

MERCY GLOBAL ACTION NEWSLETTER

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GREETINGS FROM THE MERCY GLOBAL ACTION OFFICE!

Dear friends,

This edition of the Mercy Global Action Newsletter highlights the importance of advocacy and keeping close to the experience of people on the ground. You will read about the UN Indigenous Peoples Forum, where MGA had the opportunity to hear from Indigenous people from all around the world. Likewise, Cecilie Kern and Isabel Salter were immersed in the experience of people on the move at the US/Mexico border. Advocacy for and with people can only make sense within the context of listening deeply to first hand accounts.

There is a lot to read and reflect on in this edition. We invite you to take your time with the materials we have shared and to reflect on these issues from your own context, wherever you may be in the world. This post-Easter time calls us to be people of hope, even in the darkest of times. Let us pray for one another in this time of Global Crisis.

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Image: MGA

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Thematic Areas - Displacement of People

Image: MGA

- *Cecilie & Izzy reflect on Mercy immersion to El Paso-Juárez border*

From April 21-26, Cecilie Kern (MGA Global Research and Policy Advocate), and Izzy Salter (MGA intern) attended an immersion to the US–Mexico border. Organised by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and supported by the staff at Mission Society of St. Columban, the aim of the trip was for participants to learn more about the root causes of migration, bear witness to the conditions faced by migrants on both sides of the border, and visit some of the faith-based organisations providing accompaniment and support services. Cecilie and Izzy were joined by a fantastic group of Sisters, associates, and partners in ministry, as well as several experts in the field of migration.

The immersion was extremely well-organised and full of insightful speakers and experiences. The group heard presentations from immigration lawyers, representatives of local advocacy groups and resistance movements, officials from US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), staff from migrant shelters within the Annunciation House network, and religious missionaries serving in along the border. This diverse range of speakers provided the group with a rich understanding of the border’s historical context, as well as its contemporary policing, notably through ‘Operation Lone Star’ – the Texan state government’s crackdown regime on unauthorised migration.



Image: MGA



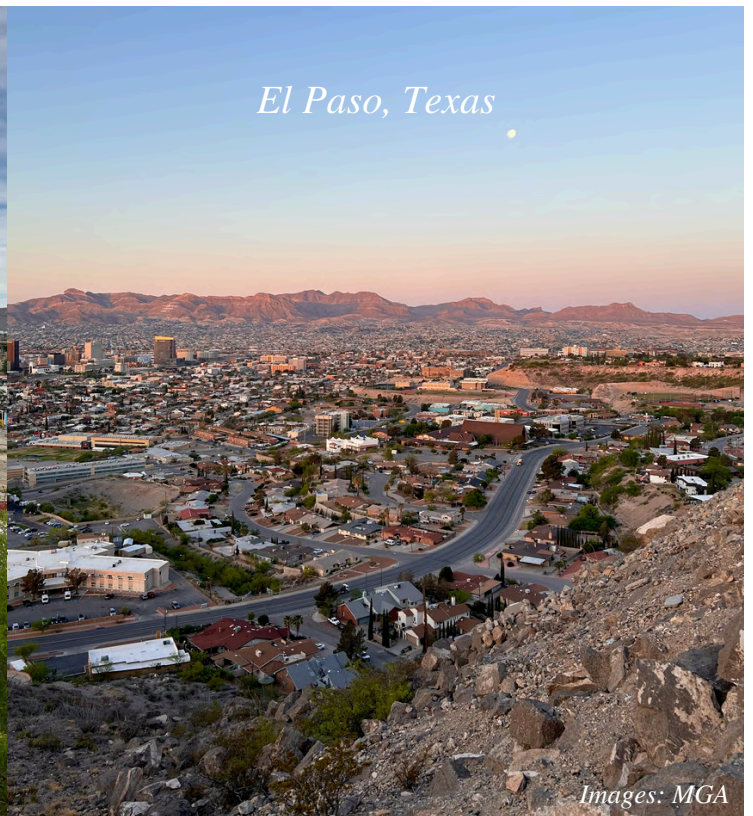
Image: MGA

The group also had the pleasure of visiting the incredible Sr Betty Campbell rsm, who has lived on the Ciudad Juárez side of the border since 1995, facilitating workshops for women on issues of self-esteem, domestic violence, organised crime, and economic exploitation. In recent years, Ciudad Juárez has at times been ranked as the most violent city in the world by homicide rate; a reality that not only impacts locals, particularly Indigenous people, but also migrants transiting through. In fact, many of the migrants we encountered expressed that crossing through Mexico was the most dangerous leg of their journey – even more so than the Darién Gap, which is known to be one of the world’s most perilous migration routes.

