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# The **MAST** Journal

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## Perspectives on Mercy Association

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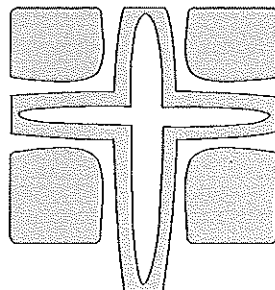
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The Journal of the  
Mercy Association in  
Scripture and Theology



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Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends of Mercy,

This issue is devoted to the theme of Mercy association. The autobiographical statements of associates show their diversity. Some came to Mercy association through a Mercy educational or health care institution, some more indirectly through a spouse, or through a community program directed by a Mercy Sister. All find spiritual meaning and support for the journey with God. Many are active in their parish and civic community.

At a party, glass in hand, I was speaking with Sr. Sheila Devereux, director of the Omaha Association, about the value of retaining the diversity of each region's approach and style—which was evident when I read associate materials she mailed to me. Her region's association covers the territory from Nebraska to Oregon. I wondered if that culture would be lost if twenty-five regions were melded into a “mega-association” erasing regional differences and voices. Would that be good for associates?

In Los Angeles for a conference on canon law, I discovered that a clearheaded presenter, Deborah Cerullo, a School Sister of Notre Dame, had done her canonical research in Rome on the phenomenon of association, which is occurring in many congregations. She provided an article to keynote this issue from research she has been doing for several years. Her article proves that divine synchronicity exists!

I asked some questions after one of her talks: Would it be timely for associates to form their own “private association of the Christian faithful” as described in canons 321–329? This would provide ecclesial identity and autonomy for them as laity, as distinct from vowed membership in Mercy. Margaret Marnell, a Burlingame associate and psychologist, told me later when I floated this idea, that not all associates want to have a formal identity with the institutional church. An alternative to sometimes bleak parish life is one reason they are attracted to Mercy association.

I had to admit that ecclesial identity is a matter for both theological clarification and emotional struggle. Do Mercy Sisters feel they are “in the church, but not of it”? Is it akin to what Jesus said of his disciples in John's gospel: “You are in the world, but not of it”? How do associates see their relation to the institutional church? If associates and companions aspire to “everything but vows,” is that thereby a critique of a spirituality grounded in vows? Didn't Jesus practice more than three counsels? Or does affiliation with “Mercy” embody chafing at too close a tie with the church's male authority structure?

As to human organization, I wondered whether it would make sense for associates in various regions to formalize their activities using the model of a not-for-profit corporation established for charitable purposes. This would be a structure inclusive enough for women and men, Catholics and those of other faiths. It would help define the distinct identity and mission of association.

In any organization of adults, disputes arise. Is it an expression of the charism of mercy for associates to have a peacekeeping board to resolve differences and promote charity so energies will be focused on good works? And what is the process for handling tensions that may arise between an associate and a vowed member? Since no discussion followed my questions, I assume they remain open for conversation.

Therese Di Lisio's study of “a comfortable cup of tea” shows that associates can interpret the charism in attractive ways. Julie Upton, R.S.M., had received a copy of her thesis in New York and forward it to me, for which readers will be grateful. Toni Gross's essay is an update of an article she submitted four years ago to *The MAST Journal* on the sister-associate relationship, which indicates how long she has been reflecting on this theme. A writer able to pull together many strands, she was also the

compiler of the report last year from the Institute Commission on Women in/of the Church, codirected by Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M. and Patricia McDermott, R.S.M.

Katherine Grant, generous in her work for Mercy higher education, and long an advocate for alternative forms of commitment, has collaborated with Katherine Ann Hill, R.S.M., in connecting the idea of companions in Mercy with Catherine's charism. Another form of collaboration, that of a colleague at Mt. St. Aloysius College, is illustrated in Rev. Victor Austin's essay on the way Catholic identity expresses itself at a Mercy institution of higher learning.

Shorter pieces include autobiographical statements by associates, a poem by Patricia Ryan, R.S.M., and a book review by Dr. Elizabeth Baer of a volume on the Rwandan Genocide, coedited by Carol Rittner, R.S.M.

We are grateful that our Mercy associates accompany us in prayer, enrich our conversation about what matters most in life, write skillfully, support Mercy ministries and chart new directions with us.

Yours,

*Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.*

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The Editorial Board wishes to broaden the voice of *The MAST Journal*. Sisters of Mercy and Associates in all fields are invited to submit editorials or opinion pieces on theological concerns arising from topics featured in the journal. Forthcoming issues will address *Reading Contemporary Theologians*, *Perspectives on Mercy Association*, *Contextual/Cultural Theology*, and *Racism*. Another welcome genre is reflections on the discussion questions of each issue. Such short pieces are normally between 400-800 words and publication includes the author's name. Submissions should be sent electronically or by mail and disk to Carol Rittner, R.S.M., MAST Editorial Board, 1502 Atlantic Ave. #2, Longport, NJ 08403. E-mail: [CarolRittnerRSM@aol.com](mailto:CarolRittnerRSM@aol.com).

# Associate Programs

## Identity and Shared Charism from a Canonical Perspective

*Deborah M. Cerullo, S.S.N.D.*

### Introduction

The phenomenon of lay associate programs connected to religious institutes has been developing rapidly since Vatican II. Current statistics place the number of associates at an estimated 27,500 in the United State.<sup>1</sup> This is marked increase from the statistics of 1997, which showed an estimated fourteen thousand five hundred associates scattered throughout more than three hundred eighty institutes—more than double the approximate six thousand associates of less than ten years prior.<sup>2</sup> Although this phenomenon has its roots in the lay and religious movements of the past, the current associate programs date back generally to the 1970s and are seen by their founding congregations as a new development coming out of Vatican II's call for greater collaboration with the laity.<sup>3</sup> According to the North American Conference of Associates and Religious, associates are lay people who affiliate with a religious institute and commit to living the mission and charism of the religious institute within their independent, lay life style.<sup>4</sup> This notion of the laity living or sharing the charism of a religious institute has been called "a radical change of viewpoint"<sup>5</sup> and marks one differ-

ence between current associate programs and earlier manifestations of the laity connecting with religious institutes, a history that goes back as far as the Benedictines of the late seventh and early eighth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

My own introduction to associate programs came when I was newly professed in 1988. My province was the last of seven North American provinces to develop such a program, and I was having some difficulty understanding the differences between my life as a member and that of associates. While it all made sense to me in theory, given the "equality of the baptized" and all the theology of inclusion that I had been learning, I was still uncomfortable. I was having trouble understanding why associates were participating in much of our shared life without having to undergo the scrutiny and evaluation that was such a constant part of my formation. I would sometimes have the experience of hearing the associates praised for all they were giving to the community while at the same time, I was feeling criticized because of some of the difficulties that I was experiencing as I attempted to acculturate into contemporary religious life. Frankly, I sometimes wondered if associates were receiving all of

### STATEMENTS BY ASSOCIATES

I am the fourth child of a family of five—three sisters and one brother. My mother died when I was about three and a half. My father raised us, along with Sacred Heart Orphanage and my devoted grandmother, with whom we spent many summers. After school in San Luis and Pueblo, Colorado, I lived in San Francisco, California, for twenty-eight years. After I graduated from high school, I went on to a vocational program—an LVN for nurses. I met my husband and married him, following him to Japan for two years. Our first daughter was born there. We returned to San Francisco and raised our five daughters and two sons. I worked part time in nursing for twenty-eight years. We moved back to the valley in Colorado where we both were from. My husband was from Denver. We were in San Luis, Colorado for twenty years. I became active in community and church volunteering. I became a VIDA volunteer for three years. Presently I am a Eucharistic minister and lector. I work one-quarter time for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program where I recruit volunteers. I have a deep interest in herbal medicine and studied at Regis College one semester through the University Without Walls program. I presently do herbal walks and lectures, and share my products made from herbs. I had the privilege of traveling to some countries and would like to

travel even more. I have fourteen grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

—**Teresa de Jesus Berlinda Vigil**, Associate, San Luis, Colorado (1996)



**Questions:** Is association a social variation on the idea of sodality? What might be some organizational structures for association?

**Answer:** About the association, I do not like to think about it as a later life

Sodality. I'd much rather think of it as priesthood of the laity. The Protestants are way ahead of us in terms of having lay people make sincere commitments to do ministry and they give them, in some cases, a "partial ordination."

I don't think the future calls for taking vows and living in obedience to an equal nor giving up intimate committed relationships (and sex), at least for most of us. That profound commitment will hopefully continue to exist for a few. The world has enormous needs and we all need to try harder to consider each other and work for the common good. Association may be one way in the future for lay people to work together, to bond together, just as many humanistic organizations do, but with the center embedded in a spiritual, Christian faith loosely and informally probably Catholic faith.

Sitting in a pew on Sunday, attending Eucharist and being preached at for ten minutes, is not much commitment, though the Church seems to say it is what is expected of the laity, that and donations plus an occasional confession. Many of us want to be actively in-

Frankly, I sometimes wondered if associates were receiving all of the benefits of membership with none of the obligations.

the benefits of membership with none of the obligations.

My study of canon law and specifically associate programs from a canonical perspective helped me to recognize the value of the appropriate sharing of charism, which is a very new concept that flows from our post-Vatican II theology of equality, and at the same time, be more comfortable with the knowledge that there are boundaries. While many communities are still in a process of dialogue to understand and develop these boundaries better, it seems to me to be very helpful to put these issues into this broader context of both sharing and boundaries.

The image that has emerged for me is that of an umbrella in relationship to the world. The charism is the canvas that covers all of the spokes, but layered on each panel is a different colored transparency, manifesting a differently hued and textured lifestyle that presents that charism to the world. Holding it all, its stem and center, is Jesus Christ. In addition to the panels of religious life and associate pro-

grams, other panels are also evident. These represent volunteers in mission who give a year or two of service and then move on, or former members who lived and were formed in the charism before moving on to new lifestyles. Partners in ministry, especially in our sponsored works, represent another panel and another might be secular branches, a new development in its very beginning stages for those who feel called to the evangelical counsels in a secularized lifestyle. All have the potential to share the charism with the world out of their particular lifestyle.

While this image is helpful, it seems to me to present two challenges, challenges that we have been grappling with ever since Vatican II asked religious to return to our founding spirit<sup>7</sup> and to hold lay apostolic works in high regard, helping to promote them in accordance with the spirit and rules of their institute.<sup>8</sup> The challenges invite us to continue to grapple with our understanding of charism, and with our own identity as religious, distinct from that of the

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laity.<sup>9</sup> We have come to understand our renewal as a call to rediscover our unique, founding charism and offer it to our world but we often struggle to identify its uniqueness.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding identity, we have spent many years developing those aspects of our life of faith that we share with others, including spirituality, ministry, community, and now charism. As our understanding of what we share with others continues to develop, it is also important to explore what makes the lifestyle of religious life distinctive, not because it is better or holier, but simply because it is different.<sup>11</sup> The struggles we experience with our associate programs around issues of identity, boundaries, inclusion, and shared charism provide us with wonderful opportunities to explore these issues in a very practical way.

### **History of Lay Associations and Their Connection to Religious Institutes<sup>12</sup>**

The first occasions of laity associating themselves with religious orders developed during the early monastic period. The Benedictines began forming fraternities of prayer that offered masses and other supplications for the success of the apostolate and for the repose of the dead. Gradually, the membership widened to include kings, princes, and nobles, and eventually even general lay folk became members. Eventually, their purposes grew to include works of charity such as giving alms to the poor and visiting the sick. It was about this same

time that Benedictine communities began accepting oblates, adults who offered the monasteries services in return for sharing in their spiritual lives. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth century, most Christians participated in one or more of the innumerable groups of lay associations that arose. It was at this time that some societies or associations actually developed a juridic form that allowed them to begin owning and administering their own property. Those attached to religious orders were placed under the order's direct supervision and administration to the extent that the superior and other professed members formed the administrative board.

It was from this historical background that third orders developed. Francis of Assisi was himself the founder of the Franciscan third order, which developed between the years 1209 and 1221 when its rule was approved by Pope Honorius III. In 1285, the Dominican third order received a rule patterned after the Franciscan rule. The Dominican rule did not receive papal approval until the fifteenth century, which was also the beginning of the approval of third orders connected with other religious institutes. In the seventeenth century, the founders of many religious congregations desired to have the laity share in the spirit and apostolic endeavors of their religious institute and from their beginnings received approval to have associations of the laity joined to them, either "in the nature of third orders" or as public or private associations of the faithful.<sup>13</sup>

involved in serving others, following Christ's model. We need community to help us do it, for support, for learning, for common prayer. And we need good theological teaching—which we are very fortunate to get from a number of Sisters of Mercy.

Every day, as I work, I think of myself as an extension of Mercy. I'm not very nice sometimes and I need someone and something to help keep me on track and to keep pushing me along in my spiritual development which Mercy association does. Many Sisters are not in Mercy-sponsored ministries. I'm the same. My work is my ministry and it is changed and enriched by being an associate. I hope in the future there will be many associates who bring the Mercy charism into all kinds of work settings working for conversion of the spirits of many, infiltrating systems to change the current narcissistic perspective.

There are those who love the religious, have free time, and who want to help them do their work. That's good and useful. I guess that's more like the sodality. But there is need for many kinds of work. I think we need to make space for all kinds of work. Probably what real community means is that we try to at least be genuinely tolerant of each other's perspectives but more ideally that we genuinely value each other's perspectives.

I need a faith community that considers science and knows that God is not a human person sitting in the clouds directing traffic and punishing when "he" gets mad. I'm glad to help when I can but I am a woman, not a child, and I have my own work to do. That's what should happen to associates. They should be women (and men) doing their work.

I think association needs to belong to itself, neither to the Church nor to the Sisters of Mercy. That is because the Church makes some rules that can limit the outreach of Christianity. The Sisters of Mercy have Constitutions that were developed for vowed religious women. We associates need something new for a new time. Yes, we belong to Mercy and to the likes of Catherine and the women of Mercy. I can see us as a new contextualization of the charism of Mercy. I suppose I can see us connected to the Sisters of Mercy organization like Catherine was connected to the PBVMs. Over time, if we keep at it, I think we must become ourselves. We aren't there yet, so we're hanging on your apron strings, and Mercys are incredibly gracious and helpful about it.

We are so young that I dread trying to become part of the institute. I think we are confused about where we are going right here in the Bay Area. If it's hard for the Sisters and they have been developing for 150 years, my gosh, it seems even harder for us. I fear that all the hassles involved will just prove a distraction from our work on becoming community ourselves. Remember that Catherine didn't even stay for breakfast after she made first vows.

I, at least at this time, would be opposed to the association becoming formally attached to the Church. I think Church hierarchy needs to be reformed. It's just too male, too dogmatic, too hierarchical. I think we're better off to live with some ambiguity for a while, but if there were some pressure for a more formal relationship with the congregation, I would not feel the same as I do about the Church. About incorporation under state law, this is in-

The 1917 Code of Canon Law, which for the first time put the law of the Church into one code, restricted third orders to those religious institutes that had an apostolic privilege. After the promulgation of the 1917 code, no new privileges were granted and much of the activity regarding lay associations was unrelated to religious institutes, but rather was centered around the Catholic Action movement and related to the development of the new form of consecrated life now known as secular institutes.<sup>14</sup> The Second Vatican Council's emphasis on the laity's "special and indispensable role in the mission of the church," brought with it a call to the laity for "an apostolate infinitely broader and more intense" than in former times due to the circumstances of the times.<sup>15</sup> Further, religious brothers and Sisters were directed to hold lay apostolic works in high regard and help in promoting them in accordance with the spirit and rules of their institute.<sup>16</sup>

It was out of this context that most lay associate programs were born and it is out of this context that the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which in many ways reflects the theology of Vatican II, situates associate programs. Book II of the code, entitled "The People of God," is made up of three sections—All the Christian Faithful, The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church, and

Consecrated Life. The canon that allows for associations connected to religious institutes, canon 303, is found in the section under Lay Associations of the Faithful—not the section on religious institutes. Canon 303 describes associate programs as associations whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction of that institute. Unlike the 1917 code, there is no requirement for an apostolic privilege to create such an association and as a result, these programs have developed primarily through the religious institutes themselves rather than through any connection with or approval by the Apostolic See.

A second canon regarding associate programs is found in the section on religious institutes, c. 677 §2, which states that institutes that have associations of Christ's faithful joined to them are to have a special care that these associations are imbued with the genuine spirit of their founder. It is interesting to note that this canon is found in the section on the apostolate, implying some connection between the spirituality of an institute and its expression in apostolic works. While many associate programs were begun for the purpose of spiritual companionship, it is not uncommon now for

**While many associate programs were begun for the purpose of spiritual companionship, it is not uncommon now for associates to move into more collaboration in ministry.**

associates to move into more collaboration in ministry. This “imbuing with the genuine spirit of the founder” takes us to our discussion of charism, where the call for a relationship of equality, where associates “live the charism in the first person and share the gifts of the Spirit in full coresponsibility”<sup>17</sup> is being seen as the true innovation of contemporary associate programs.

### Charism

Pope Paul VI was the first to use the word charism officially in relation to religious life in his apostolic exhortation on the renewal and adaptation of religious institutes after the Second Vatican Council.<sup>18</sup> Before that, language concerning charism focused on the gifts given by the Spirit for the renewal and building of the Church. From the text of the classic description of charism given in the second chapter of *Laumen Gentium* (§12b), we see that the origin of every charism is the Holy Spirit. It is a special grace given to *anyone of the faithful* as an enabling gift within the Body of Christ to make them fit and ready for various tasks for the renewal and development of the Church and its authenticity is tested and judged by the hierarchy, not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold fast to what is good.<sup>19</sup> When discussing the charism of the founder of an institute, *Evangelica Testificato* tells us that it does two things, it gives each religious community

the dynamism that defines it—often called its particular spirit—and it provides for a future with a “certain constancy of orientation” that allows for a continual revitalization and change in external forms.<sup>20</sup> *Mutuae Relationes* expanded this teaching, stating that the charism of the founder is “an experience of the Spirit,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.<sup>21</sup>

Applying these concepts to current developments in associate programs and elsewhere, it seems reasonable to conclude that the growth that was predicted, has very unpredictably moved outside the parameters of the religious institutes themselves to “multiple and no longer exclusive participations more in keeping with the concept of charism as a gift to the church.”<sup>22</sup> This view has recently been validated by the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, in which it was said:

Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that *their charisms can be shared with the laity*. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the Secular or Third Orders, a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.<sup>23</sup>

teresting. I hadn’t thought about it, don’t know whether others have.

