



Reflection 2 – 2017

In last month's reflection Elaine Wainwright (Executive Leader, Mission and Ministry) reminded us of Pope Francis call to all to practice the 8th Work of Mercy: Care for Our Common Home. I would just like us to reflect a little more on that phrase: Our Common Home. When Francis uses the term, he is talking about the home that is common to us as humans but also to grass and trees and koalas and kangaroos and ants and elephants and mountains and oceans. Because it is common to all of us, we are asked to think about our relationships with all who share this home. We need to be aware of how our actions affect the other members of this home.

What does it mean to have a home? What does it mean to feel at home? There is something about safety, about knowing your place, about being accepted, appreciated and nourished. It may not even be a specific place. Since I have moved to Sydney, I am asked if I am feeling at home yet. I am beginning to feel at home. I know where I am. I know how to find my way around a bit more. I know that I am accepted by the Sisters here. I can say that I feel "at home" when I am in a group of Sisters. So, home has something to do with having sense of place, of position, of being with others, loved, accepted and allowed to flourish.

In our 2011 Chapter Statement we are invited to extravagant hospitality, compassion and justice to our earth community shattered by displacement. This earth community is our common home. In our present times, we see and hear about so much displacement within this common home: displacement of peoples and displacement of the other than human beings with whom we share the home. We see peoples from all over the world, especially from war torn nations such as Syria, South Sudan, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and Yemen looking for a place to call home. We see pictures of people, including large numbers of children arriving in unseaworthy boats on the shores of Italy and Turkey, some of whom die in the attempt to seek protection and asylum. We see pictures of people in Refugee camps in Jordan trying to build their makeshift shelters into the semblance of a home. In our own country, we do not admit many of those seeking asylum even to enter, let alone share our common home of Australia. How can we exercise our hospitality, compassion and justice to those humans who are being denied their place in our common home?

Pope Francis calls us in this new work of mercy to "take simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness." We cannot solve the whole issue of the millions of people who are and who are being displaced, but we can do simple things like join in calling for an end to our present policy regarding the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. We can talk about the issue to raise awareness of the injustice of it, we can, in whatever way is possible for us, stand with those who are impacted by these policies. We can become more educated about the global issues and be able to have well informed conversations about for example, the effects of war. We, as mercy people, can help to spread the word that our home belongs to all, especially for those people who feel as if they do not have a place in this home.

Our other-than human beings are also suffering displacement in so many ways. Extinctions of plants and animals are an indicator of such displacement. Research from the Centre for Biological Diversity in the US states that ; "Major extinction events are nothing new for the planet, but species are now dying out at an alarming rate thanks to humans. Unlike past mass extinctions, caused by events like asteroid strikes, volcanic eruptions and natural climate shifts, the current crisis is almost entirely caused by us -- humans," explains the Center. "In fact, 99 percent of currently threatened species are at risk from human activities, primarily those driving habitat loss, introduction of exotic species and global warming."



In his letter entitled “Show Mercy to our Common Home”, Pope Francis states: “We must not be indifferent or resigned to the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems, often caused by our irresponsible and selfish behaviour. He then reminds us of what he stated in *Laudato Si’* “Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” These are powerful words coming from Francis.

Mining, agriculture, global warming, introduction of exotic species and urban development all contribute to loss of habitat. In Australia, there are concerns for one of our most iconic inhabitants, the Koala. As well as loss of habitat, koalas are at risk due to vehicle impacts, dog attacks, bushfires and drought. Although Koalas are not yet listed as endangered, there is concern in the decreasing number of koalas observed by a research in all Australian States. A second inhabitant of our home, about whom there is global concern is the bee. Bees and other pollinating insects play an essential role in ecosystems. A third of all our food depends on their pollination. A world without pollinators would be devastating for food production.

A business called the The Urban Hive was begun in 2010 by a Sydney gentleman called Doug Purdie. He laments the disappearance of bees and keeps bees on his roof in Darlinghurst encouraging all of us to do our bit for the bees. He says. “If beekeeping doesn’t appeal there are other ways to show bee appreciation. Decrease your use of pesticides and herbicides, and grow flowers. Bees are drawn to blue flowers but any colour will do. Let some leafy vegetables and herbs flower, break up the lawn with some flowerbeds, tie flowering climbers on the fence or plant a flowering tree in the nature strip. Feed the bees and the bees’ hard work will help feed us all.” Koalas and bees are just two examples of the threat of extinction.

Another example of how Earth is being shattered by human activity is demonstrated by the impact on the Great Barrier Reef from global warming, farming, mining and overfishing. Again, we cannot, by ourselves, fix these huge issues. I am sure that we have all been aware of the calls to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The wonderful programme by David Attenborough on the reef ended with his appeal to those who can act, to do so to save the reef. We can add our voices to those already advocating on behalf of this important member of our common home. There is a very useful website: www.fightforthereef.org.au which gives examples of how we can participate in campaigns on behalf of the life that makes up this wonder of our world.

From these few examples, we can see that our common home is in need of Mercy. During our MIRP discussions, we became more aware of the many ways in which our home, our earth community is being shattered by our human activity. Some of the issues raised concerns for displaced people while others reflected on displacements within Earth. In November last year, we launched our Policy on Sustainable Living: An Integrated Approach to Sustainable Living as one response of how we can care for our common home. We are now in the process of employing a Project Manager Sustainability. We are also about to begin a programme of saving energy through installation of solar panels where possible and, if not, of getting connected to green power. In the meantime, we can all do as Pope Francis invites us in *Laudato Si’* (211) “avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.” Our Common Home continues to call us to remember that how we live affects all those with whom we share this home. In *Laudato Si’* Francis asks us to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, the cry coming from this common home. He concludes his document on Show Mercy to our Common Home with this prayer:



“O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten on this earth, who are so precious in your eyes... God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all creatures of this earth. God of mercy, may we receive your forgiveness and convey your mercy throughout our common home. Praise be to you! Amen.”

Let us continue to show mercy to our common home, so that all may indeed, know it as a home.

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