



The MAST Journal

Many Gifts-One Spirit

Business and Financial Administration <i>Laura Reicks, R.S.M.</i>	4
Mercy Haven, Ministry of Hospitality <i>Patricia Griffith, R.S.M.</i>	8
Mamre: Place of Promise and Hospitality for Unemployed in Western Sydney <i>Mary-Louise Petro, R.S.M.</i>	14
Musings of a Mime <i>Gloria Heese, R.S.M.</i>	19
The Ministry of Pastoral Psychotherapy <i>Fran Repka, R.S.M.</i>	24
Scripture Reflections at Jubilee <i>Jean Evans, R.S.M.</i>	31
Mercy Works in Australia: The Poor Need Help Now, Not Next Week <i>Ailsa Mackinnon, R.S.M.</i>	33
Mercy Farm in Vermont <i>Mary Quinn, R.S.M.</i>	37
Free-Lance Musician <i>Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M.</i>	42
Sharing Our Vision: Papatuanuku ki Taurangi -Earth Promise <i>Rosemary Revell, R.S.M.</i>	46
Invitation to Writers of Many Gifts-One Spirit	50



Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

Every issue of *MAST Journal* has a particular story about its origin or its production, or some transition that was the “adventure” behind the text. Some day, I should do what Theresa of Avila did in her book *Foundations*, in which she told the story of each house of the Carmelite reform she founded throughout Spain. One adventure, repeated more than once, was how she took advantage of a law that if neighbors wanted to prevent prospective residents moving in, they had to do it before the residents actually crossed the threshold. Once the new residents had physically entered

the house, and gotten their furniture and possessions inside, the householders next door couldn’t get them evicted as undesirable neighbors. Thus, Theresa sometimes moved a group of nuns into a house at night so the neighbors wouldn’t find out until morning that a community of enclosed Carmelites were now living in the neighborhood. Theresa the foundress then made a discreet get-away, and on to the next foundation.

For issues of *MAST Journal*, I’m not sure there are moments as dramatic as this. While the gathering of contributors follows a rhythm of invitation and production, there are nonetheless unique circumstances for each issue.

Maybe I should start with the present issue, “Many Gifts, One Spirit.” Here is how it began: I was having a phone conversation with Sister Laura Reicks, newly elected President of the West Midwest community some months ago. I had only a vague sense of her background in “finance.” Somewhere in the exchange, I empathized with her that it must have been a challenge to have served in a ministry that was not the typical path of teaching or healthcare. Where did she find her support? I am sometimes an annoying conversation partner in that I will ask, purely out of intuition, if someone is a writer. I did ask Sister Laura. She admitted she had done some writing, and made a comment, “But I’m not a theologian.” That phrase struck me as a perfect theme to invite non-theologians to write about their un-typical ministries, and what inspired them to serve in the way they did. I proposed to her that she could write for an issue titled for writers like herself, “But I’m Not a Theologian.” Laura Reicks, R.S.M. subsequently contributed the account of her untypical, but essential, behind-the-scenes ministry, “Business and Financial Administration.”

When I presented this theme of “But I’m not a theologian” to my editorial board at our annual *MAST* meeting, they did their job of modification, refinement, collaboration and direction-setting. They re-stated the theme so it had a respectable biblical reference, evoking St. Paul’s letter of First Corinthians 12:4-11: “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.”

Paul goes on to list the spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation. He then contextualizes his exhortation: individuals have different gifts just as the body has many parts.

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.”

Paul undercuts the idea of domination, hierarchy, self-aggrandizement and subjugation of those “lower” parts to “higher” parts. In other words, the various works, ministries and jobs held by Mercy Sisters, and the personal gifts needed to carry them out—each person has an essential part to play in keeping the whole body alive and well. Together, all these works, when carried out faithfully, sustain the ministerial energy and charism of the community.

Paul’s vision of the Body of Christ, in which we all live, is one of inclusion, service, and the sharing of gifts. This dynamic is essential to the life and presence of the person of Christ in the world. The members don’t count their gifts as “better” or “less important” than others; rather, the focus is on the life-giving contribution each part of the body makes to the life of the community as a whole, and to the relief of human misery in the name of Jesus.

In keeping with St. Paul’s vision of diversity of gifts, but union within one body, we offer this issue. Our contributors may not be formally trained theologians, but they do understand the variety of their ministries of service to the people of God as an unfolding of their vocations, as expressions of the charism of Catherine McAuley and as fidelity to direction statements and congregational stances.

We are grateful to Julie Upton, R.S.M., our subscriptions manager, for serving as *MAST Journal’s* roving solicitor of writers while she was on speaking tours in Australia and New Zealand. Readers can thank Julie for encouraging three significant contributions. Ailsa Mackinnon, R.S.M., in “Mercy Works in Australia,” describes her direction of a multi-dimensional, impressive set of programs for training teachers, helping indigenous people gain employment skills, and advocating for refugees. Mary Louise Petro R.S.M.’s “Mamre: Place of Promise and Hospitality for Unemployed in Western Sydney,” reflects on the power of a biblical image to create a home and garden for refugees, women and children, and the desperate—and how, after 30 years, there will be a transition from Mercy to diocesan sponsorship. Rosemary Revell, R.S.M.’s “Sharing Our Vision: *Papatuanuku ki Taurangi*—Earth Promise” illustrates the commitment of women religious in Auckland, New Zealand, to identify with the way indigenous peoples cherish the earth by tending a garden. Her center fosters stewardship, hospitality, education, and sustainable agricultural practices.

