Extractivism and the Call for New Models of Development

also in this issue:

Our Shining Lamps and Today’s All-Encompassing Eighth Work of Mercy

Sharing our Common Humanity: Mercy’s Work for Immigrant Rights at the United Nations
Nine-year-old Nasira Chavez stands in a playground in La Oroyo, Peru. She suffers from elevated lead levels in her blood due to pollution from an American-owned mining and processing plant. Credit: Meridith Kohut/Bloomberg via Getty Images. Read more on page 4.

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Mercy Volunteers,

“We, women of Mercy, have discovered a new relationship among us, and we pray that the bonds we formalize today will endure, will enliven us, and will serve our church and touch our world.”–from the Founding Document of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, July 20, 1991

July 20, 2018, marks the 27th year of the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas! Happy anniversary to all!

Our Institute’s Founding Document magnificently pronounces that “our bonds are rooted in God, and that we strengthen and enable one another for mission.” It reminds us that the life and work of Mercy is grounded in hope and is continuously responsive to our Gospel call that “the presence of the church is made visible in this world through our service to the poor, sick and ignorant.”

What a life-giving and vibrant call our Founding Document still sounds today as we embrace our Journey of Oneness and our Chapter 2017 Recommitment to act as one enlivened community to meet the needs of our time and to serve one another and our world with love, mercy and justice!

Poignantly, in this issue of ¡Viva! Mercy, Sister Mary Sullivan reminds us that “as human history unfolds, the ‘signs’ of the times also emerge and evolve. Distress takes many new and more systemic forms, and our perception of and response to it must also evolve.”

The feature articles on extractivism, refugee and migrant rights, and care for our Earth explore and make visible some of most compelling needs of our times.

Consistent with our Chapter 2017 Recommitment, in this issue we learn that:

• we must continue to be radically instructed by both the suffering experience and the compelling vision of peoples and Earth;
• today’s global injustices are human-induced and systemic in nature;
• and how we engage, understand and experience today’s suffering matters to our collective transformation and compels our solidarity and our Gospel response.

As we turn the pages of this issue, we invite Lady Wisdom, Catherine McAuley, Mother Earth and all those whose lives have been impoverished or destroyed by greed, ecological or climate injustice, conflict or war to compel us anew to act justly, love Mercy and walk humbly with our God.

And as one, let us continue to joyfully proclaim: “We, women of Mercy, have discovered a new relationship among us, and we pray that the bonds we formalize today will endure, will enliven us, and will serve our church and touch our world.”

In Mercy,

From the Institute Leadership Team

(From left) Sisters Patricia Flynn, Judith Frikker, Patricia McDermott, Anne Marie Miller and Aine O’Connor.
Community Update

SOUTH CENTRAL

SISTER KELLY WILLIAMS received permission from the Community Leadership Team to make her first profession of vows. Her ceremony will be July 28 in D’Iberville, Mississippi.

Sister Maria Teresa Muhuhu completed the process of transfer and received approval to take perpetual vows as a Sister of Mercy. Her ceremony took place June 16 in Kingston, Jamaica.

More than 200 sisters from the South Central Community met in Charlotte, North Carolina, May 4-6, to reflect on “Our Reality: Emerging Apostolic Women’s Religious Life.” Sister Carol Zinn, SSJ, a former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, spoke and led the discussions during the gathering.

CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA

IN MAY THE CCASA EXTENDED LEADERSHIP TEAM and the liaisons for the various CCASA Commissions (Prophetic Voice, Mission Advancement, Volunteer Program, Communications and Associates) met in Belize. The opportunity to bring our CCASA presence to a community mostly not able to travel was a mutually enriching experience and a living out of our Assembly and Chapter commitment to strengthen the bonds among us. There were opportunities to enjoy time with the sisters and associates, to be inspired by the 135-year history of Mercy in Belize, to experience the vitality of current ministries, to explore the new consciousness to which we are called, and to plan for how we hope to implement our vision of shared leadership and recommitment to our Critical Concerns over the next three years. The broche de oro (“crowning event”) was the celebration of Sister Daphne Lizama’s 90th birthday.

WEST MIDWEST

THE WEST MIDWEST COMMUNITY signed a conservation easement with Nebraska Land Trust that permanently protects 22 acres of land that has been home to Knowles Mercy Spirituality Center and Mercy Acres. Located just outside Omaha, near Waterloo, the land borders the Platte River and features woodlands that provide habitat for a variety of birds and a large pond that attracts migratory waterfowl and other wildlife.

After signing the easement on behalf of the Community Leadership Team, Sister Margaret Mary Hinz said the easement reflects the Sisters of Mercy’s commitment to care of Earth. Sister Catherine Kuper, who also was involved in obtaining the easement, was among area sisters, West Midwest leadership and staff attending the prayer services for the signing of the easement on March 28. David Sands, executive director of Nebraska Land Trust, said, “Conservation of these resources is a legacy and a gift to current and future generations who value our natural environment.”

