

Opening Reflection

2018 Governance Forum



Eveline Crotty RSM
Institute Leader

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I would like to start with a poem:

Old maps no longer work

Joyce Rupp from "Dear heart, come home"

I keep pulling it out –
The old map of my inner path.
I squint closely at it,
Trying to see some hidden road
That maybe I've missed,
But there's nothing there now,
Except some well-travelled paths.
They have seen my footsteps often,
Held my laughter, caught my tears.

I keep going over the old map
But now the roads lead nowhere,
A meaningless wilderness
Where life is dull and futile.

"Toss away the old map" she says.
"You must be kidding!" I reply.
She looks at me
And repeats, "toss it away.
It's of no use where you're going."

"I have to have a map!" I cry,
"Even if it takes me nowhere.
I can't be without direction,"
"But you are without direction,"
she says, "so why not let go, be free?"

So there I am - tossing away the old map,
Sadly, fearfully putting it behind me.
"Whatever will I do?" wails my security.
"Trust me," says my midlife soul.

No map, no specific directions.
No "this way ahead" or "take a left."
How will I know where to go?
How will I find my way? No map!
But then my midlife soul whispers:
"There was a time before maps
When pilgrims travelled by the stars."

It is time for the pilgrim in me
To travel in the dark,
To learn to read the stars
that shine in my soul.
I will wait for the stars,
Trust their guidance
And let their light be enough for me.

In Matthew's gospel, we hear of the wise men of a pagan tradition who followed a star to find the child who was born to be king of the Jews. Then, as you recall, after spending time with the child and his parents giving gifts, and I am sure receiving gifts of a different kind, they knew in their hearts, the result of a dream, that they had to travel home by a different route.

If you come closer to home, each of you here have followed a "star" to come to this gathering place to reflect on the good governance of our works of Mercy over these two days.

Can you name the star that you followed to bring you here?

Take a minute to name for yourself the 'star' that brought you here? Write it down if you wish as we will come back to it at the end of the two days.

Then ponder the thought: **I wonder if I will go home by another route, grounded and filled with treasure that will enlighten and expand my thinking about my involvement in the works of Mercy?**

or

At the end of the two days, **will I be following the same "star" home that brought me here? How will I need to participate in these days for this not to happen?**

Every six years, Sisters of Mercy come together in what we call a Chapter. Its purpose is for us to reflect upon the past six years and name our own present reality. It is also a time for us to be aware of the changing context of our global world, and reflect on what this means for us as religious women in this context today.

The theme for the 2017 Chapter was, "Who are we becoming by the Grace of God?". During our time together, hopes and aspirations emerged to become "our guiding star" for the next six years.

Let's read it together:

At this time of global vulnerability
God's transforming mercy
fires our hearts anew with
deeper reverence for all creation.

Disturbed by
the despair and suffering of many peoples and
the degradation of Earth
we are impelled to reflective action for gospel justice.

*Long dispela taim bilong wol i gat hevi na wari
marimari bilong God i senisim
hat bilong mipela olsem niupela paia
wantaim bikpela ona long olgeta samting.*

*Plenti ol pipol i tingting
long pen na hevi i bagarapim ol
na long ol bagarap ol i mekim
long graun bilong mipela,
dispela i kirapim mipela
long lukluk gen long wei
na stretpela pasin bilong gutnius.*

I read this statement and ponder:

Am I really disturbed by the despair and suffering of many peoples and the degradation of Earth?

Then my 'other self' speaks up:

Interesting statement, appropriate for all involved with ISMAPNG, but life will go on as usual, I am doing a good enough job, and I haven't the time for this to really get under my skin. If I do, I might have to do something about it not only in the wider world but in the ministry or work that I am involved in?

I dig down further:

Do I personally get disturbed that there are people who cannot access our services, be it schools, hospitals, aged care facilities, social services?

Which takes me to the next question:

What policies or restraints are in place that exclude some people from our works of Mercy?

I ask myself again:

Where are the new needs in my ministry that are emerging?

Am I hearing them?

Do I ignore them with busyness or do I begin to delve further into the need that I hear arising? Be it to do with the Earth or peoples.

I recently read a quote by Howard W Thurman who said:

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do that.....Because what the world really needs is people who have come alive.”

These are all serious questions and this is just the first line of the Chapter Statement for me to take seriously.

Let’s stop a moment: What questions arise in you as you read the first line of the Chapter Statement: Share this with someone beside you?

So then I go to the third line I ask:

- 1. What will fire my/our hearts anew?**
- 2. What will bring us truly alive?**

Stop and reflect a moment:

Will we, all of us present, be **impelled to reflective action for gospel justice** to look at our service, move out of our comfort zone, re-examine it and if need be reach out beyond our present services to listen to those most disadvantaged and see what is needed to relieve some of **“that despair and suffering”** (*With this either being close to home, regionally even internationally as the web of life is all connected.*)

So at this time of global vulnerability what will impel us together to reflective action not just to bring about change but transformation which is real gospel justice?

