



**MERCY
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Introduction: Presence in Ministry and Community

Elizabeth Davis rsm (Newfoundland)

In October 2020, we continued the third Segment of Mercy Global Presence in month two, centering our hearts and minds on “presence to Earth.” The wisdoms were richly diverse, varied, and profound. In my Introduction, I focused on four themes: creation, covenant, care for Earth and God’s steadfast love, and Earth’s response. I reflected the special perspective of the Indigenous peoples who, while diverse in their lifestyles, in their cultures and in their spiritualities, all hold in common their interconnectedness with Earth. The theologian, Mary Tinney rsm, noted that “we are present in community, alongside other creatures, with whom we have more in common than what differentiates us, and from that stance we are present in community with the living and loving God, and impelled to act ethically for the whole community.” She added, “It is timely to open our senses and our hearts and be present to Earth in her grandeur and her groaning.” The artist Carmel Bracken rsm gave us a profound poem entitled “A 2020 Vision” with excerpts below:

NOW is our jump time.
As we emerge from this strangely surreal time
The quality of our presence to earth
May well determine whether we earthlings
Make it through this jump time.
May we learn to communicate with
The consciousness of Earth
And all sentient beings.
Truly sensing that we are cosmic stuff
embedded in the ecology
of the Whole
Thus becoming a gateway
for the presencing of the Whole
allowing the fire of creation to burn
and enter the world through us
Enabling the next step of evolution.

The grassroots minister, Michael Gross, used images, poetry and reflective words, delighting us as he told us: “A wonderfully exciting time for a biologist, specifically a plant ecologist like me, who needs to be outside. At 40 degrees North Latitude and 75 degrees West Longitude, Earth ‘creatures’ are re-awakening and new lives are emerging at an ever-increasing rate each day. Those of us who were trained to observe the world around us can’t bear to be inside, away from our DNA kin. . . I invite readers to think about how Earth has been present to them, and they to Earth, and how they can have more mutually beneficial experiences with ‘Earth.’”

From Mercy Global Action, Colleen Swain found hope for this pandemic time by learnings gleaned from wildfires. “During wildfires, despite mass devastation to life, nutrients from the dead trees are returned to the soil. This exposes the forest floor to more sunlight and allows seedlings that have been released by the fire to sprout and grow, a process known to scientists as ecological succession. What I didn’t realize was how relevant the wildfires and this transformation were in shaping my own ecological succession, and ultimately, my presence to Earth during the COVID-19 pandemic. . . This is our call. To be present to Earth and be reborn from the ashes in ways that are inclusive and ensure the flourishing of Earth.

Dominique Marendy was this month's distinct voice. She spoke about the rising concerns for compassion fatigue, "a condition described as emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a reduced ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring. It is sometimes referred to as secondary traumatic stress. While there are many plights that can cause us unrest one of the most common is the call to protect the earth." She gave us tips to help us cope, reminding us that reducing compassion fatigue means we have more energy to give to the causes we care about and stay present.

Judith Moroney rsm, Paula Anamani rsm, and Cheryl Connelly rsm shared with us an absolutely beautiful reflective prayer. They used music, images of their beloved New Zealand Earth and Earth creatures, poetry, intercessions, and quotations. They invited us to hear the sound of the Conch Shell, a call for us to be still and attend to the Presence of Earth within and around us. *Good Reading* continued this reflective stillness with videos, poetry, blessings, Earth meditations, and interviews with two loved poets, Mary Oliver and John O'Donohue.

Presence in Community and Ministry

We now begin month three with "presence in community and in ministry." Our wisdom gained from our first two themes – presence to and with God and presence to Earth – will be a firm foundation on which to hear this month's voices.

My good friend Bishop Geoff Peddle, from the Anglican Church of Canada tradition, was to be the theological voice this month. Sadly, he died suddenly last month, leaving a deeply grieving wife and two sons as well as his Diocesan community and his many friends. He worked closely with the Sisters of Mercy in St. John's NL. He was a participant in our Mercy International Reflection Process, never missing one session over the whole year in 2016. He attended the Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy in 2017. He wrote a chapter in the special edition of MAST, focused on "Cosmology and Mercy." He invited me to speak at his Conference on *Faith in the Public Square*. I have lost a friend. Our province and our country have lost a faith-filled, wise, visionary, and energizing leader. We are blessed to have known him.