(Front row, from left) Sisters Kelly Williams and Mary Rose Bumpus; (back row, from left) Sister Jill Weber, incorporation minister, and CLT members Sisters Pat Coward, Jane Hotstream, Debbie Kern and Linda Falquette

Sisters Catherine Kuper and Margaret Mary Hinz at Knowles Mercy Spirituality Center.
MID-ATLANTIC

THREE SISTERS recently received recognition for their work in serving others. Uplift Help International honored Sister Karen Schneider for her work through Mercy Medical Missions in Nigeria. She was recognized for her missionary spirit, love and work among people in most need throughout the world.

Atlantic City, New Jersey, named a street after Sister Shamus Zehrer, the principal for 38 years at Our Lady Star of the Sea, the only surviving Catholic school on an island known for its casinos, boardwalks and beaches.

Long Island’s Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults honored the late Sister Bernadette Wynne, a devoted educator who was committed to improving the lives of people who are deaf and blind around the world.

NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, PACIFIC WEST

MERCY SCHOOLS IN Buffalo, Elmira and Rochester in New York and Erie and Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania participated through prayer and action in the National Walkout on School Violence on March 14.

The Mercy Center for Women, Erie, named Sister Mary Paul Carioty and Mercy Associate Amy Danzer as two of the 12 Women Making History for 2018.

The Sisters of Mercy in Buffalo on April 26 continued celebrating their 160th anniversary with a prayer service at Mercy Comprehensive Care Center, the site of the former convent where they first settled.

Sister Barbara Moore has published her third book on preaching titled Preaching the Scriptures … through the Lens of Age and Wisdom.

PHILIPPINES

THE PHILIPPINES COMMUNITY, with the approval of the Institute Leadership Team, will open a mission in Vietnam this year to promote the Mercy charism and the culture of vocation. In preparation for this mission, Sisters Letty de los Santos and Kristine Marie Violango participated in an orientation course in April at the Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in Tagaytay City, Philippines.

The course deepened their understanding of interculturality and multiculturality from the perspective of cultural anthropology. Participants looked at interculturality in philosophical, theological and biblical contexts.

Participants were also reminded to be culturally sensitive by observing and participating, being open and making the mission a home away from home.

Sisters Letty de los Santos (second from left) and Kristine Marie Violango (seventh from left) were among the participants in the course to prepare them to establish a new mission in Vietnam.
In the *Chapter 2017 Recommitment*, Sisters of Mercy began a “revolution of tenderness” in response to the cries of our suffering world regarding immigration, racism, nonviolence, women and Earth. Sisters of Mercy committed to “align our investments with our values and, especially now, to pursue education and action against practices of extractive industries that are destroying people, communities and Earth.” This article introduces the concept of extractivism to facilitate intentional action in response to the cries of affected communities.

Recognizing that over a billion people live in extreme poverty, the international community generally agrees that global development is a top priority. We all seem to know that the people of the world deserve more, but more of what and how to achieve it are less clear.

Road maps to the dreamy land of development could not be more varied, and sometimes they are contradictory. Our roles in global society—as community members, government officials, civil society members, business representatives, etc.—shape our views on development as do our unique ideas about what the world is and how it should be. These perspectives lead us to diverging views on, for example, state intervention in the market, the role of international investment, desirable levels of corporate autonomy, and how Machiavellian we want to be (i.e., what levels of environmental destruction and/or human rights violations will we justify). Nowhere are these differences in perspective more apparent than in relation to extractivism—a model of development essentially placing all of a country’s eggs in the extractives basket.
What is Extractivism?

Extractivism is a model of development focused on the large-scale removal of natural resources intended for export. As economist Albert Acosta, Ecuador’s former Minister of Energy and Mines, notes, the most common extracted resources are fossil fuels, minerals and metals, but extractivism can also involve seemingly renewable resources like water, trees and fish when they are removed or used on such a large scale that they risk exhaustion.

As a development model, extractivism requires an enabling legal, political and economic environment to function, and hindrances to extractive activity—even human rights and environmental concerns—are necessarily minimized, delegitimized and/or accepted as collateral damage. Extractivist governments and extractive industries cannot account for negative externalities like contributions to climate change or water contamination if the model is to remain profitable. Historically, extractivist governments have silenced or ignored community demands regarding extractive activity or have paid them lip service by introducing superficial participatory mechanisms. Extractivism has also been maintained through:

- violence against human rights and environmental defenders,
- government-condoned land-grabbing by extractive industries,
- destruction of the environment, and
- exploitation of workers.

In this context, impacted communities often understand extractivism as “an economic and political model of development that commodifies nature and prioritizes profit over human rights and the environment,” according to the Association for Women’s Rights in Development.

Extractivism’s Exploitative History

Extractivism is deeply rooted in colonialism and patriarchal violence. The model emerged 500 years ago not to develop the countries where extraction took place, but to fuel nascent capitalist economies of the Global North that were rapidly industrializing and depended on extracted materials from colonized nations to do so. The model continues today, mainly in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

The early-adopted export-based character of extractivist economies also continues. Today’s extractivist models still leave material processing, technological development and use of extracted materials in manufacturing to other countries. As a result, extractivist countries forgo the job creation and sustainable growth these activities can bring and become economically dependent on extractive activity.

