

WRITER Dennis Horton is part of the mission team of Tiaki Manatū, a cluster of Mercy ministries that work in New Zealand on behalf of Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa. Each month he produces *Imaging Mercy Today*, a reflection and prayer for board and staff members engaged in healthcare, education and community development ministries. Several of those reflections this year have included a focus on the eight Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations identified by Mercy Global Action as 'especially relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy. Those reflections have been amalgamated and summarised in this feature.



Dennis Horton

Mercy's voice of advocacy at the UN: it's more about justice than charity

IT'S about two years since Pope Francis visited the United Nations headquarters in New York and made his historic presentation to the general assembly. Later that same day, the UN released its 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, with a raft of 17 goals aimed at transforming human society with a hope to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. It was no coincidence that the pope's visit should take place on the day the UN's agenda was announced, since sustainable development is high on the pope's agenda, too.

His insistence has been that human development be integral - that it should include spiritual as well as material goals, and that it be not imposed by states but allowed to be freely chosen by real men and women. Such integral development lies at the heart of his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, published four months before his visit to the United Nations and providing an insight into what his comments to the UN were likely to be.

It's no coincidence, either, that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been welcomed by the Sisters of Mercy, and that eight of the 17 goals have been identified as most relevant to their mission around the world. For almost two decades, the Sisters of Mercy have had a special consultative status at the UN, as one of many faith-based NGOs which represent poor and vulnerable people and offer input on their behalf as policy is made. Among the Sisters of Mercy working at the UN recently has been New Zealander Bridget Crisp rsm, who has devoted several months of her sabbatical to working at the UN, advocating on strategies to alleviate poverty.

The goal of eliminating poverty, the first of the SDGs, heads the list of those identified as most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy. The aim of the other seven can be glimpsed in their titles: Zero Hunger, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Climate Action and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.



Photo: Democracy Now.org

"It must be stated that a true right of the environment does exist... Every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value, in its existence, its life and beauty, and its interdependence with other creatures." Pope Francis at the UN General Assembly, 2015.

A snapshot of the work done by Sisters of Mercy at the UN comes from Irish-born Sr Áine O'Connor, who recently stepped down after five years as coordinator of Mercy Global Action. She told an Irish Catholic paper that their voice at the UN is credible because sisters work alongside people at the grassroots level and their critique is not motivated by profit or self-interest. Member states know "that we bring to the table an analysis based on justice and human rights." The rights-based approach is critical, says Áine. "It's more about justice than charity," she explains. "We want to reorder systems that have created poverty and injustice."

Sr Áine praises *Laudato Si'* as both inspiring and radical. "I think it looks at root causes. Pope Francis calls on the moral voice; he talks about how the question of justice must enter the debate on the environment. That's one of the reasons we are at a place like the UN - to see that justice comes into issues of development."

SDG 1: Ending poverty for all

ENDING poverty in all its forms by 2030 is the first of 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations. It is also among the eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified by the Sisters of Mercy as relevant to their mission around the world.

Extreme poverty rates have been cut by more than half since 1990. While this is a remarkable achievement, one in five people still live on less than \$1.25 a day, which currently defines extreme poverty.

There are millions who make little more than this daily amount; and many others risk slipping back into poverty.

The SDGs were launched by the UN in 2015, as an agenda to guide development action for the next 15 years. Whereas the previous Millennium Goals had been focussed on developing countries, the SDGs relate to all nations, including our own.

UNICEF estimates that around 295,000 New Zealand children spend their childhood living in poverty. The short-term impacts mean that they live in cold, damp overcrowded houses, they do not have warm and rain-proof clothes, their shoes are worn, and many days they go hungry. But poverty is often a life sentence. It can mean lower levels of education and income, poorer health and higher rates of criminal offending in adulthood.

A leaflet developed by Mercy Global Action to explore this SDG of ending poverty proposes a two-pronged approach, calling for both collective action and personal decisions about life-style.

Collective actions may include some of the following:

- Joining a campaign for water and sanitation rights for all, and for access to education and adequate housing.
- Lobbying for policies to ensure the safety of the vulnerable exposed to extreme climate events. This might include Pacific peoples affected by rising sea levels.
- Encouraging sustainable food production by sound agricultural practices that are not market-driven.



Have you thought about shopping from local markets or from outlets such as Commonsense Organics?

Among the **personal challenges**, Mercy Global Action proposes that we might consider the following:

Make a commitment to live more simply. Complete a 'carbon footprint questionnaire'.