I have written the theological reflection in his stead and, therefore, will not comment further here in my Introduction. I am certain that I could never express the depth of wisdom, experience, and knowledge that Bishop Peddle held and shared so richly in his writing and in his preaching. His constant cry was, "The church has left the building. We must live our faith in the public square." May he rest now for all eternity in the joy and peace of the Risen One whom he loved and served with all his heart.



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Theological Imaginings: Presence in Community & Ministry

Elizabeth Davis rsm (Newfoundland)

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8) – these words from the prophet Micah gently set the context for this theological reflection on presence in community and ministry. Doing justice in ministry, loving kindness in community and walking humbly with God for both ministry and community are a simple and vibrant expression of right relationships among humans and with their God.

Presence in Community

Let us begin our reflection with community – the sacred communion of all creation. The first chapter of the first book of the Bible tells us, “God saw everything that God had made, and, indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). In Psalm 24 (v. 1), we read, “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” In a visionary statement in the mid-1990s, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians wrote, “Spirituality is the name we give to that which provides us with the strength to go on, for it is the assurance that God is in the struggle. Spirituality spells out our connectedness to God, to our human roots, to the rest of nature, to one another and to ourselves.” Today theologians take as a given that all community is rooted in this sense of the sacred communion of all creation. When we believe this to be so, our sense of community shifts dramatically.

Jesus, at the Last Supper as narrated in the Gospel of John, describes community at the core of being his followers, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, building on that foundation, assumes that relationship is at the heart of community, “My legacy to the Institute is charity: If you preserve the peace and union which have never yet been violated among us, you will feel, even in this world, a happiness that will surprise you and be to you a foretaste of the bliss prepared for every one of you in heaven.” She adds an intimate image of presence, “Our charity is to be cordial. Now cordial signifies something that renews, invigorates, and warms. Such should be the effect of our love for each other.”

Community and Ministry Meet

Implicit in these words on community is the reach into ministry. The Jesuit James Keegan puts it eloquently, “Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.” Many of us would have studied the work of Martin Buber, the Austrian Jewish philosopher who died in 1965. His “Ich-Du” or “I-Thou” laid the foundation for the later work of many thinkers who directly linked community flowing into ministry, all rooted in presence. Buber said, “All real living is meeting. . . Healing emerges from the meeting that occurs between the two people as they become fully present to each other.” For Buber, presence describes a special way of being there or being with the other person which indicates a deep capacity to respond to the needs people have to be heard, understood, respected, and, when it is required, helped and supported. Buber is echoing a more ancient tradition inherited by Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs whose Sanskrit word for “mercy” *daaya* means “suffering in the suffering of all beings.”

For this connection between community and ministry to be real, inclusion is key. In the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, inclusion is valued although not always lived. We read in the first book of Samuel, “The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearances, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). The suffering servant song from Isaiah (the only one which speaks of women) begins, “Enlarge the site of your tent, and let the

curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes” (Is 54:2). And in the parable of Matthew 25, we read, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25:35).

When a longer text from the Hebrew Scriptures is repeated in its entirety in the New Testament, we know that is a signal to pay attention. At his first homily recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, “God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young ones will see visions and your old ones will have dreams. Yes, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in these days’” (Joel 2: 28—32, Acts 2: 17—18). Catherine McAuley also speaks to inclusion when she says, “Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible.”

The liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, whose book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, influenced Pope Francis in his writing of *Laudato Si'*, speaks to the connection between community and ministry by using the wonderful image of the daughters and sons of the rainbow. In doing so, he is referring to the first covenant God makes (Gen 9:1-17), the covenant between God and all Earth (not just humans). God chooses the rainbow as a reminder of the covenant if God should ever forget that it had been made! Boff writes, “Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals.” Today when we speak about integral ecology, we often quote from Boff’s book, “The cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor are one.”

If inclusion is essential to a healthy connection between community and ministry, boundary walking is one of the most effective ways to bring about the connection. Instead of seeing boundaries as self-protective walls and a means to define separateness, we need to see them as places of meeting where new relationships take form and exchange and growth happen. In his *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis wrote, “Unafraid of the fringes, Jesus himself became a fringe (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Jn 1:14). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there.”

The theologian Anthony Gittins, CSSp, tells us, “Religious are especially and urgently called to the margins to encounter the people who struggle to subsist there. But we are friends of God and prophets only if we have a wrenching hunger and raging thirst for God’s justice, and for putting our lives on the line, as Jesus did. This is something we all do differently but each of us must urgently do.” The German priest, Sieger Köder, has painted the Samaritan Woman gazing into the well, seeing her own image and that of Jesus, a poignant image of two boundary-walkers!

