

The MAST Journal

World-Wide Ministries

Our Global Mercy Reality: The Window from Baggot Street Mary Kay Dobrovolny, R.S.M.

"Love's Imagination to Transform Human Distress": Mercy in South Africa

Jean Evans, R.S.M.

God Was in This Place, and I, I Did Not Know It Marilyn Lacey, R.S.M.

Ministry in the Last Frontier: Parish Administration in Alaska *Joyce Ross, R.S.M.*

A Slow and Arduous Journey – Let Us Begin! Jeanne Christiansen, R.S.M.

Our Lady of Mercy: Reclaiming the Title Today as Mary of the Visitation

Elizabeth Julian, R.S.M.

Tribute to David Lance Goines, Artist Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology





Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

This issue's theme, "World-Wide Ministries," started as a consideration of Mercy action in which the work of a Sister extends beyond the boundaries of a parish, a school, or a healthcare institution. Behind this theme is our vision that each Sister's work, no matter how geographically defined, is connected with the gospel mandate to "go forth to all nations." Those of us who remember the doctrine of the "mystical body of Christ" act from the belief that our baptism as Catholics, and our consecration as religious connect each act of service, no matter how hidden, to the universal mission of the Church. That mission is to preach, teach, heal, forgive, advocate and

baptize in the name of Jesus, and summon all to a community of faith in a loving God.

What struck me as I was reviewing these articles is the courage and risk-taking of each of the authors. Each one was inspired, at some point, to leave the familiar, uproot herself from her comfort zone, and replant herself either physically or ideologically, in another place and people. At one point in her life, her main work became dedicated to a transient population, people whose experience was very different from hers, people who were "other" than those she herself grew up with. She had to form new social relationships. At the same time, there is a consistency of vision and energy in these works. Catherine McAuley would recognize them as works of Mercy extended far beyond the boundaries of the city of Dublin to suffering people in need.

Mary Kay Dobrovolny, R.S.M., in "Our Global Mercy Reality" sums up the original vision of Catherine McAuley, and the impulse that made Mercy ministries spread around the globe from Baggot Street. Mary Kay is a U.S. missionary to Ireland, a reverse of the historical direction. As the assistant director for Mercy spirituality and heritage at our International Center in Dublin, she welcomes visitors from around the world. In this article she is also "global," providing a summary of the development and international outreach of Mercy foundations from the days of Catherine McAuley forward.

Jean Evans, R.S.M., in "Mercy in South Africa," thrusts herself across the globe from California to South Africa, lending her energy for thirty years to the Mercy mission of education, community development and advocacy for the under-served in that country, sponsored by Irish Sisters of Mercy. In this article, she reproduces narratives told by Mercy women who report their work in this challenging post-apartheid social and political climate—education of the very poor, resistance to violence against women and girls, job-training and inter-faith political action.

Marilyn Lacey, R.S.M., founder of Mercy Beyond Borders, offers a spirituality based on Jacob's journey in Genesis 28, "God Was in this Place." A dream of angels ascending and descending the ladder comforts him in the night. He hears God's promise to protect him. He awakens. "Truly God was in this place, and I did not know it!" Marilyn's journeys on behalf of refugees started with her post with Catholic Charities in San Jose. She was then inspired to work with refugees fleeing Thailand. Her work then extended from southeast Asia to Sudan in Africa and then to Haiti in the Caribbean. Her spiritual vision, grounded in scripture, moves readers.

Jeanne Christensen, R.S.M., started her justice work at the diocesan level in Kansas City, Missouri, then served as Justice coordinator for West Midwest Mercies. When she focused on the trafficking issue, her ministry became an international effort, extending well beyond Missouri boundaries, U.S. frontiers, as well as the Mercy congregation itself. The very title "A Slow and Arduous Journey: Let Us Begin!" matches the narrative. It is arduous to work against the

trafficking of women and girls in the international sex trade. It is tough to advocate for liberation of men and women from slave-like employment. Jeanne describes the remarkable collaboration and cooperation of dozens of women's religious communities in this effort. The article is a resource for those wishing to lend a hand to the anti-trafficking effort.

Joyce Ross, R.S.M., author of "Ministry in the Last Frontier," started her apostolic life the way countless other Mercies have—teaching grade school. At a certain moment, she volunteered for Albany's mission in Alaska. Her life changed. Thirty years later, she looks back on her outreach to Catholics in the "last frontier" of North America, serving in several parishes in the Kenai peninsula. With her Medical Mission sister companion, Joan Barina, she then became parish administrator for a priestless parish. Her service for the next 20 years—preaching, baptizing, conducting communion services, presiding at funerals—convinced her that the church has vitality because the laity live their faith. Her article suggests that a priestless situation in parishes, and the response of women, may not be so rare for the Catholic Church in the lower 48.

Elizabeth Julian, R.S.M. of New Zealand has published previous articles, which integrate her advocacy for indigenous peoples with her scriptural work. In this article, "Our Lady of Mercy," she addresses another issue that has international implications—the meaning of the title Mother of Mercy. She reviews the history of Marian devotion in the Church and shows that emphasis changed from Mary as *Theotokos* to Mediatrix and Co-Redemptrix. She also details the references to Mary in original Mercy devotional customs and prayer texts. She proposes a theological up-dating of our relation to Mary under her title of Mother of Mercy as a scriptural, action-based portrait of Mary of the Visitation.

The editor, in a closing homage or tribute, honors the artist David Lance Goines, who is based in Berkeley, California. Mr. Goines is a graphic artist in art-deco style, designer of posters and advertising media whose work has been displayed at the Smithsonian. Mr. Goines was asked to design a new logo for The MAST Journal website on the theme of "your ship is coming in." What he did, instead, was provide, free of charge, an image of a ship and rising sun, backdrop from his work called "Annunciation." Readers are encouraged to take a tour of his works by opening his web site.

When the web-site for The MAST Journal is up and running, readers will be able to retrieve articles from a twenty-five-year history of the Journal's publication of Mercy scholarship, theological reflection and narrative.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. Editor, *The MAST Journal*

Our Global Mercy Reality: The Window from Baggot Street

Mary Kay Dobrovolny, R.S.M.

There is a map in the International Room of Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, which tells a brief version of the story of our global Mercy reality. Its sound recording begins:

My name is Catherine McAuley. You have heard the story of what happened in my lifetime, and how I delighted in each new branch in Mercy. Why, in one of my letters I actually cheered: "Hurrah for foundations! They make the old young and the young merry." But do you know what has happened to our Mercy Institute since then? I was all for going to Nova Scotia, but never did I dream that Mercy would circle the globe. However, I am getting ahead of myself. Let's go back to the beginning and watch what happened when the fire of Mercy was kindled¹

The display describes the expansion of Mercy in three waves:

1. 1831-1841: Houses in Ireland and England founded in Catherine's lifetime
2. 1842-1899: The spread to other locations-Newfoundland, USA, Australia, Scotland, Aotearoa New Zealand, Wales (1842-1852) Argentina, Guernsey, Belize, Jamaica, Guyana, and South Africa (1856-1897)
3. 1946-today: Missionary outreaches to the Pacific, Africa, Latin America

Spread of the Early Foundations from Dublin

We often take for granted the story of Mercy in Catherine's lifetime and the generations after her, but reflecting upon the story highlights how extraordinary it is. Catherine saw the abject poverty of Dublin of her day, and responded not with simple charity of bestowing gifts and alms to the poor whose paths she crossed, but with a program of social reform. She envisioned a society where those on the margins of society could take their rightful place as active, contributing participants and agents of their own advancement and liberation

At a time when Dublin had approximately 1,700 prostitutes,² Catherine provided options for women through education and skills training. She provided safe accommodation to servant girls who otherwise lacked protection. As the penal code was coming to its end, Catherine countered the British imposition of "ignorance" previously mandated by the penal code by opening a school.³ The school had 200 children within its first year, and soon included the first female teacher training institution in Ireland. Catherine and her companions provided nursing and pastoral care to the sick poor in visits to homes and hospitals. In 1832, they staffed the Townsend Street Cholera Depot when Dublin faced a severe outbreak that claimed the lives of 5,632 people.⁴

Three years after the establishment of the Sisters of Mercy, the Baggot Street community broadened their outreach in service of the poor, sick and uneducated. A branch house in Kingstown (now called Dún Laoghaire) on the outskirts of Dublin was the first to be established (March 1835), and then an independent foundation in Tullamore a year later (April 1836). The next five and a half years before Catherine's death, Mercy houses opened in eleven additional cities and towns of Ireland and England.⁵ Catherine went with the founding party to each of the new locations founded from Baggot Street and stayed for one to three months to assist in the establishment of the new ministries and mentor its new leader. Apart from the branch houses of Kingstown and Booterstown, she entrusted full leadership and autonomous authority to the superior appointed at each new convent.

Catherine modeled belief in the principle of subsidiarity in her governance style, and encouraged flexibility and adaptability in determining ministries that respond to local needs. The new convents of Sisters of Mercy responded to the needs of their particular location in the same spirit as Catherine.

When the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Carlow in 1837, they found that the Presentation Sisters were already meeting the educational needs of the poorest children. The new Mercy community opened the first non-residential pension school of Ireland, making education affordable to middle class parents

who found the fees for boarding schools prohibitive. In Limerick, in contrast, extreme poverty, hunger and disease abounded. Henry Inglis, an Englishman who visited Limerick in 1834, describes his experience:

I spent a day in visiting those parts of the city where the greatest destitution and misery were said to exist. I entered upwards of forty of the abodes of poverty; and to the latest hour of my existence I can never forget the scenes of utter and hopeless wretchedness that presented themselves that day.... Some of the abodes I visited were garrets, some were cellars; some were hovels on the ground floor, situated in narrow yards, or alleys. I will not speak of the filth of the places....The inmates, were some of them old, crooked, and diseased; some younger, but emaciated, and surrounded by starving children; some were sitting on the damp ground, some standing, and many were unable to rise from their little straw heaps.⁶

In this distressed city of Limerick, Sisters of Mercy began daily distribution of soup, meat, and bread at the convent door. They established a weekend school for factory workers. They began an early micro-enterprise foundation where people who were poor could borrow money to set up small businesses that would generate an income. They wrote a simple catechism in Irish when it was

discovered that some who wanted to be prepared to receive Catholic sacraments did not speak English.⁷

Sisters of Mercy continued the spread of the Mercy charism and Catherine's adaptable ministerial response to need after her lifetime. Catherine dreamed of having a Mercy hospital of their own where patients would not be compelled to leave until their health was re-established and they could receive all the physical and spiritual care Catherine desired to bestow upon them.⁸ This dream was first fulfilled with the opening of a Mercy hospital in Pittsburgh in 1847,

with thousands more Mercy hospitals following. Usually the expansion of the Sisters of Mercy followed the routes of Irish immigrants, but the choice to go to Aotearoa New Zealand was in response to the request of New Zealand's bishop,

Bishop Pompallier, to minister to the Maori people. During their ten-month voyage on the ship 'Oceania', the sisters learned to speak Maori. On arrival in Auckland, the sisters began ministering to both the Maori people and the European settlers. They established a refuge in which Maori women stayed when they came to the city and they invited Maori girls and orphans to live with them in their Convent.⁹

Mercy Communication and Reorganization After Vatican II

In the 182 years since Catherine McAuley, Anna Maria Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley professed vows as the first Sisters of Mercy, over 55,000 other women have followed with religious profession of vows as Sisters of Mercy. 10 Because Catherine established each new foundation as an autonomous house with its own governance structure, a system emerged of a multiplicity of separate civil and canonical congregations of Sisters of Mercy. In Catherine's day, she kept in constant contact with the foundations through her letter writing, foundation circulars, and occasional visits. As Mercy grew and expanded, this constant communication slowed and eventually became infrequent to nonexistent. One Mercy congregation in Great Britain describes the situation as such:

The autonomy which Catherine so valued in the early years became an isolating factor one hundred years along the way. Upwards of two thousand Sisters of Mercy in Great Britain alone belonged to the same Congregation, lived by the same Rule yet were scarcely aware of the existence of any group other than their own. 11

With the advent of the Second Vatican Council, vowed religious were encouraged to renew themselves in the original spirit of institute, faithfully honoring the founder's spirit and special aims, and making

adjustments in accordance with the needs of our age.¹² This brought a fresh enthusiasm for the story of Mercy, awakened renewed interest in the legacy of Catherine McAuley, and was a driving force for reinitiating connections and communication among

She envisioned a society where those on the margins of society could take their rightful place as active, contributing participants and agents of their own advancement and liberation.

the various congregations of Mercy. The first International Gathering of Sisters of Mercy was held in Dublin in August 1981 and marked the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy (December 1831). This conference, *Trocaire '81*, summoned together 130 delegates representing 22,000 Sisters of Mercy. Helena O'Donoghue, R.S.M. (Ireland) served in the role of "master listener." She recalls that *Trocaire '81* invited participants

... to a searching and refounding experience that would "fashion a future, global in vision and rooted in Mercy" and commit the Congregation, through a fresh hearing of the Word, to be and to do Mercy in a new way.... The Spirit was speaking the Word of Mercy from the floor, in the person of each representative.... in a Spanish accent from the barrios of South America, an English accent from the cold "charity" of the welfare state, in an Australian accent from the hollow emptiness of materialism, in a South African accent from the cry for human dignity, in an American accent from a media manipulated society, and in an Irish accent from the pain of rejection of Religious Life itself.... Through this voice, Mercy... enveloped, absorbed and even at times transfixed the delegates.¹³

The adaptation and renewal of religious life sought by the Second Vatican Council included deepening the bonds of affiliation and connection among religious congregations sharing the same charism. In the words of *Perfectae Caritatis*:

Independent institutes should...form federations if they can be considered as belonging to the same religious family. Others who have practically identical constitutions and rules and a common spirit should unite.... Finally, those who share the same or a very similar active apostolate should become associated, one to the other.¹⁴

Faithful to this exhortation, movements towards unification were undertaken in the Federations and Institutes of the Americas, Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, and Aotearoa New Zealand. These movements greatly facilitated the consideration of collaboration on a wider scale.

In 1987, Sebastian Cashen, R.S.M., major superior of the Dublin community, shared with Mary Trainer R.S.M. (USA) that the Dublin community

was considering leasing the Baggot Street property. Endowed with a deep love for the birthplace of the Sisters of Mercy and with a vision for its potential, Mary asked that plans be delayed until she could promote further dialogue with a broader Mercy base. Sebastian agreed. In January 1988, Mary proposed to the chapter of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (ISMA) and to the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas the exploration of cosponsoring Baggot Street as a World Mercy Centre. Both unanimously voted Yes. The proposal was circulated among the other national groups – Mercy Ireland, Great Britain (the Institute and the Union), the New Zealand Federation, and the congregations in Newfoundland, Philippines, and South Africa. All responded favorably. 15

By May 1989, the first meeting of the International Steering Committee convened in Dublin. Representatives from the six national conferences attended: Australia, the Americas, the Union and the Institute in Great Britain, Ireland, and Aotearoa New Zealand. Letters of interest and support also came from the Philippines and South Africa. International Steering Committee Member Kath Burke, R.S.M. (Australia) recalls:

I felt an absolute confidence and huge joy that our widely-flung Mercy world would one day be more closely linked and it would be Baggot Street...that would bring us all together. In Mary [Trainer] we were gifted with a person of grace and charisma, vision and administrative skills: she became in a sense our international Foundress.¹⁶

The leaders of the Mercy institutes, congregations, and federations officially formed Mercy International Association (MIA) in 1992, and the ownership of Catherine's original House of Mercy at 64a Lower Baggot Street was transferred from the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, to the global Mercy world, under the auspices of MIA. After extensive renovation, the house reopened in 1994 as Mercy International Centre.

As Mercy International Centre celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year, we celebrate the growing bonds of collaboration and unity among all in the Mercy family globally: Sisters, associates, partners-in-ministry, friends of Mercy, and others. Currently, there are 7,516 Sisters of Mercy living in 40 countries and territories around the world. These

vowed members are divided into 16 canonical congregations of Sisters of Mercy. There are 69 women in the incorporation/formation process, and 168 members (or 2.2% of the total vowed membership) under the age of 50.20 There are 4,782 Associates, and an estimated quarter million to half million partners in ministry around the world. Each of these women and men of Mercy are responding to the needs of their time with the same creativity, ingenuity, adaptability, and commitment that Catherine and the early Sisters of Mercy had.

We have much room for continued growth in more fully realizing our global Mercy reality and more fully embodying our unity and oneness, but tremendous strides have been made since *Trocaire* '81. Catherine would delight in the reach of Mercy

Endnotes

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through each one of her grandchildren. As the recording of the map in the International Room has her saying to the pilgrims who come to Baggot Street:

Ah, my dear sisters, friends, associates in Mercy - all part of our Mercy family - thanks be to God for every one of you! Not only do you hear the cries of the poor in Dublin, but your hearts are attuned to the cries of suffering throughout the world. It seems so overwhelming, but I know it is the same mysterious Providence that gave rise to our Institute that enables you to reach out and touch the misery of your times. The God of Mercy is still with us, and I your proud mother am still cheering, "Hurrah for foundations!" **

¹ Map of the Spread of Mercy (Dublin: Mercy International Association, 1994).

² Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³ Church-run schools began burgeoning in Ireland in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Government funded primary school system was implemented in 1831. Gerardine Meaney, Mary O'Dowd, Bernadette Whelan, Reading the Irish Woman: Studies in Cultural Encounters and Exchange, 1714-1960 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

⁴ J.B. Lyons, The Quality of Mercer's: The Story of Mercer's Hospital, 1734-1991 (Dublin: Glendale, 1991).

⁵ Locations in Ireland and England, founded from Baggot Street in Catherine's lifetime: Kingstown (March 1835; closed Nov 1838 and re-opened April 1840); Tullamore (April 1836); Charleville (Oct 1836); Carlow (April 1837) Cork (July 1837); Booterstown (June 1838); Limerick (Sept 1838); Bermondsey (Nov 1839); Galway (May 1840); Birr (Dec 1840); Birmingham (Aug 1841). Carlow also established foundations in Ireland in Catherine's lifetime: Naas (Sept 1839) and Wexford (Dec 1840).

⁶ Henry D. Inglis, *A Journey Throughout Ireland During the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834* (Vol 1; London: Whittaker & Co., 1835), 302.

⁷ Angela Bugler R.S.M., "Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Limerick, 1838 - Mother Elizabeth Moore, 1806-1868," *Beyond Catherine: Stories of Mercy Foundresses* (Dublin: Mercy International Association, 2003), 76-77.

⁸ Mary Austin Carroll R.S.M., *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy* (Vol 1; New York: Catholic Publications Society, 1881), 60.
⁹ Marcienne Kirk R.S.M., "Mother Cecilia Maher, 1799-1878. A Brief Biography," *Beyond Catherine*, 23.

¹⁰ Mercy International Association maintains a database of everyone who has professed vows as a Sister of Mercy from Catherine's time through today. That database has 55,145 records. This is not an exact figure as there are some people whose records are found to be missing, and a few early foundresses who have multiple records. Ursula Frayne, for example, entered in Dublin, went on mission to Newfoundland, returned to Dublin and then sailed to Australia getting established first in Perth before heading east to Melbourne. Archivists from Dublin, Newfoundland, Perth, and Melbourne all submitted a record on her and she appears four times in the International Register.

¹¹ "Movements Toward Greater Unity," *Our Story: Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, Great Britain*, downloaded March 10, 2014, http://www.ourladyofmercy.org.uk/ourstory/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=92.

¹² Pope Paul VI, Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (October 28, 1965),¶2.

¹³ Helena O'Donoghue R.S.M., "Trocaire '81 -What was its significance?' Trocaire '81 (edited by Anne Hannon R.S.M. and Helena O'Donoghue R.S.M., 31-page booklet privately published), 2; Holder: Archives, Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (Ireland).

¹⁴ Perfectae Caritatis, ¶22.

¹⁵ Taken from documents held in the archives of Mercy International Association. Printed in "Behold I am doing a new thing - do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)" Mercy E-News (Edition 551; February 5, 2014) http://enews.mercyworld.org/e-news/mercy-enews/104-2014-02-05.html.

¹⁶ This quote was first published in Leaves of the Annals of Mercy International Centre (10:2, Summer 2004), 2. See also "Memories" *Mercv E-News* (Edition 553; February 19, 2014) at http://enews.mercyworld.org/e-news/mercy-enews/106-2014-02-19.html.

