Sisters welcome call from Pope Francis for a new work of mercy

Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand are delighted to learn of the proposal by Pope Francis that ‘care for our common home’ be added to the traditional list of corporal and spiritual works of mercy. His suggestion came in his message to mark this year’s World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1.

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a “grateful contemplation of God’s world,” the pope said. As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” and “makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.”

Throughout New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga, the Sisters of Mercy and their companions in mission have long seen care for the earth as integral to their life and vision. Their commitment to preserve the integrity of creation is grounded in a theology of whanaungatanga - right relationship with God, self, others and creation.

Mercy’s ministries have often joined with other community groups to repair damage to the local environment, to restore biodiversity in urban wetlands and to promote sustainable practices among vulnerable and marginalised families. In Mercy schools, programmes that reflect a respect for Papatuanuku Mother Earth are fostered; care of gardens and grounds is a feature of many Mercy ministries.

Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa contribute actively to the work of the Mercy Global Action network with its links to the United Nations and a particular focus on ecological and environmental concerns such as climate change, the risks of fracking, the quality of our country’s water-ways and the implications of human trafficking.

We rejoice in the prayerful and practical focus which the Jubilee Year of Mercy has brought to many of our sisters and companions, especially through their active participation in the Mercy International Reflection Process. The inspiration which Pope Francis has personally provided has helped to impel us to be Mercy, as we seek to keep hope alive in our world today.

“The pope’s message for this World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation reminds us of our need for an ecological conversion,” said Katrina Fabish rsm, Congregation Leader of Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa. “He insists that we are all called to contribute to changing the course of human history, as he asks, ‘what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?’ “