EarthRights International attorney Kelsey Jost-Creegan points out that patriarchal values underlying extractivism relegate Earth’s resources and its inhabitants, especially women, to be objects for conquest and domination:

“Colonizers often described their territorial conquests in gendered terms—the land to be conquered was described as female. Implied in this feminization of the land was the opportunity for conquest, for subordination, and for plunder. And parallel to the conquest of new land was the conquest of the indigenous women who inhabited it, through rampant sexual violence. These patterns of colonial violence—the dueling exploitation of the earth and the violent assault on indigenous women—are echoed in today’s neocolonial extractivist development model.”

Extractivism continues to be violently patriarchal, and women’s human rights and environmental defenders are disproportionately at risk when they assert their rights and demand accountability, according to EarthRights International.

What Drives Extractivism Today?

1. Existing economic structures

Extractivist economies have structural backing. Undoing extractive-based systems requires peeling back half a millennium’s worth of facilitatory legal, regulatory and political structures and putting new ones in place so that alternatives can emerge. Local economies in extractivist states have been fragmented and arranged to accommodate these specialized industries, so escaping extractivism will require painful re-diversification of economies that forwent industrialization and diversification in order to prioritize resource extraction.

2. Benefits to the elite

Elites in extractivist countries often benefit from prolonging the status quo. Extractive activity is highly capital-intensive, and even a single mega-project requires years of close cooperation between the extractive industry and various governmental bodies to ensure that investments are secure enough to carry out the project. The benefits from close relationships between government officials and extractive industries typically do not reach the communities where extraction takes place. Often, a handful of actors with decision-making authority in an extractivist country perpetuate an extractivist model of development, even when that development is lopsided, unsustainable, or may not even warrant the label of “development” at all.

3. Demand for extracted materials

Demand for fossil fuels, plastics and materials for electronics keeps mega-extraction going. While renewable energy resources are becoming more integrated into the global energy mix and energy-efficiency technology is advancing, resource-rich countries have little incentive to stop extracting oil, coal and natural gas until demand falls
or resources run out. Besides energy production, fossil fuels are also needed to make plastics. One key driver of extraction is the worldwide demand for plastic water bottles, which are made from oil. People in the United States buy about 26 billion water bottles a year—enough to circle the globe five times a week, according to The Story of Stuff Project.

Raw materials, including conflict minerals, are needed to make electronic devices. Exacerbating this demand is an increasing tendency to conceptualize electronics as temporary, disposable devices rather than one-time investments requiring maintenance overtime. For example, electronics companies often base business models on planned obsolescence of devices, where products are replaced within years or even months, requiring more metals to be mined to manufacture and sell replacements. These levels of demand logically perpetuate justifications for extractive-oriented economies.

What Are Some Impacts of Extractivism?
Just as the components and drivers of extractivism are multifaceted, its impacts are numerous and complex. Some impacts of extractivism appear below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Impacts</th>
<th>Indirect Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deforestation</td>
<td>community displacement; climate change; species degradation; spread of disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure leaks and spills</td>
<td>water and agricultural contamination; impacts on community health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarization around extractive sites</td>
<td>exacerbation of long-standing social conflicts; violence against vulnerable populations and rights’ defenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>impacts on community health and food supplies; disproportionate impacts on women’s health and women’s caregiving responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragmentation of economies</td>
<td>increased dependence on extractive industries, making it difficult for communities to opt out of mega-projects or to recover in the post-extraction phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration of land titles/land use</td>
<td>negative impacts on women and indigenous people’s access to land; increased inequality; hindrance to development of non-extractive activities</td>
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Revision or Revolution: Can Extractivism Be Reformed?

While few global leaders explicitly promote unbridled extractivism today, fewer still intend to do away with extractive activity altogether. For the most part, members of the international community recognize that extractivism is problematic, if for no other reason than the inevitable limits on Earth’s resources. However, in moving beyond extractivism, we see differences in societal roles and ideologies that shape perspectives on where to go from here and how to get there.

An emergent regulatory response is neo-extractivism, a revisionist approach to extractivism exemplified by Bolivia under Evo Morales, where the state takes a more active role, corporations have less free reign and people on the ground see more benefits through reinvestment of profits into social services. While government oversight of extractive activities and more benefits for local communities is generally considered to be a step in the right direction, this conservative approach garners criticism for moving too slowly at best and for being the same wolf in sheep’s clothing at worst.

Many impacted local communities are demanding more than revision. They envision a post-extractivist world where development models solely prioritize community and environmental wellbeing. In a post-extractivist development model, extractive activity is not at the center of the economy, and only small-scale extractive activity takes place exclusively in response to community demands and is stringently regulated to protect the environment, ensure women’s decision-making authority and redistribute revenue generated, according to the NGO Mining Working Group.

The African grassroots group WoMin is at the frontlines of the fight for post-extractivist development. WoMin is spearheading “a transition towards a progressive post-extractivist, women-centered and ecologically responsive African alternative to the current destructive model of extractivism” across 12 African countries. Over the last few years, the group has mobilized women from impacted communities and tested alternatives to extraction locally; researched and disseminated information about the impacts of extractivism; exposed human rights violations by extractive corporations; achieved legislative and policy reform nationally and regionally; and expanded its democratic post-extractivist women’s movement.