One unusual characteristic of this issue is the level of personal disclosure-- the autobiographical account-- of how each writer came to the realization of how to use her gifts in service to others. There were a set of “prompts” the editor provided to writers, to invite personal reflection on their “non-typical ministry, and how it evolved. Each writer has a different story, typically a perspective on her ministry that grew over decades of change in society and in the church, in which some writers recounted life before and after Vatican II.

Patricia Griffith, R.S.M. in “Mercy Haven: Ministry of Hospitality” tells her vocation story, and the challenges she faced in moving from parish ministry to providing housing for 300 persons living with mental illness and a \$7 million budget. Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M., in “Free-Lance Musician,” traces her early awareness of her musical talent; as it developed, she moved gradually

from diocesan and parish-centered work to performing as a free-lance liturgical musician for Catholic, Protestant and Jewish worship services. Gloria Heese, R.S.M., in “Musings of a Mime,” describes her spiritual journey, and how years ago she began to mime, clown and lead movement prayer on an ad hoc basis; then, gradually, that very unique dramatic talent became more and more the expression of her ministry to religious groups, structured through own company, called Mime-Ink.

Fran Repka, R.S.M., in “The Ministry of Pastoral Psychotherapy,” traces her development as a psychologist working in collaboration with other professionals in the diocese of Cincinnati, Ohio, where she served other religious; then a turning point in 1991 when she opened Mercy Counseling Center for low-income individuals and families dealing with mental illness; how she now directs an inter-faith staff, who share a commitment to “a patient hearing of sorrows.”

There is certainly a “return to the garden” theme in several of our contributors. Mary Quinn, R.S.M. writes the story of her transition from an x-ray technician to gardener in “Mercy Farm in Vermont.” With two other Mercies on the team, Mary coordinates a commitment to sustainable living through gardening, bee-keeping, guinea fowl-tending, contribution of produce to the local food bank, education of visitors in ecology and hospitality for retreat space. Finally, Jean Evans, R.S.M., gave an inspiring Jubilee homily last summer that is celebratory of many Mercy women, whose gifts, exercised individually and together, communicate the spirit of Catherine McAuley.

I hope that you will feel inspired by the candor, freedom, confidence and generosity of these contributors. Perhaps, like them, you will experience that energizing movement of the Spirit in you, that St. Paul describes, and treasure the fact that you and Sisters you know have received many gifts from the one Spirit. Perhaps, like these contributors, you will want to share your own unique story of the unfolding of a talent, whether known early, or discovered later in life. The set of prompts given to these writers, provided at the end of this issue, may be useful to you the reader, even—and especially—if you are not a theologian.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

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

Business and Financial Administration

Laura Reicks, R.S.M.

With the crook of a finger, Sister Mary Cephas Wichman, president of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids in the early 1980's, called me to her office and asked if I would consider taking on the responsibilities of the Treasurer of the congregation. I had only been teaching in elementary schools for four years, and loved the teaching ministry. However, the area of finance intrigued me, so I agreed. I started taking accounting classes immediately while still teaching so that when I moved back to Cedar Rapids I had some educational foundation for my future ministry. But not much! While working in the finance office with one other person, I pursued my Masters in Business Administration (M.B.A.) and the combination gave me an extensive repertoire of practical, on-the-job training.

Catherine Knew the Mission Needs a Financial Base

Over the years, I've frequently asked myself if working in the area of financial administration is a ministry or a career. I find helpful answers to that question in the words and actions of Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. She recognized that without money, she couldn't do the ministry of serving the poor, sick, and uneducated that was foundational to the congregation. She was very conscientious about Foundation Funds, as she knew it was important to send money with the Sisters to establish new foundations. When she sent Sisters to Birr, she lamented, "The Sisters going to Birr must be truly spiritual souls, confiding entirely on Divine Providence as there is no Foundation Fund." The Sisters struggled financially, but the Foundation survived. Catherine also encouraged her Sisters to be good

stewards with the advice, "While we place all our confidence in God, we must always act as if success depended on our own exertions."

Catherine McAuley recognized the importance of having resources available to support the needs of the congregation. She appointed Sisters as overseers of the funds at each foundation. The responsibility of Treasurer continues today, and contributes to the well-being of the congregation. One of the opportunities that the ministry of financial administration offers is that of assisting in planning, so the visions of the congregation can be realized. Through my many years of working with finances, I have developed a critical principle for decision-making: Finances should not be the driver for making congregational decisions, but just one of the considerations.

National Perspective on the Financial Needs of Religious Congregations

My ministry in financial administration next led me to the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) as Associate Director. My primary responsibility was administering the grants programs to religious congregations of women and men across the country. The stories that the congregations told when requesting financial assistance reassured me that this was a ministry for the good of the people served by religious institutes. When we strengthened religious institutes financially, they were able to focus on their mission and

ministry. We worked with congregations that were dealing with an array of problems, such as fire-damage, inadequately maintained buildings, lack of funds to care for members, and failure in the past to have bought into Social Security coverage for members. It was clear that planning

The stories that the congregations told when requesting financial assistance reassured me that this was a ministry for the good of the people served by religious institutes. When we strengthened religious institutes financially, they were able to focus on their mission and ministry.

and forecasting needed to be implemented to successfully address these and other financial issues.

The Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR), the National Association for Treasurers of Religious Institutes (NATRI) and NRRO worked together on the *Collaborative Viability Project* to address issues around the viability of religious institutes. Through much on-site research and consultation, seven factors were identified for a community to be viable into the future:

- centrality of mission
- membership with a significant pool for future leadership
- relationships
- new membership
- resources
- efforts for planning
- risk-taking

When working with religious institutes we looked for a critical mass of members who could carry on the mission of the institute. This had to include potential leaders to serve for multiple successive terms. Emphasis was placed on long-range, strategic planning that involved members and leaders in addressing key issues of the congregation. For many religious institutes, care of members required significant time and resources.

Decisions about how and where care would be provided impact the members on multiple levels. Members who are included in the decision-making tend to be more supportive of the direction the congregation takes. Through this program we worked with many religious institutes to strengthen their move into the future, or conversely, to help them to move toward some form of re-configuration.

We found two key learnings from this effort. First, the number one factor in the viability of a religious institute is a strong leadership pool going into the future. The second learning is that finances should not be a first consideration when dreaming for the future, but may put parameters

around the scope of new endeavors.

Socially Responsible Investing

Another area of financial administration that requires significant attention is our philosophy around investing. Anne Munley, IHM, in the LCWR publication *Threads from the Loom*, says that, based on research, it takes approximately twenty years to make a lasting impact, to really effect change. About 35 years ago religious started recognizing their investment power through shareholder resolutions, proxy voting, and eliminating some stocks from the investment portfolio. Over time, the strength of these efforts has grown and the impact is now measurable and does effect change.

My initial exposure to socially responsible investing (SRI) began almost immediately as the local Treasurers met to talk about common issues and concerns. The impetus that followed occurred because we worked together and supported each other with information and encouragement.

The ministry of investing money “for good” has grown over time, and has become quite sophisticated and effective. The commitment of religious institutes to SRI gives a message of solidarity with those who suffer from corporate decisions and feel they have no voice. The Sisters of Mercy have identified five critical concerns where we focus our energies on justice issues. They are women, immigration, non-violence, environment and anti-racism.

The congregation’s commitment to socially responsible investing is one way to give power to our commitment to the critical concerns. The portfolios of the Sisters of Mercy are positioned to avoid investments in companies whose policies and procedures are not supportive of working to enhance the role of women; who do not treat immigrants or people of color fairly; who do not support changing processes to protect the environment, or who have child laborers in countries where it is not illegal. The alternative of avoiding investments in these companies is to purchase shares in the companies, which give us the opportunities to file shareholder resolutions on behalf of those we name in our critical concerns.

Congregational Finance and the Instability of the Economic Environment

Those working in the finance office and in leadership positions have greater access than members to the details related to the resources of the religious institute. Frequently there are events that occur in corporations the size of our religious institutes that can have a major impact on the financial position of the institute. As decision-makers of religious institutes, we then must decide how to involve the community members.

Reminiscing on events of 2008, we woke up one morning and discovered that the economy could not sustain itself on speculation-based, cyberspace money. When reality struck, economic chaos spread around the world into government operations, financial institutions, corporations, and family homes.

As a global economy, the impact affected everyone, including religious institutes and their members. Even today, the fallout from the 2008 – 2009 market drop is still impacting some families and companies. We live with a new knowledge of the fragility upon which we are building our financial future. How do we respond to the impact of the market in ways that reflect the values of religious institutes?

Let us begin to address that question by rooting the current reality in the history of apostolic religious life, and then move into applying it to today's economic environment. The historical perspective shows us that we've been through unstable financial times before.

The energy to respond to current socio-economic and spiritual challenges is embedded in the character of apostolic religious institutes, which were founded to address the needs of the time. In response to real, identified needs, institutions were created, buildings constructed, and corporations established to provide the structures needed to share the Gospel through the charism of the religious institute. In the process, financial struggles were part of the history we all share.

Mercy Financial Challenges Mirror Those of People We Serve

The story of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids is that they were invited to begin a foundation in the city, but upon arrival, found a building that was under construction, with no windows installed or doors hung. Sister Mary Ildephonse Holland wrote in her book, *Lengthened Shadows*, one of the Sisters quipped, "Well, it's an ill wind that doesn't blow someone good. We won't have to wash any windows today anyway." The three Sisters "made do" by moving into the unfinished building, then setting up a school as soon as possible to acquire funds. Every congregation has a similar story.

Members need to understand events occurring in the world. Ministry today must include an understanding of the economic difficulties being faced by those around us. The impact of changes at the corporate level upon congregational finances needs to be addressed not only by leadership. Each member of the congregation can play a role in shaping a response. Leadership can educate members by disclosing the impact the changing financial situation is having on the religious institute. At the same time, this education is paralleled with information about steps leadership is taking to address unexpected shortfalls. When there is an invitation to participate, membership can feel solidarity with those we meet in ministry each day. All of us feel the impact of downturns in the economy.

This can be a transformative time. It is a time to live in greater solidarity with those we rub shoulders with each day; employees, co-workers, and those we meet in our ministries. Members can be consulted about changes in financial resources and the impact on sponsored works. They can participate in setting priorities for property use.

