



Mercy Responses to the call to “care for Our Common Home”

While participating in a Global Catholic Climate Movement meeting in Assisi earlier this year, I became totally smitten with a piece of artwork in a shop that had each of the stanzas of Saint Francis’ Canticle of the Creatures portrayed on a painted tile. Together, the tiles form a beautiful representation of the prayer that inspired the title of Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*.

Now we have a modern day version of this prayerful attentiveness to all of God’s creation, in the pope’s Prayer for Earth that concludes the encyclical. His prayer is both a hymn of praise and an invitation to transformation in a world so in need of justice and mercy. It seems a fitting framework for looking at just some of the ways that Mercy around the world has responded to the call to “care for Our Common Home” since the encyclical’s release two years ago.

***“All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.”***

Just as Francis of Assisi poetically praised Brother and Sister sun, moon and stars, wind, water and fire, Pope Francis opens his prayer with homage to God’s presence in all of creation. Many participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process during the Jubilee Year of Mercy shared similar insights after analyzing issues of concern in the encyclical that particularly touched them. Among those named were the need to “live out of deep interconnection and relationship with the natural world and each other” and to “be a community which feels the pain of Earth and the cry of the Poor with a new ecological consciousness reflected in attitudes, habits, structures and actions.”

***“Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.”***

Mercys in the Institute of the Americas have joined in solidarity with indigenous peoples whose worldview of interconnectedness compels them to courageously protect their water, land and sacred dignity. These Protectors of Mother Earth are lamenting the impact of fracking and protesting the route of a pipeline near the Standing Rock tribe’s reservation in the United States. They are fighting a hydro-electric dam in Panama that would destroy the Ngäbe people’s cultural heritage, remembering Berta Caceres who was killed for defending her people’s land in Honduras, and pointing the way to a future of smaller-scale extraction of natural resources in Africa that benefits local communities and minimizes impact on Earth. Mercy has [prayed with and for them](#) as well as accompanied them in their advocacy in the halls of power in Washington, D.C.

***“Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.”***

Mercys around the world are living into ways of being that profess greater harmony with all of creation. Of particular note are the Sisters of Mercy in the Western Province in Ireland who received the Eco-Congregation Ireland Award and produced a book, [Walking Gently on Earth](#), that highlights members’ efforts in caring for Our Common Home. It traces the congregation’s journey from an evolving ecological consciousness through commitments to changes in lifestyle, intensive gardening and educational programming for primary school students, work for climate justice, and participation in the Mercy International Reflection Process. The Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, meanwhile, in November 2016 launched a [sustainability policy](#) that addresses energy use, water use, waste, transport, procurement, investment and infrastructure throughout the institute and its ministries. The policy includes a commitment to measure and monitor the impact of its sustainable living activities, education and advocacy.

***“O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.”***

Hearing Pope Francis’ call to respond to “both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor,” many participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process explored the plight of displaced persons in all forms. Sisters in England examined the needs of persons suffering from dementia; sisters in Australia and Ireland advocated against harsh policies toward asylum seekers; sisters in Newfoundland envisioned “cities and towns where homelessness is prevented, treated and resolved for all.” In New Zealand, about 500 people affiliated with Mercy, including many students from Mercy colleges, participated in a pilgrimage to parliament to call attention to homelessness.

***“Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.”***

Other reflection process participants lamented the degradation of Earth and made commitments to protect their communities against pollution and misuse of water and land. Sisters in Huarney and Puerto Eten, Peru, convened local groups that ended up confronting problems of garbage. Sisters in York, England, committed to supporting opposition to proposals for a new nuclear power station while Sisters in Australia joined opposition to fracking, or coal seam gas mining. Mercy Global Action at the United Nations, meanwhile, has been focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals and developed a [series of reflections](#) on the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources.

***“Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.”***

Pope Francis doesn’t let businesses off the hook in his call to transformation. And [Mercy Investment Services](#) (MIS), the socially responsible asset management program for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, is nudging corporations along through shareholder engagement. This year, MIS filed 11 shareholder proposals asking oil and gas companies and electric utilities to report how they are aligning

their business plans and practices with the regulatory and market changes that will be required to keep global temperature increases below the 2-degree limit set by the Paris Climate Agreement. MIS' Environmental Solutions Fund, launched in early 2015, has committed \$24 million in investments to solar and wind projects in the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa and on other environmental solutions such as recycling, waste reduction and technology.

***“Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.”***

Pope Francis recognizes the challenge of transformation in fast-paced, consumer-oriented cultures and urges us to slow down enough to contemplate our place in creation. A daily mantra, “May I live gratefully and simply today,” is guiding sisters and associates in the Mid-Atlantic Community of the Institute of the Americas after months of conversations about how to collectively respond to *Laudato Si’*. In fall 2016 they [embarked on a year-long examen](#) that so far has led them to reflect on their personal needs and wants, complicity in the global economic market, and opportunities to care for creation as consumers.

***“We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.”***

While deepening our response over the past two years to the challenges Pope Francis lays out in his encyclical, we certainly recognize the struggles ahead in the name of justice, love and peace. Yet we move into this future together, holding out the vision of a Mercy Global Presence that emerged from the thousands of participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process. In endorsing this vision, Mercy International Association’s Members and Board said earlier in June: “over the next months we will learn more about how we can become involved locally and connected globally in exploring the three dimensions of Mercy, Global and Presence.”

And all we can say to that is “Laudato Si!” or “Praised Be to You!”

Marianne Comfort
Institute of Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
E: mcomfort@sistersofmercy.org

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