

MERCY'S HOPE FOR THE YEAR AHEAD - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

Charting a course for a new year is never easy, especially for one that abounds in social inequalities and political uncertainties. What will our world look like now that Donald Trump is US president? Where will our country head, with Prime Minister Bill English at the helm? In his message for World Day of Peace, celebrated on January 1 for the 50th year in succession, Pope Francis has helped to provide a sense of direction for us all, offering the Beatitudes of Jesus as a 'manual for peace-making' in a global context he describes as 'a horrifying world war being fought piecemeal.'

Some of the flashpoints he named in this global conflict come uncomfortably close to home: families experiencing hardship, domestic violence, abuse of women and children, and an environment under threat from rapacious developers. The pope praised St Therese of Lisieux for her practice of "the little way of love," urging that we should never "miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship." Francis quoted from *Laudato Si'* (230) in commending to us all the simple daily gestures "that break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness."

This year's World Day of Peace saw the launch of a new Vatican office or dicastery "for Promoting Integral Human Development". The beefed-up office combines the work of four former Vatican departments, including those for justice and peace, migrants and refugees and healthcare. Pope Francis hopes that the new dicastery will strengthen the church's efforts in support of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations at the end of 2015. "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes bringing the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development," Pope Francis declared in *Laudato Si'* (13).

The UN goals, which include ending poverty in all its forms (halving all forms of poverty by 2030), achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls, and combatting climate change and its impacts, have been endorsed by Mercy Global Action. Eight of the 17 goals have been identified by Mercy Global Action as "most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy." In the months of the coming year, as space and other priorities permit, this series will feature each of these eight goals in turn, inviting those involved in our ministries to reflect on the issue and identify ways of connecting with and pursuing it.

For the moment, it is worth recalling the commitment made in the Year of Mercy by Ngā Whāea Atawhai o Aotearoa to the goal of te whakaruruhau mo ngā iwi katoa - shelter for all. The task we have set ourselves is to care for our common home, and light from the Year of Mercy just concluded continues to shine on all we do and hope for. There is no doubt that while much has been achieved, there is still much to do.



Social Housing Minister Paula Bennett (left) with Sisters of Mercy Tui Cadigan and Katrina Fabish and Mercy aged care manager Sandra Hunt, during the Shelter for All gathering at Parliament last year. The goal of 'shelter for all' continues as a priority for Mercy and its ministries throughout the coming year.

This year began with our Children's Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft, saying that inequality is one of the biggest challenges New Zealand faces, and that it should be "ashamed, embarrassed and worried" about some of the statistics. He noted that there are between 85,000 and 90,000 under the age of 18 who are "doing it tough", while our over-65-year-olds "are some of the most advantaged in the world." There is no miracle cure for dealing with child poverty, he said, and a broad approach is needed. "The government will need to take the lead, but we can't assume they have got to solve it for New Zealand. It will involve businesses, NGOs and the whole community."

Mercy will continue to press for an end to child poverty, in this country and in all others. Human trafficking is another emerging priority, described recently as "the dark underbelly" in a country we presumed was clean and green and pure because of its isolation, but where migrant workers are being trafficked and exploited in increasing numbers. And Mercy will continue to advocate for the victims of climate change, especially in the islands of the South Pacific where rising sea levels have begun to rob people of homes and livelihoods.

So begins our new year. A full agenda, if Mercy is to keep its word of working for a future to hope in. And our inspiration will come, as it always has, from the story of Catherine McAuley and her unshakeable faith that, with God's help, she and her companions could make a difference where it mattered.

Taihoa, spare a moment.....

You are invited to end this reflection by pondering, either alone or with someone who shares your commitment to Mercy, on this question:

- *Attributed to Catherine McAuley are the three things more precious than gold which cost nothing to give – "the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of sorrows." Where, in your current practice of Mercy, is someone waiting for you to extend one of these gestures? Talk for a moment about how this might create a break, in the words of Pope Francis, "with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.*

– **Dennis Horton**

He Inoi: Prayer

Becoming the change we hope for

*E Te Atua atawhai rohekore
God of mercy without limit,
you call us at the threshold
of this new and unfolding year
to be aware of your presence in our lives.*

*Like Catherine McAuley and her companions,
make us also people of hope,
who believe that it is never too late
to set out on the path to life
as we care for our common home.*

*Persuade us to begin
not with the planet
but with where we are now.*

*Let us write a new story,
convinced that if we join
our forces and hearts,
we can start to change the world today.
Tihei mauri ora!*

Amen.