation on which to hear this month's voices.

My good friend Bishop Geoff Peddle, from the Anglican Church of Canada tradition, was to be the theological voice this month. Sadly, he died suddenly last month, leaving a deeply grieving wife and two sons as well as his Diocesan community and his many friends. He worked closely with the Sisters of Mercy in St. John's NL. He was a participant in our Mercy International Reflection Process, never missing one session over the whole year in 2016. He attended the Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy in 2017. He wrote a chapter in the special edition of MAST, focused on "Cosmology and Mercy." He invited me to speak at his Conference on *Faith in the Public Square*. I have lost a friend. Our province and our country have lost a faith-filled, wise, visionary, and energizing leader. We are blessed to have known him.

I have written the theological reflection in his stead and, therefore, will not comment further here in my Introduction. I am certain that I could never express the depth of wisdom, experience, and knowledge that Bishop Peddle held and shared so richly in his writing and in his preaching. His constant cry was, "The church has left the building. We must live our faith in the public square." May he rest now for all eternity in the joy and peace of the Risen One whom he loved and served with all his heart.