



Synod – Francis should hear story of Mercy’s whānau

By DENNIS HORTON

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Synod is the word for this month. It comes from two Greek words meaning roughly ‘a common road’ or ‘travelling together’. Pope Francis has asked bishops around the world to conduct a consultation beginning on October 17 with their people as to how they think they should best respond to God’s word today. The bishops are to share responses at a national and regional level, in advance of a World Synod of Bishops, planned for next year but now deferred until October 2023 to permit a broader response.

Over the coming months, Catholics around the world will be invited to share their thoughts on what it means to be church and how they see their call to believe in Jesus and follow his way in the context of their time. The dialogue will seek feedback from parishes and religious organisations. It is to be hoped that all involved in Mercy and its ministries will have a chance to contribute to the process; our discernment on how the works of mercy are being undertaken and how our ministries respond to the cries of the poor and the Earth is too valuable to be omitted from the discussion.

The major issue here is how Mercy enables lay women and men to follow their baptismal call to serve as disciples in the church of today. The vision of Vatican II was of the church not as the preserve of ordained and religious but as the community of the baptized, the people of God sharing what the Council called ‘the universal call to holiness’. The invitation to share God’s mission of mercy is addressed to us all as disciples, challenged especially to serve Christ in those on the margins and see that none of them is left beyond the reach of his love.

In recent decades, Sisters of Mercy have heard the call from Vatican II to ‘read the signs of the times’, seeking through prayer and reflection to see how lay people might be welcomed as partners and companions in their mission to the poor and vulnerable. The incorporation of our major ministries has widened the pool of talent and range of

experience on which Mercy is now able to call. A process of ongoing formation is in place, ensuring that board members and managers are familiar with the charism of Catherine McAuley and the core values of Whānau Mercy.

Present efforts to establish a ministerial PJP are intended to see that Mercy’s ministries are sustainable in a rapidly changing and evolving future.

Mercy’s commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi has generated programmes that seek to empower women and girls, to enhance their mana and encourage them to be leaders and groundbreakers within their traditions. Mercy colleges seek to enable Māori and Pasifika students to make a unique contribution to school life, affirming them in their identity and enriching the wider school community with an appreciation of their cultures. Like the larger church, Mercy has worked to strengthen its links within the region of Oceania, networking with its Pacific

counterparts in new and creative ways. The emergence of a trans-Tasman alliance of Mercy PJPs is the latest initiative in this unfolding process.

The months of living through the Covid-19 pandemic have brought the Mercy world and its whānau closer together. We have seen more clearly how all of life is interconnected and that we are being called more urgently than ever to see our mutual dependence on one another and on the planet. There has been a ‘pandemic of kindness’, as we have learnt to see our greatest assets as the Mercy values of aroha (compassion), whānaungatanga (belonging) and kaitiakitanga (guarding and guiding for the future).

Sisters of Mercy have welcomed lay men and women to governance and executive roles, as staff and volunteers, associates and colleagues, all of them responding to the call of the gospel to serve Christ in the least of his sisters and brothers. If Pope Francis is serious about listening to growth at grassroots, he needs to hear from Mercy’s ministries. The wealth of our experience deserves to be reflected in whatever conversation begins this month in Aotearoa New Zealand in advance of the 2023 World Synod of Bishops.



SYNOD: Pope Francis invites Catholics around the world to say what the church should be. What is the one idea drawn from your experience of Mercy you would like him to hear?