They may, if asked, suggest imaginative solutions to the cost of caring for members under our current structures. Wisdom of the membership can contribute to solving other congregational issues. Such a conversation

Members need to
understand events
occurring in the world.
Ministry today must
include an
understanding of the
economic difficulties
being faced by those
around us.

between leadership and members can have the positive result of re-focusing priorities and inspiring cooperation with the challenges of living on a tighter budget.

This can be a time for leaders to encourage the congregation to identify the non-essentials. Even small changes reflect a commitment to weather economic challenges in solidarity with those around us.

As one of six Communities of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the decisions of each Community impact the other five Communities. This is reflective of the style of community we see in Acts 4:32, “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they had everything in common.”

Looking to a Financially Sustainable Future

In recent years, religious institutes have recognized changing needs and capabilities, both internally and externally. As a result, we have been pro-active in making adjustments to how we are present and where ministry can be provided. In the process, religious institutes are “right-sizing” and focusing resources where they can be most effective. Much prayer and discernment has gone into these processes. However, we have also made decisions in order to maintain some control of the future.

In a similar way, the economy is “right-sizing” the value of investments by throwing out

the bad investments that did not have real monetary backing, and placing a more accurate value on solid investments. A primary difference in this economic “right-sizing” is that the investor has little, if any, control. External policy changes push us into having to respond from a disadvantageous position. A meaningful prayer today is to let go of the need to control what we discover is outside of our control.

Call to a Second Non-Traditional Ministry

Life often presents new directions for us that weren’t on our radar screens, but where we hear God is calling us in new and graced ways. For me, that occurred when I was elected to the Community Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy. Once again, this is a non-traditional ministry, but which is possible only with the support of the

members of the congregation. My background in finances, administration, interactions with many religious institutes around the country, and work with professional consultants including lawyers, CPAs, property managers, and facilitators has proven beneficial in my role in leadership.

Although challenges abound, the commitment to work together on every level is energizing. We are creating new understandings of how we will be together. This struggle ties the history of religious institutes to the present as we move into the future. Our founders and foundresses demonstrated their creativity and perseverance. We now need to translate it into our 21st century decisions. ♦

Although
challenges abound,
the commitment to
work together on
every level is
energizing. We are
creating new
understandings of
how we will be
together.



Mercy Haven, Ministry of Hospitality

Patricia Griffith, R.S.M.

“Where should we begin? Begin with the heart. For the spring of life arises from the heart and from there it runs in a circular manner.”¹

Origins of My Vocation

My vocation to be Mercy started very early before I entered the community. My Mom and Dad were simple people who worked hard at their vocation of being parents. They taught us that faith was first in our lives, and, action, a natural outgrowth of faith. My Dad spent most of his time working sometimes three jobs to provide for his wife and five children. Even then they made time for family prayer, presence in the parish societies, assisting our extended family, and definitely made themselves available (or available by recruiting the children) to assist the Sisters at Little Flower Parish in Brooklyn, New York.

It was a time when we didn't converse with the Sisters as they went in pairs to school or shopping, and, a time when they weren't driving themselves anywhere. My Dad was commonly their driver while they sat in the back seat. He often took one of us with him until he succeeded in collecting enough “S&H green stamps” through the parish and his police stations to present the Sisters with their first station wagon. You might say I grew up with the nuns.

My Mom would be the one who would make us aware of neighbors who were in need and helped us know what we could do to help. This could take the form of doing their grocery shopping, helping with a chore, or having our home be the place for lunch and after school gatherings while our friends waited for a parent to come home from work.

By eighth grade, I was ready to go to the Mercy Juniorate, a school for those considering religious life. I don't know that I was sure of the vocation part. I did know I felt at home with Sisters. Within the first year, we were told that the school would close, and I became a student at Catherine McAuley High School.

Though the change was a big one for me, the school was still staffed by Sisters of Mercy. It didn't take me long to adjust into any club that had something to do with service. The Young Christian Students (YCS) was a movement I was immediately drawn to, and would eventually lead, because it was faith in action. As a member of my parish, I was eager to serve others. With a small group of girls and our newly ordained priest, I initiated a group called the Apostles of Good Will. We would meet weekly to study the Sunday readings and think of a weekly action. Neither of these groups made much of a difference to those we were helping, but these activities planted seeds firmly in my being that faith without action isn't faith at all.

Early Years in the Sisters of Mercy and the Civil Rights Era

When I entered the Sisters of Mercy, I believed religious life to be a higher calling and a sacrificial commitment, which would allow me to be a presence that I believed the world needed. The generosity of heart towards others was what attracted me. Though I was a very social young woman, I was ready “to give up” that part of life to deepen my love affair with God. When I entered, I thought I knew the life I was walking into. I was content thinking I would spend my life assisting the priest in doing God's work. If I was “privileged,” I would be chosen to go to the missions in Panama. I expected my days to be wrapped in prayer and my association with laity minimal.

I was surprised that all news and newspapers were forbidden for the first three years while the Vietnam War raged. My only concern with that war was praying for hours and days that my brother and his friends would not be drafted. At that time, I had little awareness or concern about the brothers and friends of the Vietnamese. I was not concerned about the morality of war or the United States' actions or how they were being

justified. I would have, at that time, assumed persons in authority were well-informed and correct in their pronouncements, whether in government or church. I did not know I needed to care for those outside of my familiar and national parameters. I did not know then that our actions or inactions ultimately affect our souls for all time. The insulated life of the convent allowed me to remain in a cocoon stage for a little longer.