In contrast to my desire to be seen as a good girl when I was young, today I want to be allowed to be a woman, listening to others and learning from them, working with them, but ultimately, thinking for myself and acting according to my own motivations. Fr. Hand counsels “living from the inside out.” I wonder if the Church would let me do that if I were to get too formally connected to it.

—Margaret Marnell, Associate, Burlingame, California (2004)



I was born in Coos Bay, Oregon in 1922, with an Irish Catholic mother and a supportive father. I was raised Catholic. My father died when I was sixteen. Mother was left with three other children besides me. She was always involved with the Sisters of Mercy in food drives and sewing. She obtained a job for me at McAuley Hospital as an aide when I finished high school. In 1940, I entered nurses’ training at the University of Portland, graduating in 1944; then I joined the army. In 1946, I worked as a nurse, and was active in youth groups. I married in 1948 and birthed eight children who now range in age from forty-six to twenty-nine. My husband died in 1989 after a full life involved in Knights of Columbus and other church and school activities. My interests always revolved around my husband and children after marriage. Since my husband’s death, I have been involved in many activities: I worked several years on the Social Concern Commission of our parish, several years at the Community Food Bank, and at present help our parish twice a year with St.



Catherine's recreation, a bingo program. For the past five years, I have been studying iconography and religious art. I have "written" one icon. My desire in the associate program is for prayer, spiritual nourishment, works of mercy, and coming to the table of the Sisters of Mercy sharing God's love.

—**Mary (Molly) Adele Rhodes Auer**, Associate, Coos Bay, Oregon (1995)



Born in Los Angeles, California's "City of Angels," I have a twin brother, Peter. I was raised by a mother—a single parent who worked as a nurse. My brother and I attended Catholic schools in Los Angeles and had after-school activities sponsored by the Sisters of Social Service. As a child I began my strong connection to God. I always thought something was wrong with me because I thought differently than most. I didn't like to fight or get in trouble and had a strong desire to be good. I was quite lonely. My twin brother was the rebel. I began working as a "candy striper" at the local hospital when I was thirteen and my family moved to Idaho. I became president of the junior auxiliary and, during the summer, I helped deliver meals to the elderly through the Meals on Wheels Program. At nineteen, I worked as a therapist at the state hospital for mentally retarded. I then moved to Palm Springs, California, where I took evening classes at the community college and worked in a department store. It was at this time I began to drift away from relationship with God. I was more concerned with making it in the world, having all the "goodies." I went to beauty

## What Makes Religious Life Distinctive

This growing sense of clarity regarding what religious institutes share with associates leads us back to the challenges we spoke of earlier. As our understanding of what we share with associates continues to develop, we are also challenged to explore what makes the lifestyle of religious life distinctive, examining those aspects of our life that we do not share with others. I will speak here of the legal issues that surround this topic, but it is important to understand that this is not simply about law. Law gives structure to identity, but other factors, such as theology, ecclesiology, sociology, psychology, worldview, and genera-

the leadership of the institute in the name of the Church.<sup>24</sup> This obviously implies that no one who has not professed the evangelical counsels in that institute is a member with the rights and obligations of membership.<sup>25</sup> Other church documents such as *Vita Consecrata* also speak of associate and volunteer programs, suggesting that these movements of communion and cooperation are to be encouraged but that care must be taken that the identity of the internal life of the institute is not harmed.

Two areas where this often comes up are government and finance. These are areas that require boundaries, but it is not always clear where to put them, especially with government. Finances are a little clearer because of the civil structure of the

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tional issues all come into play as well. We may not discuss these issues as fully as we would if we had a different entry point, but the issues are there nonetheless.

Canonically, it is very clear that associates are not members of the religious institutes since they do not meet the canonical criteria for membership. The code defines membership in an institute as a person who has made first profession of vows, accepted by

institute as a corporation that has many regulations that must be observed. Government is harder because of our movement to small group decision making by consensus. Associates are often appropriately welcome in these groups, but do they therefore inappropriately participate in decision making? While influence and consultation is always appropriate, actual voting or deciding about issues

that affect the internal life of the institute or the vowed life itself are not, especially since non-members do not have to live with the decisions that are made. In addition to issues of governance and finance, a new issue facing communities that have associates connected with them is the growing desire among some associates to make permanent commitments as associates.

Here the boundary issue surfaces again as the question becomes, to what group do they desire to make the permanent commitment? If it is to the religious institute, what is the nature of that commitment and what is the permanent commitment that the institute makes in return? If the commitment is to the associate program, does that group have enough of a unique identity and indicia of permanence, such as resources and identifiable, long-term mission, to sustain permanent membership? These and other questions must be discerned by both membership and associates together in dialogue as these issues arise.

### Sharing the Charism

The second challenge for our understanding of our relationship with associates is that while it may

be becoming clearer and clearer that it is our charism that we share, and not our identity or internal life, we may not be so clear about what our charism, the unique spirit of an institute, actually is. This issue was raised in a recent symposium of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in which it was pointed out that the question continues to come up—what makes a given community's charism unique.<sup>26</sup> Rather than continue to speak of charism as ephemeral qualities or virtues, such as unity, reconciliation, or even mercy, some authors are suggesting that we instead turn to the concept of "deep-story" to understand the uniqueness of each religious institute, while at the same time, reunderstanding charism as a historicized phenomenon meeting that deep-story.<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lee in an article entitled *A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism*, states:

The "recovery of charism" may be one of the most unsupportable and unnecessary burdens a religious institution has ever been asked to bear, because it cannot be done . . . Charism is not a property. It is not a possession; it is not transferable, and not controllable. Charism is a deeply historicized social phenomenon. It cannot be duplicated in any other time or place.<sup>28</sup>

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school and became a licensed cosmetologist. I went to work at I. Magnin and met some people who began to open my eyes. I started going to workshops that helped me to take a look at my life. I went back to work at Saks Fifth Avenue, and it was like going to school. I became aware of selfish people and learned patience and unconditional love, and began my return to God and prayer. I loved my experience at Saks and all the people, but I felt a strong desire to help people on a higher level. I returned to Idaho with the thought of possibly going into nursing. I went to work in a nursing home and was trained as a nursing assistant. I began working as a volunteer at Mercy with hopes of working in a Catholic hospital. I was eventually hired out of fourteen applicants and I truly feel blessed. I pray the rosary daily.

Why did I want to be an associate? To share in the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy, to be part of a healing presence in community and in service at Mercy, to grow spiritually through daily service to all I encounter by being an example of mercy and compassion.

—Patrick Michael Ahaus, Associate, Mercy Medical Center, Nampa, Idaho (1993)



I have been in law enforcement most of my adult life—twenty-three years with the Colorado Springs Police Department. I was chief for ten years prior to retirement. After retirement, I was deputy chief of Adams County Sheriff's Department, which included most of northern Denver. I have always been active in community, state, and national affairs. I am currently married to Patricia and have two sons,

two stepchildren, and four grandchildren. My spouse is an M.S.W., and director of a hospital-based chemical addiction intensive outpatient program. I have a broad range of outside interests, and am very attached to air sports, which involves the Big Brothers/Sisters, and a summer jump school. Besides the USOC and USA triathlon, I work on various mental health and addiction boards in Colorado Springs. I have a strong sense of spirituality and am aware of God's love in all things. I am not a member of any church. I got acquainted with the Sisters of Mercy through my spouse, and in working on a program for housing for women who were leaving correctional facilities and returning to the community. Presently, I am manager of Work Release, Community Corrections, in Colorado Springs.

— **John L. Taggert**, Associate, Colorado Springs, Colorado (2001)



I was born in El Paso, Texas in 1963. My parents were also born in El Paso. I currently live in Anthony, New Mexico, with my husband, Javier Filerio, and my three daughters, Vivien, 16, and Lillian and Valerie, 12. I was raised Catholic and continue to practice my religion.

I came to the Anthony area with my husband, who worked as a farm laborer in the fields because he did not speak English. Today, he has owned his own business, Rio Bravo Painting in Las Cruces, New Mexico, for more than three years. I have been working at the Women's Intercultural Center since 1997. I started as a volunteer English tutor and in 1999 became a part-time paid staff member. Before that, I worked as a secretary for a law office and have been the owner of Martina'

What Lee says a community does possess is a "deep-story," a narrative structure that has also been called a unique, incarnated spirit.<sup>29</sup> The code of canon law talks about this as the mind and design of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, and spirit of foundation along with its sound traditions or "spiritual patrimony."<sup>30</sup> Lee also says that although the deep-story is a necessary condition for charism, the story is not the charism. Rather the charism is the meeting of the deep-story with the needs of the age.

So then, if Lee is right, and deep-story is not charism, and charism is only born in its own age, what does that mean for us as we move through this transformative time and try to share our charism with the laity through our associate programs and other forms of collaboration, such as sponsored works and lay volunteer programs?

### The Life Cycle of Religious Community

To begin to answer that question, I think it is important to examine not simply the history of associate programs, but the history of religious life as a whole. In their seminal work, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*,<sup>31</sup> five authors explored the questions of revitalization and transformation in religious life.

The authors describe the life cycle of a religious community as made up of five periods. They base this cycle on their study of the history of religious life, especially during the phases of each of the great ages of

religious life that they say developed out of the major historical shifts going on at their time in history. These are the age of the desert, the age of monasticism, the age of the mendicant orders, the age of the apostolic orders and the age of the teaching congregations, which are also sometimes called the institutional age to include the hospitals that were also founded.

In studying the patterns of each of these ages in the history of religious life, the authors found that the first period in the life cycle is a foundation period that may last ten to twenty years. Often this foundation comes from the laity and not from the existing form of religious life itself. The group unites under the guidance of the founding person to search for and invent new arrangements for living the gospel together and working toward the realization of the reign of God.

The second period, which they call the expansion period, is a time during which the founding charism is institutionalized in a variety of ways. A community cult and belief system solidifies, a community polity is fashioned, and community norms and customs take hold. Attempts are made at thinking through the founding myth and expressing it in terms of contemporary thought patterns. Norms are set down and customs emerge that cover aspects of the community's life. This period can last two to three generations or longer. Next comes a period of stabilization, which may last a century or more, but is sometimes as brief as fifty years. A feeling of success pervades the community during the

stabilization period. Members experience a high degree of personal satisfaction from simply being in the community. The prevailing image of religious life is clear and accepted. It provides a basis for describing unambiguous social roles for religious. The community is accomplishing its purpose and the purpose is self-evident. I would venture to suggest that we are not in a stabilization period.

After stabilization comes the breakdown period that may be gradual and last a half-century or more or it may be rapid and run its course in a few decades. In either case, what happens (and see if this sounds familiar) is a dismantling of the institutional structures and belief systems that arose during the expansion period and served the community so well during the stabilization period. As the community loses its sense of identity and purpose, service to the Church becomes haphazard and lacks direction. There is a net loss of membership through increased withdrawals and decreased recruitment of new members. This then leads to the fifth period, which the authors call the critical period, where three possible outcomes exist for religious communities—extinction, minimal survival, or revitalization. The authors also tell us that at least three characteristics can be singled out

in all communities that have been revitalized—a transforming response to the signs of the times, a reappropriation of the founding charism, and a profound renewal of the life of prayer, faith, and centeredness in Jesus Christ. This revitalization then leads to refoundation for some and the cycle begins again.

### **Charism and Revitalization: Identifying the Need of the Age**

So where are we today in this life cycle and how does this connect to Lee's work on charism and our sharing of charism with associates? In my view, most communities in North America are most certainly in the critical phase facing extinction, minimal survival, or revitalization. Lee's work helps us to understand better the criteria for revitalization, that is, a transforming response to the signs of the times, a reappropriation of the founding charism and a profound renewal of the life of prayer, faith and centeredness in Jesus Christ. For, as Lee says,

Whether the deep-story comes alive in any age depends upon whether it can mediate redemption for the cry of this age. The deep-story emerges as charism when it is able to rise to the occasion—which is the contemporary world in all its concreteness—and the contemporary world rises in turn to

Secretarial and Bookkeeping Service since 1995. In 1982, I graduated from Ysleta High School in El Paso. I took basic studies and four years of French. I speak, read and write both Spanish and English. Though not fluent in French, I can get by. In 1992, I graduated from International Business College in El Paso.

My years at the center have been life changing. I have learned so much about the border and the issues of poverty and racism, keeping in mind the bigger picture. I am concerned and involved in human rights issues. Last year, I was approached by one of my former clients to become part owner of a legal services office. The money would have been much more than I am currently earning. I refused the offer. Having worked in both the for-profit and non-profit world, I am sure now I will never work just to earn money. My work at the center has meaning, and I do not see myself doing anything other than working with women who need education, whether it's to learn English, to understand world issues and human rights issues, or to help address issues of domestic violence. As part of the center, I see the bigger picture. I am involved in peace marches, human rights marches, and I am aware of worldwide political issues I would not have known about had I stayed working in my secretarial and bookkeeping business. You do not hear about human rights abuses or learn about patriarchy from corporate media. I have been very fortunate to have a connection with Sr. Kathleen Erickson, who has broadened my world views. About three years ago, I went to Philadelphia for an orientation of a volunteer with Mercy Volunteer Corps. Last year I agree to be part of the board. I am also a volunteer board member for the Anthony Chamber

In my view, most communities in North America are most certainly in the critical phase facing extinction, minimal survival, or revitalization.

of Commerce. I have lived in the border my entire life, but I have learned so much more about its politics and my own culture by working in an organization founded by a Sister of Mercy.

—**Martina Luna Filerio**, Associate, Anthony, New Mexico (2003)



I was born and raised in Hong Kong, and am going to be fifty years old in a few days. I attended an all-girls' Catholic school in Hong Kong from kindergarten to high school. After high school graduation, I traveled to the USA and enrolled at Easter Oregon State College. After two years, I transferred to Oregon State University, where I got a B.S. in business administration with an emphasis on personnel management. While attending OSU, I met Michael Madson, who has been my husband for twenty-five years. We have been in the Roseburg area for twenty years, where my husband was born and raised. We have one daughter, Jami, who graduated from Willamette University last May, and now works in the San Francisco Bay area.

Both my husband and I were raised by loving parents, and I became a Catholic while I was enrolled at the Catholic school; my husband became a Catholic shortly after our marriage. Both my husband and I felt that we have enough love to share with many children. However, my physical condition allowed us to have only one, precious and loving child. I undertook numerous tests and even surgery to correct this unfortunate physical condition, but my effort was in vain. I later realized we were blessed to have experienced the birth of our child, and that now I am able to have more time to devote

meet it. When they meet publicly, the world knows it. At that moment, redemption has a face and charism is afoot.<sup>32</sup>

Lee has developed this whole line of thought in a recently published book entitled, *The Beating of Great Wings: A Worldly Spirituality for Active, Apostolic Communities*.<sup>33</sup> There Lee says that charism is the social reality that provides the setting for a new religious order. It does not exist in the founding person alone, or in the followers, or in the aspirations of the age, or in the style of life proposed, but in the mutual complicity of all of these together.<sup>34</sup> He also says every charismatic moment reflects the cry of the age and the cry of one age is never identical to the cry of any other age. In order to have an understanding of the cries of the age, religious communities must be deeply inserted into our own culture and must experience for themselves its essential passions.<sup>35</sup>

Both identifying the cry of our age and our response as people deeply inserted into our culture, feeling its essential passions and needs, is, I believe, what we are grappling with most during these transformative times. Is the cry the alienation, uncertainty, and ambiguity that come from relativism? Is it the violence and reactionary domination or fundamentalism that comes as we try to embrace pluralism? Is it the need to reclaim mystery, which is emerging from quantum physics and our views of the universe? Or is it something else?

As we struggle to answer this question, it seems to me that we

are called to discover this answer with those who do not necessarily share the lifestyle of religious life, but do also know the deep passions and hungers of our times. This is the gift of pluralism of our times, our recognition that we all have something to offer each other and our world. While I continue to maintain that each lifestyle needs to identify and embrace its own distinctiveness, the cry of our age must be responded to differently from that which emerged to meet the cries for universal education and healthcare during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>36</sup>

The sharing of our deep-story, our spirituality, history, and unique outlook on the contemporary issues of our times with associates and others will contribute to the meeting of that deep-story with the cries of the age and will contribute to identifying and responding to it with a richness and an insight that we could not achieve alone. Whatever else charism is, whether deep-story, spiritual patrimony, or something else, we do know that charism is the work of the Holy Spirit, entering into hearts in every age, and vivifying our world with God's love. This is our call, religious and associates alike. Our context and lifestyle are different, giving different textures, flavors, and expressions of that vivifying love, but our purpose is the same: making God's reign of justice, peace, and love, present in our world and in our hearts.<sup>37</sup>



## Notes

- 1 *Partners in Mission: The Associate-Vowed Religious Relationship in the United States, Part II*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, November 2002 referenced at <http://www.catholic-church.org/nacar/assocgrowth.htm>.
- 2 Jeffries, R., *Associates of Religious Communities: Overview of the Current Reality*; Presentation given at the legal seminar jointly sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes (March 1997) [hereinafter *Jeffries Presentation 1997*] and Presentation to the Community of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (1996) [hereinafter *Jeffries Presentation 1996*].
- 3 Jeffries, R., "The Associate Movement—An Update," in *Horizon; Journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference*, 19 (1993) 13–14.
- 4 <http://www.catholic-church.org/nacar/assocgrowth.htm>.
- 5 Bruno, S., "Horizons of the Charism of an Institute: The 'New' Participation of the Lay Faithful" in *Consecrated Life* 17 (1992) 83.
- 6 Amos, J., *A Legal History of Associations of the Christian Faithful*, 31 *Studia Canonica* 271 (1987).
- 7 *Perfectae Caritatis, Decree On The Adaptation And Renewal Of Religious Life*. October 28, 1965, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html).
- 8 *Apostolicam actuositatem*, November 18, 1965 in A.A.S., 58 (1966) 838.
- 9 Although nonordained religious are considered to belong to the laity, they also belong to their own unique state of life, distinct from laity and clerics who are not religious. c. 588. See also, Schneiders, S., *Finding the Treasure, Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 127–128.
- 10 Maher, Mary, "Only Connect"—Discerning the Future of SSND in NAMA," presentation given at School Sisters of Notre Dame Symposium, Milwaukee, June 25, 2004.
- 11 This point was first raised by me in an article entitled "Distinctiveness, Diversity And Commonness In Religious Life," *Review for Religious* 272 (May/June 2002) 61.
- 12 The material that follows is taken from Amos, J., *A Legal History of Associations of the Christian Faithful*, 271
- 13 McDermott, R., *Associates and Associations Joined to Religious Institutes*, CLSA Proceedings 60 (1998).
- 14 Amos, J., *A Legal History of Associations of the Christian Faithful*, supra. at 287–288.
- 15 *Apostolicam actuositatem*, November 18, 1965 in A.A.S., 58 (1966) 838.
- 16 Idem.
- 17 Bruno, S., *Horizons of the Charism of an Institute: The "New" Participation of the Lay Faithful*, supra.
- 18 McDonough, E., *Charisms and Religious Life*, in *The Church and Consecrated Life, The Best of the Review 5*, Edited by David L. Fleming, S.J., and Elizabeth McDonough, O.P. (St. Louis, 1996), 131.
- 19 Buckley, M., *The Charism and Identity of Religious Life in Paths of Renewal for Religious*, *The Best of the Review 2*, Edited by David L. Fleming, S.J. (St. Louis, 1986), 60. Vol 44, 1985 pp. 654–664.
- 20 Paul VI, *Evangelico Testificato, On The Renewal Of The Religious Life According To The Teaching Of The Second Vatican Council*, (1971) available at my love and services to children oriented activities.

