



'The world is too small now for an Us and a Them': Reflecting on World Refugee Day

"In our world today, 65 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, and 34,000 additional people are displaced every single day. The need to welcome refugees has never been greater. Now is the time to take a stand." From www.standwithrefugees.us

Religious communities enjoy a certain amount of status due to access to education and historical credibility. From that place of relative privilege we take stands on many issues. We speak out. We are generous with time and other resources. We have a great deal to add to public discourse.

A colleague tells me he would like to have more conversation about living a privileged life in a suffering world. We've talked about how hard it is to change flawed systems. I propose that temptations to despair and feeling overwhelmed are intertwined with recognition of today's systemic inequality.

Technology has made it difficult to escape images of hunger, sickness, and the violence of war. Our hearts break as we learn about toddlers being washed off boats into the sea, and the desperation of refugees trying to find safety. We feel challenged as we realize that international borders, race, sexual orientation, gender and organized religion are too often used to divide human beings and increase polarization and fear. As more countries close their borders to desperate people and governments call for travel bans, one wonders what it means to be a human being in the 21st century. We join the greatest minds in history in the journey toward recognizing that we are one.

Having spent significant time with people who have lost everything, I feel some of their despair as mine. Ours. I believe the world is too small now for an Us and a Them. We have no separate future and we need to break through the many ways we are so divided. It is increasingly **uncomfortable to be comfortable** in the face of today's reality. The Mercy community has worked for almost 200 years on behalf of people who are marginated. Now, however, many of us sense there are deeper questions to explore.

Mercy values, structures and resources facilitate both individual and collective responses to our world. These might range from avoidance and confusion to new energy, action, and delight. Promoting spirituality that nurtures confidence in God and in the fundamental goodness of humanity is crucial. In the words of a young woman from Kenya, who was detained in a county jail for months,

*Know that deep within you there is extraordinary strength you never knew.
When doubt threatens to steal your joy, when confusion clouds your judgement,
don't ever let fear stop you... look deep inside of you and when you're still enough you will see
clearly who you are.*

As we plan for the future we cannot forget the Mercy ministries, both individual and collective, that have influenced so many lives. To continue having an impact in this rapidly changing world, how might we respond to needs of our time? Convents, retirement centers, land, and ministry sites are being studied, sometimes sold or given to others to further a mission. Mercy leaders continue to exhibit skilled financial planning and good stewardship. Yet we know we are complicit with and benefit from the flawed systems mentioned above which leave so many behind. How can we model efforts to help change those structures and level society's playing field?

We might, individually and communally, visibly change practices which align us with corporate models such as executive travel and meetings which emulate corporate gatherings. Those resources could be used for people in need, as could assets we no longer require. We speak of solidarity, and of simple living. It's a struggle to make the connection between those concepts. What are we willing to let go of? Where are we willing to go in order to stand with the most vulnerable? Who do we welcome?

It might be effective to focus on and augment efforts already being made. We could more intentionally encourage and find funding for members of the broader Mercy community (vowed members, office workers, board members, students and all connected with Mercy) who have the interest and desire to actively participate in social efforts for positive change. This would enhance what already occurs: exploration of the movement to offer sanctuary to immigrants, non-violence training, service trips and delegations with follow-up awareness raising efforts, and participation in lobbying efforts both locally and nationally. Mercy presence and effort on behalf of ministries in Africa, Haiti and CCASA might have more participants and support if leadership and the broader community were to invite, encourage and allocate funds for enhancement of their work. Community support and presence are crucial.

Dorothy Day is an example of someone who knew words are not enough. But she also felt there is a price to be paid for following one's conscience. "I know what human fear is and how often it keeps us from following our conscience", she said. There are many kinds of fear: "fear of losing our bodily goods, fear of poverty, fear of losing our job, our reputation, and least of all there is the strange business of bodily fear". (from [The World will be saved by Beauty](#), by Kate Hennessy, Scribner, 2017)

Can we pro-actively encourage exploration of interconnectedness (oneness) at the broadest, deepest, and most mystical levels possible? Oneness is the core issue and the remedy for hatred. How can we more persistently develop compassion for all? Not an easy endeavor!

Let's support one another in taking our stand especially as we note World Refugee Day! Let's continue to resist the temptation to turn away from suffering, complexity and our own complicity, but rather take it in and breathe out love and compassion and joy. May the strength of our community give us courage to confront the challenge of this time.

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