What Can We Do?
The pervasiveness of extractivism can make the myriad problems it generates seem insurmountable. Furthermore, the broad spectrum of distinct worldviews informing so many different responses can be overwhelming. However, extractivism is a human-conceived model of development
upheld by human-built institutions. We can and must dismantle extractivism to make space for new models of development. Grassroots social movements are already showing us how. As global citizens, it is our responsibility to listen to people on the ground calling for immediate reform to stop current abuses and systemic change for a more just world. We then have the opportunity to reflect on and modify our own practices and demand change. The challenge for advocacy is to reckon with differences in perspective to develop and implement a two-fold strategy: addressing pressing injustices on the ground in the short-term and ensuring a paradigm shift away from extractivism and toward rights-based models of development in the long-term.

Avery Kelly is a third-year student at Georgetown University Law Center, where she studies international human rights and environmental law. She is currently a summer intern at Our Children’s Trust and previously interned at the Mercy International Association: Mercy Global Action office in New York.

The next issue of ¡Viva! Mercy will continue exploring extractivism with a focus on Mercy advocacy efforts.

Impact of Extractives—Mercy Perspectives

Sisters Cecilia Baranowski and Mary Oladimeji are members of the Mercy Justice Extractives Working Group, made up of sisters, associates and coworkers concerned about the extractives industry. Read their perspectives below and on the next page.

**Sister Cecilia Baranowski, FRACKING WASTE IN CONNECTICUT**

Some years ago I became aware of the dangers of fracking when I watched the movie *Gasland*. It highlighted a community in Pennsylvania that was experiencing serious illnesses and degradation of the environment. The tap water was highly toxic; a lighted match was able to ignite the water running out of the faucet. The memory lingered.

Viewing a presentation on fracking and fracking waste inspired me to become active on the issue. The presenter was the regional director of Food and Water Watch whose mission was to educate and encourage people to work with their town councils to pass an ordinance banning fracking waste. My town of Wolcott, Connecticut, was doing nothing about this issue. Because I am committed to our Critical Concerns, especially care of Earth, I took it upon myself, being the only Sister of Mercy in town, to take up the cause.

There is no fracking in my state. However, fracking waste can be used at non-fracking sites—in landfills and as road de-icer, base for road building and construction fill. However, it is highly toxic. Our state legislature has not yet passed a ban on fracking waste. Due to this, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has not passed any regulations regarding the use of this waste.

First I had to educate myself. I did internet research and received relevant information from Food and Water Watch.

I enlisted the aid of four people who were willing to support my efforts to bring the issue to the town council. Being clueless to the difficulties I would face, I began educating the townson who using social media. It soon became clear that some people understood the dangers, while others ridiculed my efforts. The more resistance I encountered, the more determined I was to see this through. In Connecticut, 45 towns have passed an ordinance, and I hold hope for my town.

Part of the problem is with the State Senate. They have not acted on a bill passed by the House. The bill languishes until the next legislative session. We will keep up our efforts with phone calls and encouraging others to do the same.

Needless to say, prayer and Divine Guidance have been my main support.

(From left) Sisters Cecilia Baranowski and Carmela Garofalo, Associate Carol Villagio and Sister Nancy Audette at a march at the Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford.
Sister Mary Oladimeji,
OIL EXPLORATION IN NIGERIA

I felt impelled to join the Extractives Working Group because the Nigerian story of the damage caused by extractivism often does not get told. Nigeria doesn’t get the coverage that South and Central America do in the United States, even though it is the fifth-largest supplier of oil to the United States and the largest in Africa.

Oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1958, when the country was still under British rule. Since then the federal government has awarded drilling contracts to major multinationals like BP, Chevron and Shell for exploration.

The large multinationals set up fenced areas around exploration sites where employees brought in from Europe, the Middle East and the United States are housed. I visited one such site on my last trip to the country. I witnessed a heavily militarized site surrounding the corporate town. Just a narrow paved road separated the rural village of local citizens, who have no electricity, from the corporate settlement, which offers amenities like schools.

The youth who are descendants of farmers are unable to inherit their family farmland after it is taken by oil companies. Those who are able to go to school are unable to find jobs when they graduate. They have no voice, so they choose to take up arms and resist. Each new government comes in and promises new improvements. Several years ago the government offered an amnesty program to disarm and turn in guns in exchange for money or schooling. But the students come out of school and still can’t get work. The multinational companies bribe local leaders in order to avoid initiating programs and services for local people. When the people rise up in protest, the governments put soldiers in place to fight off the resistance.

In Nigeria, people get angry. They congregate in front of the oil company sites, they get arrested, and the next day, life continues. What people like us can do is lend our support to their voices to put pressure on governments and multinationals to do the right thing.

Our Shining Lamps &
Today’s All-Encompassing Eighth Work of Mercy

By Sister Mary Sullivan

“Protectors of God’s Handiwork,”
by Sister Coralita Bonnarens.
One of the biblical images Catherine McAuley used to describe our Mercy mission is a shining lamp. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:15-16).