Presence in Ministry

There is an insightful hymn by Matthew West entitled *Do Something* which contains the following verse:

I woke up this morning, Saw a world full of trouble now
Thought, how'd we ever get so far down, How's it ever gonna turn around
So I turned my eyes to Heaven. I thought, "God, why don't You do something?"
Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of People living in poverty, Children sold into slavery
The thought disgusted me. So, I shook my fist at Heaven
Said, "God, why don't You do something?"
God said, "I did, I created you"

Three women theologians describe ministry in a way that connects it intimately with community and presence. The words of Sandra Schneiders, whom are frequently quoted, “We must be where the cry of the poor meets the ear of God.” Her description is echoed by another woman religious, this time a Daughter of Wisdom from France, Inès Maria dell’ Eucaristia fdl, who wrote, “In this troubled world, we wish to express God’s love for wounded humanity and always we must answer the question: how can we dare Wisdom and Mercy in the mosaic of our realities?” The theologian, Wendy Farley, adds, “Mercy is a mode of relationship and a power that is wounded by the suffering of others and propelled to action in their behalf now.”

When Jesus began his ministry, it was rooted in presence and in relationship. His parable of the Good Samaritan carries within it five moments in ministry and mercy presence: of the three who pass the wounded man, only one sees contemplatively; the Samaritan’s heart is moved with compassion; he cares for the man, binding up his wounds (“mercying”); he creates a circle of mercy to help the man (the circle made up of the wine and oil from Earth, the road, the donkey and the innkeeper); and Jesus creates the culture of mercy when he advises the man to “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:25-37).

In Jesus’ parable in Matthew’s Gospel, the way of ministry is described in detail, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:34-36). Pope Francis adds another, “I was Earth, broken and abused, and you cared for me.” The king not only describes the areas of need but makes clear that each one of us is vulnerable. In crafting the *Corporal Works of Mercy* in the Roman Catholic tradition, we have missed that nuance and framed them instead almost as a condescending outreach not in the spirit of community but as reaching out to the other. There is a powerful image of these words of Matthew in the dining room of The Gathering Place in St. John’s NL, a centre of ministry for homeless people and precariously housed people. For each action, you cannot tell if the person is receiving or giving.

The connections between ministry, community and presence are threaded through Catherine McAuley’s letters and other writings. She wrote about five postulants who were joining the community, “Consecrate themselves to the service of the poor for Christ’s sake . . . this is some of the fire He cast on the earth – kindling.” She wanted the ministry relationship to be loving and compassionate as she did community relationships: “You must be cheerful and happy, animating all around you,” and “There are three things the poor prize more highly than gold, tho’ they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.”

One modern image deepens our sense of connection between community, ministry and presence. It is a sculpture by Timothy Schmalz, entitled *The Homeless Christ*. Copies of it are placed outdoors in public places where many people walk past. Often people sit on the bench, not realizing it is a sculpture until they see the feet. Many passersby glare at the statue, believing it to be a homeless person.

This sculpture is a powerful conclusion to our reflection. Its very presence evokes response. These responses speak loudly of the strength and the weakness of community among us. They speak loudly to our understanding of ministry. They become a measure of the ways in which we relate to one another, the ways in which we are present to one another, the ways in which we live out the invitation of our God, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4.



Presence in Ministry and Community



"The state of consecrated life is thus one way of experiencing a "more intimate" consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come." (CCC)

Grassroots Ministry: Presence in Ministry & Community

Marie O'Dea rsm (Great Britain Union): 'The Homeless Jesus'

The world-famous sculpture – “The homeless Jesus” - erected by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz depicting Jesus as a homeless person lying on a park bench came to Glasgow in 2017. The morning of the unveiling of the sculpture was wet and cold and as we stood there I recalled the many homeless people I have had the privilege of meeting during my time of working with this group in London and Glasgow. Pope Francis said recently in his message for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, ***“it's not about numbers, it's about people. If we meet them, we will get to know them, and if we know their stories, we will be able to understand them.”***¹

At this time each year, the plight of homeless people is usually highlighted by the media. The weather is getting colder and the rest of the world is becoming excited preparing for Christmas. This year the pandemic is affecting every person especially those living in poverty and sleeping on our streets. Believing that each of us is an image of God, we can say that Jesus continues to be homeless today in our towns and cities and we are faced with the question, ***“Can we pass them by and ignore their plight?”***

We read many stories of wonderful acts of kindness shown to individuals lying on pieces of cardboard or wrapped in old blankets in doorways or under bridges. Sadly, we also hear of homeless people being abused verbally and physically by people who consider that it is their own fault for being in that situation.