While I was still in the novitiate, religious women were ready to start implementing the changes of the Second Vatican Council. They had been reading and planning before I had entered. But this implementation not only surprised me. As it unfolded it would wreak havoc on our institutional church as a whole and on religious life in particular. Our self-contained little world was being challenged to accept our oneness with the laity. We realized the ability *we* had to be leaders in the Church, a role that formerly belonged only to ordained men.

One day, we believed this chosen life was a higher calling. We belonged to a group, set apart, governed by vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and service of the poor and protected by an internal set of rules. Then, another day we had that view of ourselves challenged by an invitation to embrace oneness with our lay brothers and sisters. At this same time, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were killed. The Civil Rights Movement brought long overdue attention to the oppression suffered by persons of color. In the wake of this movement, women like me were coming of age. Now more conscious of injustice, we would be expecting, at times demanding, equality in all aspects of our lives.

The events of the civil rights era prompted me with many invitations to wake up. The changes, which I had never anticipated, would challenge my faith and understanding of religious life.

Teaching Ministry

After five years of formation, I was given my first assignment to a convent and school on Long Island. My “set” would be the second group that would be college graduates before taking our first assignments. The good news was we had our degree in education before we became teachers,

unlike our sisters who had worked toward a degree by adding study to their full-time ministries. By contrast, it took my friend ten years to receive her first degree. It was assumed that I would be a teacher. It also seemed to be assumed that I would have no problem being the only one of my group to be sent alone to a new mission. No one ever asked me about either of these decisions that would affect my life for years to come.

I remember with fondness my brief teaching ministry where I spent three years accepting the challenge of exposing ten through thirteen-year-old children to a loving relationship with God. I remember the turmoil of the parents because of changes in the church and their insistence that their children should be taught to fear God. I was actually “accused” of teaching a God of love instead. What a compliment!

Non-Traditional Parish Ministry and Small-Group Living

I returned to graduate school for a Masters in Religious Education. This gave me a great experience of meeting other religious who were respected leaders in this time of transition in the church. After only three years of teaching, I asked to work in the parish because of the energy I felt with the laity. I had an intuition that a pastoral presence was needed for those not involved in the school. For the next twelve years, I would minister outside the traditional pastoral roles in this same parish, much to the chagrin of some of my Mercy Sisters. I hadn’t factored in what effect my preference for something new would have on them. Somehow, my choice spoke of rejection of their ministry, which it wasn’t, but later I would understand.

At this same time, we began to elect coordinators instead of superiors being appointed. To my surprise, I was selected as the coordinator, at age 22, with very little experience of community living. I soon had a rude awakening. I didn’t understand group dynamics or how to facilitate communal life. I don’t know what part that difficulty played in my decision to move into small group living, again outside the norm, while remaining in the same parish. I do know Sisters didn’t understand why I no longer wanted to live

with them, and worried about what the laity we served would think. Again, I was following my heart and not letting those external social factors hold me back. I never again returned to traditional convent life.

As far as my new ministry, I was hoping that the pastoral team we'd create in leading the parish would be an example of Christian community. The term "pastoral minister" didn't exist yet. In these years, I would accompany adults on their spiritual journey as they brought their children to receive the sacraments. I worked with the teens through our folk group. I organized volunteers to reach out to some of the shut-ins in our parish.

Origin of Hospitality Center and Effect on My Spiritual Life

Amidst these services, a larger, more challenging issue presented itself. Hundreds of persons who were victims of the state's decision to close psychiatric hospitals were being placed in our town. These people were now without

Hundreds of persons who
were victims of the state's
decision to close
psychiatric hospitals were
being placed in our town.
These people were now
without necessary mental
health services.

necessary mental health services. We were ill-prepared to care for or understand them. Once again, my response was practical and intuitive. Although care for the mentally ill wasn't part of what I envisioned as my ministry, I gathered members from different agencies in the town to develop a written statement about the social needs of our community. This booklet was a great way not only to expose the truth to the community but also to offer resources of advocacy and assistance to many groups.

This began my journey with the poor as friends and teachers. With the blessing of the

pastoral staff, we opened a Hospitality Center where anyone could come in and rest – have a cup of coffee and not feel so alone. This ministry evolved into a soup kitchen and place of advocacy involving more than 400 volunteers from all the local churches.

I experienced challenges to maintain my status as a member of a pastoral team and as a person equal to others, but it was a team dominated by men who were accustomed to a hierarchical life. At the same time, my personal beliefs were being challenged and expanded, as I tried to integrate my faith with my actions. Persons I met at the Center told me stories that required me to wake up and let go of my naiveté. As a professed Sister, my freedom to act publically was still limited by a church that wanted us to follow their Scriptures, but without raising too many issues. Feeding the hungry was a value, but speaking up against the structures that kept people hungry was discouraged.

This period was also a time of great ecumenical dialogue. It was the first time many of us spoke and prayed with persons of other faiths. Truth be told, we Roman Catholics still held firm to the belief that ours was the most enlightened and best religion. Many still do.

Apostolic Spirituality in the Post-Vatican II Church

Around this time, Virginia Farnan, R.S.M., led the Sisters and co-members through a four-year formative process in understanding Apostolic Spirituality. This was particularly helpful to me at this time of tension in understanding the relationship of community life and the demands of ministry. I had experience of only one assignment by leadership to a ministry, the occasion to interpret the superior's directive as God's will. Within a few years, we were free to choose our own ministry and place of residence. Some sisters thought this freedom encouraged us to be self-centered.

