

Right relationships – at home in our Earth

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! The topics for this year's series of Imaging Mercy Today, chosen by Mercy International Association, have been inspired by the current Year of Consecrated Life instituted by Pope Francis and due to finish on February 2 next year. New Zealanders will recognise this month's topic, *Right Relations*, as an indigenous contribution to Mercy's global mix.

It's our commitment to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi that helps us to see why building right relationships is so important. The broad sweep of whanaungatanga takes us from Te Atua, God, through nga tupuna, our ancestors, to te whenua, land, te taiao, environment and te tangata, other people. To overlook one piece in this interlocking jigsaw of family connections is to risk a major misalignment in our lives.

This interconnection between human beings and their world is a recurring theme in *Laudato Si'*, the new encyclical letter of Pope Francis, which he has sub-titled 'On Care for Our Common Home'. Human life, he says, is "grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin." (LS, 66) The challenge that faces us is to rediscover the intimate connection among all creatures, and see that "the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone". (LS, 95)

Pope Francis has done his homework well and drawn not only from other popes, from saints and wisdom writers from non-Christian traditions, but from a wide range of conferences of Catholic bishops around the world, including our own. He quotes from their Statement on Environmental Issues (NZ Bishops Conference, Sep 2006), asking what the fifth commandment (Thou shalt not kill) means "when twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive." (LS, 95)

The pope could have had Māori in mind when he writes that environmental exploitation can sometimes "undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural

A prayer for our earth

E Te Atua kaha rawa, all-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.....
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognise that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, (abridged)

Imaging Mercy Today



MARAE VISIT: Residents of Mercy Villas in Upper Hutt greet an elder during a visit to Orongomai Marae in 2008. The visit concluded a six-part series on *Treaty in Action*, led by Rangī Davis, then kaiarataki of Mercy Ministries.

identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community." The disappearance of a culture, he says, "can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal." (LS, 145)

He calls for special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. "They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed.

"For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values." (LS, 146) How's that for a resonance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, expressing Māori links and identity with te whenua?

In an online statement on what they name as their 'bi-cultural journey', the Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand say that they are committed to the Treaty through living out the mission of their baptism and the charism of Mercy in Aotearoa New Zealand. "Te Tiriti o Waitangi invites us to consider who we are as individuals and as a community of women committed to gospel values and the discipleship of equals. Committed to being a merciful presence in the world, we continue the justice-seeking tradition which promotes the beauty and richness of human diversity as a gift from God." (www.sistersofmercy.org.nz)

At the end of this month, many New Zealanders will join to participate in the 40th Wiki o te Reo Māori, helping to honour the language of this country's first people. Sisters of Mercy are being invited by their Leadership to spend the whole month of July searching for ways to increase their knowledge of and fluency in te reo Māori. Recognising te reo as one of the taonga or treasures named and protected by te Tiriti o Waitangi is a key step in building right relationships, and one which the pope who wrote *Laudato Si'* would most certainly endorse. – Dennis Horton