There are many causes of homelessness - addictions, mental health issues, breakup of relationships, unemployment, among others. While there are similarities in people's situations, each person's story is unique. During my time in the night shelter in London and in the day centre in Glasgow, I encountered people whose stories often brought tears to my eyes and others who could laugh amidst their sufferings.

Jean² had been a member of a religious congregation for several years. She left to marry a man who had an alcohol problem and whom she believed she could help. Sadly, she too developed a problem with alcohol, and both lost their accommodation, ending up on the streets in London until they were directed to the night shelter. Jean's story reminded me of the saying “it's easy to go down but very difficult to come up.”

Jim moved between the streets of Glasgow and the local prison, which he called his home. Each time he presented at the day centre, he regaled me with stories from the prison. He saw himself as the person, who helped to get promotions for the prison officers. Jim's

¹ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2020

² All names used in this article are fictitious

laughter was infectious and helped to make a difficult day less stressful.

Believing that no person is a hopeless case and inspired by Catherine McAuley saying, ***“it is better to relieve 100 imposters if there be any such than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty”***, I have been fortunate to witness individuals progressing from sleeping rough to recovering from addictions and eventually securing their own accommodation and living independently. Brian who was in his mid-40s and suffering from drug abuse, was sleeping rough since he was 18. He served several prison sentences for violence. Eventually he sought help for his addiction, got into a college course and secured permanent accommodation. Today he is a support worker for people suffering with addictions.

When I began working with homeless people over 40 years ago, I dreamed of the day when homelessness would be eradicated and there would be no need for night shelters, hostels, day centres etc. Sadly, the need today is just as great, despite many improvements in services, better accommodation, more advisory and addiction services, better healthcare services targeted to the needs of the homeless and other support services. The streets of London and Glasgow are still seeing large numbers of people sleeping rough. Pope Francis’ plea to us ***“to go out into the streets”***³ and Father Gabriel Gutierrez’s OSF further request ***“and embrace these people because their faces are none other than the faces of God”***⁴ are still relevant today.

The homeless population has changed greatly from 40 years ago. Today people from different countries, who have arrived on our shores seeking asylum have ended up on our streets or in the night shelters or hostels. Some have been trafficked and have escaped their captors. Another difference is the age group. We are seeing more young people, sometimes second and third generations, who have never known a loving and secure home. While both statutory and voluntary agencies are working hard to meet their needs, “the cry of the poor is still being heard.”

Loneliness and isolation are experienced by people of all circumstances, but it is especially evident among homeless people. For many they have lost contact with family and friends. During my time in the night shelter and the day centre, I was often asked to sit and listen to someone or to talk to them - a simple request but a very important and necessary one. The words of Catherine often echoed in my ears as I sat and experienced their loneliness – ***“there are things the poor price more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.”*** Funerals for people attending the centres were stark reminders of the aloneness and the anonymity of some people. I attended many over the years, but some were more distressing than others. On a few occasions two other members of staff and myself waited in the crematorium for somebody to at least mention the person’s name but no word was spoken. There were no family or friends to grieve, but in the silence, I knew the Lord was saying, ***“I have called you by name you are mine.”***

³ Pope Francis to Youth in Rio Cathedral July 2013

⁴ St. Anthony’s Brief – Oct/Nov 2020

Having no home is not just being without accommodation, it is much more. My wish for all homeless people, especially those known to me is summed up in John O'Donohue's poem,"

"FOR A NEW HOME."⁵

May this house shelter your life.
When you come in home here,
May all the weight of the world
Fall from your shoulders.

May your heart be tranquil here,
Blessed by peace the world cannot give.

May this home be a lucky place,
Where the graces your life desires
Always find the pathway to your door.

May nothing destructive
Ever cross your threshold.

May this be a safe place
Full of understanding and acceptance,
Where you can be as you are,
Without the need of any mask
Of pretence or image.

May this home be a place of discovery,
Where the possibilities that sleep
In the clay of your soul can emerge
To deepen and refine your vision
For all that is yet to come to birth.