Reflecting on the experience, Izzy says, “Coming from the Australian context, where migration feels almost *invisible* due to our coastal borders, I’ve never seen people on the move in real time like that... While it was heartbreaking to see all of the barriers working against migrants at the border – from the technical and bureaucratic hoops one must jump through to seek asylum the ‘right’ way, to the physical hurdles such as the barbed wire along the Rio Grande and the huge steel wall – what stood out was the resilience of the migrants and the incredible hospitality, solidarity, and resistance kept alive by each of the dedicated religious leaders, workers, and volunteers we met.”



Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua



El Paso, Texas

Cecilie says, “It was deeply moving to return to the land where seven generations of my family have lived – eight if I count the year and a half I lived there with my grandfather. My family has lived in the borderlands long before the modern border between the US and Mexico was established. Even though the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez borderland is now politically divided by the Río Grande (and a heavily-militarized border fence), it remains a dynamic, bi-national community, characterized by a constant flow of people, and an ever-changing policy landscape.

We were fortunate to speak with inspiring people providing daily welcome and hospitality to thousands of newcomers who have recently arrived after long and dangerous journeys. They modeled merciful, compassionate and responsive problem-solving amidst the many challenges of accompanying people in situations of vulnerability through a highly politicized environment.

I often felt frustrated by how US policy has contributed to the conditions that migrants are fleeing and long-entrenched systems of discrimination in US immigration policy that leave people of color living in poverty most vulnerable to violence and exclusion. What could I do in the face of such complex issues? Despite feeling overwhelmed, we were often thanked for coming to the border and witnessing the resilience of the migrants and those accompanying them. Even the simple act of being there and sharing what we observed was a powerful statement of our solidarity and support.”



While much of the advocacy discussed during the border immersion centered around policies at the Texas state level and the US federal level, there are still opportunities for engagement with governments at the international level:

- Cecilie and Izzy will attend the OHCHR Intersessional Panel Discussion on the human rights of migrants: “Avenues to prevent and address human rights violations and abuses against migrants in transit and to ensure access to justice for victims and their family members” on 15 May. This half-day meeting was mandated by the Human Rights Council resolution on the human rights of migrants in transit tabled last year by Mexico. Unfortunately, the excellent policy work being done by Mexico at the United Nations is not being reflected on the ground, as many migrant families reported abuses from Mexican migration enforcement agents and organized crime syndicates.
- Cecilie plans on meeting with representatives of both the US and Mexican governments during the upcoming International Dialogue on Migration, which will take place at UN Headquarters on 21-22 May. This year’s theme is on regular pathways – a timely topic for discussion, as advocacy organizations in El Paso described US efforts to pressure the Mexican government and other Central American nations to discourage migration. With this, navigating and crossing the border through official channels has become increasingly dangerous and, in certain instances, unfeasible. We hope the US government will instead pursue solutions that uphold asylum as an inherent human right.
- Through the Global Compact for Migration process, the MGA office will continue to advocate for policies that support people’s and communities’ livelihoods and well-being and their ability to stay in their homes in safety and dignity – or, if they choose to, to have information and options to migrate with safety and dignity. We will continue to advocate for policies that protect the human rights of all people on the move, with special attention to migrants in vulnerable situations, and for policies that address xenophobia and promote social inclusion.

At the United Nations

THROUGH OUR ECOSOC LENS...

- *Reflections on the 23rd UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*

The 23rd session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was held at UN Headquarters from 15-26 April 2024. This year's Forum focused on the theme: "Enhancing Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination in the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: emphasizing the voices of Indigenous youth." Mercy Global Action supported events organized by our colleagues in the NGO Mining Working Group, which centered around the experiences and stories of Indigenous peoples from the [Amazon region](#), Central America, North America, West Papua, and the Pacific.

Even with so many people from different countries, there were common threads connecting their stories. All around the world, Indigenous Peoples are defending their lands and waters against large transnational mining interests and national legislation that allows extractivism. Despite the struggle, there was a strong sense of solidarity among the Indigenous Peoples gathered at the UNPFII. It is clear from their sharing that the right to self-determination and autonomy is important for Indigenous Peoples' political, social, cultural and economic identity. The right for Indigenous Peoples to make decisions regarding their governance, territories, and resources enables them to design their own futures in a way that is consistent with their views and cultural norms.

There was power in the connections made and solidarity and unity felt among the participants. MGA and the other members of the NGO Mining Working Group heard the clear call for further advocacy and awareness-raising around the rights of Indigenous Peoples to live in peace, health, and harmony with nature.





- [Insights from the first UN General Assembly Sustainability Week](#)

The inaugural 'UNGA Sustainability Week' took place from April 15-19.

An initiative of His Excellency Dennis Francis, President of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, the aim of the week was to revitalise the discourse on sustainability and accelerate implementation of the SDGs, laying an ambitious foundation ahead of the upcoming 'Summit of the Future' this September.