I was president of the Booster Club at St. Joseph Catholic School, and chair of various fund-raising events at the time of our child's enrollment. I was a facilitator for "Rainbow for All God's Children" for several years. Currently I am president of Friends of Douglas County Doernbacher Children's Hospital. We raise approximately \$24,000 to \$30,000 a year for the hospital. I am treasurer for the Glide Booster Club for Glide School District. I also volunteer my services as a bookkeeper at Cobb Street Learning Center for Sister Jeanita Richter. God works in a wonderful way; I am blessed with a loving and supportive family and I would like to share that with the community.

—**Selina Madson**, Associate, Roseburg, Oregon (2001)



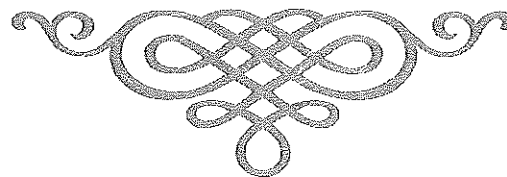
I am a native Nebraskan who was born in Cuming County in the northeast part of the state and raised on a farm north of the small town of Beemer. The farm on which I grew up has been farmed by our family for more than 130 years. My father was born and raised on this farm and he and my mom have just recently moved into a house in Beemer. I have three younger brothers: Dan, a pharmacy technician with Nebraska Health Systems; Bill, who has taken over the family farm; and Mike, who is associate professor of finance and insurance at Washington State University. My grade school education was in a one-room country school just one-half mile east of the farm. I attended West Point Central Catholic High school and Creighton Uni-

versity, graduating with a major in journalism and minors in English and secondary education. I am currently finishing an M.A. in communication at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. I am married to Timothy Coyle. He is employed at Physician's Mutual Insurance Company. We have one son, Brian Timothy, who is a senior at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa. Tim and I are long-time members of St. Pius the Tenth Parish. Currently, I serve as E.M.E. for both our parish and the Mercy school community. My other service includes making stew once a month for the Francis House, being a "dusting disciple" at St. Pius, and working with our parish Adopt-a-Family program each Christmas. In my seventeenth year at Mercy High School, I currently teach sophomore English and journalism, and advise both the school newspaper and yearbook, as well as cosponsor Mercy's Amnesty International group.

My expectation of associate membership with the Sisters of Mercy includes an increase in opportunities for prayer and service, thereby strengthening my own faith journey. Association is a way to formalize my relationship with the Sisters of Mercy. My initial relationship to the mission of educating young women began years ago when I answered a "call" to teach at Mercy High School. With each year, I have felt a growing relationship with and understanding of Catherine's mission and I feel that now is the time for me to formally become a part of it.

—**Mary E. Coyle**, Associate,  
Omaha, Nebraska (2001)

- www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6RENEW.htm.
- 21 *Mutuae Relationes, Directives For The Mutual Relations Between Bishops And Religious In The Church*, (1978) available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_14051978\\_mutuae-relationes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_14051978_mutuae-relationes_en.html).
  - 22 Bruno, S., *Horizons of the Charism of an Institute: The "New" Participation of the Lay* supra at 84.
  - 23 John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Art. 54, (Vatican Press, 1996), 93.
  - 24 C. 654
  - 25 Canons 662–672 taken together with the obligations undertaken with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience found in canons 599–601.
  - 26 Maher, M. "Only Connect"—Discerning the Future of SSND in NAMA," SSND Symposium, June 25, 2004.
  - 27 Thompson, Margaret, "Charism or Deep-Story?' Toward a Clearer Understanding of the Growth of Women's Religious Life in Nineteenth—Century America," a paper delivered at the History of Women Religious Conference, Chicago, June 1998. Cited in
  - Schneiders, S. *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, vol. 1 of *Religious Life in a New Millennium* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2000).
  - 28 Lee, Bernard, *A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism*, Review for Religious (January/February 1989)
  - 29 Maher, M. "Only Connect"—Discerning the Future of SSND in NAMA," supra. C. 578
  - 30 Cada, L., R. Fitz, G. Foley, T. Giardino, and C. Lichtenberg, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).
  - 32 Lee, B. *Socio-Historical Theology of Charism*, supra. at 131.
  - 33 Lee, B., *The Beating of Great Wings: A Worldly Spirituality for Active, Apostolic Communities*, (Mystic CT, 2004).
  - 34 *Ibid.*, 27.
  - 35 *Ibid.*, 29.
  - 36 Maher, M. "Only Connect"—Discerning the Future of SSND in NAMA," supra.
  - 37 Some of the material in this article, sections from author's thesis, was first published as "A Canonical Study of Lay Associate Programs," 33 *Studia Canonica* 442 (1999).



# The Sister-Associate Relationship In and of the Church

*Toni Gross*

## **First Years as an Associate**

I have been an associate of the Sisters of Mercy, Detroit region, since 1982. When I began the process of preparation for association I filled out an application form. The form stated that participation in the community as an associate meant being in a reciprocal relationship and asked what I hoped for from the Sisters of Mercy, what benefit my being in association would have on my life and ministry, and how my being in association would be of benefit to the Sisters of Mercy. I don't remember my response.

What is more important to me than my response, is the question. I have carried that question in my head and heart since I filled out that form. And I have looked for answers to it for almost twenty-five years. In my seeking, I have repeatedly found expressions of what the Sisters hope to give to the associates.

Gradually, however, I became aware that there was a large contingent of Sisters who sincerely disapproved . . . I wonder if some of the reason for that disapproval is that these Sisters saw associates as only gaining from them.

Rarely have I heard any discussion of what it is that associates give to the Mercy community, what reason there might be that its vowed members would have us intimately involved with them. The failure to have this discussion might be the reason for some of my later experiences as an associate.

In my first couple of years as an associate I was involved only by those who were delighted to have me and the other associates. Gradually, however, I became aware that there was a large contingent of Sisters who sincerely disapproved. This contingent consisted of Sisters young and old, some have had positions of elected leadership, and those who study current theologies as well as those who don't. Their disapproval of what I and other associates believe is a call to be part of the Mercy community has challenged my thinking.

## **STATEMENTS BY ASSOCIATES**

I was born on Labor Day in 1950. I was the second child in a family of eight; all the others boys. Was I spoiled? Hardly. There were eight of us in eleven years so there was no time for that. I was, however, a tomboy. I could shoot a basketball or hit a softball as well as most boys. Unfortunately, in the 1960s, girls' athletics were not available, so I only played sports at home. My father was of German descent from a long line of farmers. We were raised on a farm. Rural life is a culture and ethnicity all its own. Everyone not only knew everyone else, but also his or her parents and grandparents. My dad had gone to school with many of the parents of my classmates. My mother is of Irish descent. She has a flexible approach to things and always encouraged us to do our best. She had not been raised on the farm, so married life to a farmer provided much adjustment. She was a registered nurse by profession and went back to work after a twenty-year break to raise her family.

Both my parents had a strong Catholic faith, which weathered them through the hard times. They put our needs before theirs and protected and sheltered us. By economic standards we were poor, but I didn't realize that and never felt deprived or without the essentials. Living on a farm provided us with food, even down to the milk from our own cow. I was shy and sensitive as a child, and still am. I would



rather sit in the background and listen than actively participate in group conversation.

I received good grades in high school, not because I was smart, but I studied a lot and worked hard. I attended St. Xavier College in Chicago, where I studied nursing. I graduated in 1972 and passed my state board licensing exam that June. My first job as an R.N. was in the emergency department at the University of Chicago on the South Side. I was only twenty-one and very naive. I gained a lot of valuable experience, but I wanted more than that for the rest of my life. I went to graduate school at Loyola University in Chicago for an M.S.N. in nursing. Shortly after, I met my husband Rich, and we got married in 1977. We wanted to start a family, but I was diagnosed with endometriosis. I went through the works of infertility treatments and surgery, without success. We were blessed in being able to adopt two healthy children, Joshua in 1982 and Rebecca in 1986. Today, our son is twenty-one and no longer lives at home. Our daughter is sixteen. Raising teenagers was more of a struggle than I ever imagined! I have been a clinical instructor and assistant professor of nursing at Mercy Hospital, Des Moines, Iowa from 1992 to the present, and was a clinical instructor in past years at University of Nebraska Medical Center, Harry S. Truman College in Chicago, and Lewis College in Illinois. I wanted to become an associate to further the mission and values of Mercy, especially of excellence and service to others and to further develop my spiritual life.

—Anne Citarella, Associate, Des Moines, Iowa (2003)

I wonder if some of the reason for that disapproval is that these Sisters saw associates as only gaining from them.

### Mutual Giving and Receiving

At the last conference for priests of the diocese of Kalamazoo, one of the topics for discussion was collaboration with the laity." A priest friend, who considers himself open to collaboration, confided that he learned a lot from conversations with a lay woman (their conversations were open to the others at the conference) about how limited by his own behaviors and attitude his collaboration really is. His comments opened several lines of thinking in me.

First, as the clergy look specifically at their need for collaboration with the laity in these days of diminishing priestly numbers, I am reminded of the efforts of the last thirty years of the Sisters of Mercy to be in collaboration with associates. Something of that story can, I believe, help us understand how we laity (both Sisters and associates) might assist the collaboration process from the other side of the relationship.

Second, as the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas goes about its reimagining and reconfiguring, there is a need for all of us to look at the place of associates in the newly designed figure. Might there be new ways to facilitate our own collaboration?

Third, as the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas prepares for its Chapter of

2005, are there specific ideas that one might carry to that meeting so that the determinations that are made then will encourage collaboration of all kinds in our Church?

As a psychotherapist, I am inclined to come to understanding and make decisions based on my own experiences and the stories of others. In this series of reflections, I will, therefore, use both. Hopefully these stories will resonate with others' experiences and my conclusions will augment this one-sided view of the sister-associate relationship reflected in an article by Joan Chittister: "Climbing the Eight Mountains of Religious Life."<sup>1</sup> While I found most of this article refreshing, challenging, and inspirational, I had some difficulty with her discussion of the situation that she included under the subtitle, the Mount of the Beatitudes.

Chittister suggested that religious women are being called, perhaps, to become the spirituality centers of the world."<sup>2</sup> She suggested further that those who enter and leave religious life now leave enriched, and, with the riches they have received, they live the spirituality and charism they have learned and thereby enrich the whole Church, indeed the world. She challenged religious to institutionalize this reality as they welcome people who come for training for long periods or for short periods, as potential vowed members, as purposeful short termers, or as associates.

I had no argument with Chittister's suggestions. But I found them incomplete. There

was no comment on what persons who come and learn will bring to the communities other than their neediness or their possible membership. If religious communities are to be truly inclusive, they will be truly feminist in that they recognize that all of us together must live and serve and worship in wholeness and in truth. All of us have gifts to share. We must ask what those who come to learn and leave give to the communities in which they spend precious months and years. What do persons who join communities as associates give to those communities?

I have been encouraged in the effort to discern the gifts of associates to their communities by many who have happily been companions on my associate-sister journey. I have also been encouraged by the writings of many whose thinking I respect, including Joan Chittister, who has spoken eloquently and passionately for inclusivity and a reverence for the other," not only in the above mentioned article but in book-length form.<sup>3</sup>

### **Democratization of Holiness**

Authors who have focused on what has been called the democratization of holiness have especially inspired my search. Since she is a laywoman as well as a theologian, it is perhaps not surprising that Elizabeth Dryer's *Earth Crammed with Heaven* would speak to me.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth A Johnson in *Friends of God and Prophets* wrote, "The wisdom tradition widens the playing field for discourse about the communion of saints insofar as it allows

the praxis of the friends of God and prophets to take place in home and in other private spaces, in workplace and in other public spaces, as vigorously as in the sanctuary. This tradition makes room for women today, largely excluded from official religious circles, to claim their own friendship with God and a call to prophecy and to know that this is religiously important."<sup>5</sup>

**Could it be that associates are affiliated with religious communities not just to receive training in holiness but to teach, in our turn, about the holiness we have found in our own sacred places?**

This religious Sister speaks eloquently that holiness is as deeply possible in lay life as in the convent and that influence in the church is to be sought among the laity as much as among the clergy.

Could it be that associates are affiliated with religious communities not just to receive training in holiness but to teach, in our turn, about the holiness we have found in our own sacred places: the kitchen, the sick-room, the marital bed, the family car, and wherever it is that we sit in silent contemplation? I took this question to three different settings in which Sisters and associates of Mercy had gathered: the National Mercy Associate Conference in April of 1998, a gathering group of Sisters and associates of which I am a

member, and a group of Sisters and associates of the Cincinnati Regional Community for whom I had been invited to lead a weekend of retreat in October of 1998. I will share with you shortly what I learned there. Meanwhile let me continue with my story.

After these experiences, there seemed to be nothing more to do with my questions, the process I had developed to find answers, or the answers I

had learned. I simply continued to lead my life as an associate of Mercy, a wife and mother, a member of my parish community and a professional psychotherapist. As an associate, I became, after the 1999 Chapter, a member of the Coordinating Body of the Commission on Women in and of the Church and then the chair of the resource group on women in and of the church in the Detroit Regional Community. There was a lot of work for me and the Sisters and other associates involved in the projects of these groups to attend to. I lost my focus on the question of the sister-associate relationship and deepened my focus on the clergy-laity relationship, a relationship associates share with Sisters. Could it be that we could

## I am convinced that the questions of relationship between Sisters and associates and between the clergy and the laity are bound together.

learn together how to be heard in our patriarchal church?

A few weeks ago a Sister of my regional community approached me at a workshop, which the Resource Group on Women/Church sponsored and said, "I want you to know that I appreciate what you do for our community, even if it hasn't always seemed as if I do." Bam! I was right back to the issue of the relationship. And what is more, I am even more convinced that the questions of relationship between Sisters and associates and between the clergy and the laity are bound together. I will share with you now the answers to the issue of relationship between Sisters and associates that I learned in the places I took my questions.

### What Do Associates Bring?

At the 1998 Mercy Associate Conference, I asked the question, "What do Mercy associates give to the vowed members of the Mercy community?" Three marketplace groups of Sisters and associates formed to discuss it. Their answers to the questions indicated that they believed that associates:

- ▶ bring to the community their own deep spirituality
- ▶ bring an experience of living realistically with the fi-

nancial responsibilities that are theirs and often live, of necessity and joyfully, in poverty and simplicity;

- ▶ bring a presence that challenged Sisters to look more deeply into the nature of their own vocation and recommit to that vocation.

I am struck by these responses. They indicate that the Mercy community recognizes the presence of a deep spirituality in their associates and that therefore a mutual learning about holiness can be taking place. There is a possibility, too, that the gospel values of poverty and simplicity of life are recognized in both groups and appreciated there. Might there, then, be others? In the expression of a felt challenge by the Sisters present to plumb the realities of their vocation, is there perhaps a reason why I sometimes felt unwelcome in my regional community? Challenge, especially identity challenge, is not pleasant for any of us to deal with.

After the conference, I developed a process around my questions and took it first to my gathering group and then, as I said, to a retreat of Sisters and associates of the Cincinnati region. In both situations, the discussions were wholehearted, inspiring and enlightening. From both groups, I requested and received

written statements. Here is what I made of their statements and even some of their own words.

- 1) Sisters and associates see each other as supporting each other in living the Christian life in the form that each has chosen. An associate wrote: I feel my relationship with the Sisters has already deepened me spiritually—I'm sure there will be more bonding and sharing and we all support each other, my husband and I and the Sisters.

One Sister said, "From associates, I receive my primary support in living my life and in ministry in my local setting."

Clearly the relationships are in many cases mutual and give those involved the assistance of friendship in living their everyday lives.

- 2) The process of preparation for association assists the potential associate to integrate prayer life, ministry, and life-choice responsibilities. This process continues as associates share prayer, opportunities for learning, and conversations with Sisters and each other. Obviously the training in spirituality that Joan Chittister expressed hope for had already been happening for associates in the Mercy community.
- 3) Both Sisters and associates provide for each other examples of prayerfulness, dedication to the works of Mercy, and appreciation for the person of Catherine McAuley that are mutually inspiring. Again we see gifting on both sides.

4) Sisters and associates challenge each other to grow in each of these categories.

In responding to the question: "What do I receive from associates?" A Sister made this felicitous summary:

- ▶ challenge of men and women hungry and desirous of more and deeper meaning and spirituality, and men and women walking with us in the midst of all the questions and ambiguities of association and its developing (but unknown future) in Mercy and in the Church.
- ▶ challenge of men and women to invite them into my life, not to keep it to myself or /ourselves
- ▶ challenge of being open to being reshaped in ways as yet unknown to any of us and not even envisioned when I entered Mercy some forty years ago.
- ▶ challenge to see and experience Mercy as a gift of and for the Church and world.

In this wonderful statement, besides the joyful look it gives us into the open heart of a brave woman, there is glimpse again of the challenge that may cause strain in the sister-associate relationship. It suggests the difficulties of ambiguity about association itself that has been present from the beginning. These difficulties, which do not go away in the face of reconfiguring, have caused differences in expectation and thus some conflict in the relationships.