¹⁷ Mercy International Association collects demographical data annually. Statistics in this article are based on December 2013 data. The 40 countries and territories are: Argentina, Australia, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, East Timor, England, Federated States of Micronesia, France, Guam, Guatemala, Guernsey, Guyana, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Aotearoa New Zealand, Nigeria, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Romania, Samoa, Scotland, South Africa, South Sudan, Tonga, Uganda, United States, Wales, and Zambia.

¹⁸ The current canonical entities and membership numbers of Sisters of Mercy are: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (3,345); Congregation of Sisters of Mercy [Ireland] (2,122); Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (912): Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, Great Britain (243); Sisters of Mercy, Aotearoa New Zealand (215); Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane Congregation [Australia] (177); Sisters of Mercy of the Union of Great Britain (153); Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland (107); Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta Congregation [Australia] (69):

Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney [Australia] (52): Religious Sisters of Mercy, Philippines (47); Sisters of Mercy, Sunderland [Great Britain] (31); Sisters of Mercy, Midhurst [Great Britain] (19); Sisters of Mercy, Gravesend [Great Britain] (14); Sisters of Mercy, Guernsey [Great Britain] (8); and Sisters of Mercy, Woodley [Great Britain] (1). The Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma Michigan and the Diocesan Sisters of Mercy. South Portland Maine both trace their origins to Catherine McAuley, but choose not to participate in Mercy International Association.

¹⁹ Kenya (16); United States (16); Papua New Guinea (9); Peru (7); Philippines (6); Australia (4); Jamaica (4); Aotearoa New Zealand (2); South Africa (2); England (1); Guyana (1); Ireland (1). Note: the number for the Philippines is unconfirmed. Four women in the Philippines are in the incorporation process with the Institute of the Americas; the Religious Sisters of Mercy, Philippines, have not yet submitted December 2013 data to MIA. The estimate of 2 women in formation is based on prior data submitted for the International Register.

²⁰ There are another 258 vowed members in their 50s. The total under 60 is 426, or 5.7% of vowed membership. This author believes there is a critical need for the under 50s or under 60s group to be connecting with each other across congregational and geographic boundaries.

²¹ Of the 16 canonical congregations who form Mercy International Association, seven have Associates: Congregation (Ireland); Institute of Great Britain; Institute of the Americas; Institute of Australia and Papua New Guinea: Brisbane Congregation (Australia); Newfoundland; and Union of Great Britain. Some provinces in Ireland have "Circles of Mercy" or "Together in Mercy" groups; non-vowed members of these groups are included in the statistic as an 'associate.' Great Britain has both adult associates and youth associates (aged primarily 9-13). In addition to 3,261 associates, the Institute of the Americas has 8 "Companions in Mercy" who take a private vow of service.

²² Map of the Spread of Mercy.



"Love's Imagination to Transform Human Distress": Mercy in South Africa

Jean Evans, R.S.M.

On the first Friday of March 2012, Brother Emile of Taizé joined us for Evening Prayer around the Cross at the Mercy chapel in Burlingame, California. He was in California to make visits to colleges and church groups and to encourage young people to come to Pine Ridge, South Dakota for a Memorial Day Weekend as part of the Taizé Community's Pilgrimage of Trust. Before the prayer, he showed a short DVD on the Taizé Community and then spoke about Mercy:

The Taizé brothers have known the Sisters of Mercy for many years. Brothers were often here for prayers. Mercy was a key word for Brother Roger, our founder. When he arrived at Taizé, in 1940, he wrote a prayer, asking God to keep him "in the spirit of the Beatitudes: joy, simplicity, mercy."

When I visited Misericordia Chicago, I was struck by the joy that was almost tangible within its walls. More than ever before, I understood mercy is not about "pity," but it's all about creativity, love's imagination to transform human distress As I walked down the long hallways, everywhere I could see people leading others towards joy. teaching disabled children and adults to paint, draw, be creative. God's mercy is always creative and leading us to creativity.

Br. Emile's very beautiful intuition about mercy reminded me immediately of the work of Mercy Sisters in South Africa—"love's imagination to transform human distress." As I lived and worked there for over twenty-seven years (1984-2012), I'd like to share some examples of how the Sisters of Mercy in South Africa have been responding to human distress. The first is a response to the rampant spread of HIV/Aids infections from the mid-1990's. Sister Christine Jacob, director of Mercy Clinic in Winterveldt and manager of the Hope of Life Project tells the story. ¹

Hope for HIV/Aids Patients

Before 2009, the South African Government authorities were in denial of the HIV pandemic hitting the country and, yet, it is a known statistic worldwide that South Africa has one of the highest infection rates in the world. The country was also one of the slowest to roll out ARV's (anti-retroviral) when they became accessible and available to the masses of people infected on a world wide scale. All this spelled disaster for those people who tested positive for HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Mercy AIDS Project in the Winterveldt showed an average of five deaths a month from HIV/AIDS of people between the age of 27 and 38 years.

In 2003 the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) AIDS Office became one of the recipients of the President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Funding, a USA

based-funder giving financial assistance for HIV/AIDS to nine chosen countries: South Africa being one of them. The funding was mainly for the roll out of Anti Retrovirals Treatment for HIV/AIDS patients who were in serious need of treatment.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) together with Catholic Relief Service (CRS) signed a five year contract, which was later extended for another five years, to twenty-one ART Sites round South Africa. Mercy AIDS

Project, Winterveldt, became one of these sub recipients. During this period (2003 – 2013) the Catholic Church became the second biggest provider of ARV's in the country.

Winterveldt is a poor, rural area with a high unemployment rate and many social problems. A comprehensive HIV/AIDS service, and especially one like an ART (anti-retroviral treatment) Centre, was essential and very beneficial for the community. In September 2004 Mercy AIDS Project opened Hope for Life, our own Anti-Retroviral Treatment

last year in

More than ever before, I understood mercy is not about "pity," but it's all about creativity, love's imagination to transform human distress.

Centre. The target for that calendar year was to have 50 people on ARVs. By December, we had put 63 people on ARVs. In December 2012 we recorded 1,609 patients on Anti Retrovirals.

Our Programme went from strength to strength over those ten years. We were not only providing an essential service, but one that was making a difference in the lives of many people in the community. We have several patients who started with us in 2004 and who are still receiving their treatment from Hope for Life to this day. They are mothers who can now take care of their children, and who otherwise would have left them orphaned all too early. There are HIV positive people, very much part of a community, being empowered—some finding jobs, others at home, but making their contribution. Many people remain on a nutrition program, growing their own vegetables and all trying to live a healthy life style.

We started with a staff of six. We now have thirty-two staff members. In 2007 Mercy Clinic could no longer house Hope for Life as we needed bigger premises. St. Peter's Catholic Church gave us part of their buildings and PEPFAR bought us a mobile home for the use of the ART Service. Toga Laboratories provided a mobile laboratory and did the laboratory tests in this laboratory on the premises. We received results much quicker and could initiate ARV treatments much sooner in the clients.

PEPFAR also gave us a chest x-ray machine as TB and HIV are very closely linked. We not only used this machine for Hope for Life, but all the surrounding health facilities were able to make use of it. Hope for Life benefited from employing a social worker and a part-time dietician, a radiographer and a doctor.

Hope for Life is committed in maintaining a sustainable and comprehensive quality health care service. We also committed to ensuring a holistic approach in the care and management of patients, making all services provided within Hope for Life equally available and accessible to everyone. It was important to start and maintain the Nutrition Program and Food Gardens, as we had people on medication who needed to eat correctly and healthily and could do so independently through this program. The education and awareness program at Hope for Life promotes a healthy life style, behavior change and knowledge about ARVs.

In 2011 the Department of Health partnered with Hope for Life and started to provide the Anti Retroviral medication and made their laboratories available. This enabled us to take on more patients and become more sustainable for the future. Hope for Life is not without its challenges, but together we face them and try to overcome them because we want to— and do— give HOPE for LIFE to those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. Just recently it was announced that South Africa has 2 million people on ARV Treatment. It has now become the country with the biggest number of people on ARV treatment in the world. We are proud to say that Hope for Life is part of this achievement!²

What Sister Christine doesn't share in this narrative is the care given to orphan and vulnerable children and the countless hours she has spent in organizing initiatives for these kids: gatherings, activities with foster parents, meetings with care givers, parties and fun days. All these activities address the vulnerability of these children, but do so in a way that respects them and gives them some moments of relaxation and fun. Mercy is creative.

Hope through Education

"Mercy is a spontaneous act of kindness motivated by the distress of the other. It sits down next to the other and offers concrete help," writes Waaijman.³ This becomes readily evident in the stories collected by Sister Immaculata Devine of the Mercy community in Pretoria's Iona Convent:

Catherine McAuley's belief that education could raise young people out of poverty is borne out by the following stories. At a time when the standard of education in South Africa is at a very low ebb it is good to know that the children who attend our Mercy schools benefit from our efforts to strive for the best. Many of these children come from very poor backgrounds. What follows is a sample of their stories.

Buti's Story

Buti is the oldest of three children who grew up in a two-roomed shack in Ramagodi, a slum area, North West of Pretoria. Both parents are unemployed and survive on what they can earn from doing odd jobs. Buti attended Tsogo High School, 10 Evans: Love's Imagination

and in spite of having to walk five kilometres to school every day he focused on his studies and in his final examinations obtained seven distinctions [A grades]. Having attracted the attention of a sponsor, Buti is now a successful actuarial science student at Pretoria University. Emelda, another past pupil of Tsogo, comes from a family of four. The father is dead and the mother supports the family by selling fruit and vegetables at the railway station. Emelda obtained six distinctions in her final examinations and has just completed her first year at the University of Johannesburg with four distinctions [A grades].

Sister Francis Sheehy sent us two stories from St. Matthew's, Soweto:

A Brother's Love for His Sister

Just a few days after the opening of school in 2007, a little girl came to me and asked for money for lunch. I gave her R10 [about \$2] and, after lunch, I talked to her about her home circumstances. She told me she had no grandparents, and seemed quite surprised when I asked about her parents. Both had died several years earlier and she was living with two older brothers and a sister. Their only income was the child support grant, which her sister was receiving for her baby. I invited one of her brothers to come and see me. The brother proved to be a friend of

Placidus, a past pupil of St Matthew's who had just matriculated and obtained a bursary to study engineering at the University of Cape Town. Placidus's granny had assured him that if he could get his little sister into St Matthew's, the Sisters would look after her. The siblings did "piece" (parttime work) jobs to ensure their youngest would be able to stay at St Matthew's. The little girl is now a confident young lady with a University Entrance certificate with six distinctions. She is waiting for a sponsor to help her to further her studies at the University of Cape Town.

Rosalia's Story

Rosalia came to St Matthew's from Camp 3, an informal settlement near Chiawelo, Soweto, where hundreds of people live in tin shacks without running water, proper sewerage or electricity. Despite the

difficulties of growing up in such primitive conditions, Rosalia matriculated at St. Matthew's in 1995. In her final year at school, she applied for a job at First National Bank. She was called for an interview. Rosalia's marks were excellent, but she had no clothes but her school uniform. The Sisters and the school secretary fitted her out for the interview, which was successful. She began work at the bank and two years later, she phoned to tell us that she and her mother were moving into a house in Lenasia-the first house her mother had ever lived in.

Overcoming the Stigma of Parents Dying of AIDS

About eight years ago a young pupil at Iona Convent lost both her parents when she was in grade four. She was nine years old. Because her parents

had died of AIDS, she was rejected by all her family except her aged grandfather. She continued at Iona and last year passed her final examinations with five distinctions. There are many such stories to be told and it is gratifying to see so many of our students making a success of their lives despite the many horrific problems many of them have to deal with. Nelson Mandela said. "In the same way that we waged war against apartheid government education, and communities should together combat those factors which militate against effective learning and teaching."⁴

Not only through its imagination, but also in its various expressions—healing, lending a "hand up" to young people, educating for societal change—love works to transform human distress.

Educating to End Violence

This next narrative is contributed by Colleen Wilkinson, R.S.M. Colleen is Director of Mercy House in Pretoria, a temporary shelter for women and children. She reports an initiative taken by the children at McAuley House School in Johannesburg during March 2013. It aptly describes the action that mercy takes in the face of cruelty and abuse:

Motorists driving past McAuley House (our Mercy School in Parktown West, Johannesburg) on any Friday this March, would have seen a line of school children – not filing into the classrooms— but standing in absolute silence along the perimeter of the school grounds. Dressed in Kwanele Kwanele

(Enough is enough!) T-shirts, they stood facing the road, raising the curiosity of the passers-by. These children have had enough: Enough of the pervasive and persistent violence against women and children in our country; enough of the rape; enough of femicide; enough of abuse of all kinds.

In a recent television interview Athol Fugard, the well-known South African playwright said, "We are not a happy country." The Rainbow Nation has lost its way. South Africa is experiencing a wave of violent crime; especially against women and children.

According to the U.N. Office for Drugs and Crime, this country has the 10th highest murder rate in the world. Femicide by an intimate partner occurs every eight hours. Rape is endemic. In two separate surveys conducted in the rural areas 27.6 percent admitted to being rapists and 46.3 percent of victims were under 16 years of age. 22.9 percent were under eleven years of age and 9.4 percent under 6 years old. A high proportion of the attacks occur within families.

McAuley House staff and learners had begun planning a campaign against violence which was to have been launched later this year. Then suddenly, there was news that shocked the nation. On the 2nd February, 17 year-old Anene Booysen from Bredasdorp in the Western Cape Province was gang-raped. Her attackers then slit open her stomach, took out her intestines and broke her fingers and her legs. She lived long enough to name one of her attackers.

Everyone at McAuley House realized that the campaign would have to begin immediately. T-shirts were printed and posters were produced. The objectives and actions of this initiative were put onto the school's website. Here we read:

With a greater awareness of this issue in our society, and a stronger, united voice against abuse, we believe that change is possible and that as a country we can achieve:

- more stringent penalties for those who abuse
- a more sympathetic justice system, where victims are always treated with dignity.
- a proper implementation of the National Register of Sex Offenders
- behavior change of perpetrators/abusers.

Besides the silent protest that will take place once a month, the school has also adopted a woman's shelter and will raise funds to give assistance to the victims of abuse sheltering there. Once a month guest speakers will be invited to educate the learners and their parents on what constitutes abuse and what behavior is acceptable.

Other schools have been invited to join the campaign and everyone is eager to wear the T-shirt. The local parishioners and the students from the University of the Witwatersrand partnered with the school in dealing with this scourge of violence.

Through Kwanele Kwanele the students at McAuley House are saying:

- As a society "Enough is enough; we will not tolerate abuse any longer!"
- As victims "Enough is enough; we will no longer be silent!"
- As relatives, neighbours, mothers and fathers

 "we will not sit by and idly watch!" 5

Direct Ministry to Women and Children in a Poor Neighborhood

Finally, Sister Juliana Yarkwan, a young professed sister talks about what it means to be "poor." She ministers with women and children in the Alexandra Township. Just a few miles from Sandton, the wealthiest suburb in the country, "Alex" as the township is called, is extremely poor in housing, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.

Here is the report Sister Juliana gives: 6

When I talk of the poor, I am talking about all the aspects of poverty, which enslave the human heart for example, the poverty of food and shelter, the poverty of loneliness, the poverty of greediness, the poverty of knowledge, the poverty of possessiveness, the poverty of "you-don't-belong-here" and the poor who are sick. These were the kind of issues Jesus addressed on a daily basis and taught his disciples how to go about them and render help, which brought liberation and hope. Mercy is alive and well in South Africa. Not only through its imagination, but also in its various expressions—healing, lending a "hand up" to young people, educating for societal change—love works to transform human distress. •

Evans: Love's Imagination

Endnotes

⁶ Sister Juliana Yarkwan who ministers with women and children in the Alexandra Township first published this account in Mercy @live, published by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/. Accessed January 18, 2014.



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¹ Donations to build the Mercy Clinic in Winterveldt came from the five hospitals of the former Burlingame Community: St. Joseph's in Phoenix, St. Mary's in San Francisco, Mercy Hospital, San Diego, Mercy Hospital in Bakersfield, and St. John's in Oxnard.

² This narrative account by Sister Christine Jacob, director of Mercy Clinic in Winterveldt first appeared in Mercy @live, published by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/ Accessed January 18, 2014.

³ Kees Waaijman, Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002): 86.

⁴ The stories recounted by Sister Francis Sheehy in Soweto first appeared in Mercy @live, published by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/. Accessed January 18, 2014.

⁵ This account by Colleen Wilkinson, R.S.M, Director of Mercy House in Pretoria first appeared in Mercy @live, published by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/. Accessed January 18, 201

God Was in This Place and I, I Did Not Know It

Marilyn Lacey, R.S.M.

In my work with Mercy Beyond Borders (MBB) I have the privilege of visiting our projects in South Sudan and Haiti each year. Over and over, I am inspired by the wonderful resilience of the displaced women and girls with whom we work; and little by little, I feel that I am starting to understand them and their cultures. Occasionally, however, I am brought up short by the immense differences in our worlds. Allow me to share two examples:

Being Changed by Learning Cultural Differences

First: During a Leadership Training Week in South Sudan, I asked one of our young women scholars if she were happy to be participating. "Happy?" she replied, "No, no! I am beyond happy!"

Her radiant expression confirmed her words. I, too, was enjoying the interaction with our scholars; my one complaint (unspoken) was the monotony of the meals maize and beans, maize and beans, maize and beans at every meal, every day. When I asked scholar what she enioving most about the leadership week, she said, "The wonderful, balanced meals!" Ouch. What for me was tedious. bland and tiresome was for her an extravagance of wholesome nutrition. (Imagine: three meals a day! Imagine: second helpings any time you wanted!)

I walked away from that exchange feeling what the old spiritual writers called compunction, a certain piercing of the heart. How immersed I am

in abundance. How rarely I remember to give thanks. How ready I am to murmur when everything isn't exactly as I want it to be. How crucial it is for me to be with the poor whose recognition of life's daily gifts startles me into wakefulness.

Then: A few months ago I was sitting in the tiny, stucco-walled, windowless MBB office in Gros

Morne, Haiti, reviewing program expenses with Darline, our Haitian Scholarships Coordinator. She mentioned that she was overdue to pay \$5,000 in tuition to a particular high school in town for our MBB Scholars, but had not been able to do so because "there isn't enough money in the bank." I glanced at the most recent bank statement lying on the dusty desk between us. Even reading it upside down I could clearly see that MBB had a balance of \$7,000 in its account. While wondering what kind of marks Darline had earned in math class, I offered a gentle correction: "Look, right here; there is plenty of money."

She looked me in the eye and shook her head "No," claiming she'd been to the bank three times that week but there was not enough money. I was

about to contradict her again when she smiled, raised one hand slightly and explained as one might to a two-year old, without any apparent impatience: "Sister, it is the bank that does not have the money." Customers wanting to make a withdrawal needed to wait until the bank itself got more cash.

Well, that silenced me; I felt more than a tad ashamed at my presumed fiscal superiority. I, a complete newcomer in Haiti, thinking that I knew more about Haitian banking than our local Haitian manager. What is the root of such arrogance? Does it come from living in the world's most powerful nation? Do I unconsciously assume that people in developed countries

know more than people in less-developed places? Is it because I am in a "helping profession," both as a religious woman and as director of an international nonprofit?

Whatever its source, it brought to mind Dorothy Day's words: "We must pray that the poor will forgive us our charity...." And that prompted me to reflect on the difference between charity and mercy. In my experience, charity connotes a giver and a

In my experience, charity connotes a giver and a receiver in an unequal relationship, whereas mercy is about kinship: it emerges when there is awareness that God is present and active, forging bonds that connect us profoundly to one another that we instinctively share all that we have because we are literally one with the other.

receiver in an unequal relationship, whereas mercy is about kinship: it emerges when there is awareness that God is present and active, forging bonds that connect us profoundly to one another that we instinctively share all that we have because we are literally one with the other.

God invites us all to forego charitable impulses that may be colored by colonial, we-they overtones

and instead to live in the expansive, worldwide web of mercy. That means, of course, that in our lives and in our ministries we are called to forego any traces of power, ascendancy, control or advantage. It means, however uncomfortably, that we live from the kenosis of Jesus who emptied himself even from the perks of divinity.