This tension would affect our community relations for many years, for it made us reflect on the core of our identity as a community, but one living our charism of service. Virginia reminded us that we had to be stretched in understanding our life as a dynamic, creative choice. Her insight was

a timely and timeless gift. “Sisters of Mercy, following in Catherine’s footsteps, continually form themselves and one another not only to serve, but to become servants of the poor, sick and ignorant. Hopefully, the poor, sick and ignorant will one day call them friends.”²

I would learn that all Christians are called to this maturity through our baptismal call and that religious life was only one way to respond. The inclusion of laity in our co-membership program was one I eagerly encouraged. I also served this program through leadership. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:4)

Through my study and retreats that I led or attended, I was influenced by persons like Joanna Macy, Joyce Rupp, Judy Cannato, Elizabeth Johnson, and Miriam McGillis. I felt a particular connection with Joan Chittister who has been a dear companion and friend.

It was the best of times and the worst of times. Life in our parish was divided between those who saw the Vatican Council as corrupting their traditional image of God and those who were so thirsty, so ready for their faith to be inflamed into a vibrant relationship with God. One could hardly keep up with all the opportunities of movements like Marriage Encounter, Christian Awakening, Cursillo, Antioch Retreats, and the like. The music of Weston Priory, Carolyn McDade, the St. Louis Jesuits, and John Denver would help us feel and articulate our new selves as persons of faith in the post-Vatican II Church. So many of us were alive with the love of God and seeking community and equality in ministry, it was the best of times. “Were not our hearts burning?” (Lk 24:32-33).

Last Days at Hospitality Center and Opening of Mercy Haven

My ministry at the Hospitality Center would evolve into our becoming public advocates with political and church officials. This resulted in

birthing yet another ministry, a non-sectarian, non-profit called Mercy Haven. We had a history of ministry and friendship with the poor. Our deep relationships solidified with volunteers. They were frightened, but ready to contest the local government and church officials who planned to remove housing in our town for nearly 200 persons living with mental illness. These persons had been living in our community, housed in two hotels owned by a slum landlord, for more than fifteen years. Truth be told, they were the scapegoats for some of the challenges the town was facing economically. Our Hospitality Center, which fed scores of people, had been touted as one of the top five social problems in the community!

The Sisters of Mercy could not have done more corporately or individually. They were front and center in supporting our involvement in this housing issue. They attended meetings and wrote letters to local officials.

Eventually I was fired by the pastor from the parish where I had ministered for fifteen years. His explanation for getting rid of me: “Lest we divide the community.” My only regret in looking back is that neither I nor the leadership of

our community made any issue about his decision. My reason for not protesting—though I hope was not cowardice—was that my intuition told me any increased public tension with him could result in his closing the Hospitality Center in my absence. Since I was leaving the position, as I did, he’d be hard-pressed to find a reason to close the Center.

I am a witness that this ministry is still in existence thirty years later. This gives me some confidence that I chose the right course of action.

Leaving the parish broke my heart – broke it open to so many new experiences of goodness and evil. Moving into this ministry was harder than the other moves because of the loss of my grounding in a faith community. My life had to be enlarged to be in the public’s eye more than I ever wanted or needed to be. I had to find ways to speak the language of charisma, faith and ministry, which motivated us.

The amazing grace in this
unfolding has been the
freedom to watch
something grow from
nothing into an agency
that could become what
our residents needed.

Kathy Nolan, R.S.M., co-founder, and the small ecumenical faith community who created the Hospitality Center, were now motivated to move into this new unknown of Mercy Haven. It was like being in a foreign land. Mercy leadership supported us with financial assistance and a salary for one of us, for the first three years, so that we could establish this new ministry. Our supporters never doubted we'd create safe and affordable housing for our friends, although it would take us five years to actually open our first home.

Mercy Haven Today—Sustaining the Project

We now oversee housing for nearly 300 persons, owning or renting 100 sites. The challenge in our growth has been in reconciling the prejudices that we've encountered, the physical threats on our own lives for "doing such a thing" to a neighborhood, and, our deepest belief that we are warned "to not forget to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

The amazing grace in this unfolding has been the freedom to watch something grow from nothing into an agency that could become what our residents needed. Single parents, estranged from a child because of living with mental illness, desired to reestablish this relationship and so we created supportive family housing. Staff has had their lives enriched by learning how to relate to our friends. Eager to help, they have learned gratitude that a person chooses to live with us. There's nothing more touching than to have watched a gentleman, so institutionalized he didn't know how to shut the lights off in his room, come alive in finding his life again. Or another, who was seriously withdrawn and non-verbal for years, call you by name. These are the miracles of seeing "the seed of God in us all." (Meister Eckhart)

As our ministry grew from an idea into a seven million dollar business, we had to create structures that would carry our values and culture (charism). This is an ongoing, imaginative

challenge I've enjoyed. Finding the right persons for our Board or for staff leadership, persons attracted to this work of Mercy and willing to stand with our friends, is a big part of my responsibility.