Through a series of high-level dialogues, the week-long program focused on the sustainability and resilience of key sectors, including transportation, infrastructure, tourism, and energy. It also highlighted the importance of addressing unsustainable debt burdens for developing countries. In the 'High-level Thematic Debate on Debt Sustainability and Socioeconomic Equality for All', Secretary-General António Guterres called for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to temporarily suspend debt interest charges, noting that "3.3 billion people – almost half of humanity – now live in countries that spend more money paying interest on their debts than on education or health."

The MGA office was also fortunate to attend a side event hosted by UNANIMA International, entitled, 'Holistic Approaches for a Sustainable Future: Centering Individual, Collective, & Planetary Well-being'. The event emphasised the importance of self-care for people working in the line of advocacy, connecting inner-peace and inner-sustainability to our ability to work for *world* peace and sustainability. Speakers shared important insights on challenges experienced by long-term advocates, including compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. You can watch the event [here](#).

- [Updates on Mercy Water Justice Coalition](#)

On World Water Day 2024, MGA announced the launch of the Mercy Water Justice Coalition (MWJC), inviting members of the Mercy World who are passionate about water issues to contribute to Mercy's commitment to the UN Water Action Agenda.

We are pleased to share that we have received expressions of interest from a quorum of people who are eager to put their Mercy organisations on the map as part of this initiative! At the end of May, we will be commencing the first MWJC Task Force. Members will meet over several months to support each other in the creation of their localised Water Action Agendas. If you are interested in signing up for the inaugural Task Force, it's not too late! Read more and fill out an expression of interest [here](#).





What are our MELF Fellows reading?

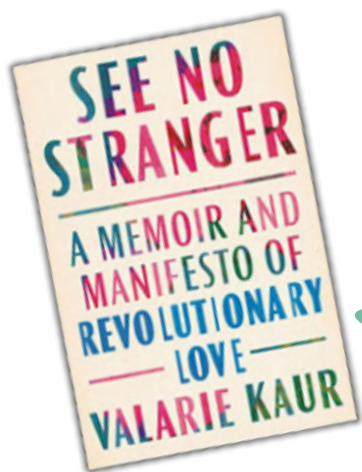
“The power of books must be fully harnessed. We must ensure access to them so that all people find refuge in reading and can thus dream, learn and reflect.” - Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of World Book and Copyright Day 2021

A good book can transport us and expand the way we think and live in the world. On 23rd April 2024, UNESCO commemorated World Book and Copyright Day, a chance to celebrate the enjoyment of reading and the rich contribution that writers make to our world. Here are some bookish recommendations shared by MELF Fellows! We hope you find some interesting new reads. We’d love to hear from you via email or social media: *what are you reading and enjoying right now?*



Andrea Haller
MELF Fellow, Cohort 3

One of my favourites is *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E Butler. Originally published in 1993, it’s a story about a teenager living in the United States in the 2020s following climate disaster and economic collapse. She faces many challenges for survival and difficult decisions. What keeps her going is her sense of spirituality and vision for humanity.

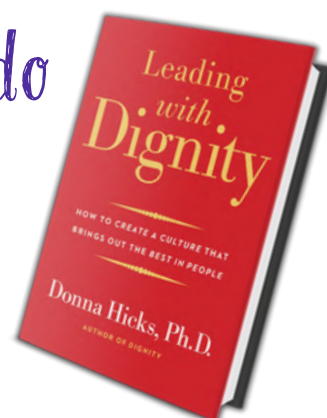


I just finished *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* by Valarie Kaur. She is a Sikh American who shares her journey of activism. She describes the urgent need for us to recognize our interconnectedness to one another and say, “you are part of me I do not yet know.” Kaur approaches advocacy through this Revolutionary Love, allowing us to better understand one another’s values, fears, and understandings.



Virgencita (JenJen) Alegado
MELF Fellow, Cohort 3

I loved this book “*Leading with Dignity*” by Donna Hicks! It’s part of our MELF classroom resources and recommended reads.



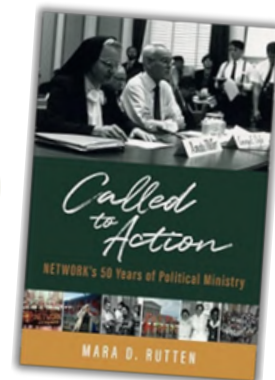
Cynthia Mulholland

MELF Fellow, Cohort 3

I recently met with Sr Eilish McCulloh of NETWORK Lobby in Washington DC to learn about their organisation and ways they advocate for social justice. Sr Eilish gifted me a copy of 'Called to Action: NETWORK'S 50 Years of Policial Ministry' by Mara D Rutten RSM.