Commit to not wasting food at home or when you are out. One meat-free day a week?

Purchase only what you **need** when shopping.

Join a local group to implement

the SDG national plan. What about UNICEF NZ, Caritas Aotearoa or the Child Poverty Action Group?

What is one choice you might make?

He inoi: Prayer

Daring Mercy in a new way

E Te Atua atawhai,
God of unending mercy,
through last year's global reflection process
we have heard anew and with great urgency
the cry of Earth and cry of the poor.
We believe that in your abundant mercy,
we are being called to respond.
Empower us to live in solidarity
with all who seek a new and better world.

In an earth where so much is broken,
help us to heal and unite.
Where so many feel alone and excluded,
may we be able to welcome and include.
And when so many despair and doubt they
can change, give us hope, renew us within.
Let us dare Mercy in a new way.
Amen

Planning for a world without hunger

AMONG the eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified by Mercy Global Action as most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy is the second, *Zero Hunger*. The goals set out a vision for the world for the next decade and a half, so that we will all work collectively and collaboratively to end poverty and hunger.

The hope of all those who have endorsed these goals, including the New Zealand Government, is that by 2030 the nations of the world will have made giant strides towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

A tall order? Yes, but one that is achievable. Like its partner poverty, with which it goes hand in hand, hunger is not natural or inevitable. It is, as Nelson Mandela noted, “man-made, and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

The problem is a global one, affecting lives here as well as overseas. The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services estimates that there are around 622,000 people living in poverty in this country, or one in every seven households, including around 230,000 children. Living in poverty means experiencing hunger and food insecurity, reduced life expectancy, poor health outcomes, debt and unaffordable or bad housing.

A recent National Children’s Nutrition Survey found that one in five Kiwi families said they could only sometimes afford to eat properly. A further one in five households reported that food sometimes or often ran out because of lack of money.

There is enough food to feed everyone in the world. The biggest problem is not the supply of food but its distribution. A lot depends on how we measure how well we are doing as a nation. US president Franklin D Roosevelt wisely said, “The real test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much, but whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

In terms of the UN’s sustainable development goals, including Zero Hunger, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission offers some helpful advice on how we can get involved (www.hrc.co.nz - the global goals, Goal Two - Zero Hunger). The first step is to take action, by joining the worldwide movement to make the goals well known. Adding our regular support to groups like UNICEF and Save the Children, or to Caritas Aotearoa which is currently raising funds through its East African Crisis Appeal,



could be a place to start.

The second step recommended by our Human Rights Commission is to tell everyone. “The more people who know about the SDGs, the more successful they’ll be,” says the HRC. “We need your help to share the goals. In conversation, on email, in debate, at home, work or school. Whatever it takes, tell everyone.”

Planning for the future is one of the key themes of Mātāriki, the Māori new year which begins next year on Friday 15 June. Traditionally the cluster of stars appeared at the end of the harvest season. This was the time when storage houses (pātaka kai) were filled with food. The kūmara had been gathered and stored in specially prepared pits to ensure a year-round supply.

Mātāriki was a time for bountiful catches, with the migration of fish like the moki and korokoro. Having feasted on berries, Kererū, the native pigeon, were snared and preserved in fat during this season. People gathered together during Mātāriki, to survive the winter months, to remember the past and to plan for the future.

Visitors were often showered with gifts, especially preserved eels, birds and other delicacies. The sharing of food was very important and hospitality (manaakitia) was an honoured way of showing respect for visitors.

Conservation and care for the environment remain key themes in celebrating Mātāriki; giving thanks for land and water that have provided sustenance is important. We are also reminded in this season to respect and protect nature, so that future generations may enjoy the same quality of life that we cherish.

Learning for women - 'nothing better for society'

OF the United Nations 17 Social Development Goals, it's the fifth - gender equality - which is arguably the most closely aligned to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy worldwide. Their founder, Catherine McAuley, wrote in the Congregation's original rule that no work of mercy "can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor, than the careful instruction of women." No matter what place in society they occupy, "their example and advice will always possess influence," she wrote, and it is through their efforts that "peace and good order are generally to be found."

No one can begin to read the story of Mercy's founder without soon discovering her deep conviction



about the fundamental need and role of women in society, and seeing how so much of her effort was focused on providing opportunities for women and girls to learn skills that could transform their own lives and those of their families. From the day its doors opened in 1827, her first House of Mercy offered classes for young girls whose families could never have afforded to send them to school, and training for women in skills that might provide them with a living. Her work was transformative.

