March 3, 2015

Dear Pope Francis:

We warmly greet you with peace during this holy season of Lent, a time when you have called on each Christian to be open to receiving a “heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous.”

We are justice coordinators for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and we eagerly look forward to the release of your encyclical on the environment. The timing could not be more critical as we witness communities suffering from the ravages of extractive industries, the impacts of climate change and the effects of an economic system that places profit over the lives of vulnerable people. We especially appreciate that you hope to influence the international climate change talks in Paris in December.

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas are made up of more than 3,000 women religious who take a vow of service to persons who are poor in addition to the traditional vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. We sponsor and serve in more than 200 organizations that work with those in need in the U.S., Central and South America, Jamaica, Guam and the Philippines. We have even more of a global reach in 44 countries under Mercy International Association, which is made up of 11 other Mercy congregations, institutes and federations.

As justice coordinators, our role is to animate sisters, associates, co-workers, students and volunteers throughout the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to live out our Gospel commitment to persons who are poor and to what Mercy has identified as critical concerns for Earth, immigration, non-violence, anti-racism and women.

This work was strengthened at the Sisters of Mercy’s 2011 Chapter of Affairs, at which sisters and associates committed “to unmask and address the underlying causes of our critical concerns and the interconnections among them” and “to act in ways which contribute to a sustainable future for our Institute, the Church and Earth.”

That has led us as justice coordinators to deeper analysis and reflection on an ecological and human crisis that has condemned billions of persons to hunger and misery, and is threatening whole cultures and Earth herself. We have welcomed your strong statements on this crisis, a crisis that is being produced and deepened by the current, dominant economic model which prioritizes the market, profit and unharnessed consumption, by regarding Earth as a resource to be exploited, and using violence and militarism to keep...
structures of injustice in place, causing individualism and shameful inequality to become more deeply entrenched.

We remember how powerful has been your call to those in positions of responsibility and to all people of goodwill, urging us to be "'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment."

Recognizing that the world desperately needs to wake up to this call and to listen to the voices of vulnerable people and communities with whom we live and minister, we humbly offer the following hopes for your encyclical:

- An analysis of the ways in which the capitalist system systematically violates human, environmental, social, cultural, economic and religious rights

- A critique of the financialized economy, which has the generation of money as its top priority

- A critique of the extractivist model that replaces the production economy, destroying communities, cultures, environment and human health.

- A challenge to large corporations that are taking over communities’ water and land, preventing food sovereignty and destroying the environment and peasant and aboriginal cultures.

- Exposing how oil corporations and other market interests are impeding the development of cheap, clean and renewable energy.

- Noting the growing phenomenon of environmental refugees, people displaced by rising sea levels, droughts and floods, and the degradation of the land by mining practices.

- A call to residents of rich countries to acknowledge and resist our complicity in environmental destruction through our lifestyles and patterns of consumption.

We know that there are existing models for a more sustainable way of life, and this animates our hope that another world is possible. We are trying to do our part by adopting more environmental practices, making fair-trade purchases, engaging with corporations to change unjust practices, and advocating for systemic change with our government officials. We also are amplifying our voices by joining social movements and faith-based coalitions.
Thank you for reading of our deep concerns and highest hopes. We stand ready to promote your encyclical as a basis for further prayerful reflection, education and advocacy.

Sincerely,

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