In high school Latin class I encountered the curious maxim, *Virtus stat in medio*: goodness stays in the middle. Though I had to memorize it in school, I never believed it. Goodness, after all, means God-ness. Insofar as I can

see, goodness—Godness, holiness, being moved by God's holy spirit, living in sync with God's ways-propels us not to the middle but to the edges of life, to the margins, there to stand with the poor--whether that be through our prayer, our advocacy, our sharing of resources, or our actual physical accompaniment.

An Abandoned Lifestyle

Jesus never stood in the safe middle path. Neither did Catherine McAuley. By the way they lived and the instructions they gave their followers, they gave powerful witness to a much riskier, more abandoned lifestyle—abandoned, that is, to the absolute mercy of God.

Abandonment in most English usages does not connote something positive. One abandons a dangerous place, abandons a responsibility (or worse, a person), abandons all hope. The pervasive feeling is of defeat. Abandon can also imply a kind of recklessness, a wild, one-sided disregard for personal safety, the Evel Knievel daredevil impulse. In classic spiritual literature, however, and in the language of lovers, abandonment is something else entirely. This kind of abandonment presupposes an utterly reliable relationship within which we surrender our well-

being to a trusted Other. As St. Peter advises us in his first letter, "Cast all your cares on God who cares for you."

Sounds good, doesn't it? In practice, it's not so easy. You may be familiar with a team-building exercise common in management trainings. It's designed to reveal how much trust (or lack thereof) a person has in her colleagues. After pairing up, one

person is supposed to stand ramrod straight and, without bending, fall backwards into the waiting arms of the partner who will catch her. Adults can't do it. We simply don't trust that much! After falling a few inches, self-preservation takes over the person instinctively crumples forward to save herself. Interestingly, children can do it. When my youngest brother was about five years old (and I was a teen), I played this same game with him all the time. He got so good at it that he could actually fall almost completely horizontal before I scooped him up in my arms. No

fear whatsoever. He never once doubted that I would protect him. He knew I cared for him. That makes abandonment not only possible but actually desirous, as it strengthens the relationship.

Waking Up

...the One who can be

trusted to be always

with-us, invites us anew

every day to live our

charism of mercy by

risking relationships on-

the-edges, in dicey

places, with marginal

types or even

complete strangers.

So, what has abandonment to do with mercy and with ministry? And why is this article entitled "God was in this place and I, I did not know it?"

My experience of working with refugees, migrants, and displaced persons over the past three decades has convinced me that the God of Mercy, the One who can be trusted to be always with-us, invites us anew every day to live our charism of mercy by risking relationships on-the-edges, in dicey places, with marginal types or even complete strangers. We can be sure of this: God comes to meet us when and where we least expect it. We seldom recognize the encounter. Only in retrospect do we slap our hand on our forehead like Jacob of old and exclaim, "Whoa! God was right here, in this messy place, and I, I did not know it!"

Recall that in Genesis 28, Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau, who wanted to kill him because he'd just been cheated out of their father's

blessing and inheritance. Granted, it cannot have been easy for Jacob to live up to family expectations. After all, his grandfather was Abraham and his father Isaac—both rather dominant figures-- and he had a twin brother who was apparently the favored one in the clan. Still, Jacob was pretty much a conniving liar and cheat. Once Esau learns what Jacob has done, Jacob has to get out of Dodge quickly. He runs into the desert as far as he can and then, exhausted, grabs a stone for a pillow and lies down to sleep.

It is into this stressed-out, rapidly-unraveling, ethically-bankrupt life that God drops a ladder. We ourselves might have sent the sheriff out to cuff Jacob and haul him back to justice to pay for his lawlessness, God's mercy instead pulls Jacob back into relationship. Right there, into this scoundrel's heart, comes a vision of holiness from the heavens: God's messengers ascending and descending, God promising him long life, prosperity, greatness.

I am the God of Abraham and Isaac. The land on

which you lie I will give to you and descendants. Your vour descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; and you shall spread to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south: and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves through descendants. And behold: I am with you, and I will take care of you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done as I have spoken. (Gen. 28:13-15)

Our misdeeds are instantly overshadowed by God's mercy, our limited understanding of ourselves vastly expanded by God's vision for us.

Waking up, Jacob rubs his sleepy eyes and pours oil on the rock to mark the revelation and to signal to others the holiness of the place: "God was in this place and I, I did not know it!"

So it is with us. God speaks to us in dreams and daily events and ordinary people. God doesn't wait until we are ready, much less perfect. Our misdeeds are instantly overshadowed by God's mercy, our limited understanding of ourselves vastly expanded by God's vision for us. We wake up to the presence of the Holy One, here and now and everywhere. We sit up and take notice: God is here! God is promising to be with me always.

When I surrender to that presence and that promise, miracles happen. Suddenly my past does not constrain me. All things are possible.

Abandonment to this kind of God is immensely freeing. It is a Love that casts out all fear, as John the Evangelist reminds us.³

Abandonment in Ministry

Whatever our place, whatever our ministry, whatever our innate gifts and limitations, what matters is our abandonment to the One who holds us dear. As that relationship deepens, we find ourselves drawn inexplicably to the margins, where life is tenuous and fragile and people feel unlovable. The sure mark of holiness is unbounded kinship. We are all one. We can never limit the circle of our concern or say: "This is enough. I can't care about anyone beyond this line I've drawn in the sand of my heart."

The spiritual path doesn't require any leaping of geographic boundaries. (Therese of Lisieux, after all, is patroness of missionaries despite never leaving her cloister.) I am convinced, however, that it does require moving beyond our comfort zone. It means

crossing all sorts of borders: reaching out to a person who looks lonely; valuing someone else's culture and worldview; consciously shedding the "isms" that separate me from those who are different; welcoming a stranger; sharing time and resources with others who are not my cup of tea. It may also mean literally moving to the margins to work with the homeless, the addicted, the trafficked, the mentally ill, the migrant or refugee or displaced. There we discover, much

to our amazement, that we are the beneficiaries from these encounters. We are the ones who find that God is here ahead of us

Invitation to the Periphery

Pope Francis noted God's predilection for the margins in a Vatican speech during January 2014⁴:

Jesus' mission, [Francis] said, "did not set out from Jerusalem, the religious, social and political centre, but rather began in a peripheral zone, an area regarded with disdain by the most devout Jews, on account of the presence in the region of various foreign populations....

"It was a border area, a transit zone where people of different races, cultures and religions encountered

one another. Galilee therefore became a symbolic place for the opening of the Gospel to all peoples. From this point of view, Galilee resembles today's world: the co-presence of various cultures, the need for comparison and encounter. [In] this type of context we can become fearful and give in to the temptation to build barriers, to feel more secure, more protected.

...God prefers to begin in the periphery, with those who are last in line, to reach everyone. [God's method] expresses ...the mercy of the Father. ... We are all invited to heed this call, to come out of our own comfort zone and reach out to the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel."

This is God's Doing, Not Ours

My work with Mercy Beyond Borders constantly confronts me with blessings (yes, confronts, because blessings are not always easy or sweet). When I see young girls forced by the South Sudanese culture into early marriage, I want to scream. Instead, MBB sets up weekly radio programs promoting gender equality and extolling the benefits of allowing females to attend school. When I see the elected leaders of South Sudan growing rich from corruption and dragging the whole populace back into armed conflict, I feel like giving up. Instead, MBB hosts annual leadership training programs for young South Sudanese women, knowing that they will in time bring women's wisdom to leadership governance.

When I see most girls leaving school in Haiti after 6th grade because their families cannot afford tuition for continued education, I am tempted to despair at persistent global inequities. Instead, MBB offers scholarship opportunities for those girls. When I see the restavek (domestic slavery) situations that many Haitian girls live in because their own families literally cannot afford to care for them, I cringe at the sexual exploitation it often leads to. Rather than wringing our hands, MBB operates boarding houses for young girls needing a safe place to stay. When I see widows impoverished by cultural tradition⁵ in South Sudan, I feel like attacking the male relatives who control their lives. Instead, MBB provides micro-enterprise training and loans so that these widows can make life better for their children.

MBB's work is difficult, taxing and uphill all the way. We fail as often as we succeed. (I treasure Martin Buber's insight that "success is not a name of

God.") At the same time, the work is immensely blessed because it puts me in touch with people whom the world considers of no account but to whom the God of Mercy stands very close. I am energized by them. I learn from them. Being with them continually reminds me what matters in life. MBB also puts me in touch with wonderful people around the world—Mercy Sisters and Associates and institutions and colleagues, laymen and women, and perfect strangers—whose involvement and generous support make this work possible. So much goodness everywhere. Each day now I wake up, rub the sleep from my eyes and, astonished anew, breathe a prayer of thankfulness: "God was in this place, and I, I did not know it!"

Endnotes

¹ 1 Peter 5:7



² Genesis 28

³ 1 Jn 4:18

⁴ Vatican Information Service || 28 January 2014. Source: http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2014/01/angelus-god-prefers-to-start-out-from.html

⁵ Cultures in South Sudan still follow the Levirate practice whereby a widow loses her house and all her possessions to the family of her deceased spouse, whose brothers then have the right to father children by her in order to "honor the memory" of the dead man.

Ministry in the Last Frontier: Parish Administration in Alaska

Joyce Ross, R.S.M.

God's blessings are many, one of my greatest was to become a Sister of Mercy. Another of my blessings was to become a teacher and I taught for nineteen years. In 1972 a huge change came into my life and it, too, was a wonderful gift. I became a parish associate at St. Patrick's parish in Anchorage, Alaska. Working in a parish opens new worlds. It certainly gave me new insight to what "the people are the church" means. It brought the reality of what Vatican II said to life. For seven years I was at St. Patrick's and in 1979 the reality of the "people of God" was really driven home.

It was in 1979 that our Archbishop asked me to minister in all the parishes on the Kenai Peninsula, which is 60 miles south of Anchorage by air and one hundred sixty by road. The Bishop wanted two sisters to go. Since there were no Mercies available, a Medical Mission Sister, Joan Barina, who was living with us, said she was willing to go.

From Religious Education to Parish Administration

In August 1979, Joan and I drove south and began a thirty-year mission on the Kenai. For ten years, we traveled to Kenai, Soldotna, Homer, Seward, Sterling, Ninilchik, Cooper Landing and Moose Pass. oversaw We the Religious Education Programs and had adult groups in each place. The people had already had many programs going; our role was to help increase and build on what was already started.

In 1988 another big gift and challenge from God was given to us. The Redemptorist Fathers staffed the parishes in Kenai, Homer, Soldotna and Seward. All these parishes had missions mentioned

above. One of the priests was changed and was not being replaced. The Archbishop asked me to be

administrator and Sister Joan to be the associate. A whole new world opened for the parish and for us.

First, the parishes were very open to our being the leaders and were also open to new ideas. Many had given their own insights and thoughts as to how things should be done. Since Sister Joan and I were believers in all Vatican II proposed and we had been teaching about it for almost ten years, this was the opportunity to prove that vision could work.

Since many of the people were homesteaders who came to Alaska after World War II (when Seward was the only designated parish on the Peninsula) they were more than ready to be "church." Truly, they were already church. One thing we did to prepare ourselves for this new challenge was to read all the minutes of previous council meetings. This taught us a lot. One thing we discovered was that many proposals had been put forth, agreed upon, but never translated into action. We listed these unrealized proposals to present at our next parish meeting.

Our people are holy, spiritual, and show hemselves willing and with the Talents and Vision of Parishioners The first "big project" was to

make some changes in the church sanctuary. The altar was at floor level and not really visible to everyone, especially if you were short and not in the first row. In addition, the altar was a rather large cement square with a top that resembled a chopping block, (historically very symbolic, but not obviously so) and not too popular with the congregation.

Revamping the Physical Space

The parishioners decided to raise the altar up on steps and exchange the stone block for a wooden table. They wanted to do it

themselves, not only to save us money, but to give one of our wood workers the opportunity to use his

spiritual, and show
themselves willing and
able to be church,
despite the fact that
there is no ordained
resident pastor. In
Kenai, they proved it
and I believe this is true
of all parishes. If only
the official church
believed it.

talents. One of the women designed the altar and baptismal font to match--another talent put to good use.

The Sunday following the meeting, several men arrived at Mass with their sledgehammers. After Liturgy they went right to work, demolished the altar, and put in the steps and platform to have things ready for the new altar. Everyone seemed very happy with the new look and now everyone could see the priest when he was celebrating Mass.

It was the beginning of the people taking ownership, taking a more active role in being church, recognizing their gifts and becoming active ministers themselves. The council and we began to invite people to use their gifts, many they weren't even aware of, but others recognized them. More people became active in the ministries at Mass. More began serving others in the community at large, the elderly, the poor and those with needs of many kinds.

Adopting a Mission Parish in Kenya

Stewardship became very important, at first the time and talent aspect more than the treasure. There were two projects that were very meaningful and did much for others. One involved treasure, the other service. The parish adopted a mission in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya in East Africa. The Korogoho slum had many handicapped children cared for by a single mother because she was the one blamed for the handicap. She had been abandoned by husband and her family. Unfair, but it was the reality.

We sent money each month to help these children and their others and siblings. Not only did this help with the physical needs, but also with education, sign language for the deaf, teaching the children nursing skills of caring for parents with aids.

Religious Education in a Native American Village

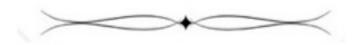
The other project not only helped others, but also opened a new world to our youth and those of us who worked with them. Each summer we sent a group of teens to one of the Native Villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to do a summer religious education program. This gave our teens the opportunity to know our Native people and experience their life styles. Both learned a lot and I think gained a new respect for each other.

The people in the villages are very hospitable and generous. The parish is still sponsoring both these projects. Other parishes in the diocese are following their example and go to visit the villages also

To be able to send our youth, we had two big projects every year. In Advent, we had a Cookies by the Pound sale, and before Lent, a Mardi Gras. Many people and the youth participate in both. Families make wonderful cookies of all kinds for Mardi Gras and many donate many things to raffle off. With these activities, we never have to turn away a young person who wants to go to the village even if they can't afford it. The parish takes care of the plane fare and food for all the young visitors.

Vision of a Woman-Led Parish

These are only a few examples of how people show they are church. All ages take part in the liturgies and in caring for others. Our blessings are many and meant to be shared. Our people are holy, spiritual, and show themselves willing and able to be church, despite the fact that there is no ordained resident pastor. In Kenai, they proved it and I believe this is true of all parishes. If only the official church believed it. lacktriangle



A Slow and Arduous Journey-Let Us Begin!

Jeanne Christensen, R.S.M.

As persons of Mercy, "Our prayer calls us to respond to the needs of the world and our ministry leads us back to God." We are called to integrate contemplation and action. As Joan Chittister, O.S.B., says, we are called also to compassion and to understand ourselves. "What religious life requires of us is an authentic response to today."

Today one of the most complex and complicated issues we are called to address in ministry is human trafficking. It is complicated because it is interconnected with many other issues, as is clear from looking at our Institute-wide Critical Concerns.

Connection of Trafficking with Mercy Critical Concerns

- Because so many human trafficking victims are women and girls, it is easy to make the connection with our critical concern for women. This is especially true for commercial sex trafficking or forced prostitution.
- Labor trafficking connects very closely with *immigration* since many of the trafficked laborers are *immigrants*, both legal and illegal. They may be found in sweatshops, domestic servitude, restaurants, agriculture, construction, in hotel/motel cleaning services or working as a neighbor's housekeeper or nanny to name a few.
- We can see also a connection with *Care of the Earth* and trafficked workers who are exposed to dangerous pesticides. We know, too, that such workers can be environmental refugees, persons forced to flee their homes due to natural and/or human-made disasters. Such disasters leave them destitute and at risk for becoming trafficked. This is especially true if they are promised jobs or housing. Their situation is similar to immigrants who pay a *coyote* or smuggler to bring them to a promised better life but end up in debt bondage and trafficked.

- Trafficking discriminates against victims who are treated as a commodity, to be used and discarded at the will of the owner. Many of the victims are also persons of ethnicity or color and subjected to racist behavior by owners and purchasers of their services.
- *Violence* permeates the lives of trafficked persons whether physical, emotional, or psychological. The stories of victims are filled with abuse. Teen runaways, most of whom are escaping abuse at home, are among the most vulnerable to be trafficked, especially young girls.

Poverty, while not a Critical Concern, also is a powerful risk factor for persons vulnerable to being trafficked. This is especially true in impoverished areas of any country, where the promise of a better life leads individuals to accept the promise of a better job, education, life, or material goods and end up, instead, in servitude. The saddest stories are those of children sold by their desperate, destitute parents on the promise of a better life for their child. Instead, the child is enslaved in sweat shops, harvesting crops in unsafe fields, providing sexual service in brothels or sent out to "work the street."

Inter-Community Response of Sisters to Trafficking

How do we respond? Members of the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community (WMW) minister in our local areas, and in state, national and international arenas. We minister in Mercy, interfaith, civic community, non-profit and service organizations, political, and Catholic arenas. We are engaged in direct services, education, awareness-raising, and advocacy. We network and collaborate because we understand we cannot do this by ourselves.

At the local and/or state level, coalitions in which WMW sisters are active include the Northern California Coalition Against Human Trafficking, to

which Therese Randolph, R.S.M., belongs, includes ten other women religious communities. They have provided training for hotel staff and others to be aware of and recognize trafficking victims and how to intervene. This training has resulted in successful interventions. They also educate and advocate.

Emily Devine, R.S.M., is a member of the Network against Human Trafficking in Ames, Iowa, which engages in education, awareness-raising and Rita Connell, R.S.M., a member of a advocacy. human trafficking working group in Omaha, Nebraska, collaborates with sisters in the Servants of Mary (Servites) and the Notre Dame Sisters. They are working on education and awareness-raising. Mary Pat Conlan, R.S.M., is a member of the Dubuque (Iowa) Justice League, to which Sisters from the Franciscans (OSF), Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), and Presentation (PBVM) also belong. They, too, are working on education and awarenessraising. They recently sponsored a workshop on how to identify victims of human trafficking. There were three Sisters of Mercy participants. Donna Ryan, R.S.M., ministers with Kris Wade, Director of The Justice Project which assists women in need to get access to financial aid, other forms of help, and access to the justice system.

I belong to the Kansas City Coalition against Human Trafficking within the Western Missouri U.S. District Attorney's Office. This group consists of law-enforcement and direct-service providers. They engage in rescue efforts in their district if needed. The District Attorney's office is responsible for the prosecution of traffickers and other predators.

Providing Support and Alternatives for Trafficked Persons

I was asked if I could provide any stories of individual persons or groups in any location who have been rescued from trafficking as a result of Mercy efforts. I responded that in the technical sense of rescuing, I don't know that we have stories of individual persons who have been rescued.

We have certainly provided safe alternatives for women who have escaped or are in the process of transitioning out of an oppressive situation. We have provided training for hotel staff and others to be aware of, recognize a trafficking victim and how to intervene. Therese Randolph, R.S.M, and the

members of the coalition to which she belongs, have had success in this effort. We provide or are collaborators with organizations or programs, which provide safe alternatives and support for victims to escape their situations so they can leave behind their pimps.

This has been particularly effective because of our volunteer efforts in non-profit organization and because of the generosity of Mercy ministry fund grants to groups/organizations serving these victims. Examples in Kansas City are The Justice Project, "a peer-based nonprofit human rights organization, which provides criminal justice system advocacy and navigation for women in poverty suffering from a multitude of challenges, including homelessness, addiction, mental illness, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation." The Willow Tree is an outreach of The Justice Project where the women gather weekly for comfort, safety, strength and advice through team and peer-support.

...these women are prostituted and domestically trafficked. All have gained sobriety from their addictions and have regained custody of their children.

The women they serve are primarily prostituted women, many of whom are domestically trafficked. The other organization is Amethyst Place, a women's transitional housing program whose women include but are not limited to victims of trafficking. Again, these women are prostituted and domestically trafficked. All have gained sobriety from their addictions and have regained custody of their children. I have been involved with this organization since 2000, working with their board of directors, consulting with the executive director and teaching the women crafts and interacting informally with them. A third one in the past was Veronica's Voice, a safe center providing services and programs. Unfortunately, we had to withdraw our involvement due to factors that we had no control over and chose not to make public. I was associated with them for

five years, mostly as a member of the board and mentor to the executive director.

