

Kairos—a moment to grieve before we act

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! While some of our key ministries are committed to providing a 24/7 level of care, the holidays that follow Christmas in New Zealand prompt overseas visitors to wonder if the nation closes down for most of January. The welcome break that many of us enjoy gives us a chance to draw breath, give thanks for the accomplishments of the past 12 months and to plan for the year ahead. But for those committed to Mercy, the break may offer a deeper purpose. Perhaps it is a chance to reflect in our hearts on what the Year of Mercy may mean, and on how the doors for which we are responsible might be opened more widely.

In [a thought-provoking essay](#), Mary Sullivan rsm, whose biography on Catherine McAuley is the definitive summary of our founder's life, suggests that our first response to the Year of Mercy needs to be a pause that allows us to weep and grieve, as we listen to the cry that comes from the poor and from our wounded world.

As Pope Francis makes clear in announcing this Jubilee of Mercy, "this is a *kairos* moment for humanity, for all created life on this planet, and so for the global Mercy family," writes Mary Sullivan. "A *kairos* moment is a crisis or turning point in history, an hour of grace, an appointed time in the purposes of God that demands specific decisions while the opportunity is still present. Either we engage now in integral ecological conversion, or further human suffering and cosmic destruction will surely lie ahead. Either we will weep now and act, or we will weep even more later."

What are some of the voices we need to hear as we pause and take stock in this moment of grace that begins this Year of Mercy? Perhaps the voice of Sister of Mercy Bridget Crisp, as she returns from the COP21 Conference in Paris, where she and four other Mercy women spoke on the urgent need to keep fossil fuels in the ground and to ban the practice of fracking, because of its potential threat to environment and society.

Pope Francis has used his message for World Day of

E Te Atua,
te Marama ki te ao nui:
God, light that illumines
our vast galaxy and beyond:
we rejoice that when you created time,
you gave all in our Earth the chance to be.

As this Year of Mercy unfolds,
be present with us in its newness.
Let your own light be the brightness
that lets us see the possibilities
that open before us.

Work in us the miracle of your grace,
opening through us te kuaha o te atawhai –
the doorway of mercy - to all who wait
in longing for your aroha and love,
in Mercy's name. Amen.

Imaging Mercy Today



WHAT Mercy threshold will you help to open this year?

Peace, which Catholics observe on January 1, to invite world leaders to focus on those "left most in need by society – especially prisoners, migrants and the unemployed." His specific requests include the abolition of the death penalty, legal residency for migrants, jobs for the unemployed and access to medical care for all.

He urges better living conditions for those detained while awaiting trial and a greater readiness to welcome migrants and to facilitate their integration. He appeals especially for those who lack labour, land and lodging. "I am thinking of the creation of dignified jobs to combat the social plague of unemployment, which affects many families and young people." We might wonder what Francis would say about a country like ours, where last month's report from the Children's Commissioner claimed that a third of New Zealand's children are living in poverty and that more than half of them will never escape it.

Or we might wonder what the pope would say about our collective reluctance, to raise a refugee quota that hasn't shifted in nearly 30 years and has actually fallen in comparison with our population growth, or to lower our rates of imprisonment in a penal system that our bishops have described as "a poison in the bloodstream of our nation," focused more on retribution than restorative justice.

And what about the almost 13,000 signatures delivered in a petition to Parliament last month, asking that this country's Land Wars of the 1800s be formally commemorated in some way? Might not this issue provide a worthy focus during our Year of Mercy, as we reflect on the conversion that could lead to a healing of wounds that have left iwi and whenua so deeply scarred? Our history is taught to ensure that Anzac Cove and Passchendaele are enshrined in the collective memory; why not Parihaka and Orakau and Gate Pa? Perhaps because the change of hearts and minds that this would take involves more imagination and daring than changing the nation's flag.

Some of Mercy's doors were opened with appropriate ceremony last month, to mark the beginning of the Holy Year. Other doors in our Mercy colleges will wait until schools reopen in February. In the meantime, we have a *kairos* moment to ask ourselves what threshold we would hope Mercy will open in the coming year, and how we might help to make this happen. – Dennis Horton