

Playing it safe with the gift God has given us

Nga mihi atawhai – greetings to all in Mercy! History will be made this month, as Sisters of Mercy around the world join their voices with those of many others on October 19, observed as Global Frackdown Day. Fracking, also known as ‘hydraulic fracturing’, is the process of injecting fluid which contains sand and chemicals at high pressure into rock, in order to fracture it. The aim is to release and extract oil and gas which were previously trapped in the rock.

Sisters of Mercy are among a growing number of people who are committed to highlighting issues of ecological damage. The issue becomes more serious when environmental disasters, like BP’s massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, are seen to affect the most vulnerable peoples of the world. That disaster affected the livelihood of many people, to say nothing of wildlife devastated in sea and on beaches, marshes and wetlands.

The issue has been highlighted in New Zealand by Fonterra’s recent decision not to collect milk from any new land-farms in Taranaki. Land-farming involves spreading drilling waste on farmlands and sowing new pasture on top. In Taranaki, there are 12 landfarms, where drilling wastes from oil and gas exploration are currently being spread onto land.

Drilling waste – crushed rock, underground water, traces of oil/gas and drill lubrication substances such as clay, water and oil – is being spread on flattened coastal dune country between Patea and Hawera. The waste is then covered with topsoil and sown into dairy pasture.

Learning again to read God’s signs

E te Atua, Kaihanga o te Ao,
God, creator of our world,
in the beginning your Spirit hovered
over the formless void,
separating the dry land from the seas,
and you saw that it was good.

As creation unfolded in the fullness of time,
you placed us here to cherish and care for your gift,
cultivating and making it fruitful for the good of all.

Teach us now to grasp the rhythm and logic
of what you have made,
not to exploit or destroy just because we can,
but to preserve and enhance Earth’s life for now
and for generations still to come.

May we walk more lightly on our Earth,
guarding its fragile resources when we are unsure
by policies of precaution that limit our impact,
so that in your mercy Papatuanuku may continue
to bless our world with abundance. Amen.

*This column is produced for Tiaki Manatu Sisters of Mercy
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Imaging Mercy Today



Sr Bridget Crisp, inviting Mercy people to take a stand on global fracking.



But Climate Justice Taranaki researcher Catherine Cheung says that not nearly enough science is being done to prove that incorporating the drilling waste into dairy pasture is safe. “It doesn’t take much to work out that food production, especially food that commands premium prices, and industrial waste management are not mutually beneficial, and certainly not on the same piece of land.”

Ms Cheung was quoted in June by the Wanganui Chronicle as saying that consumers were not aware that they were buying milk from cows grazed on such pasture. “Consumers have a right to clean, healthy food grown on uncontaminated soil. Presently there is a lack of transparency in this whole practice.”

Underlying Climate Justice Taranaki’s concerns about disposal of drilling waste is its opposition to the oil and gas industry, because burning fossil fuels contributes to climate change. “The solutions – energy efficiency and renewable energy – are here, but they are being side-lined by our governments,” said Ms Cheung.

Sister of Mercy Bridget Crisp is coordinating the local response to the call from Mercy Global Action, with an invitation to prayer and reflection. She also suggests that New Zealanders measure their ecological footprint, using a simple website such as www.myfootprint.org and think of one simple action that would allow them to walk more lightly on the Earth, such as saving water, using less petrol or power.

She suggests that people write to the Government, insisting that mining companies list the chemicals used in fracking fluid and make that list open to public scrutiny. The Government should also place a moratorium on fracking and on land-farming, and until more research is done, insist that the precautionary principle is adopted.

She quotes Pope Francis, who in his message for World Environment Day on June 5 said that caring for creation is part of God’s project for humanity. “We have moved away from God, we no longer read God’s signs,” the pope warned. - Dennis Horton