Anti-Trafficking Efforts at the National Level

At the national level, I am the Sisters of Mercy representative to the national U.S. Catholic Sisters against Human Trafficking Coalition which was formed last year when women religious from thirteen different communities were called together by LCWR. Our mission reads:

U.S. Catholic Sisters against Human Trafficking is a national, collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy in an effort to eradicate modernday slavery.

One of our current efforts is the development of social analysis-based educational modules that can be used in classrooms, parishes and other settings. ³

Inter-Congregational and Organizational Collaboration to End Trafficking

Besides Mercy, the members' communities include: Sisters of St. Joseph, Dominican Sisters, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Ursuline Sisters, Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Humility of Mary, Sisters of St. Joseph – Concordia, Sisters of the Holy Family, Religious Sisters of Charity, and Felician Sisters.

Some of the organizations in which these sisters minister are:

- Southern California Partners for Global Justice (Los Angeles Metro);
- Lifeway Network, Inc., which collaborates to combat human trafficking through safe housing and education;
- Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center (Seattle, WA) recognizes and respects the dignity of all persons and all creation and acts for justice in the church and in the world. IPJC is sponsored by sixteen religious communities and collaborates with Catholic, ecumenical, interfaith and other organizations in carrying out this mission;
- UNANIMA International is a non-governmental organization (NGO) advocating on behalf of women and children (particularly those living in

- poverty), immigrants and refugees, and the environment. Their work takes place primarily at the United Nations headquarters in New York, where they collaborate to educate and influence policymakers at the global level and work for systemic change to achieve a more just world;
- Bakhita Initiative is a website with resources, links and a compiled list of coalitions in the U.S. to which women religious belong;
- Collaborative to End Human Trafficking's (Cleveland, OH) mission is to educate and advocate for the prevention and abolition of human trafficking while connecting services on behalf of trafficked persons; others minister within their own or other religious communities as justice coordinators.

Also, at the national level, Mercy Investment Services (MIS) is addressing human trafficking. The two areas of focus are the hospitality and trucking industries. They are working with their major trucking firm accounts and with Truckers against Trafficking. Sr. Karen Donahue (WMW) serves on MIS board of Directors. Staffer, Pat Zerga is a member of the Mercy International work group on human trafficking. Readers can learn more about the work of Mercy Investment Services. ⁴

International Efforts of the Sisters of Mercy

Internationally, the Sisters of Mercy are addressing human trafficking through education, advocacy and direct services. As a member of Mercy International Association's work group on human trafficking, I have spoken with sisters in England, Ireland, Philippines, New Foundland, Australia and New Zealand. The sisters in Australia are part of the very active ACRATH coalition. They are the Australian Catholic Religious against Human Trafficking in Humans. They have a website that describes their ministry. ⁵

Our sisters are also members of the Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation (RENATE). This network includes both East and West Europe. MECPATH (Mercy Ends Child Prostitution and Human Trafficking) Campaign is sponsored by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, Ireland. Their Campaign is aimed at getting as many hotels as possible to sign the ECPAT Code of Conduct. The sisters are working to ensure the MECPATH Campaign is national and will engage all

aspects of the hotel industry. The President of the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF) pledged full support for the MECPATH Campaign⁶

One of Mercy Global Concerns, based at the United Nations, emphases is human trafficking. Working with the Mercy International Human Trafficking Task Force, Mercy Global Concerns just completed the Sisters of Mercy statement submitted to the United Nations' Economic and Social

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Council's Commission for Social Development. The challenge was to create a statement, which would address their priority empowerment "promoting people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all." As a member of the subcommittee assisting writing this statement, I can attest to the challenge, especially as we worked to relate the topic to human trafficking. The Introduction to the statement reads:

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas welcomes the

opportunity to present to the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development our deep concerns relative to the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. The goal of empowerment remains dangerously imperiled by rampant and worldwide gender inequality, exclusion and disempowerment. Poverty is structurally and systemically embedded. Jobless growth and trafficked labour keep costs at a minimum and erode the ideal of decent and full employment. Specifically, these persistent social ills so rampant yet accepted throughout the world community lay bare the root causes of violence against women that render them poor, vulnerable, and, too often, prey to human trafficking. ⁷

Those of us in the WMW who are addressing human trafficking hope to begin the process of having a Corporate Statement on Human Trafficking. Our sisters in the Northeast Community have already initiated this process. They have included education, advocacy, direct ministry to survivors and collaboration with others as part of their statement.

Perhaps we will be able to move toward an Institutewide statement.

How Abuse Affects One's Relationship with God

I began this essay by saying, "As persons of Mercy, our prayer calls us to respond to the needs of the world and our ministry leads us back to God." We are called to integrate contemplation and action.

I wondered, what do victims and survivors say about God? We know that a trafficking victim endures daily, repeated acts of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. This constant abuse often skews a person's concept of God. Some victims feel that God has abandoned them and are very angry with God. For others, there is no God. The trauma which trafficking survivors experience is very complex and complicated. So I wondered further, how do we help victims understand the love of God and that they are spiritual beings worthy of being loved by God? In a few weeks, I will be attending a conference where

I hope the workshop entitled "Approaching Spirituality with the Rescued" will help me find some of the answers.

Here is what some of the survivor women residing at the Willow Tree in Kansas City said about God:

- God is my protector.
- God is good all of the time.
- God is REAL love not fake love
- God always found me when I was lost.
- God is a spirit who always loves me when nobody did.
- I used to think God was punishing me but now I know I just didn't let him help me.
- Without God, I would be dead.

The women also said that they don't like the Godname "higher power" because in their experience it means the power to be abusive. They might consider "deeper power." A Native American transgendered person talked about the native belief that God is everywhere, takes all forms, has many names and is

in all of us. The women shared a common belief that God is always with us, but that we have the choice of what to do. The overall belief is that God is a loving God, but that God is very capable of, in their term, "kickin' your ass."

Most of us have no clear idea or background to grasp the horrendous treatment these women have survived. I am amazed at the courage of these survivors who have been traumatized by years of abuse, but still find the courage to make the transition out of their past. In my experience of working with them, I receive more than I ever give. To fully respond to our calling for ministry with them, we must simply walk with them until we understand. It is a slow and arduous journey – let us begin!

Endnotes

http://undesadspd.org/CommissionforSocialDevelopment/Sessions/2014/NGOsStatements/WrittenStatements.aspx. The Sisters of Mercy's statement is about half way down the list on this site.

The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology publishes THE MAST JOURNAL, begun in 1990, three times a year. Members of the Editorial Board are: Sisters Eloise Rosenblatt, Editor (West Midwest), Patricia Talone (Mid-Atlantic), Marilyn King (West Midwest), Aline Paris (Northeast), Kathleen McAlpin (Mid-Atlantic), Marie Michele Donnelly (Mid-Atlantic), Sharon Kerrigan, (West-Midwest), Mary Jeremy Daigler (South Central) and Mary-Paula Cancienne (Mid-Atlantic). Subscriptions and correspondence to Julia Upton, R.S.M., St. John's Office of the President, University, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Jamaica, NY 11439, e-mail uptonj@stjohns.edu.

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¹ Mercy Spirituality: Reflections on Living the Charism of Mercy, Sisters of Mercy South Central Community, 2011, p. 1.

² This section on human trafficking and Mercy Critical Concerns appears in the spring 2014 edition of Viva Mercy.

³ The completed educational modules on trafficking and other information, especially about coalitions throughout the U.S. can be found at www.bakhitainitiative.com/u-s-catholic-sisters-against-human-trafficking.

⁴ To learn more about the anti-trafficking work of Mercy Investment Services, see <u>www.mercyinvestmentservices.org</u>.

⁵ Information about the Australian Catholic Religious against Human Trafficking in Humans can be found at http://acrath.org.au.

⁶ The website of MECPATH (Mercy Ends Child Prostitution and Human Trafficking) Campaign is Learn more at: http://www.sistersofmercy.ie/vision/mecpath_campaign.cfm.

⁷ The full statement of the Sisters of Mercy submitted to the United Nations' Economic and Social Council's Commission for Social Development can be found at

Our Lady of Mercy: Reclaiming the Title Today as Mary of the Visitation

Like theologian Elizabeth

Johnson, she insists that, as

well as returning the divine

attributes to God, there

needs to be a retrieval of

Mary as a real historical

woman whose life was a

journey of faith.

Elizabeth Julian, R.S.M.

Introduction

Traditionally, our patronal feast day as Sisters of Mercy has been and still is 24 September. Formerly the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, it was also known as the feast of Our Lady of Ransom. However, it was one of many feasts deleted or moved in the revision of the Roman Calendar after Vatican II.¹

Today we generally refer to 24 September as

"Mercy Day." What do we celebrate? What do our schools and institutions celebrate? Do we honour Mary? Do we honour Catherine McAuley? Or do we do a bit of both?

I made my vows according to our vow formula as a Sister of Mercy in 1978 under the patronage of Mary, Mother of Mercy. Who is she? What is the connection between Our Lady of Mercy and Catherine McAuley? Where is Mary in our Chapter

statement: "Centered in God, impelled to be mercy, keeping hope alive, in our world today"? Although there is no direct mention of Our Lady of Mercy, I am convinced that Mary is there.

A more appropriate image, today, however, may be that of Mary of the Visitation – the Mary out among the homeless, the distraught, the grief-stricken and the severely traumatised survivors in the rubble of a city struck by an earthquake. (The 2010 McAuley Lecture address based on this paper was delivered two weeks after a 7.1 magnitude earthquake.) This paper will discuss the reasons for my conclusion that Mary of the Visitation is a very apt biblical image to explain the title of Our Lady of Mercy.

Three questions will provide the framework for my reclamation project:

- 1. Who is Our Lady of Mercy?
- 2. Who was she for Catherine McAuley?
- 3. Who is she today?

First, I need to address two areas of confusion: Theologian Elizabeth Johnson, insists that, as well as returning the divine attributes to God, there needs to be a retrieval of Mary as a real historical woman.

1. Mercy rightly belongs to God, not Mary. Overwhelming evidence from the New Testament shows how this mercy is revealed most fully in the person of Jesus. Catherine McAuley herself was

very clear about this principle. The first article of Chapter 3 of her (which Rule she composed adapting parts of the Presentation demonstrates that understanding of mercv was focused on what Jesus says in the parable of the last judgment. There, the king who expresses the mercy of Jesus, says, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"(Matt 25:40).³

Australian theologian Pat Fox, R.S.M. has pointed out that "Mother of Mercy" is primarily a title for God.⁴ She argues that divine characteristics traditionally associated with Mary, e.g., "mother" and "mercy," need to be restored to where they rightly belong, i.e., God. Like theologian Elizabeth Johnson, she insists that, as well as returning the divine attributes to God, there needs to be a retrieval of Mary as a real historical woman whose life was a journey of faith. Once the figure of Mary no longer has to bear divine imagery then the Marian tradition can be set more clearly within a gospel framework in which Mary emerges as a person in her own right, "a genuine woman whose life was a journey of faith." However, Fox argues that we must retain the actual title "Mother of Mercy" for Mary and relate to Mary "in her humanity as our mother and sister in faith." My reclamation project will suggest a possible way. To me such a reclamation is

important for two reasons:

i) As Johnson points out, the history of devotion to Mary has proved that the female figure is capable of imaging God – thus every woman is made in the image of God. However, some women fear that once all the female symbolism has been redirected to God, there is a very real danger in a church so institutionally patriarchal that the symbolism will be lost. 6 Is it not our responsibility,

therefore, as members and associates of a religious congregation dedicated to Mary to ensure that some of the shrines, devotions and titles which are keeping something womanly alive, actually remain?⁷

ii) Mary should have a prominent role in the lives of Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the conclusion of the first Mass celebrated in this country on 13 January 1838, Bishop Pompallier dedicated the

whole country to Mary under the title of her Assumption. Furthermore, the Immaculate Conception is the patronal feast of the Wellington Archdiocese. As Mary Hines observes, these two dogmas are concerned with the beginning and end of Mary's life: "Her whole life was caught up in God's grace." Thus, we too can stand with Mary in God's gracious embrace here in our land.

On 8 December each year, the Archdiocese is consecrated to the Immaculate Conception. It is also the day when Catholics in Wellington pray to Mary for protection from earthquakes. The reason is that in 1855 Wellington experienced a very severe earthquake. Bishop Viard, overseas at the time, decided on his return to consecrate the city to Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception. (The dogma had been defined in 1854.⁹)

There are several significant images of Mary in the Archdiocese. The gigantic statue of Our Lady of Lourdes is impossible to miss on the Kapiti Coast. Dutch artist Martin Roestenburg made the two-metre head in his Taihape home while the body, with its four metre-wide shoulders, was made on site. The massive hollow structure with its internal staircase is one of the largest of its kind in the world. Seventeen bulbs light up the halo at night. At

the base of the statue are the words "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Further south is the cloaked statue of Our Lady of Lourdes on the hillside at Pukekaraka, *Hine Nui O Te Ao Katoa* Mary Great Mother of the Whole World. This statue dates from 8 September 1901. Mary is wearing a Māori chieftainess cloak of honour. I had my First Communion photo taken in

front of it in 1959.

Every historical

period shapes Mary

according to its own

needs and each

image of Mary tells

us as much about

ourselves as it does

about Mary.

2. The second area of confusion that needs to be addressed concerns the Mercy Shield. I do not know how and when the association of the Sisters of Mercy with the Mercedarians (the Order of Mary of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives) began and thus the tradition of the Mercy Shield which features on some of our school logos. There is no evidence in the earliest sources to suggest that Catherine McAuley herself made any connection. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that Mary Ann

Doyle, who was one of Catherine's earliest associates, had the Mercedarians in mind when she suggested that the Baggot St. building be named the "House of Mercy." However, a connection was obviously made at a later stage, evidenced in school logos in various parts of the world and their accompanying explanations, for example:

Mother Catherine McAuley, an Irish heiress, founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831. Seeing in its gold background a symbol of God's mercy and noting the similarity in the works to which the thirteenth century monks and the nineteenth century religious women were dedicated, the sisters adopted the shield as their particular standard.

Courtesy of Sisters of Mercy Archives¹¹

The Mercedarian Order was legally constituted at Barcelona in 1218 by King James of Aragon, and was approved by Pope Gregory IX in 1235. It was founded after the Virgin Mary appeared to Peter Nolasco on 1 August 1218 in Barcelona, encouraging him in his efforts to buy back Christian slaves held captive in Moslem territory and restore their human dignity as children of God. If necessary, members would offer themselves as a ransom pledge. Mary promised Peter and his

Julian: Our Lady of Mercy

followers her protection symbolised by the scapular and the mercy shield. Their feast day was instituted and celebrated on the nearest Sunday to 1 August, initially in the Order then everywhere in Spain and France. In 1696 Pope Innocent XII extended the feast throughout the entire Church and changed the date to 24 September. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII encouraged the devotion by making this feast proper to all the dioceses of England, with a focus on how Mary ransoms us from the slavery of our sins, and brings us the grace of conversion. 12

In the Derry Large Manuscript (composed mainly by Doyle [1800?-1866] although

not in her handwriting), Doyle records her role in naming the house in Baggot Street the "House of Mercy" in 1827:

> However as it was determined that the house should be opened, Miss McAuley wrote to Miss Doyle saying that as all needful preparations would soon be completed she might enter if she pleased on the 23rd or 24th of the current month which was September. Miss Doyle, though she did not then know of the feast, fixed on the 24th but in another note remarked that she should be particularly rejoiced to begin her labors on that day as it was dedicated to our Lady of Mercy, suggesting at the same time that "House of Mercy" would be a good name for the institution. Nor can we think it was without a special

providence of God that a day was chosen which in an especial manner placed the house and subsequently our holy Order under the protection of His immaculate Mother and caused them to be named from the most amiable of her attributes by which she most resembles Him whose mercies are above all His works. 13

Doyle recalls that the chapel was dedicated in 1829 by Archbishop Murray under the invocation of Our Lady of Mercy.¹⁴ Further evidence of Doyle's role in naming the House comes from Clare Augustine Moore (1808-1880). In her memoir Moore recalls:

Miss Doyle was delighted at the thoughts of beginning her work on such a feast as that of Our Lady of Mercy, and suggested that the name of the institution should refer to it, and so the House and the order got their name. 15

Mary Vincent Harnett (1811-1865) adds that on 24 September 1828 Archbishop Murray "most kindly gave permission to have the new Institute styled of our Blessed Lady of Mercy." 16 Clearly there is no mention of Our Lady of Ransom in these earliest sources. (Who these women would have understood Our Lady of Mercy to be will be

discussed later.) As Doyle recalls,

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Catherine:

... took great delight in projecting means of affording shelter to unprotected young women. She had then no expectation of the large fortune that afterwards was hers, but her benefactor had once spoken of leaving her a thousand pounds, and she thought, if she had that or even a few hundred, she would hire a couple of rooms and work for and with her protégés. The idea haunted her very dreams. Night after night, she would see herself in some very large place where a number of young women were employed as laundresses or at plain-work, while she herself would be surrounded by a crowd of ragged children which she was washing and dressing very busily. The

premises therefore were planned to contain dormitories for young women who for want of proper protection might be exposed to danger, a female poor school, and apartments for ladies who might choose, for any definite or indefinite time, to devote themselves to the service of the poor, without the restriction of vows, and remaining at liberty to visit their relatives or even to remain with them for a time in case of affliction or sickness.¹⁷

Thus, there is no suggestion that Peter Nolasco's ministry of ransoming slaves influenced Catherine's dream for the House.

Having addressed the confusion about to whom mercy rightly belongs, as well as the misunderstanding concerning Our Lady of Ransom, I shall begin the reclamation project by exploring the first of the three focusing questions:

I. Who is Our Lady of Mercy? A Developing Understanding

Mary has been and is known by countless names, one of which is Our Lady of Mercy. Every historical period shapes Mary according to its own needs and each image of Mary tells us as much about ourselves as it does about Mary.

Throughout the history of Marian devotion there have been four basic images:

- Mary as a restorer of health
- Mary as an intercessor or mediator between heaven and earth
- Mary as a social critic or prophet
- Mary as a woman (mother, comforter, nurturer, friend). 18

The title "Our Lady of Mercy" is the product of the second of these images.

Although the beginnings of the devotion to Mary are somewhat obscure, it is clear that in the second century, Mary became a figure for devotion among the Christian community. A fresco of the virgin and child painted about 150 AD in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome is the earliest artistic representation of Mary.

The earliest known prayer Sub tuum praesidium (Beneath your protection) dates from about the third century and is commonly translated. "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all danger, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin." This prayer was the first I learned when I joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1976. It has also been translated as: "Under your mercy we take refuge, Mother of God, do not reject supplications in necessity. But deliver us from danger. You alone, chaste, alone blessed." Already, then, in the very early Christian period, Mary's mercy is given concrete expression. 19

However, devotion to Mary did not really begin in earnest until the Council of Ephesus in 431 with the definition of Mary as *Theotokos*, "the one who gave birth to the one who is God." ²⁰ While the city of Ephesus in the eastern Roman empire was thriving, the western empire was in decline.

The title itself – implying the fully developed understanding of her as Mother of Mercy – was first applied to her in the sixth century. Syrian poet Jacob of Sarug (c.451-521) writes in De Transitu (on the Passing of Mary the Mother of God):

... How many terrors did not the Mother of Mercy experience when you were buried and the guards of the sepulchre turned away, so that she could not approach you! ²¹

Throughout the seven hundred years of social and economic disorder – known as the "dark ages" – the Church and Marian devotion survived but did not flourish. Its first real growth took place during the eleventh century as European culture began to revive and by the twelfth century, it was widespread. Gothic cathedrals – many dedicated to Mary – were built and schools of theology began.

Mary, Mother of Mercy, as Mediatrix

Three aspects of devotion to Mary in the Middle Ages are particularly significant: praise for the Virgin's beauty, trust in the Mother's mercy, and appeals for the Queen's protection.²² The second two are very instructive for my purpose.

Developments in Christology (how Jesus was understood) at this time produced a Jesus removed from the experience of ordinary people. With the Father, Jesus became a rather distant feudal king and judge — someone much too powerful and threatening to be approached directly. Therefore, it made sense to approach his mother, who like a tender-hearted feudal noble woman could influence her son. Hence, her role as mediatrix became very popular.