5) Sisters experience associates as giving them hope that the charism of Mercy will be expressed long into the future and that they will have companionship into old age. Again an expression of gifts received from those who had been seen as the receivers.

6) Both Sisters and associates are learning about God's ways with us. For example, both groups have come to realize that associates experience their relationship to the community of Mercy as a specific call from God. There is also a recognition gained by some that there is a call to the single life that is distinctly different from the call to vowed celibacy in a religious community.

A Sister wrote: "Single life is really a vocation, not just a time of waiting until a real decision gets made."

At greater length, an associate said, "With C. and J. who are both free to become vowed members of the community if they wish, but who choose not to do so, I have learned about the call to lay life, the call to the single life as specific and beautiful. They have helped me to value my own place in the Church and the place of single men and women."

Clearly these Sisters and associates are on a shared journey in which they learn together.

### **The Relationship of Sisters and Associates for Mercy Community and Church**

In response to questions about what the relationship of Sisters and associates can mean to the

Mercy community, what it can mean to the Church and to the world beyond, the following answers were given by both Sisters and associates.

- 1) The more of us there are and the more diverse our settings, the more we can bring Mercy to those who need it. This is a service oriented response, obviously, and echoes the desire of every Mercy heart. There is witness here on both parts to a desire to live the Mercy charism.
- 2) The more of us there are and the more diverse our settings, the more impact we can have on institutions, both those sponsored by the Mercy community and those not. Our energy and ability to cause systemic change increases as our numbers increase. It may be that the system we can help to change is the Church itself. Some of this is expressed in another set of responses.
- 3) A small number of Sisters and associates understood that the gift of the associate-sister relationship to the Church, certainly, and to the world, possibly, is the witness of the relationship as such. An associate commented: We can witness to the Church (and perhaps beyond, depending on our diversity) with its patriarchal structures, to our ethnocentric states, to our resource-controlling world. We can witness to unity in diversity, and, hopefully, to a unity that is egalitarian.

A Sister wrote, "[The sister-associate relationship] can bring a lessening of violence and divi-

sions. [It is a] living example of living in harmony with various kinds of people. [We] continually challenge ourselves to inclusion [and] become temples of acceptance." It seems then that we could take our experience of relationship between two diverse groups as gift to the clergy of our Church as we seek mutuality in relationship with them.

- ▶ Whether one expects it or not, both parties in a relationship will gradually come to recognize the gifts the other brings that support one's values and the living of one's chosen way of life.

Given these realities, it is perhaps time to ask how the sister-associate relationship, now almost three decades old, can

## A relationship between persons of differing life choices will almost certainly lead them to reassess their own choice and provoke anxiety and some irritability.

### Some Chapter 2005 Issues

Looking first at what my own experiences and those of my companions in Mercy have taught me, I recognize several factors that might be helpful for our relationship in the future and for the relationship between laity and clerics.

- ▶ Time spent together attending to the work needed for building the kingdom of God leads gradually to mutual understanding and appreciation.
- ▶ The ambiguities of the sister-associate relationship and of association itself has caused difficulties in the relationship.
- ▶ A relationship between persons of differing life choices will almost certainly lead them to reassess their own choice and provoke anxiety and some irritability.

best be supported. In the reconfiguring of regional communities, groups with differing views of what association is are coming together. Is it perhaps time to further unify our understanding of association? Is it time to have an Office of Association at the institute level just as there is a Justice Office and a Mercy Corps Office? One of the questions about association concerns the mutuality of the relationship. For example, is it appropriate for associates to assume that their call to association might be a call to minister to the religious community itself as well as to work alongside Sisters in Mercy ministries and to be inspired by them to bring mercy to other venues? This is happening already, of course, in the work of associates on committees at both the institute and regional levels. The Chapter of 2005 might be a place of privacy for a discussion of this question.

Whatever is done at the chapter regarding association, I know there is much yet to be shared between us. I am aware, because of my long relationship with the Sisters of Mercy, that religious know how to find spiritual sustenance in many places outside of parish life and the formal celebrations of the liturgy. They know that one can develop prayer forms and exercises that lead to spiritual development. Many members of the laity are not even aware of the possibility.

I am aware, too, that I and most of my associate companions know about parish life. We know how to serve there and be nurtured there. I also know that vocations to religious life are mostly coming out of the parishes rather than out of educational institutions. Yet I see vocation personnel concentrating great energy on seeking vocations in colleges and universities. Laity can, I think, help religious Sisters plumb the richness of parish life and together they can then work to overcome the barriers that separate them as laity from the clergy.

### The Analogy of Sister-Associate and Priest-Laity

As we look at the question of the relationship between the laity and the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church, I am reminded of the learnings the Commission on Women in and of the Church recorded in "Analysis of Focus Group Data."<sup>6</sup> Included in this study are several important ideas:

- ▶ The success of the relationship between a pastor and those laity who work with him either as employees or as volunteers depends in great part on who the pastor is and the extent to which he allows mutuality in the relationship.
- ▶ There is a need for those who would increase the openness of clerics to mutuality to learn to engage respectfully and firmly with a cleric, expressing one's displeasure and asking for what one desires of the relationship.
- ▶ Surviving the rigors of the relationship between laity and clergy is facilitated for women by the support groups they form formally and informally and by the encouragement they receive by seeing one another succeed in the relationship on both parish and diocesan levels.
- ▶ There are groups of women who feel alienated and unvalued in their Church. One of these groups is lesbian Catholics. Another is those who have been treated unjustly or abused by clergy.

My hope is that the Chapter of 2005 will work with these realities to discover ways to improve the relationship between the laity and clergy and to discover ways to bring our marginalized lesbian Catholics to a safe center among us. Perhaps we will discover ways to learn the language of and best methods of approaching our brothers who are also clerics so that we may speak

to them effectively of what hinders our working together to build God's kingdom. Perhaps we will find more ways to support women, both Sisters and associates, who labor in the vineyard of the official Church. Perhaps, at least, we will continue the work of the Commission on Women in and of the Church so that these discoveries have an ongoing place to be made.

### Conclusion

Kathleen Norris, a friend of the Benedictine community, writes, "Our idol of the autonomous individual is a sham; the truth is, we expect everyone to be the same and dismiss as elitist those who are working through a call to any genuine vocation. It may be that our culture so fears the necessary other that it has grown unable to identify and name real differences without becoming defensive about them. A call, on the other hand, is pure process; it cannot be measured, quantified, or controlled by institutions. People who are called tend to violate the rules in annoying ways."<sup>7</sup>

We have reflected on the annoyances experienced by those called to different ways who meet on the same path. We have also seen that in the light of shared values and shared goals those annoyances can fade. I have learned, indeed, that out of the fertile soil of willingness to respond to one another's gestures of welcome deep and lasting friendship can grow.

In our effort to continue to live the sister-associate relationship, we can expect annoyance.

In our effort to develop more satisfying lay-cleric relationships, we can expect annoyance. We can, I believe, reduce the annoyance. We can do so first by identifying each others' unique gifts and call so that neither is obliterated. Secondly, we can open ourselves fully to the mutuality of the relationship. We can also become more hopeful in the midst of the annoyance if we realize that the mutual relationships we have already lived successfully are gifts to our patriarchal institutions and even nations. As Sisters and associates of the Mercy community, we can especially rejoice that our relationship appears to be one of God's gifts to our world in this age.



### Notes

- 1 Joan Chittister, "Climbing the Eight Mountains of Religious Life," *National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 20, 1998.
- 2 Joan Chittister, *Heart of Flesh* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).
- 5 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 43.
- 6 Commission on Women in and of the Church, "Analysis of Focus Group Data," Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Silver Spring, MD, 2003.
- 7 Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: River Head Books, 1996), 41.

# “Expand the ropes of your tent . . .” (Isa 54:2) Reflections on New Forms of Mercy Commitment

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*Mary Kathryn Grant and Katherine Ann Hill, R.S.M.*

Isaiah opens chapter 54 with a song of celebration, a promise of fruitfulness and blessing, and a call to lengthen the ropes and expand the space of the tent, to be ready to burst out and not hold back. This is followed by an admonition—do not be afraid or worry—God’s faithful love will last forever. God’s faithful love has inspired women and men throughout the ages to lives of service and mercy. These words of hope should inspire us as we examine what expanding the ropes of the tent of religious or committed life might mean today. What might it mean in the community of mercy to widen the tent to include, enclose, and embrace newer forms of commitment, participation, and contribution?

A vocation is a very personal experience; it can be a persistent, nagging notion, an irritating yet irresistible invitation, an energizing, compelling call. Whatever form it takes, it cannot be denied, suppressed, or ignored. A vocation is a sacred invitation to follow God’s call, to acknowledge and act on one’s deepest longings. In some cases, this call, this vocation, is an unmistakable invitation to a life of gospel service.

Throughout history, women and men have responded in different ways to this call. In apostolic times, followers of the Christ—the Lydias, Priscas, Susannas, Marthas, and Marys—lived out the teachings of Jesus in organizational structures that varied from community to community, such as house churches, missionary networks, deacons, deaconesses, and the order of widows. Over the centuries, men and women who dedicated themselves in stable forms of vowed religious life came moved from desert hermitage to independent monastery to diocesan associated centers to abbeys and convents. The life form has evolved over time with many manifestations—monastic, mendicant, apostolic, missionary, and the many mixed expressions today.

Outside of the evangelical religious life, other forms of committed service have always existed. The Beguines came into existence at a time when Rome withheld approval of new forms of religious life. Individuals such as Angela Merici, Louise deMarillac and Vincent dePaul, felt the traditional enclosed lifestyle would prevent them from directly serving the needs of the poor; they initiated new expressions of committed life.

Writing on this topic of new forms, Maria Casey, R.S.J., also quotes from Isaiah: “Here and now I am doing something new; at any moment it will break from the bud! Can you not see it?” (Isa 43:18–19.) She refers to this type of development as a “new form of consecrated life.” “What is critical,” she writes, “is that the notion of consecration perdures and the means by which individuals and groups enact that consecration change with time. In this new millennium, there are new needs, as never before; it is not only possible, but imperative that more new forms be permitted to emerge, to break from the bud.”<sup>1</sup>

The call in Catherine McAuley’s heart was a call to serve the poor and uneducated and only reluctantly, facing the possibility that the work of her little group might not endure did that call take form in vowed consecration. In order to preserve her original vision into the future, Catherine estab-

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lished a religious congregation. And this was only on the condition that the charism of service form the heart of the new congregation. Thus, the Sisters of Mercy take four vows—with the implicit understanding that poverty, chastity, and obedience are linked with the fourth vow of service to those who are poor, sick, or ignorant.<sup>2</sup>

**The call to Mercy service,  
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Answering this call may take  
forms other than vowed  
evangelical life.**

This call to service, specifically the call to Mercy service, echoing across time, is today responded to in different ways. Answering this call may take forms other than vowed evangelical life, such as covenanted association, Mercy Volunteer Corps, and more recently a form known as companions in Mercy. While all forms of committed service will be touched on in this paper, the main exploration will be the newest form: companions in Mercy.

The foundations of this call are simple: apostolic spirituality, mission, and community.

### **Apostolic Spirituality**

Companions seeking vowed commitment to a life of Mercy and service burn with a desire to live the gospel in the spirit of Catherine McAuley and in mutuality with the Religious Sisters of Mercy. They seek to share in the spirituality of Mercy, to live lives of service, to be and bring God's mercy to our world. They do not feel called to do this in the context of the evangelical counsels, yet want to orient their lives to God and to the service of the poor and needy in a public way that recognizes their relationship to the Mercy congregation and fulfills the passion and commitment of their hearts.

At baptism, all Christians are called to live a gospel life. How this is expressed in each individual life is one's vocation or calling. What is charac-

teristic of the call being responded to by companions is: fidelity to an apostolic spirituality, grounded in prayer and the sacraments; commitment to building and being a community of persons with the same purpose; and intention to hold one another in fidelity. There is no doubt that individuals could live this commitment individually and personally, but this is not part of the vision of companions. They yearn to be nurtured in the apostolic spirituality of Mercy together with the community of Mercy, signaled by a public commitment to these actions through a private (noncanonical) vow of Mercy service.

### **Mission**

Mission is perhaps the most central elements of the three: a deep call to live the gospel in the spirit of Catherine. Mission is the magnet, or in New Science language, the "strange attractor," drawing women and men to lives of service. Prominent authors reflecting on religious life itself speak to the need to reestablish the centrality of mission in this postmodern era. Howard Gray, S.J., writing in a volume of collected essays, *Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life*, challenges religious leaders on the issue of "mission or maintenance." His arguments articulate the desire of those seeking deeper communion and relationship in ministry. He writes of three principal elements: 1) formation in the spirituality and charism of the congregation, 2) community of heart and purpose, and 3) apostolic action.<sup>3</sup>

Catherine Harmer, Medical Missioner, issues a strong challenge to religious to "be very open to a variety of ways to live the committed life."<sup>4</sup> She asserts that "religious congregations . . . could be a conduit and a support" for those seeking a committed life. "Associate programs are a first step, but it is possible that the future will see a more radical step, one that recognizes different forms of *membership*<sup>5</sup> [italics hers], including core members and other members . . ." She concludes by acknowledging there would need to be "clearly delineated policies and practices, clarity about rights and responsibilities," and more significantly a "recognition of an equality of commitment."<sup>6</sup>

Harmer looks ahead to a time when the mission is the central focus and essence of the commit-



ted life, and things such as retirement, voting, and leadership, which are so often raised as obstacles to welcoming newer forms of connection, inclusion, and ministry, disappear altogether.

### Community and Inclusiveness

Companions seek inclusiveness within a community of Mercy. They seek no offices, no rights beyond that of belonging in spirit and action to the ministry of service expressed so well in the fourth vow: service to persons who are poor, sick, or uneducated. They seek to be *a part of* and still *apart from* and to self-differentiate within the larger context of the Mercy congregation. This is a new form developing in relationship to an already existing form (vowed religious life) of which there is other recently established forms—association and Mercy Volunteer Corps. Praying and celebrating with, being called upon for their individual gifts and talents, and ultimately being accepted within the community as integral “members” are public manifestations of this broader community, united in heart and mind.

Holding lightly to and still respecting boundaries, companions describe their deepest desire to be accepted and recognized as viable, committed, dedicated, and faithful to the call of Mercy. Conceiving of community in the broadest sense, not of a community of place, they seek a community of purpose and common passion for service. They only ask that the ropes of the tent be expanded . . .

In this respect, one is reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theory of community as being formed by attachment to the center. Those participating come from various points/space(s) of distance and what holds each one and the group is their attachment to the center.<sup>7</sup>

### Charisms and Strange Attractors

When a single charism is like a magnet attracting various forms of response—vowed, committed associates, dedicated coworkers, volunteer corps, and companions—the challenge is to describe how these disparate parts relate to one another. Images of an umbrella with many spokes, concentric circles, a tree with many branches have been

offered. None adequately capture the heart of belonging and relating.

Searching for a metaphor to describe how various new responses relate to existing structures yields two quite different examples of sewing/knitting together into some kind of whole, that of a quilt or of a weaving or tapestry. A quilt has unity through a thematic pattern, color, motif, or other unifying vehicle. Each distinct part is carefully crafted and can stand alone. The parts are ultimately sown together to make a whole. A weaving, on the other hand, has internal integrity; the warp and woof ultimately holding the cloth together as a single fabric. No part can stand alone; no piece or part has meaning outside of the whole. Both metaphors could be used to describe or situate forms of “membership,” which can be a piece, sewn into the fabric of the Mercy community or it can be an integral component, inseparable from the whole.

**Companions seek to be *a part of*  
and still *apart from* and to  
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congregation. This is a new form  
developing.**

Looking back to the foundations of the Sisters of Mercy, one might argue that Catherine’s vision most resembled a weaving, where individuals—vowed, volunteer, even donor—were all part of the vision of serving the poor in a seamless fashion. She attracted women and men who responded to the call to serve the poor and not as ordained or vowed, cloistered religious.

At the heart of the call are the gospel and the attractiveness of the life of Catherine McAuley. Beyond that, lifestyle, personal commitments and obligations, professional responsibilities, and personal discernment shape the various modes of responding. “We fear both ambiguity and complexity . . . because we still focus on the parts, rather than the whole system . . . We still believe what holds the system together is point to point connections that must be laboriously woven together by

us. Complexity adds to our task, requiring us to keep track of more things, handle more pieces, make more connections. As things increase in number or detail, the span of control stretches out elastically, and, suddenly, we are snapped into unmanageability.”<sup>8</sup>

Employing more contemporary theories—systems theory, quantum physics, chaos theory—all tell us that we are united; we are one with the universe, with the past and the future; that there is meaning in chaos; that the whole is contained in each part. The image that begins to emerge from this seeming chaos is one of a community in service, of many individual players contributing their gifts to building the reign of God on earth in the tradition and charism of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy. The intent becomes one of understanding the new movement based on a deep respect for the web of activity and relationships that comprise the system. The intent is not to push and pull, but rather to let go and to give form to what is unfolding.

**Both Mercy associates and companions seek not to destroy boundaries, but, in respecting them, seek to treat them as permeable when appropriate.**

### **Creative Reordering and Evolving**

Recalling that Catherine’s initial vision was to gather persons of the same mind and heart, willing to live the gospel, to pray and support one another, to sacrifice and strive to alleviate poverty, oppression and their causes, one begins to understand the roots of the Mercy charism. “Charism,” Mary Jo Leddy describes as “an energy, a dynamic, a power which cannot be contained or possessed . . . but must be shared.”<sup>9</sup> Or as the *Mercy Constitutions* reads “By collaborating with others in the works of mercy, we continually learn from them to be more merciful.”<sup>10</sup> And even stronger “we rejoice in the continued invitation to seek justice, to be compassionate and to

reflect mercy to the world.”<sup>11</sup> The challenge is to do so in a variety of ways of serving, belonging, and do this mirroring the creative energies of the universe in all its diversity and complexity.

### **Boundaries: Skin or Barrier**

Often the argument of boundaries is made: stressing how important it is to keep distinctions clear and defined. No one would argue against this. Both Mercy associates and companions seek not to destroy boundaries, but, in respecting them, seek to treat them as permeable when appropriate. If the frame of reference were a community of Mercy, with the gospel and Catherine’s life as central, associates, coworkers, companions, candidates, former members, volunteers, and others all sharing the same mission and values, consider how far the reach of Mercy could be extended, expanded, and enriched. The space of the tent opened wider.