Referring to Matthew, Catherine says that “we should be shining lamps, giving light to all around us,” lamps “consumed with the fire of divine love, shining and giving light to all” (A Shining Lamp, 131, 124). The “light” in our “lamp” is Jesus Christ himself, the “true light” that will shine for all people in the human lamps of those who faithfully follow him: “Whoever follows me will . . . have the light of life” (John, 8:12).

This light is the revelation that in Jesus the full and final reign of God’s merciful love has definitively begun. This was the light Catherine hoped would be shining in the human lamps of our lives and works. In the Mercy Rule she composed for us, she outlines our two-fold work: our own following of and resemblance to Jesus Christ, and our fidelity to the works that are “peculiarly characteristic” of our Institute: “Instruction of poor Girls, Visitation of the Sick, and protection of distressed women” (Rule 1.1, in Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy, 295).

“Protecting” and lifting up the “distressed” is the most comprehensive work of all, embracing all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. It is the all-encompassing work of mercy that underlies the incarnation of Jesus the Christ. This work of mercy, as Walter Kasper explains, is “the fundamental attribute of God” (Mercy, 88).

Vatican II recognized that the Gospel is always in dialogue with human history: “The church seeks . . . to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit . . . . To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel” (Gaudium et Spes, Art. 3-4, emphasis mine).

Responding to this sign of our times calls for a new work of mercy, what Pope Francis calls the eighth work of mercy: spiritual and corporal “Care for Our Common Home.” It involves all the personal, social and institutional “house-cleaning” and inclusive hospitality that such “housekeeping” demands and implies.

We know the “dirt” and “dust” we are dealing with: the rapid increase of carbon dioxide, methane and other gases in the atmosphere, potentially leading to a disastrous rise in Earth’s temperature greater than 1.5 degrees Celsius. Climate change research indicates that global warming is already causing rising sea levels, melting glaciers, droughts, floods and extreme weather events that are causing food and water scarcity, famines, epidemic diseases and the widespread migration of environmental refugees. The merciful “housekeeping” this distress calls for is heavy-duty: no random swipes of a feather duster, no casually sweeping dirt under the rug, no superficial cleaning here and there, but a thorough ecological conversion of our consciousness and human behavior.
A New Approach

The difficulty of strenuously engaging in this eighth work of mercy is unlike that of engaging in any of the other seven spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Merciful spiritual and corporal care for Earth, for our Common Home, is new, born of a brand-new “sign of the times.” We have, in general, very little past knowledge and experience to fall back on, and, except for the vigorous efforts of some of our sisters and associates across the world, we have comparatively little Mercy history to show us what to do and where to apply our energies most effectively.

Climate change and the degradation of Earth is, for most of us—especially those of us who are not scientists—a new and intricate phenomenon calling for new and concrete merciful actions. These challenges are multi-faceted, scientific in nature and, in a sense, remote. They are not easily addressed with the skills we have accumulated since 1831. Most of us realize we are beginners in the wide range of merciful actions that relieving this distress and addressing its causes now require of us.

So where do we start?

First, we must read, study, listen and learn. We need to grow in our knowledge and understanding of Creation itself and learn the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all its created realities: its water, soil, sun, wind, bees, human lives, plants, carbon dioxide, flowers, oxygen, oceans, trees, rain, ice, high temperatures, methane, low temperatures, ecosystems—all the material, organic and sometimes invisible elements of this created Earth.

We also need to grow in our knowledge of the effects of human activities related to the natural resources of Creation: agriculture, transportation, the manufacture and consumption of products, deforestation and reforestation, waste management, energy selection and storage, to name a few. And if all this were not enough “homework,” we also have to learn something of the history of Earth, especially since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, in order to understand why we are now confronted with this new “sign of the times”—a distress that neither Jesus of Nazareth nor Catherine McAuley directly perceived or felt obliged to address.

The Difficulty of Change

This need for new knowledge and new commitment is one reason the eighth work of mercy—hearing and responding to “the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor,” this most urgent need of the twenty-first century—is so difficult for us. Like the priest and the Levite, we are tempted to walk away from the wounded Earth, passing by “on the other side” of the road (Luke 10:31-32). The only problem here is that there is no “other side” of the road.

The other difficulty with this eighth work of mercy is the magnitude of the “ecological conversion” it requires. At the micro level, we will need to reform many of our personal habits, alter many of our daily activities, and sacrifice or change many things we have taken for granted and never worried about (paper napkins, the shampoo we use, plastic bottles, light switches, even how we brush our teeth!).

Then there are the “big” things we need to understand and address: the disastrous chemistry of burning fossil fuels, the dangerous economy of producing and consuming more than enough, the political forces arrayed against Earth’s well-being, misunderstandings about what constitutes true human progress, the unfair corporate intrusions into the natural resources of poor nations and their peoples, our own shortsighted wastefulness and much more.

Perhaps our personal and institutional ecological problem is that we mentally live in too small a world. Today, the “neighbors” Jesus wishes us to love and care for—as God has loved and cared for us—are often far away. For example:

Indigenous peoples living in Brazil and Peru have been struggling for decades—even dying—to protect their rainforests from logging and mining profiteers. They know that the Amazon rainforests, the largest in the world, are crucial to the health of the whole Earth, because they store carbon dioxide and restore oxygen to the atmosphere.