Peter Damian (d.1072), famous for his treatise on the Eucharist, taught that because Christ had come to us through Mary then we had to go through her to Christ: We ask you, most clement Mother of pity and mercy that ... we may deserve to have the help of your intercession in heaven; because, as the Son of God has deigned to descend to us through you, so we must also come to him through you.²³

From that time, Mary as the mother of Mercy began to play an ever-increasing role in medieval Catholic life, both devotionally and doctrinally. The ordinary person before God conscious of the depth of his/her sinfulness and fearful of judgment needed a mediatrix, the Mother of Mercy.

The title was probably introduced in the west by the monasteries attached to Cluny in the tenth century. There was a famous Abbot of Cluny called Odo (d.942). The author of a book about the life of Odo tells the story of a reformed robber who became a monk. The monk experienced an apparition of Mary during which Mary told him that she was the Mother of Mercy. The monk reported this to the Abbot who from that time on regularly used that title for Mary.

A very influential figure in the twelfth century was Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109). He composed three Marian prayers extolling Mary's greatness which became very popular. Referring to Mary as "mercifully powerful and powerfully merciful," Anselm contrasts his own sinfulness and misery with her purity and dignity. For Anselm, the age of courtly love was translated into a religious context with, Mary as the beautiful Lady under whose protection he, as a spiritual knight, placed himself.

Praying to Mary as More Merciful than Jesus the Judge

An English monk Eadmer (d.1124), who was the most famous of Anselm's disciples, argued that it was better to pray to Mary rather than to Christ because Christ as judge had to weigh up the pros and cons of a petitioner's case unless the petitioner were his mother. In this case he would consider her merits and respond immediately. Eadmer believed that Christ gave Mary everything she wanted so he implored:

If you, who are the Mother of God and therefore the true Mother of Mercy, deny us the effect of the mercy of him whose mother you have been made so

marvellously, what shall we do when your Son comes to judge all men with a just judgment? ²⁶

This view of Mary as the provider of salvation in situations where Christ would condemn a person became increasingly popular. Stories of Mary's miracles multiplied, spreading throughout Europe by itinerant preachers. In them, Mary becomes the Mother of Mercy writ large. Her mercy is implored by people from all walks of life: kings, bishops, knights, artists, acrobats, travellers, mothers of wayward sons, monks and nuns.

This Mother of Mercy helps in many different situations, e.g., calming storms, assisting in childbirth, protecting kidnapped children and saving the drowning. In her, medieval Christians found someone who was always on their side in the exercise of mercy.²⁷ She also became Queen of Heaven and Earth with increasing powers of protection attributed to her. From the time of Louis IX (1270), portrayals of Mary's coronation by Jesus appeared in the West.²⁸

Devotion was intense, impassioned and excessive. Mary was seen as a most reliable guarantee against all manner of evils, including even the consequences of sin and crime. Many people put their trust in her power to rescue and save them rather than living ethical lives and relying on the sacraments. Pilgrimages to her shrines were undertaken, her relics and images venerated.

The *Salve Regina*, attributed to St Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) but probably composed earlier towards the end of the eleventh century, or the beginning of the twelfth, expresses the medieval person's complete confidence in Mary as Queen and Mother of Mercy:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.²⁹ Her power and sovereignty are graphically illustrated in the Madonna of the Protective Mantle/the Mother of Mercy. Various people in need (e.g., a religious order, kings, nobles, monks, nuns, a family, a whole town) take refuge, huddling under her great cloak (like the mother hen in Matthew 23:37-39)³⁰. Reflecting the harshness, wretchedness and insecurity of the times they sought protection against war, sickness, temptation and eternal judgment. For them, especially the poor, such a protective image of Mary enabled them to make sense of the misery of their lives, to feel accompanied rather than abandoned and, above all, to hope. Devotion to the Mother of Mercy thus:

encouraged the belief that the protective force emanating from the Virgin's cloak was sustained, in part, by the prayers of the faithful. It was their spiritual insurance policy. Some Dominican nuns in Strasbourg developed an exercise of communal prayer in which, when one nun died, they began a new series of prayers to ask the Mother of Mercy to spread her cloak spiritually over the next sister to die. They settled on ninety thousand Hail Marys as the equivalent of the cloak's cost. The order of service declares: 'This is the cloak of the worthy Mother of God for the first sister who shall come to die. May Mary protect her beneath her maternal cloak from all her enemies when her life ends.'31

Mary Spreading Her Mantle

The Protective Mantle image is one of many different representations of Our Lady of Mercy.³² (As will be discussed below, Catherine herself refers to this image.) Another image is that of Our Lady of Ransom with the Mercedarian scapular in her right hand and chains in her left. To my knowledge, this image is not found in Mercy houses in Aotearoa New Zealand, even though some of our schools have the Mercedarian Shield. A third image is the one at Baggot Street of the enthroned Madonna with the Christ child on her knee, which many houses here do have.

Interestingly, the earliest images of the Madonna of Mercy are to be found on medieval seals.³³ The image of the tall figure of the Virgin

standing and holding her great cloak with outstretched arms so that figures half her size take shelter under it appears on Cistercian seals of the fourteenth century. One of the earliest – dated 1335 – is from the former Beaupré Monastery in France. On it the Virgin with Jesus in her arms, faces front. Several nuns shelter beneath her mantle. Art historians have traced this image back to early Roman coins.

The Emperor Trajan (53-117) had a gold coin struck dedicated to Jupiter whom he believed had led him to safety during a terrible earthquake in Antioch. On one side of the coin is the image of Trajan and on the reverse is the figure of Jupiter

A third image is the one at Baggot Street of the enthroned Madonna with the Christ child on her knee, which many houses here do have.

extending his mantle over a small figure representing Trajan who gazes up at the god. Coins such as this, acknowledging a Roman god as preserver, protector or defender, became extremely popular. They in turn became the models for small round seals in the Middle Ages. Similarities between such coins and the Madonna of Mercy have led art historians to conclude that the coins provided the inspiration for the seals. The Cistercians merely substituted the figure of their beloved Virgin for the Roman deity.

The coin image and the seal image both have a centrally placed tall figure under whose cloak small figures half the size of the large ones shelter. While the shape of the mantle, the way it is held and the number of those taking shelter may differ (between one and two on coins and more than three on seals), both images symbolize the protective and intercessory powers of the exalted. However, art historians have found even stronger connections between coins representing the female virtues of *Pietas* and *Concordia* and the Madonna of Mercy.

Julian: Our Lady of Mercy

Pietas is the Latin root for two qualities most commonly associated with the Virgin, piety and pity. Its inscription on the coins, as well as its personification sheltering small figures beneath her mantle, would logically have been assumed to refer to the Virgin since from earliest times Christians were encouraged to imitate this particular virtue of hers.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the chief spokesman of the Cistercian Order's devotion to Mary, wrote about the Virgin's *pietas*.³⁴ His reflection would no doubt have been familiar to the unknown monk who made the seal for his order.

The popularity of the image of the Madonna of Mercy in the late Middle Ages resulted in numerous versions being available throughout Europe. One of the last was painted in 1444 by Piero della Francesca for the Confraternity of Misericordia in his home town of Sansepolcro.³⁵

Excessive and intense fervour characteristic of the age led an impassioned Bernard to write in one of his sermons:

If you will not be submerged by tempests, do not turn away your eyes from the splendour of this star! If the storms of temptation arise, if you crash against the rocks of tribulation, look to the star, call upon Mary. If you are tossed about on the waves of pride, of ambition, of slander, of hostility, look to the star, call upon Mary. If wrath or avarice or the enticements of the flesh upset the boat of your mind, look to Mary. If you are disturbed by the immensity of your crimes ... if you begin to be swallowed up by the abyss of depression and despair, think of Mary! In dangers, in anxiety, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let her name not leave your lips nor your heart, and that you may receive the help of her prayer, do not cease to follow the example of her conduct ... If she holds you, you will not fall, if she protects you, you need not fear. 36

The Hail Mary, the most popular of all the Marian prayers, Marian litanies, e.g., the Litany of Loreto, as well as the Rosary, all developed about the same time as the *Salve Regina*.

A very influential thirteenth century sermon (wrongly attributed to Bonaventure) held that the kingdom of God was divided into two zones, mercy and justice. Mary was the Queen of Mercy while Christ was the King of Justice. Mary was then

portrayed as restraining her son's wrath raging against sinful humanity. Gradually her power over him increased until she was able to order him by her maternal authority. So great was her mercy that theologians at this time described her in the same terms as the biblical authors used to describe Christ, e.g., "of her fullness we have all received" (John 1:16). As Johnson states:

As coredemptrix, she merited salvation; as mediatrix, she obtained grace for sinners; as queen and mother of mercy, she dispensed it herself. All of this power resided in Mary as a maternal woman, who could be trusted to understand and cope with human weakness better than could a somewhat testy God the Father or a righteous Jesus Christ. In her person, she represented ultimate graciousness against divine severity. Hence, she was the recipient of sinners' basic trust and affection. ³⁷

A little later John Gerson (d. 1429), the famous mystical theologian, reiterated the idea that the kingdom of God was divided into two zones, mercy and justice. Mary was above all the Queen and Mother Mercy as she was for most Western Christians while Christ was the King of Justice.

Painting of Our Lady of Mercy at Baggot Street

At this point, something needs to be said about the Baggot Street painting of Our Lady of Mercy with which many of us are familiar. What are its origins?

The original painting probably dates from the end of the sixteenth century. The Baggot Street version is a copy of the painting of Our Lady of Mercy in St. Pudenziana's Church, recognized as one of the earliest places of Christian worship in Rome. The Church was built over a second century house (probably during the time of Pope Pius I (140–155). The exterior mosaic of Our Lady of Mercy above the door was created during restoration work in 1870.³⁸

Monsignor Tobias Kirby, while at the Irish College in Rome, had been impressed by the original painting (said to be miraculous). Thinking it would be appropriate for the Sisters of Mercy, he had a copy painted and asked Pope Leo XIII to bless it. Kirby wrote to Mother Liguori Keenan in 1890:

The Holy Father placed his hand on it, blessed it, and commissioned me to send it to your convent in his name, as a special image or painting of the entire order of the Irish Sisters of Mercy.

The painting represents a somewhat dour woman seated on her throne, wearing a crown, scepter in her hand and a sad looking son on her

knee. It cannot be traced to Catherine or her earliest associates, but nevertheless it is reflective of the theology of their time. The painting, gifted through a well-meaning cleric's kindness, came with an indulgence of 100 days for anyone who recited three "Hail Mary's" and the aspiration, "Hail of Mary, Mother of Mercy!" before it. It is one of many typical images of Our Lady of Mercy.

However, with the arrival of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II, a much more balanced approach was adopted and Mary was presented in the context of a renewing Church.

Mary During the Reformation and Enlightenment

The Reformation beginning in the sixteenth century challenged the popular understanding of Mary and tried to curb its abuses and distortions. However, Protestant criticism of the Marian cult served only to increase Catholic enthusiasm for it. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) convoked in response to the criticisms of the Reformers did not deal explicitly with Marian issues although it did curtail some of the excessive artistic endeavours, including the proliferation of the Madonna of Mercy images. In Catholic countries, devotion to Mary continued with the Rosary becoming increasingly popular aided by the efforts of the Jesuits.

A hundred years later, in the seventeenth century, devotion to Mary reached another peak especially in France:

Popular manuals of devotion multiplied among an increasingly literate population. These manuals, often filled with the most alarming and bizarre bits of pious humbug about Mary, fed the unquenchable popular thirst for Marian devotion.⁴⁰

Some people mistakenly believed that devotion to Mary alone was all that was necessary for salvation.

With the eighteenth century came the enlightenment and its focus on reason. Many traditional customs and institutions were called into question and devotion to Mary was severely curtailed. The suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 heralded a very bleak outlook since they had consistently fostered Marian devotion. Many

shrines either fell into disrepair or were abolished and the number of Marian feasts was reduced to a minimum. By the time of the French Revolution in 1789. however, the emphasis on reason had spent itself and a period of romanticism followed. Marian devotion and teaching flourished once again. This new climate favoured the mystical, and there was a great wave of enthusiasm for all things Marian. The most

important writer on Mary during the eighteenth century, Alphonsus Liguori (d.1787), produced his book, *The Glories of Mary*. It has been the most widely distributed book on Mary in modern times with over 800 editions in many languages since 1750.⁴¹

Part One focuses on Mary's mercy and intercession by examining each phrase of the *Salve Regina* while Part Two consists of sermons for Marian feasts. Liguori accepts without question the medieval understanding of the kingdom of justice ruled by Jesus and the kingdom of mercy ruled by his mother. Did Catherine McAuley read this work? It would seem likely since another of Liguori's books, *Visits to the Most Holy Sacrament*, is one of the thirteen books, which are referred to, in the earliest memoirs. ⁴³

In 1830 Mary appeared three times to Catherine Labouré, a French nun, instructing her to have a medal produced in honor of her Immaculate Conception.⁴⁴ The first medals were distributed in 1832. Did Catherine McAuley have one? While no evidence has yet been found to this effect, I find it reasonable to assume that she did.⁴⁵

The next 100 years or so would see increasing enthusiasm regarding Marian devotion, culminating in the dogma of the Assumption in 1950. 46 From 1950-1958 both popular devotion to Mary and scholarly writings about her expanded enormously.

Julian: Our Lady of Mercy

Catholics today who are older than about fifty-five are perhaps the last generation to have experienced such saturation in all things Marian. However, with the arrival of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II, a much more balanced approach was adopted and Mary was presented in the context of a renewing Church. It is from this vantage point that we have been able to look back. More importantly for my reclamation purpose, today's vantage point provides a launching pad for future exploration.

Having explored how the understanding of Our Lady of Mercy developed, what can be said about Catherine McAuley's relationship to and understanding of Mary? How did she pray to her? What did she write about her? How biblical was her understanding? What reading about Mary did she have access to? I turn now to the second question guiding this reclamation project: Who was Our Lady of Mercy for Catherine McAuley?

II. Catherine and Mary

As discussed earlier, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw an increase in devotion to Mary after it had waned during the eighteenth century enlightenment. By the mid-nineteenth century apparitions of Mary were occurring all over Europe as ordinary people thirsted for tangible signs of the divine on earth. The great age of Mary had arrived:

Mary had become a more and more autonomous figure. She was no longer seen in the Trinitarian, Christological or ecclesial contexts within which the early Christians had seen her. There was an exaggerated emphasis given to our dependence on her. 48

Catherine and the first sisters would have been influenced by this heightened devotion. Mary Clare Augustine Moore's beautiful illuminations at Baggot Street testify to this fervour.

Much has been written over the years about Catherine's overwhelming sense of God's love and mercy, as evidenced in her writings. However, in keeping with the times, Mary would have been the great mediatrix, the powerful queen and the Mother of Mercy. Indeed there was need of such a Mother! While Catherine herself was not poor, early nineteenth century Ireland was, "a land made miserable. Its poor were wretchedly poor; its sick

helplessly sick; its ignorant hopelessly ignorant."⁴⁹ In such a reality a great mediatrix, a powerful queen, and a Mother of Mercy ready to spread her cloak over all who sought her protection would have found a ready welcome.

One of Catherine's earliest associates, Mary Clare Moore, identifies "Thirty Days Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Honour of the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ" as a favourite

> It is thus obvious that Catherine has a deep and confident familiarity with Mary.

prayer of Catherine's. While it is unclear when Catherine herself began to pray it, it was first published in 1804. Catherine prayed it every day for a month each time a new foundation was made. She particularly recommended it as "a proper devotion for every day in Lent, and all the Fridays throughout the year."

Throughout the lengthy prayer filled with a medieval understanding of Mary and echoing the *Salve Regina*, Mary is described and addressed as "ever glorious and blessed Mary," "queen of virgins," "mother of mercy," the "hope and comfort of dejected and desolate souls," "mother of mercies," "amiable mother of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," the "sweet comforter and only refuge of the needy and the orphan, of the desolate and afflicted," "his blessed Mother," "most blessed virgin," "sacred Mother of God." At the heart of the prayer is a great confidence in Mary's power before her son:

...And as I am persuaded my divine Saviour doth honour thee as his beloved Mother, to whom he can refuse nothing, so let me speedily experience the efficacy of thy powerful intercession...

Furthermore, the image of the Madonna of the Protective Mantle is quite explicit:

Cast, therefore, an eye of pity on a poor child of Eve, and hear my prayer; for since in just punishment of my sins, I find myself encompassed by a multitude of evils, and oppressed with much anguish of spirit, wither can I fly for more secure shelter, O amiable mother of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! than to the wings of thy maternal protection?⁵³

Of the prayers, that Catherine herself composed, the "Blessed Mother of God's" intercession, together with that of all the saints, is sought on behalf of a dangerously ill sister. The prayer is not for a cure, but so that freed from all sin, she would enter into the joys of eternity having departed this "miserable" world. In her "Prayer before Meditation," transcribed on a blank page at the front of her copy of the book *A Journal of Meditations for Every Day in the Year, Gathered out of Diverse Authors*, Catherine seeks the intercession of "His sacred and immaculate Mother," "Guardian Angels" and "Patron Saints." 55

As well as the evidence of these prayers, it is clear that Mary was important to Catherine when we read her Rule. As Mary Sullivan's meticulous examination has shown, the adaptations Catherine made to the Presentation Rule composed in 1805, in order to craft her own Rule, were highly significant. For the purposes of this discussion concerning Catherine McAuley and Mary, the relevant sections of the Rule are Chapter 11 "Of the Office and Mental Prayer," Chapter 12 "On Fast and Abstinence," and Chapter 16 "On Devotion to Our Blessed Lady." (Chapter 3 "Of the Visitation of the Sick" will be considered later.)

Marian Devotion in the Original Rule

In Chapter 11 "Of the Office and Mental Prayer," Catherine's only prescription for prayer is the daily recitation in community of the "short Office of our Blessed Lady" and a period of mental prayer. The Keeping in mind the active lifestyle of the sisters, Catherine reduced the Presentation Rule requirements. Mary Ann Doyle records that from the day after Catherine, Elizabeth Harley and herself were professed, all the sisters recited the *Little Office* in English. Furthermore, Mary Clare Augustine Moore recalls Archbishop Murray's insistence on English always. The *Little Office*, a shorter version of the *Divine Office*, was biblically rich. Moreover, its appeal to Catherine is

demonstrated by the fact that when she was dying "she would go on reading the public lectures, and reciting the *Office* until absolutely incapable of uttering a word."

In Chapter 12 "On Fast and Abstinence," Catherine notes that, because the sisters are involved fulltime in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, they are bound only by the Church's requirements in this regard. However, there is an additional recommendation to fast and abstain on the eve of the Marian feasts of the Conception, Nativity, Presentation, Purification and Our Lady of Mercy by way of preparation for the celebration.

In the three articles of Chapter 16 "On Devotion to Our Blessed Lady, etc." Catherine has a devotion to Mary that reflects the theology of the time. Mary is protectress, advocate, powerful intercessor, mother, mistress, most pure,

Mary's prompt
response, her courage
in the face of a
difficult journey, her
willingness to help
others, her modesty,
her recollection, her
charity and, above all,
her humility, are
identified as worthy
of imitation.

immaculate and clement Virgin, Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, Most Holy and Glorious Virgin and Mother of God.

The first article encourages imitation of Mary and warm devotion to her because the congregation is under her special and powerful protection:

Devotion to Mary ever Virgin and Mother of God has always been the favorite of religious persons, and is particularly recommended in every regular institute. But as this congregation is immediately under Her special protection and as she is under God its principal [Patron] Patroness and Protectress, the Sisters shall always have the warmest and most

Julian: Our Lady of Mercy

affectionate devotion to her, regarding her in a special manner as their Mother, and the great Model they are obliged to imitate, that by Her intercession and Powerful protection, they may be enabled to fulfil the obligations of this Holy Institute and implant Jesus Christ in the hearts of the poor, whom they are charged to instruct.