Emphasis on boundaries has at times lead to inaccurate and sometimes hurtful misunderstandings and assumptions. Boundaries may be viewed as skin or as walls.<sup>12</sup> When viewed as the skin of the self, boundaries are essential: they breathe, protect, absorb light. Boundary, as border or wall, on the other hand, separates and divides. This meaning of boundary has been common in religious life in the past. The vows were often used as a border or wall separating vowed persons from others. The structures of religious life—convents, horaria, ministry, vows, and habits—were all boundaries used to identify an individual with a group. They were sometimes a means of encouraging inner “structures” of identity but often that reflection was guided by boundaries imposed from without, for example, “You keep the rule and the rule keeps you.”

### **Evidence of Chaos**

Some things must be lived and then defined and described, not the other way around. This is particularly true of evolving realities, and the difficulty sometimes gives rise to misunderstanding. The most commonly heard negative comments about the call to deeper participation in the Mercy mission include: “You are trying to have your cake and eat it too,” “You’re just Sisters-of-Mercy-

wannabes.” Fears spoken in terms of these comments are understandable yet misplaced, often voiced to impede or obstruct the emergence of new forms asking to be born. The promise of the Christian life is life in abundance—abundance that invites all to participate and partake and is characterized by rich diversity.

The “wannabe” comments cut deeply. Companions do not want to be Sisters of Mercy. They do want to be part of a larger community of Mercy in a distinct and evolving form of committed life. They seek intentionally to orient their lives to the gospel and to the charism of Mercy, ultimately to be faithful to their own unique vocation.

In attempting to diffuse some of the misunderstandings and addressing some of the concerns, one might be guided by Henri Nouwen’s thoughtful commentary on moving from hostility to hospitality. “Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines . . . to open a wide spectrum for choice and commitment . . . the opening of an opportunity for others to find their God and their way.”<sup>13</sup> Nouwen sees this conversion as an essential dimension of genuine spiritual development.

### The Heart of the Matter

One thing is certain, the Spirit is alive, the call is being heard, and the paradigm is shifting. One knows that it is impossible to reverse a paradigm shift. Institutional religious life has experienced a dramatic reduction in numbers of vowed members and, at the same time, experienced a dramatic increase in associates, in volunteer organizations, in individuals wanting to be connected to the charism of the congregation.

Data suggest that the numbers of individuals seeking association, comembership, and other related forms of inclusion in the life and spirit of a congregation are growing rapidly, more rapidly in most cases than the numbers of vowed religious. A recent study by Kathleen Wade, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: The Associate Movement in Religious Communities*, gives some details of alternative modes of relating and expanding the ropes.<sup>14</sup> The author cites a recent 2000 study of 11,000 religious

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congregations, which reported 27,400 associates, with an additional 2,700 in formation.

Writing on this movement several years earlier, Paul Philibert, O.P., calls for “more apostolic options . . . this is God’s doing and not just an unfortunate consequence of our inability to keep business as usual functioning (relative to numbers of vocations [to evangelical life] and institutional supports). The time has come for us to be in serious dialogue . . . about [an] understanding of this new moment in church life.”<sup>15</sup> Thus it is imperative to widen the ropes of the tent.

When the patterns of this new call are observed, insights emerge. Two of these are: 1) new forms of committed life are a unique, contemporary charism in the church and 2) mission is the essence of the call. Margaret Brennan, I.H.M., has argued that religious life itself should be viewed as a charism in the Church;<sup>16</sup> perhaps the time has come to recognize dedicated, committed lay life as a comparable charism.

What individuals desiring to “enter the tent” seek are acceptance, welcome, and a share, insofar as appropriate, in the mission, the ministry, the spirit and spirituality of Mercy. In essence, this is a moment to return to Catherine’s original design to have a tent big enough to include “all sorts of people,”<sup>17</sup> people whose deepest desire is to meet the needs of the poor and to extend the reign of God on earth by following in her footsteps. Our challenge today is not to be afraid to expand the ropes of the tent and allow our God to continue to do something new.



## Notes

- 1 Maria Casey, R.S.J., *Breaking from the Bud: New Forms of Consecrated Life*, (Burwood, NSW: Sisters of St. Joseph NSW, 1805), 34–35.
- 2 See Sheila Carney, R.S.M., “The Constitutions: Our Corporate and Corporeal Word, *The MAST Journal*, 2004, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 4.
- 3 Howard J. Gray, S.J. “The Challenge to Religious Leadership: Maintenance or Mission?,” in Paul J. Philibert, O.P., *Living in the Meantime: Concerning the Transformation of Religious Life*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 51.
- 4 Katherine Harmer, *Religious Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995), 66.
- 5 For many, the term member should be reserved only for those in consecrated life. Harmer is using it here more broadly and the authors of this article prefer to do the same.
- 6 Harmer, p. 67.
- 7 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1960), 60–61.
- 8 Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 109–111.
- 9 Mary Jo Leddy, *Reweaving the Future of Religious Life*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 61.
- 10 *Mercy Constitutions*, § 6.
- 11 *Mercy Constitutions*, § 84
- 12 See also Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *Religious Life in the New Millennium*, Volume 1, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Culture Context*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 360–363.
- 13 Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, (New York: Doubleday Press, 1975).
- 14 Kathleen Wade, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: The Associate Movement in Religious Communities*, (Cincinnati, OH: OPEL Press, 2003).
- 15 Paul J. Philibert, O.P. “Editors Afterword,” *Living in the Meantime*, op. cit., 221.
- 16 Margaret Brennan, I.H.M., *Living in the Meantime*, op. cit., 153–52.
- 17 Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 3–4.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATES

September 20, 2001

Dear Mercy Associates,

In the wake of the heart-rending tragedy that has literally consumed us all this past week, I begin this letter to all of you, our dear and cherished associates. The depth of our sorrow and anguish for all those who lost their lives and all those they left behind knows no bounds. I am sure for all of us, it wasn't the collapse of images of the towers, or the destruction of the Pentagon (those symbols of power and might) that touched our hearts and emotions, but the faces and families of our countless dead as well as the heroism of those responding. We hold them all in our prayers and loving thoughts, even as we reflect on our own priorities and take personal responsibility for changing the world from one of hate to one of love and peace.

I believe you will have already received the lovely Mercy Day Letter, 2001, by the time you receive this, but I, too, want to join with our regional team in wishing you all a blessed Mercy day. May it be a day for all of us to thoughtfully and prayerfully reflect on the word MERCY and the profound meaning of the word at this sad time in our history. Mercy, according to Webster's definition, is "refraining from harming, a disposition to forgive or be kind, a blessing." And, in the words of Shakespeare, "Mercy is not strained. It drops as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest. It blesses the person who gives, and the one who takes. It is an attribute of God himself, and earthly power is most like God's when mercy seasons justice." It is a quality of behavior that strikes at the very heart of how we will respond as individuals and as a nation to the violence inflicted on us this past week. We hope that mercy and love will prevail over hate and retaliation. As we all know, violence only begets more violence and perpetuates the cycle of war and hatred. May our hearts, our prayers and reflections on this 2001 Mercy Day be about the beautiful quality of mercy and its power to change our world

Another very special purpose of this letter is to invite and encourage you to attend either of the two fall area meetings (Omaha—November 2–3 and Portland—November 9–10). I do know distance, time, family commitments and many things make attendance impossible at times, but a focus of this meeting is going to be on Mercy association, our relationship, and our future together. So, we would like as many of you to attend as is possible . . .

May your hearts be filled with God's mercy, peace, and love in these uncertain times of our lives.

With love and affection always,

**Sheila Devereux, R.S.M.**  
Director of Associates

# A Comfortable Cup of Tea

## A Symbol of and for the Sisters of Mercy

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Therese B. Di Lisio.

*When Catherine McAuley was dying, many of the sisters gathered around her bedside to say good-bye and to pray the prayers for the dying. Not long before she died, at the end of a long day of waiting, she said to one of the sisters: "Be sure you have a comfortable cup of tea for them when I'm gone." Ever since, the comfortable cup of tea has been a symbol of the warm and caring relationships which were at the heart of Catherine McAuley's Mercy vision.<sup>1</sup>*

Other than the Mercy Cross,<sup>2</sup> which symbolizes the embeddedness of the Mercy tradition within the larger Christian tradition, "a comfortable cup of tea," is perhaps the most popular and ubiquitous of Mercy symbols. Actual teacups, pots, and associated items, as well as their images and likenesses in photography, art, and artifacts (such as candles, pins, refrigerator magnets, miniatures, figurines, plaques, wall hangings, stamps, stickers, jew-

elry, logos on T-shirts, and the like) are likely to appear anywhere that Sisters and associates of Mercy are found.

Why do Mercy Sisters and associates surround themselves so thoroughly with these "tea things" (teacups, pots and related objects and images)? If you ask them, as I did, many will say that "a comfortable cup of tea," symbolizes love, friendship, conversation, gathering, sharing, caring, comfort, relaxation, refreshment, healing, warmth, welcome, acceptance, inclusion, equality, generosity, grace, graciousness, hospitality, the spirit of Catherine McAuley, Mercy heritage, identity, unity, and community.<sup>3</sup> In a word, the cup is all about *relationship*.<sup>4</sup> The primary function of tea things within Mercy culture is to initiate, cultivate, nurture, maintain, acknowledge, affirm, enable, enrich, express, extend, empower, imagine, remember, and celebrate rela-

tionship with God, Catherine McAuley, one another, the human family (especially the poor relatives, women and children) and the world.

Tea things are commonly used to create ritual environments by their placement on altars and in prayer spaces. For women in particular, altars and sanctuaries are places set aside, not for sacrifice, but for the expression of relationship with God and others.<sup>5</sup> Tea things also play a major role in the social ritual of gift giving, not only for specifically Mercy events and occasions (such as anniversaries, commissionings, receptions into the community, taking vows, moving into new ministries, and transitioning into positions of leadership), but for general occasions as well (such as birthdays, Christmas, house warmings, and special accomplishments).<sup>6</sup> Tea things are also a regular feature in the printed media with which Mercys communicate and ritually interact with one another (such as in stationary, note cards, graphics on various publications, correspondence, notices, invitations, announcements and printed materials used in connection with Mercy gatherings, celebrations, worship, and rituals).<sup>7</sup>

Tea things are commonly used to create ritual environments by their placement on altars and in prayer spaces. For women in particular, altars and sanctuaries are places set aside, not for sacrifice, but for the expression of relationship with God and others.

Not unlike crosses and memorials, tea things are deeply embedded in the everyday material world of Mercy community members. Tea things tend to blend into the local scenery, even as they help to color and texturize it. To offer a case in point, I have just inventoried my own home, which I share with a Mercy associate. This, to my own surprise, is what I discovered.

**Living Room:** a miniature teapot that lives on my piano with other "favorite things."

**Dining Room:** a classic style Royal Albert china teapot with two matching cups and saucers; a "Boyd's Bears" figurine of two female bears having a tea party; another Royal Albert teapot shaped like a comfortable easy chair occupied by a bear holding a tiny teacup; four small teacup and saucer prints on the wall; a miniature crystal tea service, a miniature porcelain tea service, a miniature cup and saucer on a stand; one Irish-import teacup, three teacups and saucers of different shapes, colors, and designs.

**Kitchen:** two full-sized teapots in the shapes of different kinds of houses; two miniature teacups and saucers; two mugs and tea bag holders on which are printed: "Catherine's Comfortable Tea;" a small gold teapot tea bag holder; a small pewter teapot magnet on the refrigerator; our everyday teapot always on the stove.

**Office:** a miniature teacup and saucer; teacup note cards (some designed by Mercy artists), note pad and stationary;

a teacup magnet; an acrylic stand-up frame holding a piece of graphic art created and given to me by Sister Virginia Farnan (Brooklyn), bearing a transparent teacup with Catherine McAuley's image inside of it, and the superimposed text: "*The cup was no longer separate from herself . . . the poor . . . no longer sipped from the cup in her hands. They feasted from the brewed cup of her life! Be sure everyone has a comfortable cup of tea.*"<sup>8</sup>

Most of these items were gifts from Mercy Sisters and associates. We also have an inventory of a half-dozen teapots, cups, candles, and pins (purchased opportunely at bargain prices) to be given away as gifts some time in the future. My home is not atypical. All except one of the Sisters and associates who responded to this study reported that they have one or more of these types of items "on display" in their homes, have either given or received such things, or that they "collect" them as objects of delight. Things associated with "a comfortable cup of tea" are simply part and parcel of our multitextured, multicontextual material lives.

### Good Humor and Joy

The giving, receiving, displaying, and using of tea things has a

certain enjoyable, lighthearted, and even playful quality about it. Several Sisters and associates with whom I have been in conversation in connection with this study have taken particular delight in reminding me of the "inside story" that a "comfortable" cup of tea means, among other things, that the tea is "spiked" with Irish whiskey!<sup>9</sup> The fact that a splash of levity is mixed in with the deeper meaning of the symbol in no way dilutes—but enhances—the rich flavor of Mercy carried in the cup. Catherine herself is remembered and much beloved for her good humor, clever wit, and willingness to play. In her letters to her Sisters, she reminded them to "dance every evening!"—not just to keep warm, but to build among them a relationship of unity and community in the "comfort" of one another's hospitable good company. These qualities of life, among the many meanings symbolized by "a comfortable cup of tea," are *materialized* in the way the symbol is both "played with" and "prayed with" in material Mercy culture and ritual practices.

According to Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., "The offering of hospitable tea to guests," in the literal sense, "is a longstanding, worldwide tradition of the Sisters of Mercy."<sup>10</sup> The bodily, sensory, and social experience of drinking and sharing "a com-

Things associated with "a comfortable cup of tea" are simply part and parcel of our multitextured, multicontextual material lives.

comfortable cup of tea” materially grounds and reinforces the symbolic significance of material objects and images associated with that experience.<sup>11</sup> Sister Paula Diann Marlin (Baltimore) recalls that when she was a Heritage tour guide at the Mercy International Centre in Dublin, a “morning tea/prayer ritual was part of every retreat experience.” Associate Rita Retzlaff (Brooklyn) writes about an evening ritual she experienced as a retreat guest at the centre, one she found to be “especially meaningful”—and enjoyable.

We had spent time reflecting and touring “Catherine’s house.” We ended up in “Catherine’s parlour,” which was set up for tea. At each of our places was a “cup of tea” and “words of wisdom” on place cards. Then Catherine [*a likeness, I presume*], came to serve us tea. We each read our words of wisdom to each other and then “danced” together. We had a fabulous time.<sup>12</sup>

“A comfortable cup of tea” has been drunk from—literally, symbolically and ritually—in a variety of imaginative ways. Associate directors Maureen King (Brooklyn) and Kathleen Schiro (New Jersey) shared their joint recollection of a teacup ritual that took place at a regional associates conference in the summer of 2000:

We brought a teacup with us when we arrived, we put the teacup at one of six tables that were set up for “a tea party.” No one knew at that point whose teacup was whose. The next day after Sheila [Carney] spoke about Catherine, we had to walk around and find a teacup that we liked and sit at that table. Once the table was

The bodily, sensory, and social experience of drinking and sharing “a comfortable cup of tea” materially grounds and reinforces the symbolic significance of material objects and images associated with that experience.

full, we drank tea from the new ones we chose while we talked about our memories of tea and the significance of it in our life. The common themes were warmth, hospitality, familiarity, family, comfort. We took them home with us as a gift from one to the other. On the last day, we found the person whose cup we chose and had tea with them while we listened to their story about the cup and why they chose to bring it and also we talked at that time about what brought us to and what keeps us a part of Mercy.<sup>13</sup>

### Women’s Gathering

On another occasion, Patricia Black and Eileen Lennon, two former Sisters of Mercy who were the planners-to-be of a *Mercy Feminist Network* gathering in Brooklyn, happened to be shopping in a mall when they spotted Emilie Barnes’s popular book, *If Teacups Could Talk*.<sup>14</sup> This book includes not only tea-time recipes, but also the stories of women’s lives and their memories associated with teacups. Patricia recalls, “When I saw the display, I immediately associated it with Catherine’s comfortable cup of tea.” Patricia and Eileen bought the book and, months later, used part of it in

the creation of a ritual that included, among other things, a tea party.

Everyone brought their own teacup. The planners provided tea bags with homemade “tea-tags.” The tags contained quotes such as “Life is a cup to be filled, not drained;” “Tea quenches tears and thirst;” and “A woman is like a tea bag. It’s only when she’s in hot water that you realize how strong she is.” The ritual included an introductory conversation about coming together, a blessing-prayer before the tea, a reading from *If Teacups Could Talk* (in which Barnes writes that the whole experience of “preparing and enjoying tea is a ritual in itself” and a way to refresh the spirit); the serving of tea to one another; a sharing of stories and memories while drinking the tea; their reflecting together on the fragility of teacups and of life and of the necessity to take risks anyway (as did Catherine McAuley); and a closing prayer focusing on the two elemental essentials needed to brew a cup of tea: fire and water—symbols of Catherine McAuley’s “fiery passion” for the poor, and of the “river of Mercy” that is her continuing legacy. In this ritual of remembering, blessing, serving, and sharing—remi-



niscient of the action that takes place in Eucharistic liturgy—participants experienced Catherine’s spirit in the sharing of “a comfortable cup of tea.”

### Contemplative Prayer

Teacups have also been used interactively and as environmental symbol-objects for contemplative prayer. In their 1996 book, *Praying with Catherine McAuley*, which features the image of a steaming hot cup of tea on its cover, Sisters Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney offer primary source readings, stories, prayers, and questions for reflection on various topics related to Christian spirituality in general and to Mercy spirituality in particular. In each chapter, following some text by or about Catherine McAuley, the reader is invited to “pause” and “prepare a comfortable cup of tea

confessed that she might not use the teacup symbol in her book in this way if she were writing it today. Sheila expressed concern that the teacup can become too trivialized if we are not very careful with it.<sup>16</sup> She believes Catherine McAuley’s *gesture* of offering “a comfortable cup of tea” ought to be the primary focus of attention, rather than the cup itself. The gesture is important, says Sheila, because

... even as Catherine lay dying, her thoughts were turned to other people. The kind of generosity that characterized her life did not leave her, even in this extreme situation . . . It is true that the teacup is a symbol of hospitality, but there is more to it. . . . The teacup represents a rich gesture within the tradition and we don’t want to stop too short of understanding what it means as a symbol of generosity, relationship, and concern for community . . . We can *use* the teacup any way we want, but the important thing is

in a way that could potentially weaken its power as a Mercy symbol. In Sheila’s view, a teacup can be potent as a Mercy symbol only insofar as it points beyond itself to the deeper Mercy story. Sheila expressed the hope that, within the larger Mercy community, the teacup symbol can be thought about more seriously, carefully, and consciously by “pausing over it a little while to consider what it really means.” After saying this, Sheila began to chuckle. When asked why, she told me she had just swung her desk chair around, as we were talking, and that she noticed something of which she had become totally unconscious. Attached to her metal radiator in her institute office is a teacup magnet, and next to it, a magnetic sign that says: “Women are like tea—they get stronger in hot water.” Catherine also cared deeply about Mercy but was very much “of the world” and “in the world” and never took herself too seriously. I could almost hear her, too.