This book describes itself as; "...the story of how the 'radical feminists' of NETWORK offered an alternative vision of what it means to be church as it worked to advance the rights and dignity of all peoples, occasionally running afoul of powerful political and church interests".

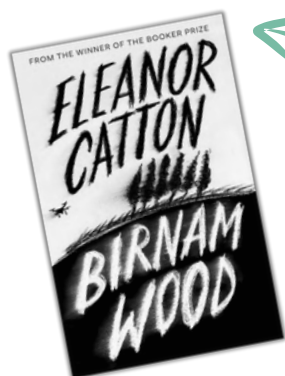
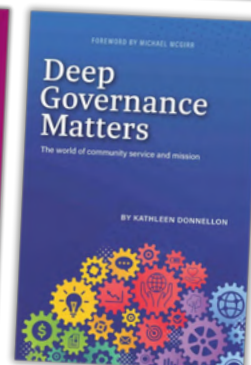
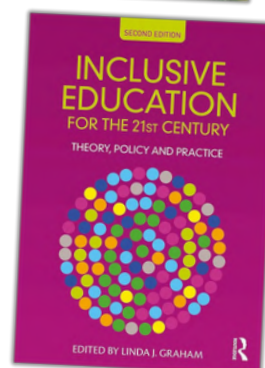
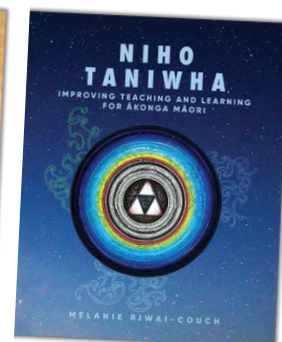
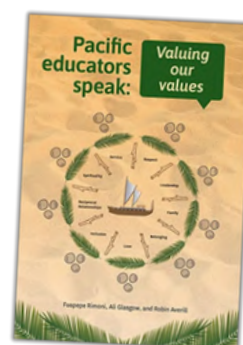
As I read this very thoughtful and insightful book, I find myself contemplating the dedication and drive of a few women to create a lasting impact on society, that has led to significant change in the lives of many. As I think about what has been achieved, I find myself wondering what work still needs to be done and the roles we all play in building a better future.



Sarah Dwan

MELF Fellow, Cohort 3

I am a school principal, and I find I don't have as much time for reading as I would like, BUT! I have recently delved into these books in preparation for things happening during our next term at school...



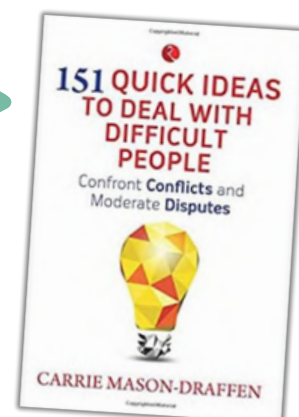
For my personal reading, I've been working my way through the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards short and long lists. Birnam Wood by Eleanor Catton deals a lot with the issue of degradation of the earth.



Dinah Mwendwa

MELF Fellow Cohort 3

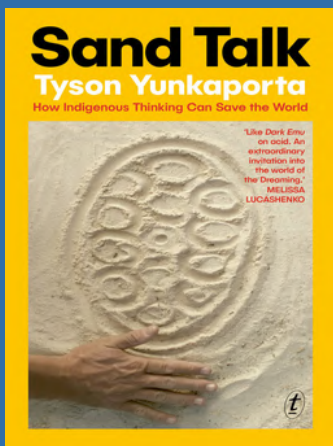
It has become very useful for me as some examples given are exactly what I encounter every day. Poverty is not the only problem. Lack of enough funds contributes to not having the right people in positions and this brings its share of the daily challenges at work.



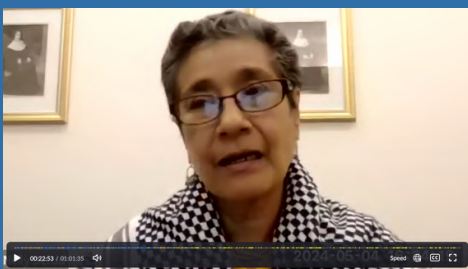
“USEFUL RESOURCES



Welcome to the Great Unraveling: Navigating the Polycrisis of Environmental and Social Breakdown
- The Post Carbon Institute



Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World
- Tyson Yunkaporta



Webinar by Nellie del Sid,
Mercy associate & coordinator of
Mercy's Dream Weavers in Honduras



UPCOMING EVENTS & INTERNATIONAL HOLIDAYS



Image: MGA

- May 18-24: Talitha Kum Annual General Assembly (human trafficking conference)
- **June 5: World Environment Day**
- **June 8: World Oceans Day**



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Subscribe to our e-newsletter to learn about our vision in action and the ministries carried out by our member congregations:

[\[Link\]](#)