In the second article, sisters are to have "unlimited confidence in her," imitate her virtues, be worthy of her maternal protection, celebrate her feasts, pray the Rosary daily in her honor, and

...the Sisters shall

always have the

warmest and

most affectionate

devotion to her...

instruct those in their care to have the "greatest respect, veneration and love for Her." (Mary Clare Moore recalls that they said the Rosary all together while walking up and down.)⁶²

The third article includes the Act of Oblation and Consecration to the Blessed Mother of God to be prayed on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy and at the time of Profession.⁶³ Here, the image

of an imposing Virgin figure with her great cloak sheltering those beneath who look up to her, is once again invoked:

Deign, Most Pure and immaculate Virgin Mother of God, to receive us all and everyone of us in particular under Thy Holy protection. We look up to Thee as our Mother, our Lady, and our Mistress, as our [Patron] Patroness and Protectress, advocate and directress, humbly entreating Thee to obtain, through the merits of thy adorable Son, the pardon of all our sins and transgressions against the Divine Majesty, and of all our negligence in Thy Holy Service.⁶⁴

Marian Devotion in Other Historical Congregational Writings

More evidence concerning Catherine's devotion to and understanding of Mary is found in the earliest and most authentic compilation of her sayings, *The Practical Sayings of Catherine McAuley*, compiled by Mary Clare Moore and published in 1868. ⁶⁵ In describing the fruits of the vow of poverty, Catherine speaks of the peace and joy which Jesus' parents displayed even though they lacked "temporal comforts."

Later Catherine lists Mary's virtues of charity, prudence, modesty and reserve and encourages sisters to reflect on how Mary practiced them. Sisters are to see her as a model to be imitated when visiting the sick and performing other duties and they are to ask for her help. Reflecting a biblical understanding of Mary, Catherine refers to Mary's response to the angel at the Annunciation, "She says no unnecessary word, asks no useless questions." It is interesting to note that Catherine emphasizes here, not Mary's *fiat* which, prior to feminist biblical scholarship was the usual point for

emphasis, but rather that Mary actually questions the angel purposefully.

Sisters are encouraged to pray the Rosary because it is a powerful means of obtaining every grace. The "Holy Mary" in particular should be said with great fervor "begging" Mary's help now and at the hour of death. Sisters are to have 'the most tender devotion'

to her not for her own sake but because she is "the blessed Mother of our Redeemer."

source of information Another about Catherine's devotion to and understanding of Mary is found in The Customs and Minor Regulations of the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy in the Parent House, Baggot Street, and its Branch Houses. This book of customs at Baggot Street, first published in 1869, undoubtedly reflects some of Catherine's own thinking and practice. Among the devotions recommended are: the praying of the Angelus, the Little Office (now to be said in Latin), the Act of Consecration to Our Blessed Lady, the Thirty Days Prayer to the Blessed Virgin, May Devotions, and the Rosary. Benediction takes place on fourteen Marian feasts and daily during both the month of Mary and the Novena preceding the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. ⁶⁹ On Saturday evenings the *Litany* of Loreto is sung followed by a short prayer to Our Lady and a hymn in her honor. (For the purpose of this paper, it is significant to note that the Magnificat was recited returning to the chapel after the evening meal. It was also recited as part of the Little Office.)

Further insights into Catherine's understanding of Mary are found in her instructions to novices. Between 1832 and 1835, Catherine *gave retreat* conferences to her novices, which were eventually

published in a book.⁷⁰ What picture of Mary emerges from the seven references to her?⁷¹

The first three references concern the vows. In the first, Catherine's source draws on a rather dubious claim that Mary herself had made a vow of poverty before realizing she was to be the mother of God. Catherine prefaces this by stating, "It is piously believed ..." By contrast, she is much more convinced when using Scripture. The humility Catherine wants for her sisters, is that which she finds in Mary's claim, "Because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid" (Luke: 48). Mary's humility is not simply a mental attitude (the opposite of arrogance) but an objective condition. In her own society, Mary was indeed poor and powerless.

Often mentioned with St Joseph and usually referred to as the "Blessed Virgin," Mary is held up as a model to be imitated in the living out of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Three virtues which characterize her: humility, resignation to God's will, and abandonment into God's hand, are identified. Humility, an inseparable companion of poverty, in particular, is stressed and sisters are to "beg" the Blessed Virgin to obtain it for them.⁷⁴

In offering advice about dealing with distractions in prayer Catherine suggests that, when praying the Hail Mary, sisters should imagine they are looking directly at the Blessed Virgin watching her answer their requests. She is convinced that "the Rosary is a most powerful means of obtaining every grace" and, as in the *Practical Sayings*, the "Holy Mary" in particular should be said with great fervor "begging" Mary's help now and at the hour of death. What stories, what joys and sorrows, Catherine's own beads now on display at Baggot Street could tell.

Another source of information about Catherine's devotion to and understanding of Mary is the 1863 manuscript of Sister Mary de Pazzi Delany who entered the Baggot Street Community in 1830. Serving as Catherine's assistant in 1840, she attended her during her final illness and death and was elected as superior of the Baggot Street Community in 1841.⁷⁷ The manuscript, "Extracts from the Instructions of the Venerated Foundress" is thus the work of a first-hand witness to Catherine's thinking. ⁷⁸In regard to Mary, de Pazzi Delany identifies her as "our blessed mother," "our

blessed lady," the "blessed Virgin Mary," the "blessed Mother of God," the "Mother of Mercy," the model to be imitated, the one to turn to in need, to have unlimited confidence in, and whose feasts are to be celebrated with joy and devotion.

The purpose of general recreation on Marian feasts days is to highlight the pleasure found in the annual return of the feasts. It is almost as if there is a countdown before the next feast. Implicit in the document is the notion that devotion to Mary is not a private affair. Sisters are to make the most of any opportunities to encourage devotion among both visitors and those whom they visit. During the month of May especially, sisters are to unite in honouring their "protectress" and have the "warmest and tenderest devotion to her." Her intercession is to be sought because the graces God gives are distributed "by the hands of the blessed Virgin Mary."

Thus, Catherine encouraged her sisters both to imitate Mary's virtues and to turn to her in their every need. The level of her trust in Mary is concretely illustrated by the statue she brought to Birr in May 1841. She placed it in the garden facing the Crotty Church to implore Mary's intercession in the healing of the schism.⁷⁹

According to Degnan's Appendix in the *Retreat Instructions*, when Catherine lived with her Conway relatives, she often came to kneel in the Liffey Street Chapel where:

Over the altar hung an original painting framed in double pillars: a woman crowned with stars, the moon and a serpent under her feet; pleased angels looking out from folds of the firmament around her and a Dove hovering over her head. It was not the traditional representation of the Virgin but an artist's concept of the Woman of the Apocalypse, her figure, her hands and feet alive; her face primal, freshly innocent and perfectly contemplative. ⁸⁰

Perhaps this painting, too, and others in St. Teresa's Church in Clarendon Street, where Catherine and the early sisters worshipped before the Baggot Street Chapel was opened, helped to shape her understanding of and devotion to Mary.⁸¹ Catherine obviously had particular tastes in art. Doyle recalls that Dr. Blake, Catherine's great friend, brought several works from Italy and gave Catherine a Madonna and Child painting for the

chapel altarpiece which "though rather small for the purpose she preferred to all the rest." It may be a work of Domenico Cassarotti (1791-1866) a somewhat obscure Italian artist. What did Catherine see in this painting, still at Baggot Street, that spoke to her?

Mary was an historical

woman who responded to

God and the events of her

life in Palestine in the first

century just as Catherine

responded to God and the

events of her life in Ireland in

the nineteenth century.

To this point I have clarified some confusions, explored how the understanding of Our Lady of developed. Mercv examined some of the prayers and writings associated with Catherine insofar as they concern Mary. As is evident from the review, Catherine had a very warm, tender and confident devotion to Mary, regarding her as a channel of God's grace and, above all, a protective and merciful mother.

There is additional evidence to be considered concerning Catherine's understanding of Mary – her biblical knowledge of Mary.

III. Catherine and the Bible

Did Catherine know the Bible?⁸⁴ Exploring this question is important because, as I suggested at the outset, a more appropriate image today of Our Lady of Mercy may be that of Mary of the Visitation – the Mary out among the homeless, the distraught and the traumatized in the drastically altered Canterbury, New Zealand landscape following the devastating earthquake. What then did Catherine know of Luke's account of Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth?⁸⁵

As Davis points out, Catherine lived in a time when lay Catholics did not read the Bible. However, she argues convincingly that "Scripture became an essential element in her establishment of a religious community designed to influence social development in Ireland and beyond." Citing numerous biblical quotations from Catherine's letters and other writings, Davis argues that Catherine was not engaging in proof-texting to support her doctrinal claims, but instead was intentionally appropriating the language and

authority of Scripture in order to direct, motivate and support her community.⁸⁶

The actual Bible that Catherine herself used has never been found.⁸⁷ In her early biographical manuscript about Catherine, Mary Vincent Harnett claims that, while Catherine was looking after the

bed-ridden Mrs. Callaghan, she often "read for her some book of moral and religious instruction." Davis accepts the common assumption that because Mrs. Callaghan was a Quaker, most of the reading would have come from her Bible.

Although we have no evidence for assuming that Catherine read the Bible as we read it today, the community meditated daily on the Scriptures using Catherine's *Journal of*

Meditations for Every Day in the Year. 90 These meditations biblically-based were composed in Latin in the seventeenth century. At least 360 of the total 420 pages concern Jesus' life and teachings.91 The meditations use both Old Testament and New Testament texts and apply them to the daily life of the reader. 92 The meditations for Monday to Thursday of the third week of Advent are all concerned with the Visitation account.93 Mary's prompt response, her courage in the face of a difficult journey, her willingness to help others, her modesty, her recollection, her charity and, above all, her humility, are identified as worthy of imitation.

As well, Catherine used two other biblically based texts: *The Following of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and a *Paraphrase on the Seven Penitential Psalms*. Catherine's favorite chapters from the former quote from, and refer to, the gospels, Deuteronomy, the psalms and the historical books.⁹⁴

As noted above, Catherine refers to Mary's question to the angel of Annunciation. In the same source, *A Little Book of Practical Sayings*, Clare Moore observes:

She did not like the Sisters to use long words in speaking or writing, remarking that in the Psalms and other parts of Holy Scripture inspired by the divine wisdom, there was scarcely a word of more than three syllables. 95

By drawing on Scripture to advocate simplicity in speaking and writing, Catherine proves her familiarity with it.

Catherine's biblical understanding would have been enriched by her daily reading in the refectory from Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, a tradition that was evident from June 1829. What would she have learned about Mary? The 1846 edition, which would probably have been identical in wording to that used by Catherine, contains lengthy reflections on the following Marian feasts: The Annunciation, the Visitation, the Purification, the Conception, the Assumption, the Rosary, and the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fach reflection includes a history of the particular devotion, its biblical roots where applicable, and a theological explanation.

It is interesting to note that there is no reflection for the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. From the three-page reflection on the Visitation, Catherine would have learned once again of Mary's humility, dignity, charity, joy, modesty, readiness to respond, courage in undertaking a dangerous journey and gratitude to God, as qualities to be imitated. In keeping with the theology of the time she would have been reminded that Mary is both a powerful intercessor and channel for God's grace. Interestingly for my purpose, she would have learned that St Francis de Sales took the name from this feast for the order of nuns he founded to visit the sick. 99

Thus, Catherine's spirituality was biblically informed and nourished. She was well acquainted with the Visitation account. Perhaps this enrichment was an influencing factor in the writing of Chapter 3 of her Rule "Of the Visitation of the Sick" to which I now turn.

IV. Catherine and the Theme of Mercy in Her Rule

As well as editing the Presentation Rule to suit her own needs, Catherine composed two chapters of her own, one of which was Chapter Three, "Of The Visitation of the Sick." The longest chapter in the Rule, it consists of eleven articles, the first three of which document the theological and spiritual foundations for visiting the sick. The remaining

eight deal with the practical implications, while giving both insight into Catherine's own spirituality as well as her knowledge and experience of what visiting the sick actually entailed. Venturing into the slums of Dublin required great courage and involved many risks. It brought Catherine into "a world in which the poor were especially vulnerable because of the overcrowded and decaying condition of their dwellings, their poor sewage disposal, and their unprotected water supplies." Although not beginning this ministry officially until 30 November 1828, 103 Catherine had much experience in visiting the sick poor in their own homes while she lived with the Callaghans on Mary Street and then at Coolock House (1803-1822).

From the outset in Article 1, Catherine is very clear that being a disciple of Jesus means being merciful as he was: "Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him." It is in this article, too, that Catherine points out that visiting the sick is not for sisters alone. The work is everyone's responsibility because "Mercy ... has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor." Catherine finds the reason for this ministry in Matthew 25:40, "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to Me." As in the gospel, Catherine identified the poor with Christ.

In this article she lists saints who had devoted their lives to "this work of Mercy": Vincent de Paul, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Ignatius, Francis Xavier, Aloysius, Angela De Merici, Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa." The Catherines and John of God do not feature at all in the Presentation Rule, yet Catherine inserts their names. As noted earlier, Catherine read aloud the lives of these saints every day in the refectory, probably from Butler's *Lives of the Saints*. Describing them as "bright examples" of women and men who devoted their lives to visiting the sick, Catherine must have seen in them qualities that were relevant for her ministry.

For example:

According to Butler's *Lives*, John of God (1495-1550), having created in Granada, Spain, a hospital for "sick persons ... whom he served ...

with an ardor, prudence, economy and vigilance that surprised the whole city," then "made strict inquiry into the wants of the poor over the whole province, relieved many in their homes, employed in a proper manner those who were able to work, and with wonderful sagacity laid himself out every way to comfort and assist all the afflicted members of Christ" (3:67-77). Similarly, Catherine of Siena (1347-80) "liberally assisted the poor, served the sick, and comforted the afflicted and prisoners." She "dressed, and served an old woman named Tocca, infected to a degree with a leprosy, that the magistrates had ordered her to be removed out of the city and separated from all others." Then, "a pestilence laying waste the country in 1374, Catherine devoted herself to serve the infected" (4:304-14). Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510), "ministering to Christ in his most distressed and suffering members ... determined to devote herself to the sick in the great hospital of the city," but "her charity could not be confined to the bounds of her own hospital: she extended her care and solitude to all lepers and other distressed sick persons over the whole city, and employed proper persons, with indefatigable industry, to discover, visit, and relieve such objects" (9:141-44). 107

Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, made changes to Catherine's Rule before it went to Rome. In Article 6, about walking to the dwellings of the sick poor, Murray added "not stopping to converse, nor saluting those whom they meet." 108 It may reflect a male mind unable to multi-task, for Catherine herself had already insisted that the sisters preserve "recollection of mind and going forward as if they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer in each poor habitation ..." Catherine's many years of experience, perhaps unlike that of the Archbishop's, would have taught her that she could have many encounters with the poor Christ before reaching her destination. These would not disturb her recollection but rather deepen it. As in Article 1, Catherine adds a biblical quote, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt 18:20), underscoring both her identification of the poor with Christ and familiarity with Scripture.

In Article 8, Murray spells out in more detail what is entailed in Catherine's directive to "relieve the distress first." He adds, "and to endeavour by every practicable means to promote the cleanliness,

ease and comfort of the patient." Again Catherine would have been writing from her own practical experience and may have thought it unnecessary to spell out what ordinary common sense dictated.

That Catherine was a woman of prayer is obvious from her insistence that sisters ground their ministry in prayer. They are to pray before setting out (Article 4) asking God's blessing on the work ahead. Catherine is aware that it is not her work but that of Christ. Later the sisters are to thank God for whatever good they have accomplished for God's glory, their own salvation and the salvation of those to whom they have ministered. Such prayer in turn will lead sisters to awareness of their own limitations (Article 11).

So far, I have explored how the understanding of Our Lady of Mercy developed and suggested how Catherine may have understood Mary from evidence in the earliest sources. While clearly Catherine's understanding of Mary reflected the theology of the early nineteenth century, the depth of her devotion is obvious. Evident, too, is her familiarity with the Bible and in particular the story of the Visitation, or, at the very least, her exposure to it. I turn now to the third question guiding this reclamation project: Who is Our Lady of Mercy today?

Imaging Our Lady of Mercy Today as Mary of the Visitation

In Matthew's Gospel we are urged to bring forth both old and new treasures from the storeroom of our faith (13:52). What from our "deposit of mercy" can we mine for an authentic devotion to Our Lady of Mercy for our time and place? Is there an image of Mary that speaks to our world today in a way that is true to our charism but reflects our 21st century reality?

As already discussed, one of the two chapters Catherine composed as additions to the Presentation Rule and which clearly identified a unique ministry was entitled "Of The Visitation of the Sick." Did Catherine have in mind here the biblical story of the Visitation? Did she see in Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth the mercy and compassion she wanted her sisters to show to those in need? Catherine advised her sisters to be recollected as they went through the streets to visit the sick "as if they expected to meet

their divine redeemer in each poor habitation."¹¹⁰ Did Catherine recall Mary's recollection on her way to visit her cousin?

As noted earlier, "recollection" was one of the qualities emphasized in the meditations on the Visitation account in the *Journal and Lives of the Saints*. The latter also suggests that Mary in this story models perfectly the functions of both Martha and Mary, the active and the contemplative life. Perhaps the Visitation story, at the very least, was an inspiration for Catherine in the writing of Chapter 3 of her Rule. Bearing all this in mind then, I suggest that by befriending Mary in the gospel account of the Visitation we can reclaim the title of Our Lady of Mercy today. I do so in the light of two supporting arguments.

Need for Another Symbol of Mary

More than ten years ago Elizabeth McMillan identified a call for a resymbolisation of Our Lady of Mercy emerging from the pastoral challenges presented by ecumenical dialogue and feminist consciousness. McMillan called for Mary to be stripped of devotional accretions in order to emerge as a real woman with her own journey of faith but whom we can still refer to as Mother of Mercy. She suggested we "imagine Mary anew, to rediscover her as the daily companion and powerful advocate of women throughout the world whose daily preoccupation is survival."

Explaining that the function of symbols is to codify the past, give meaning to our present experience and project a future full of hope, she observed that the traditional image of Our Lady of Mercy seated on her throne with her son on her knee and a scepter in her hand may not speak to us today as effectively as other images. She proposed that "any new figure of Our Lady of Mercy we may dare to depict, if it rings true, will express our collective experience as Sisters of Mercy, women consecrated to be God's mercy to the poor, the sick and the ignorant within human history." Such images would have to be true to our past, give meaning to our present experience and project a future full of hope in the midst of suffering and death. I suggest that Mary of the Visitation is such an image.

In a beautifully creative but challenging exploration, Deirdre Mullan has already examined the implications of Luke's account of the Visitation for leadership today. Using the four essential elements identified by Lorraine Caza in a "visitation" encounter: the primacy of the human person, mutuality and interdependence, openness to difference, and global awareness, Mullan examines what it means for leaders to be Visitation Travellers and asks if Mercy women throughout the world can sing a new *Magnificat* for our time. What is important for my purpose is her proposal that that we should all be like Mary of the Visitation:

If Catherine McAuley had been asked to define the identity of the Congregation she had founded, she might have said: 'I see mercy as a group of women coming together who are available to assist in meeting the needs of our world, that is, like Mary in the Visitation, again and again setting out to visit all the Elizabeths in our world in a spirit of compassionate service and gratitude.' 116

Who is Mary of the Visitation?

Exegesis of Mary of the Visitation in Luke's Gospel

While speech about Mary will always have a symbolic character, Mary is first and foremost herself. Therefore, her historical reality as a first century Jewish woman in a peasant village – the reality which lies behind all the symbolism – must be taken seriously. As Karl Rahner argues:

We, however supremely elevated our spiritual nature may be, still remain concrete historical human beings, and for this reason we cannot consider this history as something unimportant for the highest activity of our spirit, the search for God.

Mary was an historical woman who responded to God and the events of her life in Palestine in the first century just as Catherine responded to God and the events of her life in Ireland in the nineteenth century. For this reason I shall approach Mary of the Visitation by examining the opening verses of the story.

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40).

What does this verse tell us about Miriam, the first-century Jewish peasant woman undertaking a dangerous journey to visit her pregnant cousin, Elizabeth? A careful examination will lead to a deeper understanding of the particular social, political, economic and religious conditions under which the pregnant teenager lived before she got to the Baggot Street painting. This historical reality should "tether down" whatever insights we may have. 119

Archaeological excavations in Palestine since the 1980s have produced many windows through which to view the lives of ordinary Galileans such as Miriam of Nazareth. In our effort to reclaim Our Lady of Mercy for today, we need to look at the biblical text through some of these windows and catch there a glimpse of the woman in her actual historical world.¹²⁰

Miriam/Mary¹²¹...

Miriam (Hebrew for 'Mary') would have entered into an arranged marriage with Joseph the Torah-observing Jew, a worker in wood and stone and member of the artisan-peasant class. The minimum age for marriage for girls was twelve, ensuring the maximum use of her childbearing years. It was also easier for the father to guarantee his daughter's virginity – as required by law and custom.

