

Mercy's journey to Rio+20 - ethics hold the key

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! If you're in the grounds of Parliament Building around lunchtime in the first week of this month, keep an eye out for a Rio+20 flag and a Sisters of Mercy banner, close to the statue of our famous premier Richard Seddon. The banners are being held by Sisters of Mercy, among them Katrina Fabish, a member of the Congregation's Leadership team who works to keep Mercy people in this country up to speed on Mercy Global Action and current environmental issues.

High on the list of Mercy's global priorities right now is the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Earth Summit which will be held in Rio de Janeiro next month. In the lead-up to that event, Congregation Leader Anne Campbell has written to the leaders of all our parliamentary parties, urging that our Government ensures that an ethical framework be added to the Rio+20 draft. The final document "must affirm a strong definition of sustainable development and a shared vision of ethical and spiritual values that inspire and guide cooperative action for change among all stakeholders and across all sectors," Anne Campbell wrote.

Her letter stresses that Sisters of Mercy have been in New Zealand since 1850, committed to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and have worked in Tonga and Samoa since the 1960s. "We know the vulnerability of the many island nations of the Pacific who may be forced to leave their homeland."

She notes that the current "ethical" framework guiding globalization supports limitless economic growth and short-term gain, but not sustainable development. "Despite 25 years of efforts to make development sustainable, governments of the world have failed in this commitment to progress towards a just, equitable, sustainable and peaceful future for all.

"We are greatly encouraged that within its submission, New Zealand has highlighted several areas of concern that arose from the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum in September 2011, particularly the health of the oceans on which we are all dependent."

Meanwhile, a group of Sisters of Mercy and friends gathered in Ellerslie to mark Earth Day on April 22 by making prayer flags, expressing each one's hopes and dreams for a

A Pentecost for our times

Haere mai, e te Wairua Tapu:
Come, Holy Spirit,
fill our hearts, and through us
renew the face of our Earth.

Let our starting point for sustainability
be not the problems we face
nor the burdens of our doubts,
but rather the strength of your grace
to transform the way we might live.

Strengthen our sense of hope,
not that things will turn out well,
but that what we do is worth doing
because it's the best we have to bring. Amen

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Today



EARTH DAY 2012: Bridget Crisp rsm (right) with friends at an Earth Day celebration in Auckland, with banners and prayer flags focused on a sustainable future for our Earth.

more sustainable future within the Earth. Bridget Crisp rsm, who serves on the Congregation's working group for cosmology and the environment, helped to organize the day. "At a time when 60% of New Zealand's freshwater fish species are listed as threatened or extinct, we thought of water's power to cleanse and renew: water of our birth, our baptism, water where life began at the beginning of time.

"We also prayed for the Rio+20 Summit. It seemed fitting on Earth Day to increase our awareness of what is happening behind the scenes, in the build-up to Rio in June. As the theme for Earth Day this year is 'Mobilize the Earth', we felt the need to mobilize our own consciousness into action, to ensure that the plight of the most vulnerable peoples on Earth is not forgotten, as some of the most wealthy nations talk 'development.'" Bridget Crisp reports.

"We also danced a lovely circle dance in the garden, as the tui sang in a nearby tree. This lovely Sunday afternoon was an Emmaus moment – we met Christ in our coming together, in our sharing of stories, and in our desire for a better future."

What is sustainability? The handiest definition was coined in the 1980s by the World Commission on the Environment - it's "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." That's a focus which indigenous peoples especially bring to the discussion. Which is why the voice of Māori must be heard in shaping our own nation's gift to the Rio+ 20 deliberations next month.

- Dennis Horton