May it be a house of courage,
Where healing and growth are loved,
Where dignity and forgiveness prevail;
A home where patience of spirit is prized,
And the sight of the destination is never lost
Though the journey be difficult and slow.
May there be great delight around this hearth.
May it be a house of welcome
For the broken and diminished.

May you have the eyes to see
That no visitor arrives without a gift
And no guest leaves without a blessing.

⁵ For a new home" from "To Bless the Space between us." A Book of Invocations and Blessings
Published March 4th 2008 by Convergent Books (first published January 1st 2008)



Mercy Global Action: Presence in Ministry & Community

Cecilie Kerns (Americas): 'Embracing a Culture of Encounter'

In times of hardship, uncertainty and fear, we rely on those around us for solidarity, support, guidance, information and empathy. Despite physical isolation and institutional barriers, community and care for our neighbor are more important than ever. During this time of global crisis, and faced with systemic inequalities and the disproportionate suffering of marginalized communities, it is clear that when one person is vulnerable, we are all vulnerable. Thus, community and solidarity, expressed in service to people, are vital at the global as well as the local level. The current pandemic has offered us an opportunity not only to reflect, but to act – to overcome the walls that separate us, to foster community, and to minister to others. Love for our neighbor compels not just a desire for actions on behalf of others in need, but leads to seeking transformation of our ability to address those needs both individually and communally.

These messages are central to Mercy Global Action's recent publication, ["Hope in a Time of Pandemic: Responding to COVID-19 through a Mercy Lens,"](#) as well as Pope Francis' new encyclical, [Fratelli tutti](#). Both of these documents emerged from a process of listening, theological reflection and analysis of expert writings. Both highlight the inequalities that persist in our societies, challenge us to act against unjust economic and political systems that exploit people and planet, and emphasize the importance of kindness and solidarity in overcoming these challenges to ensure that all people can live with dignity and exercise their universal human rights. Both documents also call for improved international cooperation, as "nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet" (FT 137). As members of one human family, we have a responsibility to care for one another.

Central to *Fratelli tutti* and "Hope in a Time of Pandemic" is the parable of the Samaritan, which challenges us to reflect on our relationship with those different from us and those who are suffering. Pope Francis calls upon us to reflect: "Here, all our distinctions, labels and masks fall away: it is the moment of truth. Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others?" (FT 70) The parable calls us to reject isolation – rather than observing the suffering of others from our place of comfort and privilege, we must actively reach out to those in need, even if they are different from us, or excluded by society. "The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project" (FT 69). How do we as people of Mercy include, integrate and lift up those who have fallen or are suffering in our ministries?

In “Hope in a Time of Pandemic,” the Mercy World has revealed a ‘pandemic of kindness,’ demonstrating the human capacity for transformation and calling forth great acts of resilience, kindness and creativity. We have witnessed and heard accounts of incredible acts of kindness throughout the Mercy World and beyond, including providing essential services and assistance to people in need, as well as providing emotional and spiritual support to one another. While the pandemic has been devastating to health and disrupted many aspects of our lives, it has brought about a renewed sense of the importance of relationships and community. There is a heightened awareness of the value of connecting with and caring for others.

In *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis also references the importance of kindness, likening it to a star “shining in the midst of darkness” that “frees us from the cruelty... the anxiety... the frantic flurry of activity” that prevail in the contemporary era (FT 222, 224). The chapter on “*Dialogue and friendship in society*,” further emphasizes a “culture of encounter” with everyone, even with the world’s peripheries, because “each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable” (FT 215). The culture of encounter requires us to place the human person and respect for the common good at the center of all political, social and economic activity.

Entering into a culture of encounter is not an easy process, but the pope's call to break down walls resonates with our daily work to build bridges of dialogue and accompaniment and find common humanity between people. In a world plagued by poverty, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of systemic marginalization, Mercy ministries exemplify a culture of encounter that emphasizes the dignity and rights of all people, and works to reduce social, economic and political inequalities. In the spirit of Catherine McAuley, we are called to celebrate the values of our intrinsic interdependence, compassion, kindness, justice and equity and use this time to focus on new creation and a new order.

Being truly present to one another, and being open to a mutual encounter with the other who comes as a stranger, is a prophetic act in today's divisive context. True dialogue, indeed, is what allows one to respect the point of view of others, their legitimate interests and, above all, the truth of human dignity. This approach is vital to ensuring that people have the agency to participate meaningfully in their communities. We are called to action and to deeper solidarity, which “means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights” (FT 116). During this difficult time, and as we seek the transformative change that will enable us to build back in a more just, equitable and resilient way, solidarity and a deeper commitment to community can help us to restore hope and bring about renewal.