Marriage was a two-stage process. The first stage was the betrothal – the formal exchange of the couple's consent to marry made in the presence of witnesses. Included in the betrothal was the payment of the bride price by her family to the groom. This was the form of a legal marriage, even though the young woman would have remained with her own family for about another year. Betrothal was much more than an engagement as we understand it today. The man now had legal rights over his wife; if he died during this period, she became his widow. It was during this period that Miriam became pregnant.

In the second stage of the marriage process, the wife physically transferred from her family home

into her husband's family home, becoming part of his extended family. He was now financially responsible for her. It was at this stage that they would begin to have sexual relations.

...set out...

Miriam presumably set out from her home in Nazareth, a fairly insignificant village of 300 to 400 people situated among the hills of southern Galilee. The village was only six kilometers from Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee. But the archaeological material from the early Roman period yields no evidence of private wealth and no luxury items such as perfume bottles or imported wine vessels. The evidence suggests, rather, a preoccupation with agriculture. Moreover, there were no paved roads, no public buildings, and no public inscriptions.

What sort of house did Miriam set out from? It was probably made of stone held together with a mortar of mud and smaller stones. Consisting of one or two rooms with a thatched roof, it would have been built with three or four other houses around an unroofed courtyard.

It was in the courtyard area of the compound that Miriam, together with the other women, would have prepared and cooked the food. Domestic animals would have shared this space, too. Sewage would have been thrown into the alleyways between the compounds, making it a very smelly environment. The village as a whole would have shared a threshing floor, olive press and wine press.

...at that time...

What period of history are we talking about? Miriam was alive in Galilee during the decades before and after the year later designated as 1 of the Common Era. The Romans had conquered Palestine in 63 BCE and prior to that, during the latter part of the fourth century BCE, the Greeks under Alexander the Great had invaded the Middle East. Both groups, but especially the Greeks, had a strong cultural influence on Israel. When Herod the Great died in 4 BCE the Jews revolted. The Romans responded by looting and burning villages, slaughtering people or selling them into slavery. Many women and girls would have been raped. Miriam, caring for a young child, would have

witnessed these horrific events and probably hid with other women and children as the violence swept towards Nazareth.

Women were primarily involved in providing food. Joseph probably cultivated a plot of land for basic food requirements - grain (mostly wheat but also some barley), olives and grapes. There would also be a kitchen garden near the compound, which would supply legumes, vegetables and leeks. Orchard trees provided figs, nuts and dates. Most families kept a few animals as well – sheep, goats and sometimes a few cows to provide dairy products, occasional meat, wool and skins for clothing. Women worked in the distant fields during planting and harvest times, of which there were three each year. Because women were also responsible for child care, they usually worked in the kitchen garden so they could look after both children and crops. Women also had to look after the domestic animals kept in the courtyard.

As well as preparing each meal, women were also responsible for making clothes. While men probably did the shearing, women had to card and spin the wool, weave it into cloth and then sew the garments. Women also made baskets for containers and pottery for household needs.

..and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah.

While Miriam was probably a strong robust young woman because of her physically demanding daily routine, how fast could a pregnant teenager walk? The 120-kilometer journey to En Kerem, where tradition places the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah, would have taken Miriam the better part of a week – less if she had had a donkey. The probable route from Nazareth to this small village equidistant from Jerusalem and Bethlehem would have been eastwards to the Sea of Galilee, south along the flat valley of the Jordan River, then up into the Judean hills.

What did Miriam do – besides keeping alert for any sign of danger – as she walked along? She would have been deeply steeped in all the prayers, songs and rituals of her Jewish religion and accustomed to pray morning and evening. She would have heard the Scripture readings in the synagogue over and over again and participated in

instruction. Because of the recent amazing events in her life, Miriam would have had a lot to discuss with her God and many questions to ask. Perhaps her days on the road passed very quickly.

When other travellers came towards her what did they see? Not Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* or Our Lady of Mercy but a dark-haired peasant woman with Semitic features.

She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

Finally, what language did Miriam speak? Palestine was an occupied country in a multi-lingual world. While Greek was the language spoken by educated, business and ruling classes throughout the Roman Empire, Latin was the native tongue of the Romans themselves. Miriam would have heard

It is Mary of the Visitation who I believe is an appropriate image of Our Lady of Mercy for us today.

Hebrew when she listened to the Torah scrolls being read and debated in the synagogue. She herself would have spoken Aramaic, the everyday language of the villagers.

By journeying through the first two verses of the Visitation account I have tried to provide an "off the wall" picture of Mary, i.e., a picture of some of the conditions of Mary's life before she got "on the wall" in the traditional Our Lady of Mercy painting. In this unusual scene where two women meet and become the centre of the reader's interest, Luke paints a picture of Mary the pregnant traveler, who cares about her older pregnant cousin, who goes the distance for her, who enters her house, who puts her prayer into action and above all who praises God's mercy in her *Magnificat*.

What is the *Magnificat*?¹²² Recently I heard a glorious rendition from Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*. Performed in St. Mary of the Angels Church, Wellington, to mark the 400th anniversary of the work's publication, it was prayed in honor of the Feast of the Assumption.¹²³ Above

all, the *Magnificat* is Mary's great song of praise and hope and, as Edward Schillebeeckx observes, a "toast to our God." 124 From her reading Catherine, too, would have learned of its remarkable nature: "... the most perfect model of thanksgiving and praise for the incarnation of the Son of God, and the most precious monument of the profound humility of Mary."125

Mary's prophetic proclamation is significant in that it is the longest speech attributed to any biblical woman. The two parts of the Magnificat may be understood as being about love of God and love of neighbour, or spirituality and social justice, or contemplation and action. 126 Whichever way we decide to approach it, we immediately get caught up in Mary's expression of happiness. Mary, the poor, struggling Galilean peasant woman, has been chosen by God. Mary celebrates what the "great" "saving," "mighty," and "holy" God has done for her in looking on her "lowliness." 127

In the second part, Mary sings passionately about God's mercy to oppressed people - God's victory over the proud, the powerful and the rich. The song celebrates reversals. 128 The reality of firstcentury Palestinian Jewish society called for this kind of salvation. The song is full of powerful verbs in the past tense, as if the reversal has already happened. 129 But the reversal that Mary herself, the teenager pregnant with the Messiah, experienced, is a paradigm of the reversal to come. She embodies the reversal she proclaims. The approach of the Reign of God will mean the reversal of so much: the hungry will be fed, the

Endnotes

lowly will be exalted and the powerful will be toppled, generation after generation.

Conclusion

It is Mary of the Visitation who I believe is an appropriate image of Our Lady of Mercy for us today. The image is true to our past, gives meaning to our present experience and projects a future full of hope in the midst of suffering and death. In this image we have a Mary singing of God's mercy and interpreting God's word for others. While Catherine could not have known the historical reality of Mary's life as we do today, I have reviewed the sources that show she was well acquainted with Mary of the Visitation. As in any reclamation project, however, there are endless and challenging demands ahead. For example, who do we visit? That is, whose reality, whose joys, ¹³⁰ whose sorrows, whose hopes, and whose fears do we actually enter into today? Who do we think is worth making the journey for, worth making the effort for, worth taking the time for?131

So who and where is Our Lady of Mercy today? She is Mary of the Visitation walking with and through us today. 132 Off the Baggot Street wall and in the company of Catherine she is a prophetic presence alongside us, proclaiming God's mercy. She is our sister. She is our kinswoman in faith. Mary of the Visitation, pray for us. ◆

¹ It was listed in the 1968 Columban Calendar. In 1969, 24 September was an 'Ember Day' under which was written in brackets [OL of Mercy]. The new universal calendar was published with the Missal of Paul VI in 1970, which is why the feast does not appear after that date. The assigned gospel for the feast in the Missal prior to 1970 was the Wedding Feast of Cana (John 2:1-11).

² The latter was my aim in preaching at Mass in Sacred Heart Cathedral, Thorndon, on Mercy Day 2005 to the students of St Mary's College.

See www.welcom.org.nz/?sid=1369

³ Mary Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 297.

⁴ Patricia Fox, "Mother of Mercy: Reclaiming a Title for God," Listen 14, no. 1 (1996): 4.

⁵ More recently Fox has argued very strongly for a mature theology of God. See Patricia Fox, "Women as the Image of God," in *Fire Cast on the Earth-Kindling*: Being Mercy in the Twenty-First Century (Burlingame, CA, 2007). I suggest that alongside such a theology there is also need for a mature theology of Mary. To my knowledge, none of the papers at the 'Fire' conference discussed the role of Mary in our efforts to be mercy in the twenty-first century.

⁶ Elizabeth A Johnson, Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints (New York: Continuum, 2003), 91.

⁷ As long ago as 1974 Paul VI, in *Marialis Cultus*, urged a renewal of Marian devotion and encouraged the development of new devotions based on biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological criteria. What have we done? We are far from having exhausted the opportunities contained in this document. In 2002 Pope John Paul took up his predecessor's challenge in Rosarium Virginis Mariae. He affirmed the rosary as a treasure to be rediscovered (RVM 42) and added five moments from the public ministry of Jesus (the baptism in the Jordan, the wedding at Cana, the proclamation of the Reign of God, the transfiguration and the institution of the Eucharist) as new mysteries of the rosary. Noting that the contemplative dimension and mantra-like rhythm of the rosary make it a suitable prayer practice in today's frantic pace, he writes:

At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all [hu]mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life (RVM 2).

http://www.gmahs.org/RelId/610281/ISvars/default/The Mercy Shield.htmshield

Clearly, this name reflected what was in her own heart and what she had perceived of and received from Catherine. Mercy as a naming of God or of her work does not emerge explicitly in the earlier writings of Catherine or the memories of a younger Catherine. Rather what is named and remembered from those years prior to 24 September 1827 is her courageous compassion among those in desperate need. Mary Ann Doyle's naming of their work as merciful compassion spirals into a naming of the God who accompanied them in this work of mercy.

¹⁷ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 45.

¹⁸ J Shinners, "Mary and the People: The Cult of Mary and Popular Belief," in *Mary: Woman of Nazareth*, ed. D Donnelly (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 168-77.

¹⁹I discovered recently that this prayer is recited at the end of every Mass celebrated in Māori, a custom which probably developed with the early Marist missionaries in this country.

²⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries:Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 55.

²¹ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1965), 122. Graef notes that Latin and Greek titles of the time do not use this title.

²² Elizabeth A Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. J Raitt, *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York Crossroad, 1987), 395.

²³ Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion: 208

²⁴ Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 259.

²⁵ Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion: 212.

⁸ Mary E Hines, *What Ever Happened to Mary?* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2001), 43.

⁹ It is interesting to note for the purpose of this paper, that Mary Clare Augustine Moore, an early associate and biographer of Catherine as well being an artist, was asked by the Irish bishops to illuminate, in Gaelic, the congratulatory address they wanted to send to the Pope marking the declaration of the dogma. See Sullivan, *Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy*: 195. ¹⁰Sullivan, e-mail message, July 8, 2010.

¹¹ See the website of Gwynedd Mercy Academy, PA for this information.

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¹³ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 48.

¹⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵ Ibid., 199.

¹⁶ Ibid., 159. Elaine Wainwright, "Mercy is One of God's names," *MAST* 12, no. 3 (2002): 7. interprets Doyle's naming:

²⁶ Ibid., 217.

²⁷ Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," 403

²⁸ Caroline Ebertshauser et al., *Mary: Art, Culture and Religion, through the Ages* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 181.

²⁹ Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion: 230.

³⁰ Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," 409.

³¹ Mary Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1996), 189-90.

³²Seehttp://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq/yq19
6.html.

³⁴ Ibid., 367.

³⁶ Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion: 237.

³⁷ Elizabeth A Johnson, "Mary and the Female Face of God," *Theological Studies* 50(1989): 509.

³⁸ This information was taken from the guidebook *Saint Pudenziana's Basilica* and the following websites: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Pudenziana;http://www.paradoxplace.com/Perspectives/Rome%20&%20Central%20Italy/Rome/Rome_Churches/Santa_Pudenziana/Santa_Pudenziana.htm;

http://www.mercyinternational.ie/aboutthecentre/default.cfm?loadref=50. The 1870 date of the exterior mosaic differs from that of Sisters Magdalena Frisby and Mercedes McCarthy who suggest the sixteenth century.

39 Cuppen In Search of Mary: The Woman and the

³⁹ Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol:* Plate 5.

⁴⁰ Shinners, "Mary and the People: The Cult of Mary and Popular Belief," 166.

⁴¹ O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*: 14.

⁴² See

http://www.catholictradition.org/Mary/glories1.htm for a copy of this book

⁴³ Mary Sullivan, "Catherine Mc Auley's Spiritual Reading and Prayers," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1991): 129.Sullivan notes that the list is not exhaustive and that the Discalced Carmelites in Clarendon St provided Catherine and the early sisters with much reading material. Since the Carmelites had great devotion to Mary it would be reasonable to assume that they had the book in question. To date my efforts to confirm this assumption with the Clarendon St Community have been unsuccessful.

⁴⁴ Pius IX solemnly defined Mary's Immaculate Conception as a dogma in 1854.

⁴⁵ Sullivan, e-mail message, 10 August, 2010. Note that Doyle uses the adjective 'immaculate' in her recollection of the naming of the Baggot St House: '... placed the house and subsequently our holy Order under the protection of His immaculate Mother ...'

⁴⁶ Pius XII holds the record for the most published statements about Mary, which outnumber the combined contributions of his five predecessors. In 1948 the Dominican scholar Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (the most famous of the Dominican theologians of that period who went on teach Karol Wojtyla [later Pope John Paul II] published 'The Mother of the Saviour'. Biographical information about Garrigou-Lagrange is available at http://www.latin-mass-society.org/2006/garrigou.html.

Marian scholar, the late Pat Bearsley SM, suggested to me in 1993 that Lagrange's theological exposition was probably the most modern available. Considering it to be rich in meaning for us today, Beasley had hoped to write a theological reflection on the title. Lagrange's book, available at

http://www.catholictradition.org/Mary/mother-savior.htm, is divided into three main parts and within the third, 'Her Universal Mediation and Our Interior Life', is a chapter called 'Mother of Mercy'.

⁴⁷ Elaine Wainwright describes ways being developed by scholars to read biblical texts ecologically giving an example of her process which she calls intercon/textuality using Matt 13:1-9. I am unaware of any scholars at present applying such a process to the early Mercy manuscripts such as Catherine's letters. It is, however, an important area for study. We are now more aware of our evolving universe and of our intimate connectedness to the whole of creation. In addition, there is growing appreciation of attempts to see things from the perspective of Earth, and a deepening wonder and awe before God who is the source and sustainer of all creation. Elaine Wainwright, "With Ecological Eyes: Reading a Shared Tradition," *Massah* 29, Winter (2010). ⁴⁸ Kathleen Coyle, *Mary in the Christian Tradition:*

From a Contemporary Perspective, Gracewing (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996), 61.

⁴⁹ M. Joanna Regan and Isabelle Keiss, *Tender Courage:* A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine Mc Auley, First Sister of Mercy (Chicago, Ill: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 1. The authors explain the reasons for the extremes of wealth and poverty. See also Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, *Praying with Catherine Mc Auley* (Winona, MN: St Mary's Press, 1996), 15-16.

⁵⁰ Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, *Praying in the Spirit of Catherine Mc Auley* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 50.

³³ Susan Solway, "A Numismatic Source of the Madonna of Mercy," *The Art Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (1985).

³⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

⁵² Ibid., 71-73.

⁵³ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52. This prayer is found in the *Practical Sayings*,33.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 53-54.

⁵⁶ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 294-328.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 306. In contrast to the Presentation Rule Catherine does not stipulate the time to be set aside for meditation (45 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the evening) nor the subject of their meditation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 206.It remains unclear when it began to be recited in Latin the official language of the Church.

⁶⁰ See Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion: 230-31, .for the history of this devotion. An English translation of the Little Office is available at http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/LittleOffice1. htm.

61 Elizabeth Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," in Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible, ed. Christiana De Groot and Marion Ann Taylor, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium series (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 75. Davis quotes CMcATM

⁶² Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 86.

⁶³ Ibid., 310. Sullivan notes that Catherine makes the praying of this prayer a public act rather than a private one as in the Presentation Rule.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 311.

⁶⁵ Sullivan (ibid., 358 #13) documents the story of the origin of this compilation.

66 Mary Clare Moore, ed. A Little Book of Practical Savings (London: 1868), 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁹ The Customs and Minor Regulations of the Religious called Sisters of Mercy in the Parent House, Baggot Street, and its Branch Houses (Dublin: J. M. O'Toole and Son, 1869).

⁷⁰Albany Sisters of Mercy [Mary Bertrand Degnan], ed. Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine Mc Auley by Sister Mary Teresa Purcell (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952). According to Sullivan the origin of this book is very complex. However, she considers it reliable if it is regarded as transcriptions – from pre-existing spiritual books by unknown authors - which were made under Catherine's supervision early in the 1830s (email correspondence).

The references to Mary are found on pages pp. 41, 43, 53, 102, 104, 107 and 161.

72 That Catherine quotes from this section of Luke's Gospel suggests her familiarity with the Visitation account. This point will be important in the next section of this paper.

⁷³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J Harrington, vol. 3, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book. The Liturgical Press. 1991), 42.

⁷⁴ Mary Bertrand Degnan, ed. *Retreat Instructions of* Mother Mary Catherine Mc Auley by Sister Mary Teresa Purcell, 41.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁷ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of *Mercv*: 406.

⁷⁸ Mary Sullivan kindly mailed me a copy of the relevant sections of this handwritten document.

⁷⁹ See the inscription on the statue, currently at Baggot St while on loan from the Convent of Mercy, Birr.

80 [Mary Bertrand Degnan], ed. Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine Mc Auley by Sister Mary Teresa Purcell, (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1952), 197. This passage in the Retreat Instructions was written by Degnan, the volume's editor. Mary Sullivan sent me a copy of a handwritten note by Degnan, one of Catherine's biographers. The note, beside a copy of the painting, indicates that the painting is now at the Archbishop's House, Drumcondra.

81 Formative too would have been the Marian hymns of the time. Although the traditional 'Mother of Mercy' hymn composed in 1848 by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) could not have been known by Catherine, there may have been others that she learned from the Presentation Sisters during her Novitiate.

82 Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 51.

83 Degnan, in a handwritten note attached to a copy of the painting, wonders if it is another of his 'Mother of Divine Love' paintings.

⁸⁴ The best work today is Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture." 85 Sullivan has drawn parallels between gospel stories of three women whom Jesus helped: the hemorrhaging woman, the daughter of Jairus and the widow in the Temple and Catherine's own response. See Mary Sullivan, "The Following of Jesus: Biblical Parallels in the Life of Catherine Mc Auley," Listen 21, no. 3 (2003): 10-18. I suggest an addition to the list of parallels is the story of the Visitation. Catherine's addition to the Presentation Rule (her chapter 'Of the Visitation of the Sick') offers a parallel between her visitation ministry and Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth.

⁸⁶ Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," 65.

⁷ Ibid., 73.

88 Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercv: 145.

⁸⁹ Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," 74.Sullivan says that there is no documentary evidence for this assumption and advises using primary sources only to substantiate claims (email to me 10/06 2010). The claim appears in Regan and Keiss, Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine Mc Auley,

First Sister of Mercy and in Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, Sisters of Mercy (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 1996), 7.

⁹⁰ Mary Sullivan, "The Prophetic Life and Work of Catherine Mc Auley and the First Sisters of Mercy," *MAST* 8, no. 1 (1997): 3.

⁹¹ Sullivan, "The Following of Jesus: Biblical Parallels in the Life of Catherine Mc Auley," 10.

⁹² Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," 75.

⁹³ Richard Challoner, ed. *A Journal of Meditations for Every Day in the Year: Gathered out of Divers Authors* (Dublin: Richard Coyne 1823), 49-53.

⁹⁴ Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," 76.

95 Moore, A Little Book of Practical Sayings, 28.

⁹⁶ Sullivan, "Catherine Mc Auley's Spiritual Reading and Prayers," 136.

⁹⁷Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints*, vol. X (New York: Sadlier, 1846), 19.

⁹⁸ Bernard's impassioned advice quoted earlier appears in the reflection for the feast of the Rosary.

⁹⁹ Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints*, vol. VII (New York: Sadlier, 1846), 12.