Ethiopians and Somalis, whose small streams and agricultural plots, their only sources of water and food for themselves and their animals, are being slowly destroyed by recurring droughts.

Small Islanders and the people of Bangladesh, whose coastal homes and small family fisheries are sinking into the Pacific and Indian Oceans due to melting polar ice caps, rising seas and increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

It All Depends on Our Exertion

So the Merciful Housekeeping of our Common Home to which we are now called requires determined study, firm
personal and institutional reforms, and credible action and advocacy. When are we going to switch to using only renewable sources of energy (wind and solar)? When are we going to put solar panels on the convent buildings we own? And solar farms and wind turbines on our large fields? When are we going to install lighting motion sensors inside all our buildings and over our parking lots to conserve energy? When are we going to spend the necessary money to inaugurate these needed efforts to mitigate the distress of Earth and its most vulnerable peoples? If we don’t think we have the money now, what are we going to sacrifice and forgo in order to have the money to do these merciful works as soon as possible? After all, robbed and wounded children and adults are even now lying on the side of the road.

Catherine McAuley left us an inspiring but demanding saying: “While we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertion” (CCMcA, 323). Relying fully on God’s help, let us now act as if all depended on our exertion—for the sake of Earth and all its vulnerable peoples.

In gratitude for God’s gift of this beautiful planet and in neighborly love for all humanity, let us not risk causing our dear Catherine McAuley to be disappointed in us by putting the light we carry under a bushel basket!

Sister Mary Sullivan is an author and historian. She is professor emerita of language and literature and dean emerita of the College of Liberal Arts at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Her work, The Path of Mercy, details the life of Sisters of Mercy founder, Catherine McAuley.

**References:**


Many sisters, associates and companions live the commitment to care for Earth, our common home, each day. On a systemic level, Sisters of Mercy administrative centers, convents, ministries and institutions have built certified “environmentally friendly” buildings, installed energy-efficient lighting and bought water bottle filling stations, among other measures, to protect our precious resources. The examples are too numerous to mention in one article.

The Institute Justice Team recently conducted a survey of Mercy communities, ministries and institutions to identify specific examples of environmentally sustainable practices and policies that are underway, planned and budgeted. The survey was sent to Community leadership teams as well as to chief operating officers, property and facilities managers and individual ministries and institutions, including colleges, universities and schools.

Responses are being compiled and analyzed for sharing in Mercy Now sometime soon. In addition to the results being shared and celebrated, the information gleaned will contribute to an announcement by the Vatican in September about the global Catholic Church’s commitment to reducing carbon emissions. We look forward to publishing the results of this survey and highlighting the many ways that we rise or can rise to Sister Mary Sullivan’s challenge for action and advocacy.

For more stories about how the Mercy community is caring for our Earth, visit bit.ly/EarthBlogs. You can also read about the Sisters of Mercy’s history in addressing this issue on pages 98-104 of Union and Charity: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by Sisters Denise Colgan and Doris Gottemoeller.
Mercy’s Work for Immigrant Rights at the United Nations
By Colleen Cloonan

September 19, 2016, was the day all 193 member states of the United Nations gathered in the Hall of the General Assembly to adopt the New York Declaration. It is a commitment for all countries to protect migrants and refugees as well as to develop two Global Compacts, one on refugees and the other to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration.

That day is prominent in my mind for two reasons. One, because it was also my first day working with Mercy International Association: Mercy Global Action at the UN (MIA: MGA at the UN), the international nongovernmental organization that represents the voices, concerns and aspirations of Mercy Sisters and partners worldwide at the UN. Two, because it is monumental. Never before have the world's nations come together to reach a consensus about one of the most significant issues of our time—migration.

At that gathering of the General Assembly, Nadia Murad, a survivor of the genocide of Yazidis in Iraq, talked about being kidnapped by ISIS and being a refugee. Urging heads of state to take action in the conflicts around the world that are displacing millions of people, she declared that “there is only one border and that is humanity” and called on listeners to “put humans first.” Despite her horrific experiences, she believes we have few differences compared to our shared humanity and begs the international community to respond to the crisis of displaced people.

Scope of the Problem

While Nadia’s story is only one account, she represents hundreds of thousands of people who have left regions of Iraq and Syria due to the Yazidi genocide. Worldwide, according to recent statistics from the UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), 22.5 million people are registered as refugees, and 65.5 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homelands. Furthermore, the 2017 International Migration Report of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has estimated that 258 million people are migrants, living in a country other than their country of birth.

Sisters of Mercy and partners around the world are working to change the negative discourse regarding refugees and migrants on the local, national, regional and international levels. These advocates act with compassion, embrace our common humanity and draw attention to positive contributions—seeking to connect others across divides.

Process of Producing Compacts

The UN’s processes for drafting the Global Compacts on Refugees (GCR) and Migrants (GCM) have involved regional consultations and thematic sessions. Committees have gathered input from stakeholders and, most importantly, refugees and migrants themselves.