Including this goal among the eight most closely linked to Mercy's mission, Mercy Global Action has produced a flier devoted to the theme (see mercyworld.org, SDG 5).

The goal has a target of eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking and sexual or labour exploitation. Among the global facts which the flier lists are the following:

Gender inequality is the most persistent form of human rights abuse.

1 in every three women has experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in her lifetime.

70 percent of all victims of human trafficking in the world are women and girls.

The Mercy Global Action flier proposes a range of collective actions, including to work with others in addressing every form of gender inequality, to campaign actively against so-called 'honour' killings, female genital mutilation and child marriage, to treat all children as equal, helping them to value and respect their differences, and to redress the injustices of women having less access to education, training and recruitment.

Among the personal actions recommended by Mercy Global Action are to join campaigns working towards equal pay for women and men who do the same work, to promote women's leadership through trade unions, civil society and feminist organisations, to work with community services to promote education and equality for women, and to take steps to be more peace-full persons by being welcoming, honest, non-judgmental and respectful of difference.

He Inoi - Prayer

Leaving no one behind

E Te Atua, rapu i te tika,
God, seeker of true justice:
in the breadth of your gaze,
no one is overlooked or ignored.

We praise you for all those who work to see the true place of every woman acknowledged.

For Sisters of Mercy whose scholarship draws wisdom from scripture and theology to shed light on the role of women in our world. For their ministry of care for refugees and migrants, helping them and their families to find a place and to settle in our land.

For Sisters who care for women in prison and support them when they are released, we give thanks. For those who work in community development, with programmes for victims of domestic abuse and for women of diverse cultural backgrounds, struggling to create a home in a new and strange environment, we praise you.

We ask you to bless the principals and staff of our Mercy colleges, encouraging young women to strive for excellence and to pursue their dreams. May their efforts among young Māori and Pasifika women especially go from strength to strength.

We honour Mary as the woman who with her 'yes' to your call reveals the path that leads to life; may we follow her in faith, magnifying your greatness and trusting in the promise that reaches from one generation to another. Amen

Access to clean water a basic human right



AFTER a public outcry last year over foreign exports of New Zealand water and a petition calling for a moratorium on the practice, the country's former Prime Minister Bill English asked a panel of experts to consider the issues relating to the use of this natural resource. In the same month, a Treaty of Waitangi settlement conferred the legal status of a person on the Whanganui River.

In what was regarded as a world-first, the settlement means that New Zealand's third-longest river now has all the rights and safeguards that come with personhood. Treating a river as a person may seem unusual to some, but not to Māori, who often regard rivers as living entities and as tūpuna (ancestors). To the peoples of Whanganui belongs the famous proverb, 'Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au' (I am the river and the river is me).

In his address to the United Nations in 2015, Pope Francis insisted that the environment has "a true right." This is partly because every aspect of God's creation has its own intrinsic value, and partly because human beings depend on nature for their survival and growth. "Any harm done to the environment is harm done to humanity," said the pope.

Pope Francis has also insisted that the future of humanity depends on our ability to safeguard and share potable water around the world. In a message last year to mark World Water Day, he described water as "the most essential element for life." In recognition of this same fact, Sisters of Mercy have endorsed the UN's sixth goal for sustainable development, with its focus on *Clean Water and Sanitation*, as especially relevant to their mission. "Sisters of Mercy worldwide have a growing concern about the global water crisis," according to Sr Áine O'Connor, former coordinator of Mercy Global Action.



New Zealand's Whanganui River, given legal status of a person.

Pope Francis marked World Water Day this year with a special greeting to participants at a Vatican-sponsored conference on water. He welcomed efforts to raise consciousness about "the need to protect water as a treasure belonging to everyone." He quoted UN figures, noting that every day a thousand children die from water-related illnesses and millions of people drink polluted water. "It is not too late, but it is urgent to realise the need and essential value of water for the good of humanity."

He inoi— prayer

A promise of living water

E Te Atua Kaihanga, Earthmaker:
we praise you for our world and all it contains,
especially for water that sustains all that lives.
Teach us to respect Earth's fragile balance,
and to care for the gifts of your creation.

Let us reverence the other life-forms
that share this planet with us,
on which we and future generations depend.
Help us to change our mind-sets and life-styles,
that we and all your creatures
may know the joy of abundant life.