"Change and transformation are not the same. Change happens at a point in time; transformation happens over time. Change is a new beginning; transformation begins with an ending."

Brother Sean Sammon FMS, quoted in 'Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding' by Diarmuid O'Murchu, 2016, page 9.

We have wonderful examples of this in the lives of Catherine and Pope Francis. Their personal transformations to become the people we know took quite some time.

Walter Brueggemann, an eminent Scripture scholar, says for transformation to take place we go through three movements:

- 1. Our orientation in life is secure and focused:** *We know the path of life we want to take – all is going well*

2. Then there is **Disorientation** – *something begins to shift in us – it could be minor or major; for Catherine a major shift was the death of her parents*

3. **Reorientation** – *we reorientate our thinking or way of being. It is not the same as the original orientation. We can choose to go with this change which may be uncomfortable or unchartered (the way of the pilgrim) or we can go back to the safer orientation. Catherine was 52 years of age when the “star” that she was following in her heart became grounded in the establishment of Catherine’s house for disadvantaged women.*

Let’s turn to Scripture:

There are many examples in the Bible where we see gradual transformation taking place in Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was here to spread the Good News to the poor. But time and time again it was the outsider who grounded him on what that really meant and it was often the poorest of the poor.

There was every reason for a Jewish man not to go near a person who was ritually unclean or marginalised in some way, because of societal, cultural, religious or gender prejudices. But these people kept coming to Jesus.

For example, the Syrophoenician woman - an outsider, a gentle woman from Greece asking that her daughter be healed of a demon. The woman with the haemorrhage, ritually unclean and poor, spent all of her money on physicians to be cured. Remember the context, Jesus was on his way to cure Jairus’ daughter. He was focused and on his way. Then he becomes disorientated, he felt something, and asks, “who did that, who touched my cloak?”. The woman, unnamed of course, takes an enormous risk to touch his cloak to be healed. There were others - lepers, social outcasts, Samaritans and the list goes on. Jesus is challenged. The outsiders are saying, “your good news includes me, not just the poor of Israel but the poorest of the poor”. Jesus on many occasions was disorientated – people challenged him.

In the gospels there are often crowds, disciples trying to get Jesus not to take risks, urging him not to step over the boundaries, but he goes with the disorientation and the outcome is new learning for him as well as the other in the encounter.

After the resurrection Jesus joins two disciples, probably a man and a woman, Scripture scholars tell us, “on the road,” (a very grounded image) to Emmaus. There he walks, talks, stops, sits with them and breaks bread.

Later Jesus appears to the disciples on the beach. Once again, he sits and eats with them. He takes the time. This is all very ordinary and down to earth. During this meal, along with other things, he

says - "Go and proclaim to all nations." Now everyone is included – no one is to be excluded, not only the poor but the poorest of the poor.

Can you think in your own life when there was 'disorientation/disruption' in your own life? Did you have to re-orientate your life to cope with this new reality you were facing? Where in life has this re-orientation taken you?

Now move this thought to the ministry in which are you involved:

Is it all very comfortable or is challenge coming your way? What do you hear yourself saying? Is it anything like this?

1. Our ministry is going well? Let's keep it on an even keel – that is enough to cope with.
2. Or, yes we are beginning to see some change needed. We are taking note, listening, reflecting, feeling some disorientation and noting the challenges. We are asking the questions - What does this mean for us? Who do we want this ministry to be serving in 10 years, in the next 5 years, even next year? What structures will enhance our ministry into the future? Do we know who the people are who are falling between the cracks and not eligible to attend our service? How can we reach out to them?

Give yourself a moment and if with someone from your service check with them - are we asking these questions?

To ask these questions takes **Courage**, the saying goes, "being deeply loved gives you strength, loving deeply gives you courage."

It takes Trust

As the well-known quote says - "A bird sitting in a tree is not afraid of the branch breaking because her trust is not in the branch, but her own wings" and we add – the belief we are loved by God and could transform the world.

It also takes Hope

"Hope is the little voice you hear whisper 'maybe' when it seems the entire world is shouting 'No'

All of this we do within our words of our Chapter Statement

*God's transforming mercy
fires our hearts anew with
deeper reverence for all creation.*

To conclude may I share a poem written by Noel Davis:

Taking each other beyond what we alone see

Accompanying each other

Caring for each other

Doing things together

Taking each other

Beyond what we alone see

To places we have never been

Finding a way through the impasses

Growing in trust and self-confidence

And the audacity to explore another way

Bring into the light our unlived selves

Grow us into the fullness of ourselves

And expand the frontiers of our freedom

To choose

(‘Together at the Edge: Trust Me’ by Noel Davis, 2011, Page 175).

May we work together as one over these days so that in the coming years our Chapter Statement takes flesh in all of our varying ministries.