

Pope names a year for waking up the world

Imaging Mercy Today

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Pope Francis has helped to shape our agenda by naming 2015 as the Year of Consecrated Life, with a focus on how religious sisters, brothers and priests enrich the life of the whole church. He has called on all religious to 'wake up the world' through the witness of their faith, holiness and hope.

Sisters of Mercy and those engaged in their ministries are being invited by Mercy International Association to respond to the pope's call by taking his message to heart.

April 9 this year also marks the 25th anniversary of Catherine McAuley being declared Venerable – the first step to being acknowledged as a saint of the church and a role model for Catholics to follow in their response to God's call. Catherine may also help to 'wake up the world' through her faith, holiness and hope, says a statement from Mercy International this month, outlining themes for the year with a particular Mercy flavour.

"The themes are not confined to religious, but invite all – especially members of our Mercy Global family, to participate in this process," says MIA. "The support of our associates, partners and friends in Mercy is especially important to us." Where possible, *Imaging Mercy Today* will pick up those themes and make them our own.

In his statement, Pope Francis says the year has three aims: to look at the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope. He quotes Benedict XVI in saying that it is not by proselytising



that the church grows, "but by attraction." Religious life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocations programmes, "but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy!" Francis notes. In the same way, the effectiveness of religious life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods, "but on the eloquence of our lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the gospel and following Christ to the full."

The pope insists that the Year for Consecrated Life is not just for religious but for the entire church. "I ask the whole Christian people to be increasingly aware of the gift which is the presence of our many consecrated men and women, heirs of the great saints who have written the history of Christianity." He invites us to draw close to religious as we remember gratefully the gifts we continue to receive from the witness of founders like Catherine McAuley.

This month, Mercy International has proposed hospitality as its first theme for the Year of Consecrated Life. It is a theme which surfaces in the message of Pope Francis, when he invites religious to "go into the world" – the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers. "A whole world awaits us," says Francis, "men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those rich in the world's gifts but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine..."

"Don't be closed in on yourselves," Francis writes. "Don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their problems. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love."

"I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, finding creative ways to teach others to pray. I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed and apostolates adjusted to new needs." As Mercy's ministries set their strategic plans for the year, there's a call to consider, as we seek to thread manaakitanga or hospitality into the fabric we weave. "Who stands today, waiting at our door to be welcomed?" is the question we must ask. - Dennis Horton

Hospitality - Mercy's hallmark

*E TE ATUA, Kaimanaaki o nga mea katoa,
God of hospitality for all you have made;
you came as a stranger to our world,
waiting as the outsider to be welcomed.
Your son, who is the way and the life,
has told us that we find you present
whenever we welcome others in your name.*

*In this Year of Consecrated Life,
we pray that the witness of Catherine
may inspire us, Sisters and Companions in Mercy,
to catch afresh the light of her flame,
that we may be hospitable to whoever
stands waiting for our welcome,
not next week but today.*

*May we learn as Pope Francis urges us
to cease being a hostage to our own problems;
to find life by giving life, hope by giving hope,
to discover love by offering love.
May manaakitanga be for us a way, not just a word;
let Catherine's founding charism help us to see
who it is that stands at our door, seeking entrance.
Amen.*