## Teacups have also been used interactively and as environmental symbol-objects for contemplative prayer.

and think of a time in your own life when you . . . (experienced God’s compassion; waited for God; found God in humor; extended hospitality, etc.)” According to the authors, the teacup is employed in this way to invite the reader to enter into “a comfortable, centered space in which to meet oneself and our gracious God.”<sup>15</sup>

In my telephone interview with Sister Sheila Carney, she

to *reflect* on who Catherine was and what she was doing, both in her life and at the time of her death . . . and to be guided by that in our own lives.<sup>17</sup>

Sheila shared her concern that teacup jewelry, magnets, stationary, miniatures, images, and the like have become quite trendy, commercialized commodities in today’s popular culture.<sup>18</sup> She thought these items could reinforce appropriation of the teacup

### Hospitality

Among all the things said to be symbolized by the “comfortable cup of tea,” hospitality, in the interpersonal as well as broad social, spiritual, and ethical sense of the term stands out over and above, and is inclusive of, them all. In 1979, long before it had become the popular object-symbol it is today, Mary Cleophas Costello, past president of Mount St. Agnes College, delivered a speech about hospitality to her Baltimore Province and entitled it “A Comfortable Cup

of Tea.” Mary Cleophas said to her Sisters:

“A Comfortable Cup of Tea,” the words of Mother McAuley, continue to challenge all of her daughters whenever we hear them . . . They are a typical phrase to describe the kind of woman she was: a practical person who set to work on the most obvious task in any situation . . . for the alleviation of any human need that demanded a remedy. She began with what was on hand, what was on the surface to alleviate human suffering; but the impulse to begin at all was a deep flame that sprang from her lifetime devotion to that humanity she had learned to revere in the crucified Jesus . . . No wonder . . . that she speaks so forcibly to us today when we have become so conscious of human destitution . . . More and more . . . the Sisters of Mercy are answering that challenge.<sup>19</sup>

Hospitality is the principal characteristic of Mercy identity, spirituality, and mission. In light of the example of Catherine McAuley, Sisters and associates broadly understand hospitality as an individual and collaborative way of being, believing, and behaving in relation to God and others in the world, in practical response to today’s human needs. In the Americas alone, on the institute level alone (which does not include the separately sponsored works of each regional community), Mercy Hospitality means:

- ▶ selling Mercy property to create McAuley Institute, a national non-profit agency that provides low-interest loans, technical assistance, information, training and public policy advocacy for

the development of healthy communities and affordable housing;

- ▶ seeking ways to change social, political, and economic systems that create and perpetuate poverty, through the Institute Justice Ministry, which “works for social justice by facilitating access to information and resources; collaborating with other justice coalitions . . . mobilizing for public witness and corporate voice; and making available tools for advancing the work of social justice,” and making heard the voices of poor and marginalized people;
- ▶ educating hundreds of thousands of students from preschool to graduate levels in a way that “nurtures growth of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, and morally;”
- ▶ sponsoring or cosponsoring six health systems and “approximately 140 health-related facilities throughout the United States [and more in Belize, Guam, Guyana, Peru, and the Philippines] including hospitals,

long-term health facilities, rehabilitation centers, and family care and outreach centers, making them one of the largest health care providers in the United States;”

- ▶ going to, gathering up and taking in poor, sick, uneducated persons (especially women and children) through community outreach services, mental health clinics; shelters and transitional housing facilities; family and children’s services, and a broad spectrum of human services as varied as are human needs;
- ▶ operating “retreat centers and houses of prayer where people can come and stay for a few hours or a few weeks;”
- ▶ on a less grandiose but no less important scale, Mercy hospitality means treating every individual, in the most ordinary of daily situations, with respect, acceptance, and acknowledgment of their human dignity.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sentimental Rather Than Sacramental?**

Can so delicate a symbol-object as “a comfortable cup of tea”

Sisters and associates broadly understand hospitality as an individual and collaborative way of being, believing, and behaving in relation to God and others in the world, in practical response to today’s human needs.

## It seems a virtual certainty that Catherine McAuley did not think of “a comfortable cup of tea” as a symbol carrying the many meanings attributed to it today.

really carry the meaning of all of this? Can a cup of tea really “continue to challenge all of Catherine’s daughters [and sons]” to meet today’s complex “human needs demanding a remedy,” as Mary Cleophas Costello said Catherine’s words could? Sister Cynthia Serjak (Pittsburgh) does not think so. She offers this challenging perspective:

The CCT idea has been invested with meanings that I’m not sure Catherine intended. It has been asked to bear a symbolic weight that it is not capable of doing . . . It is as if we’ve latched onto something concrete, limited culturally and contextually, and now use it to express some significant piece of Mercy life. I believe hospitality is important, of course, but I think there are many ways in which Catherine showed us a very radical, extensive hospitality—one being the House of Mercy itself, the complete spending of her inheritance! The CCT does not match the weight of all that for me.

So, it’s a nice symbol, but where is its challenge? If a symbol is a doorway to deep mystery, where is that in the CCT? The symbols we use in Catholic rituals are multivalent—the fire of Pentecost comforts *and* chastens, the waters of baptism welcome *and* threaten, the bread and cup of Eucharist are nourishing *and* are invitations into the fullness of the paschal mystery—they challenge us to be broken and poured as Jesus

was. I don’t see the CCT as having these wonderful paradoxes and powers. It feels flat to me, not something I would return to again and again to learn from and reflect upon, as I would with another symbol. When I have seen it used in Mercy gatherings I have found it not to be an engagement of a potent meaning (anamnesis) but rather nostalgic, perhaps sentimental, even “cute.”

I don’t find Catherine’s words in this instance to be compelling in a metaphorical, symbolic or even spiritual way. Her legacy and her ministerial example are very compelling to me—I just don’t think the CCT carries the same weight. Perhaps I am missing something by not appreciating the “Irish” or local custom to which she refers. Perhaps I need more “exegesis” of the scene.<sup>21</sup>

Sister Donna M. Ryan (Omaha), who works in a church as a pastoral minister expressed similar concerns.

I really don’t think in looking over Catherine’s life, she would have used that symbol much—she was too busy. . . . I personally am comforted by the cup of tea, but I am aware that it could cloister me in comfort so that I no longer have to be passionate to take risks, or move with society of the local church as we move into the twenty-first century. [Although, Catherine’s] style of ministry . . . was to be in collaboration with the laity . . . so today she would have offered

the cup of tea to men and women doing works of Mercy . . .<sup>22</sup>

It seems a virtual certainty that Catherine McAuley did not think of “a comfortable cup of tea” as a symbol carrying the many meanings attributed to it today. Then again, the same can be said for the traditional Eucharistic symbols of bread and wine and other liturgical symbols and practices upon which theologians over the centuries have heaped multiple meanings having mythical and questionably historic origins. These Eucharistic symbols are not rendered “flat” and powerless on account of this interpretive activity. Likewise, the liveliness of “a comfortable cup of tea” as a Mercy symbol need not turn on the question of whether or not Catherine McAuley expected a teacup to carry the multiple (and polyvalent) meanings it holds for many today. Lives lived in the spirit of Catherine continue to infuse Catherine’s special blend of contemplation and action with fresh flavor each time the symbol is encountered and interpreted anew. Without such continual renewal, symbols simply die.<sup>23</sup> Further, insofar as the spirituality implied by the “comfortable cup of tea” is one of being both empty *and* full, of receiving *and* giving, of filling up *and* spilling over, the symbol is capable of carrying paradoxical tension.

The more compelling and critical questions raised by Cynthia Serjak and Donna M. Ryan have to do with whether or not and to what extent “a comfortable cup of tea” has the power to provoke deep thought, to facilitate encounter with mystery, and to challenge someone

to the kind of bold risk taking that Catherine's own brand of hospitality entailed. The evidence suggests that "a comfortable cup of tea" does, in fact, have the power to help draw many, though obviously not all, carriers of the Mercy charism into contemplative encounter with "deep mystery"—that transcendent mystery that paradoxically dwells immanently near in the midst of our loving, compassionate and just relationships and activities in *this* world, our *material* world. As theologian Karl Rahner explains, holy mystery *can* be encountered in the things of this world, insofar as all matter is drenched in God's grace-filled presence.<sup>24</sup> Mystery can be let loose in the liturgy of our ordinary, daily lives through the most ordinary and even "cute" things. "A comfortable cup of tea" *can* have the power to help challenge complacency, help impel people to action, and help empower creative, practically responsive ministries of hospitality. Cynthia Serjak is quite right, though. For this power to become activated, some "exegesis of the scene" needs to take place.

### Mercy Charism

Anna Nicholls, a Mercy from New Zealand, sees "a comfortable cup of tea" as a symbol of "the hospitality aspect of our Mercy charism, an aspect that has been a big factor in my Mercy journey." Anna's story includes a laminated text that hung on the wall of the kitchen of the first Mercy house in which she lived. This text directly

relates "a comfortable cup of tea" to Mercy identity, spirituality, and mission:

When Catherine McAuley was dying, many of the sisters gathered around her bedside to say goodbye and to pray the prayers for the dying. Not long before she died, at the end of a long day of waiting, she said to one of the Baggot St. Sisters: "Be sure you have a comfortable cup of tea for them when I am gone." Ever since, the comfortable cup of tea has been a telling symbol for the Sisters of Mercy and those who uphold the Mercy charism. There is nothing pretentious about a cup of tea. Having a cup of tea with someone is a simple homey gesture of hospitality which implies a certain ease of relationship. The comfortable cup of tea is a way of expressing how we are together. It is a way of sharing a common space. It is a way to include others. It is a way to give our time, our presence, our love. If you are getting it right in your ministry, you will be able to have a comfortable cup of tea together. If you are implementing policies that are just and charitable, if you are living the basic human virtues of integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness, you will feel free to share a comfortable cup of tea with business colleagues. If you are really trying to live out the gospel imperative that, in spite of the inequalities that exist between you and others, you can experience a relation-

ship of friendship, then the cup of tea will be as symbolic for you as the foot washing was for the early disciples.

The comfortable cup of tea can be a gauge of how you are doing. If you are not in a position to have it, you can ask yourselves why not? And what would have to change before you could have the comfortable cuppa? Can you change it? Are you willing to change it? Why are things this way?

Anna states, "This simple text both inspired me and has shaped the way I see the comfortable cup of tea. The questions that it asks continue to challenge me out of my comfort zone, especially the one that says, why not?"

Exegesis—and hospitality—may begin in one's own kitchen, but they need not and do not end there. When the power of "a comfortable cup of tea" is truly engaged, Catherine's identity, spirituality and mission have been demonstrated to spill over into the lives of persons within and beyond the Mercy community, and to excite them as collaborators in ministry. Anna Nicholls took a copy of the above text to the Mercy College in which she teaches and hung it in the staff kitchen. "For the next few weeks you would see people stopping and reading and commenting . . .

The evidence suggests that "a comfortable cup of tea" does, in fact, have the power to help draw many, though obviously not all, carriers of the Mercy charism into contemplative encounter with "deep mystery."

For our staff, the comfortable cup of tea has become a Mercy symbol that they can embrace." Anna also has a teacup pin that she wears to school. She reports that the staff commented on it so much that teacup pins were ordered for each of them as gifts to celebrate Mercy Day. "Many still wear them today," she says. The teapot pins, quite apparently, serve as symbols of solidarity in mission and ministry.<sup>25</sup>

In response to Anna's story, Dolores Liptak, R.S.M., commented: "Still another generation of Mercys has been helped (in fact, excited) to understand how [Catherine's] words and actions reflect and challenge all of us to be the true Catherine—the true Mercy. The new symbols we come up with need the same kind of recovery and development. They must come from who Catherine was."<sup>26</sup>

Such "recovery and development" efforts were undertaken in earnest at St. Mary's Children and Family Services, a sponsored ministry of the Brooklyn Regional Community. St. Mary's offers "full service," on and off-site hospitality to troubled children and their families.<sup>27</sup> Sister Francene Horan, director of mission effectiveness at St. Mary's, shared this story about how the St. Mary's staff came to thoroughly "buy into" the story and symbol of "a comfortable cup of tea."

Three years ago the Brooklyn Region was interested in assessing mission effectiveness in our Mercy high schools and agencies. We hired S. Maureen Lowry, R.S.M., from the Merion Region to meet with us over a two-year period of time.

She was terrific . . . Maureen met with the Board of Directors, Executive Cabinet, Cabinet (directors of the various departments and programs), and individual staff members. She also gave presentations to the various departments. She gave Catherine McAuley's concept of mission and expanded on the role of the lay people working hand in hand with the religious . . . It was through this renewal type of experience for the agency that we talked more about Catherine McAuley, the history and the spirit that we want to keep alive—hence the story of Catherine on her deathbed telling the Sisters to make sure they had a comfortable cup of tea when she was gone. This story was a favorite for our staff. They saw the warmth, the caring, and the sharing at such a critical moment in Catherine's life . . .

You probably know how popular teacups and teapots are today. So it was very easy to get graphics from the computer, napkins, and all kinds of paper goods with the symbol. This made it easy for us to elaborate on the comfortable cup of tea at simple prayer services to commemorate the feast of Our Lady of Mercy in September and Foundation Day, December 12. These were the two events that we have tried for the last two years at St. Mary's. One year we had the video of the history of the Sisters of Mercy and followed it with tea and scones.

A year and a half ago, we formed the Mission Team, a group of staff of various programs whose focus is mission effectiveness on a daily basis. They meet about every six weeks and plan simple ways to keep the mission alive for staff. At the meetings, we have a picture of Catherine McAuley, a Mercy candle and a cup and saucer on display. This year the

Mission Team will start the year off with a prayer memorial for September 11. It is still in process, but will have "the comfortable cup of tea" as part of the celebration. This comes from the team . . . they have taken this on as a peace-filled symbol that all staff can identify with regardless of race, color, or creed.

We also have found out that a few staff members have teapot collections and bring these very special teapots to our gatherings. They have taken on the symbol and find much bonding in this experience . . . All I can say is that the whole idea has taken hold with our staff and hopefully will continue. Catherine's spirit comes alive through this "comfortable cup of tea."<sup>8</sup>

### **Pastoral Settings**

The "comfortable cup of tea" can and does spill over into non-Mercy ministry environments as well. Sister Rosemary Hudak is the director of pastoral ministry at St. Joseph's R.C. Church, a 6,000-family parish in Toms River, New Jersey. Sister Rosemary depends on the collaboration of more than two hundred parishioners, many of whom are women, in order to effectively perform her various church and outreach duties. She recently wrote an article about her ministry and "a comfortable cup of tea," which begins with this quote from Catherine McAuley: "You cannot fail to be happy while the spirit of your vocation animates all your actions." Rosemary recalls:

A few years ago I planned an evening for women and called it "A Comfortable Cup of Tea."

It gave me an opportunity to tell Catherine's story and encourage women to continue the tradition of Mercy hospitality. The Rosary Altar Society continues to sponsor this program each year. I was asked to speak on women's spirituality at the last one, and you can imagine my delight when I heard one of the Rosarians tell the story of Catherine's "comfortable cup of tea" prior to introducing me. I felt like a proud parent!<sup>29</sup>

Also working in a non-Mercy pastoral ministry environment is Sister Lalemont Pelikan (St. Louis), who says the Eucharistic cup and Catherine's "comfortable cup of tea" are "the symbols of my Mercy heritage and my Christian heritage." In her office at the Diocese of Lubbock Catholic Pastoral Center, where she works in the Office of Christian formation, Sister Lalemont displays a teapot set in front of her Mercy calendar from the Mercy International Centre in Dublin. She reports that "there are numerous teacups on the bookshelves in my office, too, and the rest of the staff at the center are well acquainted with their meaning."<sup>30</sup>

Members of the general public who are not directly engaged in ministries with Sisters and associates of Mercy can also support those ministries with "a comfortable cup of tea." For example, *The Catherine McAuley Center* in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, operates a transitional housing program for women and an adult education program for women and men. In conjunction with this ministry, they also operate *Catherine's Tea Store*, from which anyone who happens to be in the neighborhood or has an internet connection can purchase Cath-

erine's tea leaves, tea bags, tea bag holders, teacups and saucers, tea mugs, miniature tea sets, teacup pins, a variety of Catherine's tea note cards and gift baskets containing any combination of the above. The Tea Store's web site tells this story:

Our tea is not just another commercial product. Catherine's Comfortable Tea is a symbol of compassion and dedication to women in need. Throughout her entire life, Catherine McAuley devoted herself to serving others. Even on her deathbed, she urged her followers to "be sure you have a comfortable cup of tea for them when I am gone." With her spirit in mind, the Catherine McAuley Center created Catherine's Comfortable Tea. Proceeds from the sale of the tea benefit the Catherine McAuley Center . . . Learn about the Catherine McAuley

greater the number of these ingredients one can taste at once, the more powerful the punch of the tea—with or without a splash of Irish whiskey.

### Marking the Years

Once "a comfortable cup of tea" resonates with someone, it resonates for a very long time, even though the emphasis in its symbolic meaning may shift. Consider a group of former Sisters from the Detroit Regional Community who gathered this summer to celebrate what would have been their fortieth anniversaries of entrance into the community. On the table in the center of the room where their ritual took place, sat a teacup with a shamrock on it.<sup>32</sup>

## The "comfortable cup of tea" can and does spill over into non-Mercy ministry.

Center organization and discover how Catherine McAuley's compassion lives on through each cup of tea we sell.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that "a comfortable cup of tea" has the power to challenge some people to participate in Catherine McAuley's charism, spirituality, and mission lies in the fact that this simple cup is filled with the following essential ingredients: *narrative* (Catherine's story), *memory* (as remembered), *text* (as told), *material object* (as sensed), *experience* (as lived), *interpretation* (as reflected upon), and *imagination* (as creatively and actively engaged). The

Finally, consider the story of Susan Manion, a former member of the St. Louis community who cannot remember when she first heard of the teacup symbol because "it seems to have been around forever." For Susan, drops of meaning from American culture, from Irish culture, from secular and spiritual culture, from personal, professional and ministry-related relationships, from the charism of Catherine and her community, from life experience before, during, and after Mercy membership all coalesce in a single teacup.