As Sister Angela Reed, coordinator of the MIA: MGA at the UN, said, “We are at the table because we believe in the human dignity and human rights of all people, irrespective of race, culture, gender, age, status or religion. Our faith in a God of Mercy impels us to act, to speak out, to work to ensure that we look at every global policy issue through the lens of the most disadvantaged.”

Since February, the GCR and GCM have been undergoing the process of intergovernmental negotiations. During this period of negotiations, member states work to revise the text until consensus can be reached.

The stakes are high, and intergovernmental negotiations are scheduled to continue until mid-July. This gives MIA: MGA at the UN and other civil society organizations time
to complete visits to member-state missions to continue advocating for:

- the rights and dignity of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status;
- the empowerment of women and girls as agents of change;
- zero toleration for discrimination;
- social inclusion;
- keeping families together, protecting children, and ending child detention;
- addressing root causes and drivers of migration, such as extreme violence, poverty, and those affected by climate-induced displacement;
- ensuring social protection, including access to adequate living conditions, education, labor markets, justice systems, and healthcare within the compact.

Putting Policy into Action

After the adoption of the Global Compacts, the MIA: MGA at the UN will work to ensure member states adhere to their commitments, including those previously mentioned, and share the positive messages and experiences of migrants and refugees, illustrating the capacity of our common humanity.

In his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2013, Pope Francis said, “Migrants trust that they will encounter acceptance, solidarity, and help, that they will meet people who will sympathize with the distress and tragedy experienced by others, [and] recognize the values and resources the latter have to offer.” In 2018, he stated, “Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age.”

This is mercy. It is our call as Catholics to respond. This isn’t unfamiliar work to Mercy ministries worldwide; we are connected. Drawing inspiration from Catherine McAuley, our Mercy International Reflection Process Outcome Document, the Chapter 2017 Recommitment and Critical Concerns, we recognize an interconnectedness with all creation and seek just responses to address the signs of the times and represent a community of hope in a fractured world.

While positioned for direct governmental advocacy, the work of the Sisters of Mercy does not begin at the UN. It begins with all of those in Mercy ministries, institutes and congregations. Whether it’s standing in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in solidarity with DACA students, volunteering with the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants, working at the U.S.-Mexico border, or connecting child migrants in hope of increasing awareness, all of these actions are introducing acceptance of diversity and creating inclusion at a Mercy ministry. These acts represent Mercy changing the current discourse on refugees and migrants.

We, the members of the Mercy community, must continue to be leaders of compassion and hope. We must continue to open the door of Mercy; walk with those rendered vulnerable and threatened; celebrate the positive contributions migrants and refugees have made to our communities; recognize the humanity and dignity within each and every person; stand in solidarity; break down the barriers that separate us; and use contemplative dialogue to continue to bring others to new consciousness. Above all, we must seek to share our common humanity.

Colleen Cloonan is an advocacy consultant in the Mercy International Association: Mercy Global Action at the UN Office in New York. Colleen has earned bachelor degrees in global studies and Spanish as well as a master’s degree in international relations from Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. She can be contacted at fellow@mercyinternational.ie.

There are many ways to follow and engage in the processes toward the Global Compacts on Migrants and Refugees. Visit:

- the UN’s website for refugees and migrants at refugeesmigrants.un.org
- NGO Committee on Migration at ngo-migration.org
- Subscribe to the MIA: MGA monthly newsletter and/or view at bit.ly/subscribeMGA

Visit the Sisters of Mercy blog for more ways that Sisters of Mercy are advocating for the human rights of migrants at bit.ly/ImmigrationBlogs
Called to Mercy, Called to Service

“But Ruth said, ‘…For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried…’ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.” —Ruth 1:16-18

The choice was an easy one to make. I had known before the official planning had started that the story of Ruth and Naomi must be the Scripture reading for the simple, intimate ritual at which I was welcomed as a candidate into the Sisters of Mercy. Ruth’s fidelity to Naomi, her people and her God captured how I was imagining my days in Mercy might be. As I knocked on the door to request entrance, a highly meaningful moment in a richly symbolic ceremony, my whole heart desired to cross the threshold into beginning life with my new Community. I anticipated sharing daily prayer, evening meals and joys and sorrows mingled as together we would “take one day only in hands, at a time, merely making a resolve for tomorrow…. The rest, I trusted with hopeful anticipation, would unfold. And it has.

As the days have turned into years, I have been drawn deeper into the life of our Community through experiences of service with other Sisters of Mercy, our associates, companions and co-workers. During my candidacy and novitiate years I spent many days alongside them in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Bronx, New York; and Sacramento, California, and witnessed the many, varied ways each of us is called to, and can, animate Catherine’s lived wisdom, “There are three things the poor prize more highly than gold…. among these are the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.”

The fabric of my call to Community was being woven through my experience of ministry. Ruth’s avowal—“Your people will be my people”—resonated in my spirit before I entered and then found fuller expression as together we served our poor, sick and uneducated brothers and sisters, giving texture to the vow of service I made two years ago.

Shortly after I professed first vows, I began ministry at an independent nonprofit community center where the corporal works of mercy were the order of every day and where I was the only staff member who had even heard of our beloved Community of Mercy. My initial joy that such would be the business of my life disintegrated into discouragement and loneliness. I thought I must have been doing something wrong as I clung to the idea that surely this was what I had been called to do. I rolled up my sleeves and worked harder and longer. That did not work.

