Through community engagement we participate in ushering in the Reign of God. We are involved in the healing and restoration of humanity and creation; in so doing we conform more to what God desires and intends. In this way we share in the mission of Jesus Christ, a mission which will see a new age dawn, the long reign of sin ended, a broken world renewed, and humanity once again made whole.

2

But in case it all sounds too demanding, too complicated, too hard, a great saying from the Scriptures sums it up simply and succinctly. It is worth letting this saying inspire our community engagement.

"WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, AND TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?"

Author: Anthony Steel

For more information please contact the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement, Australian Catholic University.

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1 These three obstacles to community and human flourishing are recurring themes in the writings of Richard Rohr, ofm. See, for example, his On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010, p. 96) and Radical Grace: Daily Meditations (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 1995, p. 18)

2 Adapted from the Preface of Easter IV
With these words, the Bible asserts the goodness of all creation. However, we know from both history and our own experience that this state of original blessing, peace and harmony was not sustained. Sin entered the world, and disfigured it. The reality is that human selfishness and greed have thwarted God's will. When the drive for possessions, power and privilege becomes more important than relationships, solidarity and community, we build a world that bears little resemblance to what God desires.

Significantly, building community is fundamental to Australian Catholic University. At the University, community engagement is not optional, but is integral to living a good life and making a positive contribution to the world. We take seriously the task of transforming the world, and restoring it to reflect what God wills for humanity and creation.

This is the work of ushering in the Reign of God here and now. The Reign of God (kingdom of God) becomes present when human beings are in right relationship with one another; where justice prevails, so that everyone has what they need to live a decent and fulfilling human life, the “life to the full” referred to by Jesus. (John 10:10) This is a participation in an integral aspect of the promulgation of the personal, social and transformational understanding of the personal, social and transformation of the personal, social and ecological fabric of the planet; of the world that Jesus spoke in his parable of the last judgment.

Community engagement is an expression of our personal mission, leading us to transformation: personal transformation which challenges us to move beyond our comfort zones and allow ourselves to be shaped to become the best human persons we can become, and agents of transformation in and with communities seeking to establish just and more human conditions for people and the whole of creation.

This is the transformation of which Jesus speaks in the parable of the Last Judgement: transformation of the personal, social and economic conditions of vulnerable people and of the environment and the whole of creation.

Community engagement calls us into mutual relationships with poor, oppressed and vulnerable communities. It requires that we ‘work with’ people rather than ‘do for’ them, that we act collaboratively, that we are attentive to the environment and community learning, and open to being influenced by the other and their perspectives and community norms, traditions and stories. This calls us to a deeper experience of community engagement, to work with people, to seek to understand and empathise with people who are affected by these issues, and to understand the ways in which our actions affect the community.

Community engagement calls us into the service of others, to help those in need and to work for the good of the community. It requires that we engage with others, that we listen to their stories and experiences, that we work to understand their perspectives and perspectives and to work for the good of the community.

This is a mission built on human dignity, directed towards establishing justice and restoring hope. It gives concrete expression to God's preferential option for the poor, while inviting us to work for the common good in solidarity and collaboration with all God's children. It is Jesus' mission, in which we share in the work of transformation of the personal, social and ecological fabric of the planet; of the world that Jesus spoke in his parable of the last judgment.

Community engagement is also attentive to the environment and the whole of creation. We read in the Scriptures that God placed Adam in the garden of Eden to till it and to care for the land. Human beings are stewards of creation. We are called to use its gifts responsibly and to care for the land, in order that the generations who come after us may enjoy its gifts as well.

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