May Jesus, whom you sent among us,
keep his promise of living water
welling up within us to unending life.
As we celebrate the joy of his rising,
may we find new ways to support all who thirst.
Amen!

A goal close to Catherine's heart

FROM her first-hand experience of the conditions in which she spent her whole life, Catherine McAuley knew what a difference decent work and pay could make to the people around her. Her primary objective in using her inheritance to build a House of Mercy in Dublin was to provide training opportunities for the girls and young women she watched at every turn, enabling them to find a job and earn the means to support themselves and their families. It's not surprising that of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations, Goal No 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth - is among the eight chosen by the Mercy International Association as 'most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy.'

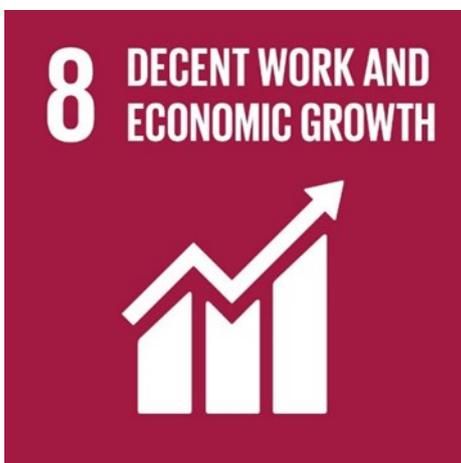
Indicators identified by the United Nations in pursuit of this goal include an expanding annual growth rate of GDP, espe-

cially in the least developed countries. Goal 8 also requires an ongoing commitment to efficiency in consumption and production, seeking to uncouple economic growth from damage to the environment. It also seeks to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities. The goal includes a commitment to equal pay for work of equal value.

The goal recommends that within the next five years (by 2020) there be a substantial reduction in the numbers of young people (aged 15-24) not in education, employment or training.

While GDP is one way of assessing development, Pope Francis has warned against using this as the sole measure of a nation's well-being. A growing GDP may hide, for instance, disastrous gaps between the super-rich and the utterly destitute. It may be used to justify a "free" market, without political oversight or regulation.

Pope Francis insists that true development must be sustainable, resting on three legs - economic, social and environmental. And if one leg is neglected, the entire structure may collapse. The solution, in Catholic social



A Mercy aged care staff member with a resident. Newly negotiated pay rates will help staff working in this sector to a better life for themselves and their families.

teaching, is to choose solidarity over self-interest, the common good over profit maximization, and sustainability over short-termism. This does not mean rejecting the market; but it does mean recognising the market has clear limits, and keeping it under human and ethical control.

The last word on this topic goes to the late US Republican and former gridiron player, Jack Kemp, quoted on the website of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission: "Economic growth doesn't mean anything, if it leaves people out."

Kia inoi tatou—let us pray together:

As we remember the life and witness of Catherine McAuley, let us give thanks for her creativity, her openness to the new, and her joy in finding fresh ways of letting God's mercy be seen and felt by the poor.

May we rejoice in reaching out, as she did, to those who might never expect that things could change for the better.

Amen.

A declaration for every Kiwi to consider

The United Nations' 13th Sustainable Development Goal - climate action - is among the eight named by Mercy International Association as 'most relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy.'

Among the latest in a series of leaflets to focus on the SDGs, Mercy Global Action has developed a useful resource on [Climate Action](#). Its starting point is a quote from Pope Francis, noting that 'climate change is contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world's poor, though least responsible for global warming... are suffering most from its impact.' (*Laudato Si'*)

The leaflet goes on to highlight some of the facts related to global warming, including an increase in earthquakes, cyclones and flooding, the deaths of thousands and the displacement of millions of people, and the prospect of extinction faced by animals and plants, unless greenhouse gas emissions are soon and severely reduced.

The leaflet includes a series of proposals for collective action. These include raising aware-



ness about the negative effects of climate change at local and international levels, lobbying for a transfer to renewable energy and for divesting from fossil fuels, campaigning for climate change measures, and forming groups to study *Laudato Si'* and the recommendations the pope makes in his letter.

Suggestions for personal action include avoiding waste of natural resources such as water, and support for fair trade products when shopping.

Among the goals adopted by Mercy Global Action, which represents the Sisters of Mercy at the United Nations in New York, are plans to curb climate change, to advocate to address the refugee problems caused, in part, by climate change, and to lobby to limit gas emissions by keeping 80 percent of fossil fuel resources underground.