My responsibility includes raising more than 10% of our budget. Our strategic planning includes staff's participation in envisioning communities where diversity and inclusion are explicit values. Each of these groups has had to process their disillusionment at times in light of the oppressive structures and attitudes we encounter on a regular basis. Holding to our truth, while working with people in positions of power, is where I have learned most to bring my gifts. Through the creation of a legal advocacy department, we have had achievements beyond what one could imagine. We have obtained fair hearings for a person's entitlements. We have

I did not engage
in any of these works as an
isolated individual. Each
work involved not only my
sisters in community but
newly formed groups of laity,
who provided active support,
prayerful reflection and
spiritual commitment.

supported class action lawsuits that have affected hundreds of thousands of households in the state of New York. It reminds me, as Brueggemann says, "If the task of prophecy is to empower people to engage in history, then it means evoking cries that expect answers, learning to address them where they will be taken seriously, and ceasing to look to the numbed and dull empire that never intended to answer them in the first place." ³

Continuing to Grow and Reflecting on the Path Thus Far

Because of the support of the Mercy community, I was gifted with two other opportunities for study: Earning a Masters in Social Work for the ongoing skill development I needed. Later, I had the blessing of receiving my D.Min. in Creation Spirituality. The opportunity of integrating study and creativity would break open a new way of receiving the gifts of the universe and shifting my own understanding of my ability and our ability to effect change globally

as we saw the evolution of this multi-faceted agency.

Each of my ministries has been a commitment to hospitality, service, and advocacy within formative communities where each person is giver and receiver, teacher and student, dreamer and visionary, healer and healed. I didn't engage in any of these works as an isolated individual. Each work involved not only my sisters in community but newly formed groups of laity, who provided active support, prayerful reflection and spiritual commitment.

Even today, beyond my work with staff, Board and residents, I am engaged with four different formative communities because of our thirst for God and needing one another — “to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk gently on this earth.” One group is made up of my Mercy Sisters. The second is a group of “Radically Amazed” laity eager to break open the evolving story of the Universe. The third group is eager to have a community to understand the inspirational writings of leaders like Joan Chittister, Richard Rohr, and other spiritual writers in the light of Sunday's scripture. The fourth includes Associate members, who may also be participating in one of the above groups as well as their formal commitment to the works of Mercy.

We recently had a convocation of the Mid-Atlantic community. Being part of a body of 475 of our 900 members was a holy experience. The formidable presence of women—their years of ministry, the varieties of risks they had taken, the commitment to community and to mercy— was so evident in this body of committed people. The pride I felt to be part of this was palpable. I kept thinking, “No wonder they (the male hierarchy) are afraid of us.”

A Word for the Future

Amidst the discouragement and outrage I feel towards those who want to audit religious women's life instead of looking at their own structures that are dying, I know new life is coming. This can't go on. Sometimes it's easy to get preoccupied with questions and worry about religious life and its future. I'm sympathetic to the concern we have about caring for one another

through our time on earth, and wanting our communities to be forever, but more and more I find myself feeling a call to let that go — and preferring we go out in a blaze of glory. As Anthony Gittins says, “If caution and prudence are more evident than risk and trust; if the art of the possible has become more practiced than the virtue of hope; and if some of the most adventurous religious have long since left the communities; what right do we have, to expect the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth?”⁴ There is still so much life to unleash.

Amy Hereford says it better. “Having built the institutes and empowered lay ministers...not only have they renewed religious life, but they also have been key players in the renewal of the church at large and in enabling lay ministry in an unprecedented way...As in any good book, the last chapter is the most satisfying to read. No one wants a good book to come to an end. But end it must, and blessed are those whose privilege it is to write that chapter...the newer members from the midst of these communities are eager to be set free to begin writing the sequel with their lives.”⁵

I have been truly blessed with an adventurous life of ministry strengthened in community and challenged by the urgency of the Gospel mandate. I don't know exactly what the future will bring for religious life or my next ministry, but neither worries me. ♦

Endnotes

1. Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, Vermont: Bear and Co., 1983: 4.
2. Virginia Farnan, R.S.M., *Apostolic Spirituality*, Brooklyn: Printed by the Brooklyn Regional Community, 1984: 6.
3. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978: 23.
4. Anthony Gittins CSSP, “Adventure and Transformation,” *Religious Life Review*, V. 49, No. 263, 2010: 213.
5. Amy Hereford, CSJ, *Religious Life at the Crossroads*, New York: Orbis, 2013: 87.

Mamre: Place of Promise and Hospitality for Unemployed in Western Sydney

Mary-Louise Petro, R.S.M.

The one constant in my ministry in Religious Life is that I have never “decided” on a ministry for myself – I have been appointed or elected. The most amazing ministry, the point of this reflection, came upon me in a way that I can only attribute to the work of the Spirit. That ministry is Mamre.

Movement into Youth Ministry

By profession, I am a qualified teacher and youth worker. Mamre invited me to learn from the University of Life. Early in my ministry, I taught primary and secondary students. In 1981 my Parramatta Congregation, which had been primarily engaged in education, decided in Chapter to work with young people after they had left school. I was invited to get training in youth ministry and to lead a yet-to-be-formed Mercy Youth Team.

The timing coincided with youth unemployment in Australia reaching its highest levels. When our Mercy Youth Team consulted the Western Sydney communities for direction for our work, they requested assistance for unemployed youth.¹ The buzzwords of the time were “job creation” and “job seeking skills.” The degree of need created a burgeoning industry of employment assistance—not within our experience or skill set, but I felt a deep call to respond to the need.

