



We are all made in the image of the same God; we travel together in one and the same boat

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Sisters of Mercy have worked hard over many years to break the barriers which make some feel excluded from the table of God's plenty. They endeavour to use language that ensures all feel welcome, especially those who are poor or marginalised. So, it is a pity that the latest letter to us all from Pope Francis has a title, borrowed from St Francis of Assisi, that addresses us as *Fratelli Tutti*, brothers all. Given how much society has changed since the little Poor Man of Assisi reached out to all creatures in the 11th century, it would have been better for the pope to take a fresh look at the language he uses, and ensure that from its opening page his new letter does more clearly what he hopes – to reach the hearts and minds of all people of good will, regardless of gender or culture.



Pope Francis signs his latest letter, *Fratelli tutti*, on the tomb of St Francis at Assisi.

We are blessed in our Mercy world with a collective title that includes all of us in a word – whānau. And our task of extending whanaungatanga or kinship in every direction comes close to what Pope Francis is calling for in his remarkable letter – building a better, more just and peaceful world, with the contribution of all people and institutions.

'People are more important than ideas,' Francis writes. And that's a key insight at the heart of the pope's thinking – every human person is entitled to the same respect and dignity, because they are loved by the same God in whose image they are made.

Creating a world in which that great truth – self-evident and inalienable – can be honoured by deed as well as word is the imperative which Pope Francis sets out for us. He takes issue with unbridled free-market capitalism, reminding us that the right to private property is secondary to the overriding principle of the universal destination of the world's wealth and resources. In other words, the wealthy are not entitled to hold onto more than they need when there are others who lack essentials.

An entire chapter – 'A stranger on the road' – retells the parable of the Good Samaritan and Pope Francis invites us to decide with whom it is in the story that we identify. Love builds bridges, not walls, he insists; those who build walls end up as slaves within them. Rights have no borders, and no one can remain excluded from the good things of life simply because of where they have been born. The encyclical includes the strongest condemnation of modern warfare in any papal statement, insisting that talk of 'a just war' is no longer possible when the risks to innocent civilians are so high. Pope Francis has also declared that the death penalty is inadmissible and must be abolished worldwide. He also cautions that 'a life sentence is a secret death penalty.'

There are insights that we shall return to as time passes. But with elections concluded in our own country and another soon to be ended in the United States, perhaps the last word to ponder here is the pope's insistence on 'the miracle of kindness'. Kindness should be cultivated, writes Francis. 'Precisely because it entails esteem and respect for others, once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared. Kindness opens new paths where hostility and conflict would burn bridges.' One thinks of the instruction of Catherine McAuley that 'Sisters of Mercy should be the kindest people in the world,' and that the primary meaning of atawhai is kindness. It was the call to 'be kind' that led us through Covid-19. The pandemic has reminded us, says the pope, that 'we are a global community, all in the same boat; that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.'

Taihoa – spare a moment

Reread the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) and share with a friend how you see your Mercy ministry in terms of this story. Which of the characters in the parable does your ministry most closely resemble? How could it fit the teaching of Jesus more?