

Our world through Mercy's ecological lens

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Vatican watchers are predicting that Pope Francis is close to issuing an encyclical letter to the whole church on care for the environment, inviting us to be more aware of climate change and its implications for the world's poor.

Commentators expect the letter to be released – possibly as soon as this month - in advance of two crucial summits on the environment. The first of these in September will see world leaders at the United Nations attempting to draft goals to battle poverty; the second will be a UN climate change conference in Paris in December.

The papal document will come hard on the heels of Pope Francis' visit in January to Tacloban, the Philippine city devastated in 2013 by typhoon Haiyan. "The pope is very aware that the consequences of climate change affect all people, but especially the poor," says Bishop Marcelo Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "This is the moral consequence, the moral imperative.

"If current trends continue, the century will witness unprecedented climate change and destruction of the ecosystem with tragic consequences."

Pope Francis himself has argued for a radical new financial and economic system to address human inequality and ecological devastation. "What dominates are the dynamics of an economy and a finance that are lacking in ethics," he told a gathering of Latin American and Asian landless peasants in October. "It is no longer man who commands, but money. Cash commands.

"The monopolising of lands, deforestation, the appropriation of water, uncontrolled agro-toxics are some of the evils that tear man from the land of his birth. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms we witness," he said.

None of this should come as a surprise to us, when people in nearby Pacific islands are now forced to leave their homes as sea levels rise, crops fail and land becomes no longer habitable. Communities in Tonga and Kiribati are among the world's first climate-change refugees, even

Beyond our planetary crucifixion

E Te Atua pōuri - God, pain-bearer:
we watch you in a world that suffers,
as your gift of life is extinguished
in forests that die, in species now extinct,
in people whose habitats can no longer
support them; in rivers, lakes and seas
where fish no longer swim or breed.

Give us hearts and minds to dream
of a world made better through our care,
where the poor are no longer victims,
and where hope is possible
because we have chosen a better way.
Let Mercy people be mid-wives of
a culture waiting to be born. Amen.

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though our own Court of Appeal last year refused to acknowledge such a status for one Kiribati family, deporting them home to an island that is fast sinking beneath the sea.

It's 12 years since author and 'geologist' Fr Jim Conlon was here from the Sophia Center in California, insisting that in fidelity to Catherine McAuley, Mercy people today need "listening hearts" that can hear the poor and voiceless. "The invitation is to awaken to the realisation that where we stand determines what we see, and that Mercy's position on this planet is to stand with the children and the poor of every species on this sacred Earth.

"We are at the door of the empty tomb," said Fr Conlon, "Easter comes through resurrection moments, whenever creativity happens and newness is born." Hope, he said, is not conviction that things will turn out well, "but a deep certainty that what we are doing makes sense and is worth doing, regardless of how it turns out.

"The need is to become hospice workers for a culture that has to die, and mid-wives for a culture waiting to be born. In the process, we must be willing to love, to do good, to be honest, and to give our best to Earth and to every species."

Our Lenten journey this month should help us to see the world through a new lens, recognising the signs of what Fr Conlon describes as "planetary crucifixion" – endangered plants and polluted rivers and beaches, as well as battered wives and neglected children. For here are the poor which Mercy must hear today. - Dennis Horton