

# Mercy MOMENTS



## Let it begin with me



**Recently we celebrated the International Day of Friendship and contemplated the importance of friendship in our lives.**

At the same time we were confronted with the national debate over immigration and Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers – a space where friendship, hospitality and welcome, it seems, are not a national priority.

Canadian Theologian Susan Kennel Harrison reflects on the use of the term 'hospitality' in theologies of religions and found herself pondering its meaning in the following way:

- > Is hospitality the first step in creating peaceful and just societies?
- > What is the point of the invitation, the welcoming of the guest, if not to explore the possibility of further deepened relationship?

Harrison believes hospitality is the 'social space in which friendships most often take root, but in and of itself, hospitality cannot mend the world – that requires a deeper, more reliable quality of relationship'. She argues that this pertains to 'intra-denominational brokenness and unrest, and extends to international brokenness and unrest. In hospitality inequities, injustices and imbalance can remain unnoticed, or unheeded, for the relationship encounter is short-lived'.

The interface between friendship and hospitality at a personal level and our capacity to welcome refugees to the country is challenging. Harrison's call for more peaceful and just societies must begin with social, communal and national attitudes to others – to strangers who turn to us for help.

With a public discourse almost entirely characterised by fear, meanness, lack of charity and self-pity, and a political agenda focused on offshore detention and turning back the boats, Christians have to ask: 'How do I answer the commandment "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"?' (Mark 12:31).

*Evangelii Gaudium* uses the example of Jesus to offer us a blueprint for friendship and inclusion which deepens relationships and improves lives:

Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world (EG#269).

Jesus urges all of us to 'stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness' (EG#270).

If we wish to see a world filled with friendship, hospitality and welcome we must foster these qualities in ourselves and then share them with everyone and everything around us.

References: <http://www.stateofformation.org/2014/07/hospitality-or-friendship/>; [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#III.%E2%80%9C](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#III.%E2%80%9C)

### REFLECTION

- > How can your ministry practise 'friendship and inclusion' at all levels?
- > How can you live the motto "we are better than this"?