Each human being
is an image of God ...
each creature has
its own purpose.
None is superfluous.
(Laudato Si' 84)

Graphic: © 2017 Mercy International Association

MGA will campaign against ecological violations, including the contamination of water, associated with different forms of mining.

Closer to home, a group of New Zealand scientists, professionals and celebrities joined earlier this year to launch a call for action on climate change. *Our Climate Declaration* calls on the Government to phase out the extraction and burning of fossil fuels by 2050, with no new coal mines or coal-burning plants and an end to deep-sea oil exploration and fracking for oil and gas.

Our Climate Declaration also invites citizens to play their part in taking climate action. Visit www.ourclimatedeclaration.org.nz to add yourself and your organisation to this venture.

He Inoi - Prayer

Embracing Earth with care

E Te Atua hau taiao,
God, breath of the cosmos:
by your word you call our world into being,
in your endless love, it continues to unfold.
Make us aware of our impact on all life,
that our touch may heal and not destroy.

Let us join with other citizens of goodwill
to declare our resolve to act for our climate,
to protect whatever is at risk of harm
and to avoid whatever has the potential
to leave our world worse than we found it.

May we accept our share in caring for Earth,
sustaining today a hope for tomorrow
and healing our wounded world
in mercy's name. Amen.

Creating a peaceful world by acting justly

The last page in this series has been saved to feature the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16, the last of eight among a total of 17 named by Mercy International Association as especially relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy. An appropriate theme as we prepare once more to celebrate Christmas, its focus is on promoting peace and justice, and building social institutions that are accountable and inclusive.



Mercy International describes this as the central, transformative goal, in a pamphlet to highlight this topic. "It addresses violence, war, injustice, corruption within national institutions, human trafficking, and exploitation of peoples and Earth." The call to collective action which Mercy makes to us all is to work with others in challenging violence and institutional abuse, advocating for an end to human trafficking and exploitation of the vulnerable, and campaigning for renewable energy and for ensuring that fossil fuels remain buried in the ground or under the sea.

It was Pope Paul VI who wrote in his message for World Day of Peace in 1972 that if we want real peace, we need to work for justice. The focus for Pope Francis in his message for January 1 next year is on migrants and refugees - those whom he calls "seekers of somewhere to live in peace" in our world, currently over 250 million migrants, of whom 22.5 million are refugees. The word from Francis is that we should be opening doors, rather than building fences or walls. He uses four words to outline the kind of response we should be making to this human crisis of enormous global proportions - 'welcoming', 'protecting', 'promoting' and integrating.'

Part of the challenge we face is to find ways of raising our collective voice, to remind the politicians and decision-makers that there is a moral truth beneath the crisis faced by asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as those whose homes are being destroyed by climate change and rising sea levels. They are members of the one human family, looking for a share in what God intends us all to share as our common home.

Advocating and articulating that message is something

which our own Sisters of Mercy did in November, joining their counterparts in Australia and New Guinea in a statement on the plight of 600 refugees in Manus Island. They appealed to Australian parliamentarians to bring the refugees without further delay to Australia, and commended the New Zealand Government for its offer to resettle some of them in this country. "We Sisters stand ready to provide assistance where possible," the statement declared. "It is time that decency prevailed and Australia lived up to its obligation and long-held reputation as

a fair, just and compassionate nation."

There is no knowing where a collective voice may go, or what change it may accomplish. One has only to consider how the recent #Me too campaign, of women standing up against men in positions of power who have abused and violated them, has affected the show-biz world and changed its culture for the better. Who can say what will be achieved if Mercy people stand together to act justly in the cause of peace?

Our passport to paradise

E Te Atua atawhai
Kaitiaki o nga hunga rawa kore -
God of mercy,
Saviour of the poor and powerless:
World Day of the Poor
is the latest gift from Pope Francis,
to be a once-a-year reminder
of your constant call to
turn fine words into deeds.

In Christ Jesus, born poor
to save us by his ultimate act
of self-emptying on the cross,
we find the true measure
of his redeeming love -
a willingness to lose all, to save all.

At this time we also recall
Catherine McAuley's insistence
that the poor need help today,
not next week.
With eyes of faith, she saw
that in reaching out to touch the poor
it was Christ himself whom she embraced.

Help us by your grace to know
as Pope Francis reminds us
that the poor are our passport to paradise
and that only what we invest in love remains,
when the rest of our strivings will vanish. Amen.