Distinct Voice: Presence in Ministry & Community

Michelle Goh rsm (ISMAPNG)

Who could have ever imagined that 2020 would turn out to be like this? The future ahead now is as uncertain as it was eight months ago. This once-in-a-century global pandemic has brought disease and death, economic devastation and chaos. People are experiencing frustration, fatigue, powerlessness and fear, especially with the beginnings of second or third waves of viral outbreaks in their countries.

Where can we see the presence of God in our world in the midst of all this? How do we keep our hearts attuned to God's presence in our everyday experience?

For me, it is in seeing the gifts and fruits of God's spirit working in people, that I have an ongoing awareness of God's mercy in our world. My hope is sustained by the ongoing works of loving mercy of people everywhere in our communities, whereby the Gospel message of love, compassion and healing is shared.

In the community, we are heartened by acts of kindness and generosity of people in neighbourhoods reaching out to one another – looking out for each another, helping out with errands and shopping for supplies, neighbours sharing home-baked goods, children displaying their craft and creativity in neighbourhoods. To help those who are struggling financially, and to support people who are confined indoors in isolation, the community has responded with the provision of food and essential goods. As citizens, we all participate in the common effort to physically distance, quarantine when necessary and obey government regulations despite discomfort and difficulty. Stressful though this time has been for each person individually, people have made extra efforts to reach out to others to foster companionship and friendship. This crisis has forced us to be creative in how we keep in touch with others in our communities, especially with those who are isolated, using the marvels of modern information technology. Who had heard of Zoom before this year?

In ministry, health care workers in hospitals and aged care facilities sacrifice not only their own but also the health of their loved ones in their daily work. Scientists are working furiously overtime in laboratories processing the enormous numbers of COVID-19 swabs, trying to keep up with the demand for urgent test results; whilst others in research are racing to find treatments and vaccines for this highly infectious and deadly virus. Teachers front up to teach our precious young people, despite the many challenges of schooling in coronavirus times. Social workers, mental health workers, spiritual and pastoral carers reach out to tirelessly support and advocate for those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Charities are working even harder than ever before to provide food, shelter and basic needs to those who are poor and marginalised. Our leaders in institutions and governments are trying their best to strike a balance between health, economic and social welfare for the good of all.

So in our lives of service and in our relationships with one another, we are agents of God's merciful presence to one another. With the help of the Spirit, we also pray continuously for our world especially in these very challenging times. As we pray the psalms regularly in the prayers of the church, we cry the same words of lament as our prophets did centuries ago, pleading for God to be with us in our suffering and asking God to send deliverance from our pain. We ask Jesus, who also walked upon this imperfect earth once upon a time, to accompany us daily in all our trials. We search patiently in faith and with hope, for God's guiding light at the end of the dark tunnel. We pray for the grace of personal transformation through this crisis – may we use this time of lockdown and solitude to look at ourselves, review our attitudes and reassess our priorities. We pray that God will give us strength of perseverance, wisdom and peace. And trusting in God's loving mercy, may we always be able to proclaim with confidence that our future is in God no matter what happens.



**MERCY
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Reflective Prayer: Presence in Ministry & Community

Marian Ladrera rsm (RSM Philippines)

(based on the passage Ecclesiastes 3:1-13)

O God Almighty, you are the author of time. Make us see its purpose and help us find the meaning of the rhythm of our existence.

- A time to plant the seed of mercy vocation and a time to follow the path of mercy;
- A time to share the passion of Catherine to bring mercy to the needy;
- A time to heal those suffering from pain, ill-health, mind and spirit;
- A time to comfort those who weep and in deep sorrow with compassionate love and care;
- A time to embrace in our hearts those neglected, displaced, and experiencing uncertainty, anxiety and fears;
- A time to welcome the homeless, hungry and lowly;
- A time to hear the cry of the voiceless and those aiming to end violence and racism;
- A time to stand firm in the truth of the gospels, and a time to promote justice and peace;
- A time to renew our hearts and a time to recognize and respect the sacredness of your creation and
- A time to celebrate your mercy and love.

With your loving presence in our midst, grant us courage and help us persevere in hope trusting your faithfulness as we continue searching for the deeper meaning of our mercy mission. Amen.