In time, consoling prayer and clarifying conversations with trusted guides and dear friends began to shine light on my experience: I sorely missed serving in the context of our beloved Community of Mercy. My initial joy that such would be the business of my life disintegrated into discouragement and loneliness. I thought I must have been doing something wrong as I clung to the idea that surely this was what I had been called to do. I rolled up my sleeves and worked harder and longer. That did not work.

In time, consoling prayer and clarifying conversations with trusted guides and dear friends began to shine light on my experience: I sorely missed serving in the context of our Community of Mercy. Illuminated was an important insight: What I do in service of God and our Church matters most because of how I do it. Revealed was a new realization: My desire to be in ministry with my sisters, our associates, companions and co-workers is part of my call to Mercy. Opportunities for our serving together often are not possible, of course, and I know the reality is that they may well be fewer in the future. For now, I must unravel Ruth’s determination to go where Mercy goes with the comfort of Catherine’s hand to clutch, as a Community we “take one day only in [our] hands, at a time.”

—Sister Danielle Gagnon
Few leave-takings are harder than walking away from a ministry. It doesn't matter how long we were there, how many sisters passed through the doorways over the years, how many evaluations, confirmations, commendations or disappointments—leaving is hard.

A small parish grade school in an industrial town populated mainly by immigrants was the site of a ministry Sisters of Mercy in New Jersey were called to in the late 1800s. The sisters taught the girls, and brothers taught the boys at first; then the sisters taught both boys and girls. Then it wasn't just a grade school but a business program and a two-year high school. By 1922, it was a four-year high school. Most students came from the city where their fathers worked in the shipyard, or the Campbell Soup factory or RCA corporation. Some came by train or bus from smaller towns not far away. Many fathers were veterans of the First World War, some still finishing their own education at the evening school the sisters provided.

With increasing enrollment, the faculty grew: mostly sisters, a few lay faculty and diocesan priests stationed in surrounding parishes.

By the 1960s, enrollment grew to over 1,000, and the school and surrounding buildings—a former theater, space used as a library and a small gym—formed a typical inner-city campus. It was a fire-trap, and when it burst into flames on a Sunday night in April, no one was terribly surprised. But ingenuity and determination prevailed. The faculty restructured the schedule, and classes resumed on a half-day basis; the play went on, baseball games were played, graduation was held. It took three years to build the new school on acres owned by the diocese in a neighboring township. When it opened, there was a new administrative team and additional faculty: diocesan priests, appointed by the bishop. The former sister principal was now vice-principal.

By the time I joined the faculty, enrollment had grown to 2,200; new educational programs were inaugurated, modified, adapted, adjusted; and the school learned the hard way what worked and what didn't. But the school spirit, generated in the very beginning, never flagged. The "Fighting Irish" were a formidable adversary on the sports field, a debate or band competition; the school plays and concerts were sell-outs. Students and faculty, like me, sometimes came with misgivings, but most of us soon discovered we loved the place, the sense of belonging, of being valued.

By 2012 one sister remained, and it was clear Mercy presence would soon be gone. Of the hundreds who had served there, few could return for events. The convent was empty until a new principal suggested an international program. I returned in 2018 for a Hall of Fame event and discovered that fears that Mercy was gone were unfounded. Catherine McAuley graced bulletin boards; pictures of sisters who served decades before watched students of the 21st century from permanent displays. Speeches made by administrators, faculty and students were peppered with quotes from Catherine's Familiar Instructions, and the curriculum included courses on the history of the school, the community that fostered its growth over 100 years and the mission and values that prevailed across those years and endured. Sometimes all God asks is that we sow the seeds.

–Sister Patricia Kenny

Photo courtesy of the Camden Catholic High School Archives.
Calendar

JULY 23-24
Partners in Mercy Leadership Academy
Baltimore, Maryland
Contact: Sister Lisa Marie Griffith
mesa@sistersofmercy.org

JULY 31-AUGUST 3
Young Mercy Leaders at Mercy International Center
Dublin, Ireland
Contact: Sister Cynthia Serjak
cserjak@sistersofmercy.org

AUGUST 7-12
Orientation Retreat for 2018-2019 Mercy Volunteers
Burlingame, California
Contact: Elizabeth MacNeal
elizabethmacneal@mercyvolunteers.org

AUGUST 7-10
LCWR Assembly
St. Louis, Missouri

SEPTEMBER 15-23
Campaign Nonviolence
Events in Washington, D.C. and other U.S. locations
Contact: TBD

SEPTEMBER 20-23
V Encuentro
Grapevine, Texas
Contact: Sister Cynthia Serjak
cserjak@sistersofmercy.org

SEPTEMBER 24
Mercy Day

SEPTEMBER 28-30
Re-Envisioning Vocation Ministry
Baltimore, Maryland
Contact: Sister Cynthia Serjak
cserjak@sistersofmercy.org

SEPTEMBER 29
Catherine McAuley’s Birthday

*“Roses Galore” painting by Sister Kathy Cairone

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