## Once “a comfortable cup of tea” resonates with someone, it resonates for a very long time, even though the emphasis in its symbolic meaning may shift.

Although I am no longer a vowed member of the R.S.M.s, I still cherish the comfortable cup of tea . . . I entered the St. Louis Province in 1968, but grew up around Mercies, as an aunt of mine was an R.S.M. Also, I am originally from New Orleans, where coffee or tea shared among family or friends is a sacred time . . . Macrinia Whittaker has a prayer that talks about sacred time with her mother baking bread. For me, sharing a cup of tea or coffee (good old American that I am) is the same. This is true whether it is an early cup of coffee with my boss at the Community Mental Health Center, where I work with the poor, or with friends or my partner after dinner or for breakfast. The comfortable cup has deep meaning for me with regards to Mercy mission/identity/ministry. It symbolizes the same at ease sharing of equals, the hospitality that I grew up with in the deep South, and the lack of hierarchy that accepts all. I was given a Belleek [Irish china] cup and saucer as a part of my exit of community. On the one hand, I would like to add to it to make a set to share with guests. On the other hand, its uniqueness is symbolic of the precious connection I will always share in Mercy.<sup>33</sup>

In the teacup, spirit meets spirit, story meets story, and experience meets experience across time and space, both within and

beyond Catherine’s community, creating a unique blend and distinctive flavor that is “Mercy.” The taste lingers.



### Notes

- 1 [http://www.mercyworld.org/nz/wellington/h\\_symbols.html](http://www.mercyworld.org/nz/wellington/h_symbols.html). In a letter to Sister Mary Cecilia Marmion dated November 12, 1941, eyewitness Mary Vincent Whitty reported Catherine McAuley’s deathbed wish: “Will you tell the sisters to get a good cup of tea—I think the community room would be a good place—when I am gone & to comfort one another—but God will comfort them.” According to Mary C. Sullivan, R.S.M., it was Sister Mary Austin Carroll who attributed the phrase “comfortable cup of tea” to Catherine’s dying wish in Carroll’s biography, *The Life of Catherine McAuley* (1866). Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Mercy Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 243.
- 2 The Mercy cross, designed by Catherine McAuley, was an ebony cross representing Jesus, with an inlaid ivory cross representing the members of the Mercy community.
- 3 In June, 2002, the author extended an open invitation to Sisters and associates of Mercy to share their insights, observations, experiences, and reflections about “a comfortable

cup of tea, what it means to them, and how it functions symbolically in their lives. Thirty women (21 Sisters, 6 associates, and 3 former members) participated in this study.

- 4 Colleen McDannell has made an unparalleled contribution to the study of North American-Christian material culture in her book entitled *Material Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). She begins with the observation that, “Material culture in itself has no intrinsic meaning of its own . . . Objects become meaningful within specific patterns of relationships.” *Ibid.*, 3–4.
- 5 “In making their altars, women assemble images that represent the power of and need for good relationships and positive affiliations. As a visual testimony to the emphasis that women place on creating links between people, between things, and between realms, the altar specifies a context for building and sustaining relationship. A center from which women can advocate their worldview, the altar is both a model of and an instrument for relationship. It is a place for understanding the presence of the Other, certainly in the sense of knowing the Divine, but also in the ethical sense of connecting to otherness and others as a goal of human living.” Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women’s Altars* (NY: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 79; cf.: *Material Christianity*, 34–35.
- 6 On the subject of gift exchange in Christian material culture, Colleen McDannell adds her own observations to those of anthropologist Mary Douglas: “Like goods in tribal societies, religious objects ‘are used for paying compliments, for initiating marriages, establishing or ending them, for recognizing relationships, for all celebrations,

- compensations and affirmations whatever.' [citing Mary Douglas, "Goods as system of communication," *In The Active Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 24] The social exchange of religious goods can strengthen friendships as well as provide financial support for churches and church organizations. Religious goods not only bind people to the sacred, they bind people to each other." *Material Christianity*, 45.
- 7 "All communication depends on use of condensed symbols, and they can be classified in numerous ways, from the most precise to the most vague, from single reference signs to multi-reference symbols." Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 10.
- 8 This text is excerpted from a reflection written by Carmelite Sister Diane Gauthier, "A Comfortable Cup of Tea," *Living Prayer* (1993) 9–10.
- 9 Sister Mary Celeste Rouleau (Burlingame), one of the institute's most respected authorities on the subject of Catherine McAuley, was among those who mentioned the whisky connotation, although she added this disclaimer, "I don't vouch for the authenticity of that!" e-mail of June 5, 2002.
- 10 Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Mercy Tradition*, 385.
- 11 Mary Douglas has been a principal proponent of the view that symbols are fundamentally based on physiological processes and experiences. See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*; and *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 12 E-mail of June 19, 2002.
- 13 E-mail of June 23, 2002.
- 14 Emilie Barnes, *If Teacups Could Talk: Sharing a Cup of Kindness with Treasured Friends* (OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).
- 15 Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, *Praying with Catherine McAuley* (MN: St. Mary's Press, 1996). Joyce Rupp's *The Cup of Life: A Guide For Spiritual Growth* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1997), is much in the style of the Burns/Carney book.
- 16 The widespread usage and familiarity of a symbolic object is not necessarily an indicator of its "desacralization." Consider, for example, "emblems," "totems," and other such objects that operate within religious groups as sacred signs (or symbols) of membership, identity, and spiritual power. See, Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1918), trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 111–126; W. Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead, A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); *The Family of God, A Symbolic Study of Christian Life in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Milton Singer, "Emblems of Identity: A Semiotic Exploration" in Fernandez, Spiro and Singer, *On Symbols in Anthropology* (CA: UCLA Department of Anthropology, 1982), 73–133.
- 17 Telephone interview of June 20, 2002.
- 18 Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood offer a positive, alternative perspective on material commodities: "Instead of supposing that goods are primarily needed for subsistence plus competitive display, let us assume that they are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture." While it is true that goods have practical value for meeting material needs, "at the same time it is apparent that goods have another important use: they also make and maintain relationships. This is a long tried and fruitful approach to the material side of existence which yields a much richer idea of social meanings . . ." Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 59–607.
- 19 My thanks to Sister Virginia Farnan (Brooklyn), who provided me with a printed copy of this speech.
- 20 All of these "works of Mercy," and many others, are included under the banner "Creating a Spirit of Hospitality" at the web site of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. <http://www.sistersofmercy.org/works.html>.
- 21 E-mail of June 20, 2002.
- 22 E-mail of June 5, 2002.
- 23 Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol . . . Food For Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4 (1960) 196–207.
- 24 See Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace*, translated by Dinah Wharton (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).
- 25 E-mail of June 5, 2002.
- 26 E-mail of June 8, 2002.
- 27 St. Mary's Children and Family Services, provides an on-campus school, group residences, mental health testing and therapeutic services; off-site residential facilities and services; foster care services; community based programs; and preventative services for New York City and Long Island children and families suffering the effects of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, and poverty.
- 28 E-mail of August 2, 2002.
- 29 Rosemary Hudak, R.S.M., untitled, *Connections* 2:7 (July, 2002), 3.
- 30 E-mail of June 5, 2002.
- 31 Catherine McAuley Center-Gifts: <http://www.catherinestea.org>.
- 32 Reported by Ann Dillon, Detroit associate director, telephone conversation of August 3, 2002.
- 33 E-mail of June 22, 2002.



# What Makes a Mercy College

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*Rev. Victor Lee Austin*

**T**he landscape of American higher education is littered with small colleges that were founded with a religious vision and sustained by sacrifice to further their religious mission, but which today have distanced themselves from the specifics of their founding vision and seek, instead, to find their mission and vision—and their respectability—in terms that have little to do with those of their founding. Some of these colleges with religious roots are now giants of the secular academy; one's mind turns to Yale as a symbol of the group. But many are small boats in the academic sea, struggling for survival, unmoored from their founding distinctiveness.

Is such a future the destiny of all religious colleges in America? Is the evolution from religious founding to secular respectability inevitable? As a catholic-minded Anglican, I pray not. I have my doctoral degree from a Catholic university; both my children have attended Catholic colleges; and now I am an assistant professor at a college founded and sponsored by the Religious Sisters of Mercy. What follows are reflections upon praxis, *my* reflections upon *this* praxis. That is to say, it is not my intention here to provide a review, much less a critique, of the literature on this question. Since I am most immediately concerned with the school where I teach, Mount Aloysius College, I place these reflections under the rubric, "What Makes a Mercy College." However, if my reflections are valid, they will be true, *mutatis mutandis*, for any college founded in response to a religious vision.

## **Symbols, Their Use, and Questions They Raise**

When you enter the drive of Mount Aloysius College, you are greeted by a statue of Mary. She is Our Lady of Mercy, holding the Christ child at her side

and presenting him to our view face forward. She thus welcomes the visitor by offering the fruit of wisdom. To her side is the historic edifice now known by the pedestrian title "administration building," in which there is an abundance of statuary, mostly of the Italianate Catholic variety. The classrooms and the halls throughout the campus are marked by the visual symbol of our redemption: the crucifix. The chapel is a large presence, if not centrally placed—although it rests atop the English department, which rests atop occupational and physical therapy, so it is hardly marginal. The chapel chimes are heard across the campus throughout the day. A residence for nuns, most of them elderly or retired, is placed near the chapel.

One almost ineffable element of a college education is the formation students acquire from the physical architecture of the place. Buildings, adornments, furnishings, and their arrangement and use convey a meaning to the developing mind. Students at Mount Aloysius College are not likely, most of them, to be able to distinguish the statue of Saint Aloysius from one of Saint Philip Neri. But they will pick up, in ways more subconscious than explicitly conscious, that this is a Catholic college. And they will intuit the implicit premise of the signal adornments: that this college holds there is some sort of unspoken yet crucial connection between Christ and the subjects studied in the classrooms.

If these symbols were to recede into the background—if, say, the crucifixes started coming down from the walls, or if the chapel became more a place of assembly than a place of worship, or if new construction were to be done with disregard for the continuing and living use of these symbols and spaces—then Mount Aloysius would be diluting the effectiveness with which it has carried its Catholic faith.

### The Surprise of the Acceptance That Invites

Faced with this symbolic language of Catholicism, the non-Catholic student who comes to Mount Aloysius arrives, often, with some apprehension. "Will Catholicism be forced down my throat?" is an extreme way the student might voice her concerns. More moderately, she may wonder whether she will feel an outsider. Many non-Catholics do in fact have this apprehension when they begin their studies here.

But what they find, usually with surprise, is that they are welcome and accepted as they are. In my informal surveys, senior students tell me of many occasions in which they were encouraged in *their own* faith journey. Some speak of a retired nun who likes to greet them with warmth and, after talking with them about how their student life is going (and not asking about their faith), inevitably ends with, "I'll pray for you." A Baptist tells me that she goes to the chapel twice weekly to pray in the silence. Non-Christians indicate they have space to remain what they are. Students seem to infer that the Catholicism is there for them if they want it, but they do not perceive it as imposed.

It is the goal of the religious studies program at Mount Aloysius to offer every student assistance and encouragement to take on ultimate questions, again without an effort to make converts to the Catholic faith. On the other hand, the curriculum is oriented, if not towards Catholicism, then towards Christianity. The department retains the word "theology" in its rambling title ("Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Theology"), which recollects that the study of God is borne out of faith. The introductory course is a study of "Christian theology," thus focused neither more narrowly on Catholic doctrine *per se* nor more broadly on the general questions of religion. And all students must take one or two courses in this department.

Similarly, in the overall life of the college, students experience not only the surprise of acceptance, but also a standing invitation to explore further. It is, as far as I can tell, rarely if ever suggested to a student that she might want to be a Catholic. But she will receive invitations to mass on the major feasts, to spirituality workshops, to faith-in-action service clubs, to prayer vigils on September 11, and so on. The chapel is there, not in the center of things yet neither hidden out of

sight: an architectural icon that speaks. "If you're seeking, you might look here."

It is the goal of the religious studies program at Mount Aloysius to offer every student assistance and encouragement to take on ultimate questions, again without an effort to make converts to the Catholic faith.

### A Christian Anthropology

The education that Mount Aloysius offers is principally in the helping professions. Nursing is our largest major. We have a sign language program that's so old it holds the title-deed to the abbreviation "IT" ("Interpreters' training"—the upstart information technologists are forced to make do with another acronym). We care to offer a college education to persons who are of various ages, often with restricted educational opportunities and many times coming from cultures that do not value education. A large number of our students are the first in their family to attend college. Our philosophy statement states our aim: that we encourage our students "to synthesize faith with learning, to develop competence with compassion, to put talents and gifts at the service of others, and to begin to assume leadership in the world community."

Behind this commitment to preparing students to serve others (and to offering an education to those who have been educationally deprived) is, it seems to me, a Christian anthropology. The bishops of Vatican II taught that Jesus Christ, God's only Son, is united, in some manner not explicated and perhaps not explicable, with every human being [*Gaudium et spes*, § 22]. This means, as Pope John Paul II has put it, that every human being is an icon of Christ, worthy of reverence ["In every child which is born and in every person who

lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ" (*Evangelium vitae* § 84.2)]. The pope holds that quite apart from whether a person has Christian faith, every human being is an icon of Christ, who is himself the true *imago Dei*.

In other words, if a Mercy college educates students in the helping professions, it does so because those whom the students will eventually serve are living icons of Christ. Moreover, those students themselves are living icons of Christ, as are the faculty and staff of the college. In its emphasis upon the helping professions, a Mercy college instantiates this profoundly.

### Importance of the Fourth Vow

The Religious Sisters of Mercy are distinguished, in canon law and in charism, by taking a fourth vow. This distinguishing vow, following upon the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, is a vow of "service to the poor, sick, and ignorant." The work of the Sisters, nationally and internationally, is marked by this solidarity.

Thus the academic excellence of a Mercy college is not that of the great research institutions. It is a commitment to service focused now as a commitment to teaching. Students come above research. Yet the academic limitations of their students need not imply a slackening of academic standards. One of the reasons for having a college that serves students who have not had great opportunities is to offer to *them*, and to challenge *them* to yearn for, the high calling of our intellectual traditions. Just as those who are hungry should not be served scraps from a bountiful table, so our students should not be offered watered-down wine, but deep draughts from the well of truth. The fruit of wisdom is a gift offered to all who enter here.

This Mercy mission informs not only the location and "target audience" of a Mercy college, but the content of the education. The college hopes that its graduates, in their various fields of study, will have a desire to carry forth the Mercy mission in their own lives. This is to say that Mercy graduates in whatever field—be it in health care, or psychology, or education, or pre-law, or something else—should have a heart for "the poor," broadly

construed. The college's goal is to nurture the spirit of service while also providing the intellectual and practical education to carry it out.

### Conclusion

If my reflections upon praxis are valid, the following generalized theses may be ventured:

1. A Mercy college takes care to foster the symbolic language of the Catholic faith in its architecture and appointments and in their arrangement and use.
2. A Mercy college welcomes students of varied faiths, and those with none, to explore their own convictions and traditions through questioning and through deeper appropriation. At the same time, and without any desire to proselytize, a Mercy college gently invites its students to explore the Catholic faith.
3. A Mercy college intends its graduates, in whatever major field, to be informed in their work and life by the humanist principles of Christianity. The college believes that each person has worth and inherent dignity, bestowed by God in creation and in the recreation in Jesus Christ. The college wants its graduates to acquire a proper reverence for the *imago Christi* that is every person. Similarly, the college intends to treat its members—students, faculty, staff, administration—in ways that embody the same respect.
4. Beyond this general respect for the dignity of every human being, the college intends its graduates to carry on, in a way appropriate to their own faith commitments and vocations, the mission of Catherine McAuley. And again similarly, the college itself—particularly in its admissions, marketing, and curriculum—intends to continue its mission to serve those who are (in the traditional, if dated, language of the Sisters' fourth vow) "poor, sick, and ignorant."

Attention to theses such as these would give hope that there need be no inexorable evolution away from founding religious vision in American higher education.



# Genocide in Rwanda Complicity of the Churches?

Edited by Carol Rittner, John K. Roth and Wendy Whitworth

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Review by Elizabeth R. Baer

When a nun asked a soldier how he could kill with a rosary around his neck, he replied that the Virgin was helping him to discover his enemies. Many *interahamwe* militia struck their victims carrying a crucifix in one hand and a machete in the other. Murderers and victims prayed to the same God. Killers attended mass between massacres.

Leon D. Saur's long study of the Holocaust, and now fresh study of the Rwandan genocide, has led me to the heartbroken realization that the presence of churches in a country guarantees exactly nothing.

In 1993, Carol Rittner and John Roth edited *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, a groundbreaking anthology that changed the field of Holocaust studies, highlighting scholarship on gender. In this new volume, Rittner and Roth, joined by Wendy Whitworth, are again

in the forefront, as the field of Holocaust studies expands to include genocide studies. Given the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and the genocide occurring at this moment in Darfur, the insistence, "Never again," a staple of Holocaust studies, feels increasingly hollow. Scholars have come to recognize the necessity of studying genocide in a comparative mode for what that tells us about human nature and human institutions, such as governments (usually the instigators of genocide) and churches. As evidence of this growing realization, one might cite the pattern of attendance at a recent Holocaust studies conference at Brown University: When five workshops were available, more than half the attendees at the conference crowded into one session devoted to methods of teaching comparative genocide.

It is fitting, then, that Rittner and Roth would also be moving toward this broader

perspective in their research and that, as committed Christians, they would be asking such a difficult question about the role of the clergy, the churches, and the congregations in Rwanda. Almost one million people, Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were killed between April and July, 1994, a rate of death far more efficient than the Nazi Holocaust, despite the fact that no industrial methods of killing were used. Rwandans were slaughtered with machetes, by hand; women often suffered crimes of sexual violence before they died. Many of the dead were mowed down inside churches, where they had sought sanctuary. Ten years later, many of these churches are memorial sites, still filled with the bones of the dead.