100 Davis ("Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine McAuley's Interpretation of Scripture," 73) notes that Scripture was formalised in ritual in every Mercy convent after the death of Catherine. Until 1965 the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin was said daily in Latin. Since then the Divine Office has been said in the vernacular in some Mercy convents. Furthermore, until the 1960s various psalms were recited as sisters went to and from the chapel. For the purpose of this paper it is significant to note that the Magnificat was, in some Mercy convents, recited returning to the chapel after the evening meal. It was also recited as part of the Little Office.

her Understanding of the Order of Mercy," *MAST* 3, no. 1 (1992): 15. Daly notes the exuberance and lavishness of Catherine's language in this chapter in contrast to other sections.

¹⁰² Mary Sullivan, "Catherine Mc Auley and the Care of the Sick," *MAST* 6, no. 2 (1996): 12.

¹⁰³ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 218.

¹⁰⁴ Sullivan, "Catherine Mc Auley and the Care of the Sick," 12.

¹⁰⁵ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 297.

106 Mary Sullivan, "Catherine Mc Auley and the Saints,"

1. ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 298.

¹⁰⁹ Cecily Finucane RSM used this term at a congregational meeting earlier this year.

¹¹⁰ Sullivan, Catherine Mc Auley and the Tradition of Mercy: 298.

Butler, The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints, VII: 12.

¹¹² Elizabeth McMillan, "Invitation to Resymbolize Our Lady of Mercy," *MAST* 8, no. 1 (1997).

¹¹³ Ibid., 54.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

115 Deirdre Mullan, *Leadership: A Visitation Journey* (Derry, Northern Ireland: RCD Print, Ltd, 2005). The late Sister Aloysius McVeigh's painting of the Visitation provides a beautiful front cover for the book.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁷ Johnson, Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints: 100.

A Squoted in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister:* A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints (New York: Continuum, 2003), 101.

Johnson, Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints: 101.

120 Davis, "Wisdom and Mercy Meet: Catherine Mc Auley's Interpretation of Scripture," 71 points out that the *Catechism of Scripture History* written by Mary Vincent Harnett in 1852 for use in schools included questions about the geography, climate and commerce of Palestine. It is also interesting to note that the reflection on the feast of the Visitation from Butler's *Lives of the Saints* (to be discussed later) includes a little

geographical information.

121 Interpretation theorists today speak of three different 'worlds': the world **behind** the text (the historical world of the author [the subject of historical approaches]); the world **of** the text (the world that exists within the artistic expression itself [the subject of many literary approaches]); and the world **in front of** the text (the new world of meaning made possible by interpretation. For the discussion of the world behind the text which follows I am indebted to Johnson, *Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints:* 137-206. The 2006 film, 'The Nativity Story' featuring New Zealand actress Keisha Castle-Hughes, depicts some aspects of this 'world'.

122 The discussion of the 'world behind the text' has ended and a short discussion of the 'world of the text' follows.

During a Eucharist to celebrate 160 years of Catholic education on the site of St Mary's College, Wellington, New Zealand, the presider invited the Cathedral congregation (mainly women) to proclaim together at the appropriate time, part of the Gospel, the *Magnificat*. I found the experience – normally forbidden for women – incredibly moving and prayerful. While the ground in Christchurch was moving literally in the aftershocks following the early morning 7.1 earthquake, the ground in Wellington was moving liturgically.

Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 270. The last four pages of the New Zealand Bishops' 1988 pastoral letter on Mary, 'And the Mother of Jesus Was There', are devoted to a reflection on the meaning of the *Magnificat* in Aotearoa New Zealand. The oppressed are identified as those who are so because of unemployment, illness, racism, sexual orientation, addiction and ill fortune. Among the rich are those who have misused the resources of nature. The pastoral is strong in its condemnation of past popular devotion which has often seen God in terms of justice and power, and has transferred the more gentle and compassionate virtues to Mary:

This [transference] is a mistake. Mary must not be seen in contrast to God, as if God were the severe, strict and just father, and she the tender, merciful and loving mother. Mary's love should lead us to a deeper appreciation of God's love, which is infinitely greater. As the Lord says: 'Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the child of her womb? Yet even if she should forget, I will never forget you' (Isaiah 49: 15).

Thus, God can be imaged as other than male. However, while acknowledging that God is neither male nor female and that thinking of God in solely male terms and images obscures the full richness of God's nature and the relationship God has with us, the pastoral unfortunately states: 'Mary helps us to appreciate the 'feminine' side of the divine nature. She reveals the maternal face of God.'!

¹²⁵Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints*, VII: 14.

¹²⁶ Johnson, Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints: 264.

by Daniel J Harrington. Vol. 3, Sacra Pagina [Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1991], 42) explains that this term refers both to Mary'scondition of poverty and powerlessness in

her society as well as to the opposite of the 'arrogance' opposed by God.

¹²⁸ Barbara Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke.* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 77.

¹²⁹ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2000), 26.

Jim McManus, All Generations Will Call Me Blessed: Mary at the millennium (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 120. Tina Beattie suggests here that the real purpose of Mary's visit was to share the great joy of what God was doing in both of them.

Such questions comprise the world **in front of** the text', i.e., the world of possibility that opens up when we enter the Visitation story and allow ourselves to be transformed by the very process of interaction with it. Sullivan ("Catherine McAuley and the Care of the Sick," MAST 6, no. 2 [1996]: 21) lists numerous very challenging questions arising from her assessment of the heart of Catherine's visitation ministry: 'The question for Catherine McAuley and for those who follow her really comes down to this: To what extent do we plan to avoid virulent scurvy and typhus, or their modern equivalents?'

132 Elizabeth Frink's 'Walking Madonna' in the grounds of Salisbury Cathedral captures aspects of this movement somewhat

See

http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/gallery.php?id=21
Francis Young writes that Mary is 'striding forth to bring
Christ into the world – not as the teenage Virgin,
pregnant with the new humanity, but an older Mary,
stripped down, thin and ascetic, stomach hollow, face
pinched and haggard with suffering – one who has been
through the experience of the Pieta and held the dead
body of her son across her knee, but now is determined
and invigorated with resurrection life – "walking with
purposeful compassion as a member of the community
of the Risen Christ, to bring love where love is absent".'

http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/services.reflections.previous.php?id=1





An Homage to David Lance Goines

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., Editor of *The MAST Journal*, Attorney at Law

How did I come to know David Lance Goines? His work, "Justice Tempered with Mercy" came in the form of a 5"x7" post-card to lawyers on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of McManis, Faulkner and Morgan, announcing the law-firm's move to a new location in downtown San Jose in 2003. It showed a blind-folded, mid-life Lady Justice, modestly robed, roses in her hair. Light yellow background, light blue robe. She was delicately lifting, with her thumb and index finger, the traditional scale of justice. But the scale was unusual in that it was horizontally balanced, equally weighted on the right and left plates. Each side supported a luxurious garland of flowers, in perfect equilibrium of justice and mercy. The style attracted me—a cross of art deco, Toulouse Lautrec, and stained glass--a graphic with simple lines, simultaneously classic and modern, a dignified feel, but communicating both emotion and conviction about what "the law" and "the justice system" were about—or should be.

For a decade, I kept that postcard on my desk. Law is not always balanced and lawyers are not always truthful in practice. Not all lawyers behave as though "mercy and justice" is the ideal. But here was one artist's image of the ideal that I could identify with.

Then late in 2013, wanting something beautiful for the website we were designing for *The MAST Journal*, I looked around for examples of ships. Not finding anything that was really suitable, I decided to contact the artist who had produced the Lady Justice image. For the first time, I looked closely on the back of the postcard for the acknowledgment: "David Lance Goines. *Justice Tempered With Mercy*, 1996. Permanent Collection. National Museum of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C."

I contacted Mr. Goines through his web-site, explained that I was a Sister of Mercy, that I had studied theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley years before, without ever knowing he also worked in the environs, what MAST Journal was, and the concept I was seeking, "your ship coming in," as the feeling for what I wanted to convey.

Mr. Goines and I never actually met or spoke. He preferred contact by e-mail. After scrolling through the works on his web-site, I felt respect for him as a monk-artist, a contemplative whose need for his own space I could understand. Religious life also requires interiority, silence and a prayerful protection for both. I felt he was a brother in spirit.

What I received after a couple of very simple e-mail exchanges was his reply—a linocut of a ship coming in, adapted from the background of a poster he had created, "Annunciation." For MAST's use of the linocut, there would be "no charge." I was moved and grateful.

So I began a fresh reflection. What was the relation of a "ship coming in" to the meaning of "Annunciation"? I looked up "Annunciation" on his web-site. A young woman sits—or does she stand-- by an open window that overlooks the ocean. We see only the profile of her face to slightly below her waist, not her full figure. Her dress seems to evoke the Renaissance, but her head-covering, more a cap, not a veil, feels Quaker. Her neckline is bare, adorned with a simple necklace with pendant. In the distance, across the calm water, a multi-masted, multi-sailed frigate sails in her direction. The ship could be 17th or 18th century. She holds a lily very delicately and formally. Her hand gesture reminds the viewer of a Byzantine icon. The lily could be from a 19th century stained glass window designed by Tiffany. There is thus a timelessness, a no-time, an eternal moment suggested by the image of the woman. Is she at prayer? What is she gazing at?





She is not looking at the ship, but away from it. The ship moves in her direction, into her presence. There is no angel. Why no angel if this is Annunciation?

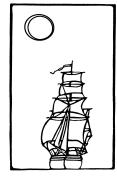
Below the image of the woman in the window, we read a Latin inscription that begins, "Ave, gratia plena..." It is the Vulgate of Luke1: 28-31. We hear, by reading, Luke's account of the Annunciation moment. It evokes the prayer of believers, "Hail, Mary." The unseen angel's words acknowledge Mary and describe what will happen. She is afraid, then assured. What happened to this woman was good for us all. The angel is there, but as an unseen presence. Very good theology after all.

There is another departure from conventional representations of the Annunciation. Here there is no dove descending, no Holy Spirit. So where is the fluttering dove? The mood of "Annunciation" is tranquil. It's a beautiful day. The woman's halo could be the sun shining, high in the sky. It's noon, the fullest light of day. Some who recognize the ship must be celebrating the sight, and exclaiming, "Your ship has come in. What a great day for you!" The ship's sails are ruffling in the breeze, a sure sign that the vessel is moving along and coming to shore soon. Does the ship arriving represent the Holy Spirit?

What comes into view is unbelievably good news. Despite the risks undertaken on the other side of the world, our ship has come in. It is sailing into the harbor. All is safe. We feel assured, fearful no longer. What happiness. It is a day of peace, a day of relief, a day of good fortune. Annunciation is a greeting: Ave, hail, hello, welcome, how good to see you! At last, you are here. What we waited for has finally come into view, borne by the wind of the Spirit, come over the horizon, from a place unseen onto our side of the world at last. We looked, we waited, we kept vigil. We were nearly worn out waiting. We expected it. There was a promise and a hope the ship would arrive. And now it has finally come true.

Your ship has come in. Annunciation is the realization that I have been saved, that good fortune has come to all of us who waited for this arrival. Surely, this is what happens when the divine Spirit is present. What a glorious and happy day. If this is not salvation defined by theologians, it's what salvation feels like to ordinary human beings.

MAST Journal, I would hope, is also a kind of Annunciation. The organization Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, founded in 1986, stated that its mission was the support of theological scholarship and reflection by Mercy women, in service to the Church, and in service to our Institute. Its publishing expression in *The MAST Journal* announces to the readership of church and society what women think, what inspires their religious dedication, what motivates their good works, how they read and reflect on scripture, how they articulate theology with a woman's voice and how they minister tirelessly, to their last breath, to those in need.



David Lance Goines



Discussion Questions

(Christensen) Jeanne Christensen describes the mission of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the U.S.A. (LCWR) as a "faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy in an effort to eradicate modern-day slavery." How would you explain Mercy's "faith-based" commitment behind our anti-trafficking efforts? What scriptural passages, for example, would you cite as our motivation?

(**Dobrovolny**) Given the history of the Mercy foundations in and after the time of Catherine McAuley, where do you locate the history of the Mercy branch community where you entered? What are the present connections your community of entrance maintains with Baggot Street? Do you have personal experiences to share from visiting our International Center?

(Evans) One of the reports in Evans' compilation, by Colleen Wilkinson, R.S.M., describes children at McAuley House in Johannesburg demonstrating against violence done to women and children. Of the means to protest, resist and change the climate, what do you think would have the greatest effect on protecting women and children? a) Stronger penalties for abusers; b) more sympathetic response of the police and justice system to victims; c) raising public awareness by a registry of sex offenders, d) court-mandated education to change the behavior of abusers; e) some other means.

(**Julian**) The author refers to Elizabeth McMillan, R.S.M., who "called for Mary to be stripped of devotional accretions in order to emerge as a real woman with her own journey of faith but whom we can still refer to as Mother of Mercy"...and that we "imagine Mary anew and rediscover her as the daily companion and powerful advocate of women throughout the world whose daily preoccupation is survival." As you consider the various historical devotional images that Julian reviews, are there any that still have resonance—Titles from the Litany? Ways of addressing Mary in early Mercy prayers? Mary spreading her mantle over people? Mary crowned, sitting on a throne, holding a scepter with Jesus on her knee? Has Elizabeth Julian made an effective case for considering Mary of the Visitation as an expression of what "Mother of Mercy" means today?

(**Lacey**) "God speaks to us in dreams and daily events and ordinary people...We wake up to the presence of the Holy One, here and now and everywhere. We sit up and take notice; God is here! God is promising to be *with me* always." Share an experience you have had of recognizing in an ordinary situation, or a daily exchange with someone, that God is present to you. Or that you recognized this in your later reflection on that event.

(Ross) Joyce Ross says that she and Sister Joan Barina, MMS, were responsible for the decisions needed to be made in the parish in Kenai, Alaska. "I did a lot of funerals, baptisms and communion services...On Sundays we had Liturgy of the Word with communion. I gave a lot of homilies." She reports that the parish community, despite the absence of a resident priest, pulled together as church. If this priest-less situation became common in parishes in cities where you live, what would happen?







Contributors

Jeanne Christensen, R.S.M. (West Midwest) has a B.A. in Sociology from the College of St. Mary in Omaha, Nebraska, an M.A. in Educational Media from Northern Colorado University in Greeley, CO, and an M.S.W. from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She presently serves as the Justice Advocate for Human Trafficking for the West Midwest Community. Residing in Kansas City, she serves on the U.S. District Attorney Western Missouri's Kansas City Coalition Against Human Trafficking, the Mercy International Association's work group on human trafficking, and the U.S. Catholic Sisters against Human Trafficking coalition. Prior to becoming an advocate on human trafficking, Jeanne was justice coordinator for the WMW community for 5 years. Earlier ministry included her role as Director of the Peace and Justice Office in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, M), as well as Victims' Advocate for the Diocese. In Kansas City, Jeanne has been a Friend of Amethyst Place, a women's transitional housing and services program, since its inception in 2000. During the period of re-configuration of the 25 regional communities in the Institute, she was WMW Project Coordinator.

Mary Kay Dobrovolny, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds a Ph,D. in New Testament and Early Christian Origins from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and an M.A. in Biblical Studies from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. Native of Nebraska, Mary Kay has, since 2009, lived in Dublin, Ireland, ministering as assistant director of spirituality and heritage for Mercy International Association. Prior ministries include assistant professor of theology at College of Saint Mary (Omaha, Nebraska), and community developer for Mercy Housing, Inc. (Denver, Colorado). She has published numerous articles and dictionary entries in The Bible Today, Mercy E-News, New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Review for Religious, Viva Mercy!, and Vocations & Prayer.

Jean Evans, R.S.M. (West Midwest), has an M.A. from the University of San Francisco in Applied Spirituality and holds a D.Th. in Theology with a specialization in Christian Spirituality from the University of South Africa She has additional training in retreat work from Guelph in Canada. She entered the Burlingame community in 1964, where her ministry was high school teaching. From 1984 to 2012, she served with the Mercy community in South Africa where religious orders worked together, particularly around the issue of "open schools" for all races. She worked with Sisters at Winterveldt, a re-settlement area for non-Tswanas who were discriminated against by the homeland government of Bophuthatswana. She also ministered at the mission in Mmakau with a high school, primary school, adult education center and a clinic. She was involved in the work of the Winterveldt Action Committee, a member body of the Pretoria Council of Churches, advocating for pensioners rights, adult education, sewing projects, and training of health workers. From 1988-1997, she was stationed in Soweto teaching high school. From 1999-2011, she was principal/site manager of a community center and vocational training center back in Mmakau, where she trained young and older adults for jobs and income generating projects. She was Executive Secretary of the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa 2005-2010. She did some adjunct teaching at St. John Vianney Seminary and St. Augustine College. She returned to the U.S. in 2012. In late 2012, she received a Pastoral Study grant from the Louisville Institute to analyze the interface between the practice of spiritual direction with phenomenology, client-centered therapy and philosophy. "Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction" was published in the Journal of Religion and Health, in an eversion on Jan. 28, 2014.

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Elizabeth Julian, R.S.M. (Aetearoa New Zealand) holds a D.Min. from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois (U.S.A.). Her B.A. and B. Ed. are from Massey University, Palmerston North ANZ and her M.Ed. from Boston College in Massachusetts (U.S.A.). She presently works within The Catholic Institute of Aotearoa New Zealand as a lecturer and coordinator of Distance Education. Her previous ministry focused on preparing teachers for careers in Catholic schools and adult education. Her research has included the relationship among biblical texts, Mercy spirituality and the tribal rituals of indigenous peoples of New Zealand. She is a regular homilist at congregational events and has been a presenter at Bishops' conferences. She has published several articles previously in *The MAST Journal*, including "The Relationship of Ruth and Naomi in the Book of Ruth," Vol. 9.3 (1999) and "Baptised into Christ: From Paul to Women Today," Vol. 19.2 (2010). Her most recent publication is "From Nowhere to Somewhere: A Combined Response to Shelter Homeless Women in Wellington" in N. Darragh (ed.) *But Is It Fair? Faith Communities and Social Justice*, (Auckland: Accent Publications): 209-216.

Marilyn Lacey, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds an M.S.W. from University of California Berkeley, and has been awarded three honorary doctorates. Her earlier ministry in the Burlingame community was high school teaching in California. She then had several years as Director of Refugee Services at Catholic Charities in San Jose, CA. Passionate about making the world a more welcoming place for refugees and migrants, she then went on to direct service to displaced persons for over 30 years in southeast Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Marilyn was personally honored by the Dalai Lama in 2001 as an "Unsung Hero of Compassion" for her life's work. Marilyn wrote a memoir, *This Flowing Toward Me: A Story of God Arriving in Strangers* (Ave Maria Press, 2009). She is founder and Executive Director of *Mercy Beyond Borders*, a nonprofit organization that supports educational projects and support for displaced women and girls in South Sudan and also projects in Haiti to alleviate the extreme poverty of women and children.

Joyce Ross, R.S.M. (Northeast) entered the Albany, New York community in 1950. She holds a B.A. from St. Rose College and M.Ed. from N.Y. State University at Albany. She taught grade school and was principal of an elementary school in Gloversville, N.Y. In 1972, she volunteered for the community's mission in Alaska. For seven years, she did parish work in Anchorage. In 1979, the bishop asked her to work on the Kenai peninsula, where she and Sister Joan Barina, a Medical Mission Sister, coordinated religious education at six Kenai parishes. In 1989, when Our Lady of the Angels parish in Kenai lost its pastor, she and Sister Joan took over administration of the parish for the next 20 years. They conducted communion services and preached between infrequently celebrated Masses, conducted funeral services, coordinated laity's activities, and facilitated parish ministries, such as architectural renovation, adult education and a food pantry. She and Sister Joan Barina, M.M.S. published *Our Journey with the Real Church: Faith in the Last Frontier* (Lulu, 2012). Currently, she is retired, living in Albany, and a volunteer at St. Peter's Hospital, and she distributes communion to homebound parishioners of Blessed Sacrament parish.







MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, 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. Aline Paris, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. MAST will hold its next Annual Meeting at St. Raphaela Center, Haverford, PA, June 14-15, 2014. Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Aline Paris, R.S.M. by e-mail at aparis@csm.edu or by mail at College of St. Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE, 68016.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Marilyn King, R.S.M., The Laura, 1995 Sam Browning Road, Lebanon, KY, 40033-9162.

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, over the years, taken on responsibility 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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