The shocking epigram above, from Leon D. Saur's essay in this admirable anthology, makes clear why the editors have asked the question they have about complicity. Rwanda is the most Christian country in Africa, with 90 percent of its population thus identifying themselves: 62.6 percent as Catholics, 18.8 percent as Protestants, and 8.4 percent as Seventh Day Adventists. To respond in the most candid, thoughtful, nuanced, and

Leon D. Saur's study of the Rwandan genocide, has led me to the heartbroken realization that the presence of churches in a country guarantees exactly nothing.

authentic fashion possible to the question that they have posed, the editors have constructed the anthology in four parts:

- I. The Church and Power
- II. The Church and People
- III. The Church and Responsibility
- IV. The Church and Complicity?

Furthermore, they have invited to contribute to the volume authors who have on-the-ground experience in Rwanda and/or significant experience researching and teaching genocide studies and/or theology and religion.

The volume grew out of an international seminar, organized by Dr. Rittner, called *The Church and Genocide: Rwanda*, held in London in March 2003. The editors state their purpose in the preface: This book is intended to encourage more sustained, more careful, and more substantive research about various challenging questions: Were the Christian Churches complicit in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda? If so, how and why? If not, why is there such a strong perception that they were? What must be changed in terms of church structures, authority, teaching, and formation of adherents to prevent genocide from happening again in the future, in Rwanda or elsewhere? If the Christian Churches were complicit in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, can they ever recover from such ethical and moral failure?

In what is a fair and balanced set of essays, providing various perspectives, the authors outline both what one writer calls the sins

of the churches in Rwanda and also wide-ranging suggestions for what those churches must do now. The former might be summarized as follows:

1. From the beginning of colonialism in Rwanda, the churches were complicit with the imperial European powers of Germany and Belgium in establishing racial hierarchies, which were sometimes justified with biblical stories.
2. The theology taught by some churches laid the groundwork for a genocidal mentality.
3. Clergy tolerated hostility between Hutus and Tutsi within church structures and congregations prior to the genocide.
4. In the midst of the atrocities, church leaders were largely silent about the killing.

### There is clear evidence that some clergy were actively engaged in the killing.

5. Worse, there is clear evidence that some clergy were actively engaged in the killing.
6. In the aftermath of the genocide, some churches have endeavored to shield guilty clergy; others have emphasized reconciliation to the exclusion of justice.

Among the suggestions put forth for the churches future mission in Rwanda are:

1. Apologize: hold the churches to a higher standard for acknowledging its participation in the genocide.

2. Bring people to justice.

3. Correct church teachings as regards the equality of God's people; this should include providing moral guidance to officials of the Catholic Church and rooting out all traces of racism in congregations.
4. Maintain the memorial sites that have been established in church buildings where genocide occurred.
5. Endeavor to learn the lessons of the Rwandan genocide; i.e., was baptism too widely and quickly practiced without sufficient evangelization? What about the issue of obedience to authority when that authority is corrupt? What about the relationship the Church maintained with the government and its aspiration to power?

6. Denounce extremism in every form.

Such analysis is undoubtedly difficult to write, to edit, and to read. Yet a text such as this is absolutely crucial if we as a human race are to grasp the deeply rooted and complex origins of a genocide in the service of preventing them in the future. The editors of this volume are engaged in just such a task. By including essays addressing such diverse topics as the effectiveness of papal and clerical pronouncements, the coverage of the Rwandan genocide in the

British press, the link between the genocide and alleged apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rwanda, and the conviction of two Rwandan nuns as participants in the killing, the editors demonstrate their willingness to explore the complexity of the complicity question they pose.

Included with analytical essays are personal narratives and an interview conducted by Carol Rittner of a Catholic priest who went to Rwanda in 1996 seeking information about the deaths of three Holy Cross brothers. Such autobiographical accounts provide primary source material that readers can juxtapose with

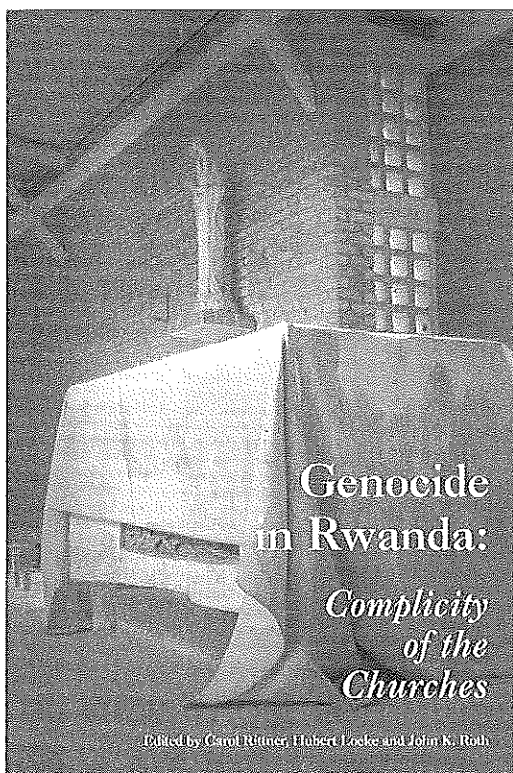
the scholarly work in the volume to reach their own conclusions.

Finally, it should be noted that the paratextual material included in the book provides an invaluable source for both teachers and students of the Rwandan genocide. These include maps, a fifteen-page chronology of the unfolding of events in Rwanda from 1885 to the present, bibliographies, a videography, a listing of relevant websites, an appendix with the text of the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide and the Statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda.

Rittner, Roth and Whitworth have chosen to end their book

with an essay by David P. Gushee that calls the churches to account, "The Churches must teach their members to stop their ears to the siren song of any ideology, such as racism or tribalism or xenophobia, that subverts the dignity and equality of all people as made in the image of God and therefore sacred in God's sight."

These editors must be praised for their courage and conviction in publishing this book. It is this kind of candor, commitment to social justice and call for institutional responsibility that our world so desperately needs at this moment.



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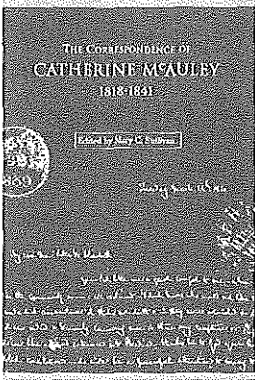
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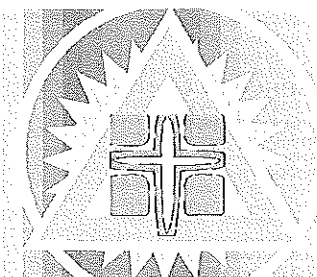
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On the left, below, is a comment in response to an article in MAST 14-2, titled *Colored Vocations: Women of Color in Religious Life* by Maria Luisa Vera, R.S.M. To the right is the author's response.

## A Reader Comments

I have been reflecting very carefully on the multicultural thrust in our Institute. It is stated in the introduction to this area of the webpage that this year's Action Plan Accountability is a reflection on our efforts to act in solidarity with one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality.

Yet, my feeling is that we are dividing ourselves according to national cultures rather than living in solidarity in embracing our international realities and our Mercy reality. Why do we need to discover how others in our various regions are admitting, owning, and asking forgiveness for our racism as individuals and as Institute? Should we not FORGIVE (actively), rather than tell others they need to seek forgiveness? I forgive myself and I forgive you rather than how are you asking for forgiveness.

Why do we divide ourselves into majority and minority? Those who are victims of racism and those who are racists? Are we not all victims in one way or another? Are we not all racists in one way or another? Do we want to choose a victim status, or should we just get on with forgiving and living?

Finally, can we not concentrate on our common Mercy culture? What makes us Mercy? (Not, what makes us racists or what makes us different.) We can spend emotional energy and precious time on our international cultures and our minority-majority status or we can look to discover and continually define our Mercy culture together. Can we thank God for our differences and then move on to our commonalities? Can we just be together and discover Mercy together? My feeling is that we are separating ourselves into groups that divide rather than that we are moving toward solidarity within our individual differences. "I forgive you and ask for your forgiveness," rather than "You are a racist and need to ask for forgiveness." In Mercy, we are one. Love that oneness and discover Mercy together.

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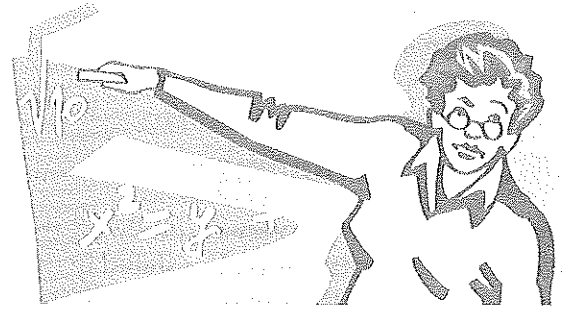
## The Author Responds

The first thing I would like to say in response to Sr. Theresa Mary DuRapau is that it is not the responsibility of persons of color to educate persons who are white about racism. We each have to do our own work, our own study and reflection and even bring our own prayer to this experience. If we agree that the whole notion of race is a social construct put in place for the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others, then it can be undone or dismantled by those advantaged and disadvantaged. The work of each, however, is quite distinct. This work is especially challenging for members of a religious congregation because we live with multiple layers of culture (primary culture and secondary culture) and multiple processes of acculturation, enculturation, and inculturation.

What we are really talking about in trying to look at racism in the religious community or in any group is the issue of "white privilege" (a topic for a whole other article). There are many ways to define "white privilege." Kendall Clark's definition states that "white privilege is a social relation, a right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases of certain burdens or liabilities." All we have to do is reflect on our U.S. history to find numerous examples that prove the existence of white privilege. Most often, the only times persons who are white have to think about racism or "white privilege" is when they are forced to do so.

I cannot speak for all members of the Alliance of Sisters of Mercy of Color in the U.S. I can honestly say for myself that it has taken a long time, much support, love and hard work to be at home with integrity in a predominantly white culture. I have had to ask myself this question many times: "How much of yourself are you willing to give up or let go of in order to feel at home?" As I continue to grow and mature as a person, I continue to define myself and redefine myself, always mindful of where I have come from and where I am going. Since many people have invested in my personal growth, I feel responsible, in turn, to do the same for others.

X



I nearly threw in the towel.  
It was May, my first year teaching.  
After Algebra class, Carleen whispered in my ear  
Sister, when are we going to learn what X is?

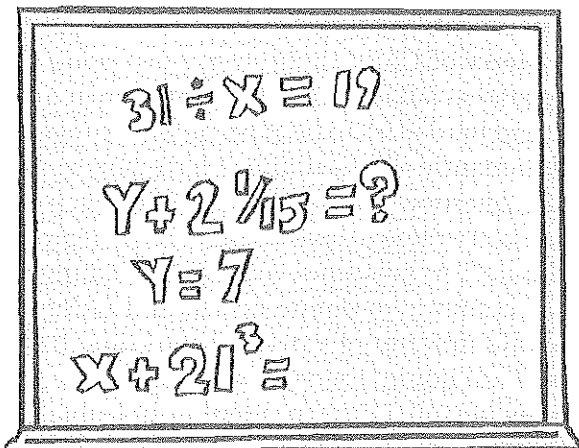
O Carleen, so many years later  
I can tell you a lot more about X.  
It not only marks the spot,  
it symbolizes every unknown, any mystery.  
It's the letter that everyone is looking for.

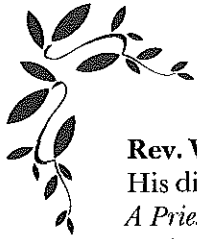
I've learned so much  
since you stunned me with that question.  
My answer right now would be "Never."  
We are never going to learn what X is.

It is the nameless essence of an eternal search  
the magnet pulling the evolutionary process  
It is totally available and open to any brain  
that needs a marker to hold on to  
the infinite reality passing through.

We are never going to learn what X is,  
but we will never stop trying.

*Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.*





## Contributors

**Rev. Victor Austin**, a priest in the Episcopal Church, holds a Ph.D. in theology from Fordham University. His dissertation was a study of the uses of Christ in the social encyclicals of John Paul II. He has published *A Priest's Journal* (Church Publishing, 2001) and edited *The Anglican*, a quarterly journal of the Anglican Society. His articles appear in the *Anglican Theological Review*, *Sewanee Theological Review*, and *Mid-Stream*. He was assistant professor of religious studies, philosophy, and theology at Mount Aloysius College in Cresson, Pennsylvania. Presently he is theologian-in-residence at Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, in New York City. E-mail: [vaustin@mybluelight.com](mailto:vaustin@mybluelight.com).

**Elizabeth R. Baer** serves as professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College, where she holds the Florence and Raymond Sponberg Chair of Ethics. During fall, 2004, Dr. Baer held the position of the Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Scholar of Holocaust Studies at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She edited, with Myra Goldenberg, *Experience and Expression: Women, the Holocaust and the Third Reich*, (Wayne State University Press, 2003), an anthology of essays. She is coeditor, with Hester Baer, of the first English edition of *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for Women*, a memoir by Nanda Herbermann, a Catholic woman arrested for her work in the resistance in Nazi Germany. Dr. Baer also serves as a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, where she teaches a course entitled "Women and the Holocaust: Gender, Memory and Representation." She was the recipient of a Fulbright Award in the summer of 2000 to study the history of Jews in Germany. E-Mail: [ebaer@gac.edu](mailto:ebaer@gac.edu).

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**Mary Kathryn Grant, Ph.D.**, (Associate, Detroit) is the executive director of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, a network of the eighteen colleges and universities of the Sisters of Mercy. She has extensive experience in Catholic health care and education focusing on sponsorship, mission and leadership development, culture, and change management. E-Mail: [marykathryngrant@aol.com](mailto:marykathryngrant@aol.com).

(continued on page 53)





## Discussion Questions

**(Austin)** “In my informal surveys, senior students tell me of many occasions in which they were encouraged in *their own* faith journey. Some speak of a retired nun who likes to greet them with warmth and, after talking with them about how their student life is going (and not asking about their faith), inevitably ends with, “I’ll pray for you.” A Baptist tells me that she goes to the chapel twice weekly to pray in the silence. Non-Christians indicate they have space to remain what they are. Students seem to infer that the Catholicism is there for them if they want it, but they do not perceive it as imposed.”

Where might this respectful approach to diversity of religious denomination be located? Reflective of Catherine McAuley’s moment in history when Catholics were a minority in Protestant-controlled Ireland? As an American affirmation of freedom of conscience and religion? As the expression of Mercy charism, which treats every person with compassion and respect? As the face of the post-Vatican Church, which expresses its mission through a spirit of ecumenism, emphasizing what religions share rather than what divides?

**(Cerullo)** “A new issue facing communities that have associates connected with them is the growing desire among some associates to make permanent commitments as associates. Here the boundary issue surfaces as the question becomes:

1. To what group do they desire to make the permanent commitment? If it is to the religious institute, what is the nature of that commitment and what is the permanent commitment that the institute makes in return?
2. If the commitment is to the associate program, does that group have enough of a unique identity and indicia of permanence, such as resources and identifiable, long-term mission, to sustain permanent membership?

These and other questions must be discerned by both membership and associates together in dialogue as these issues arise.”

**(Di Lisio)** What aspects of Mercy history, charism, spirituality and mission are expressed for you in the symbol of “a comfortable cup of tea”? Does the image of tea service have a family or other personal connection for you? Or do you share the more modified view: “So, it’s a nice symbol, but where is its challenge? . . . [Catherine’s] legacy and her ministerial example are very compelling to me—I just don’t think the CCT carries the same weight.”

**(Grant)** “What is characteristic of the call being responded to by companions is: fidelity to an apostolic spirituality, grounded in prayer and the sacraments; commitment to building and being a community of persons with the same purpose; and intention to hold one another in fidelity. There is no doubt that individuals could live this commitment individually and personally, but that is not part of the vision of companions. They yearn to be nurtured in the apostolic spirituality of mercy together with the community of Mercy, signaled by a public commitment to these actions through a private (noncanonical) vow of Mercy service.”

(continued on page 53)





## Contributors (continued from page 51)

**Toni Perior Gross** (Associate, Detroit) has been in private practice as a psychotherapist since 1981. She took first promises as a Mercy associate in 1983. She is married to Francis L. Gross, Jr and had two sons, Joseph and Matthew. She attended Our Lady of Mercy High School in Detroit and Mercy College of Detroit, with a B.A. in 1962. She completed an M.A. and then the Ed.D. at Western Michigan University in counseling psychology. Previously she taught high school, math, science, and religion courses for nine years. From 1957 to 1969 she was a member of the Sisters of Mercy.

**Katherine Hill, R.S.M.** (Detroit) has an M.A. in theology from the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, Canada. She received a certificate of advanced studies in spirituality and spiritual direction from the Institute of Spiritual Leadership in Chicago, Illinois. Presently, she is in the doctoral program at Chicago Theological Seminary for a D.Min. with emphasis on spirituality and spiritual leadership. She is also studying with the Grand Rapids Dominicans in the second phase of their spiritual formation program. She has served in administration and leadership positions for the Detroit Regional Community and formerly taught religious studies and served as campus minister in secondary schools. E-Mail: kahillrsm@aol.com.

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## Discussion Questions (continued from page 52)

1. If you are an associate, how do you distinguish your affiliation from what companions are seeking?
2. If you are a vowed member, is companions' desire for affiliation with the community of Mercy different from public identification with the Church?
3. Can either associates or companions have affiliation with Mercy apart from a relationship with the institutional Church? What feelings about "the Church" arise?

(Gross) "Surviving the rigors of the relationship between laity and clergy is facilitated for women by the support groups they form formally and informally and by the encouragement they receive by seeing one another succeed in the relationship on both parish and diocesan levels . . . Perhaps we will discover ways to learn the language of and best methods of approaching our brothers who are also clerics so that we may speak to them effectively of what hinders our working together to build God's kingdom. Perhaps we will find more ways to support women, both Sisters and associates, who labor in the vineyard of the official Church."

What collaborations among women—Sisters and associates—would contribute to survival and change within the institutional church?



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**MAST** has been meeting annually since then, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST will hold its annual meeting in Burlingame, CA, June 12-14, 2005.

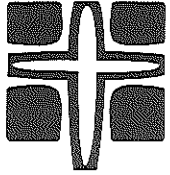
Members work on a variety of task forces related to their scholarly discipline. Present task forces include: Scripture, healthcare ethics, and spirituality. In addition, the members seek to be of service to the Institute by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

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Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.





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