Employment is at the very heart of society – it brings purpose in life; value and dignity to the person; the ability to make a contribution to society. It sustains the worker and the worker’s family.

When I presented the findings from the local community to Congregation Leader, Ellen Conway, R.S.M., her response was, “See what you can do about it.” I had been hoping for a little more insight and direction! So, the challenge was set. A whole new world was about to open for me, completely unknown, untried, a blank canvas. That was thirty years ago. What has unfolded has

been unique, creative, challenging, frightening and fulfilling.

My teaching and youth ministry skills gave me some degree of insight into planning and process. Our youth team scoured local newspapers to help understand the community needs.

Starting by a Bolt from the Blue

Two things happened simultaneously. Firstly, the local newspaper drew our attention to an historic house, owned by the State Government, which was available for lease. It was one of the earliest houses in Australia, originally owned by Anglican clergyman, Reverend Samuel Marsden, who had set up the property as a model farm for the early colony in New South Wales.² Secondly, the two newly appointed youth workers went to Melbourne to train at the National Pastoral Institute. I spent three months looking at a variety of projects aimed at unemployed youth around the State of Victoria. I was hoping that this would get my creative juices flowing. I had felt devoid of ideas up to this point. I toured many projects in Melbourne. I was inspired by the creativity and ingenuity of the project designers. Still, I had no idea what I could do in Western Sydney!

Not long before I was due to return home, I visited a Loreto friend with whom I had studied. She lived in the regional town of Ballarat where there is an historic village. Sitting in the village with a coffee, I started to feel quite anxious. I would be returning home after three months and I knew that when I came to acquit myself, I had nothing to offer. Remembering that “job creation” was the priority, I wondered how I could create jobs. Within that split second, I thought that if we were able to lease that historic property then we could start a cafe, create jobs and address the needs of our youth.

It seems so easy to say this now. But then it was as if a lightning bolt had gone through me. By standards of rational thought, it was absurd to

believe it could even have the remotest possibility of becoming a reality. There were seemingly insurmountable challenges: my lack of experience, few skills, no available finance, and paucity of resources. Just myself and a very scary and underdeveloped idea!

As I drove back to Melbourne I struggled: Would I ever tell anyone my idea? If I did, I could reasonably be judged to have lost the plot. Or if someone actually saw something of merit in it, then I would have to do something about it. I had no idea what that might be! If, on the other hand, I said nothing, no one would ever know how ridiculous the idea was, and I wouldn't have to do anything about it. However, there was no plan B, and so the investment of three months by my Congregation would have been a fruitless exercise.

See What You Can Do

In Melbourne I was staying with the director of the Youth Ministry program, Veronica Goodwin, R.S.M. On the spur of the moment, I blurted out my idea to Veronica, secretly hoping she would tell me that it was impossible. To my amazement, she said, "Go for it!" A few nights later, I invited the two youth workers for dinner. When I told them about my dream, they looked at me blankly and said nothing.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the tremendous gift given to me, our Congregation and the people of Western Sydney by Veronica. If the order of people I spoke to about my vision had been reversed, I would never have spoken of it again! I always tell this story so that people will be aware of the responsibility they have when entrusted with an idea.

When I returned to Sydney and tentatively told Ellen Conway of my embryonic idea, she didn't ask for a feasibility study or business plan. If she had done so, I think the outcome may have been very different. She just said, "See what you can do." These were such

simple words. They became a powerful witness to Catherine McAuley's reliance on Divine Providence, to her absolute faith in the power of God to make a pathway for the impossible. Those words reminded me that for the poor and marginalized, risk-taking and generous sharing of resources is obligatory. "See what you can do."

Practical Steps to Develop the Plan, Even Burying Medals

Now the miracles flowed—not without difficulty, challenges, knockbacks, criticism and judgement—but the presence of a strong and lively Spirit overcame all obstacles.

I had learned from my course work that there were lists of philanthropic trusts available. My first task was to write letters to all of them! As a result, we were gifted with two men from different Foundations. Paddy Murray brought skills from the Social Services sector and a ninety-two-year-old philanthropist, Eric Storm, brought some finance. His legacy sustains us today.

The second step was to apply for the lease on the Mamre property. Naively, I rang the State Department of Planning and stated that I was interested in taking out the lease. After a long silence, I was told that tenders had been called and submissions had closed. But as there was no plan B, I just had to persist! And so began twelve months of lobbying, enthusing, challenging, begging, confronting, and capturing the imagination of politicians and bureaucrats and engaging the community.

One of our elderly Sisters told of the "custom" of burying miraculous medals on a particular piece of property when trying to procure it. One dark night, two youth workers and I parted the

barbed wire fence and buried the medals provided by Sr. M Boniface, with a prayer that there would indeed be a miracle, and the lease on Mamre would be ours. This secret burial was not done lightly, as we were warned of ghosts and a care-

There were
seemingly
insurmountable
challenges: my lack
of experience, few
skills, no available
finance, and paucity
of resources. Just
myself, and a very
scary and
underdeveloped
idea!

taker wielding a shotgun! Our local churches and community somehow shared the vision. In one weekend, we collected thousands of signatures on a petition to the Government.

Passion, energy, determination and faith paid off. In 1985, we gained a licence to occupy the property. A twenty-year lease was signed on 31 January, 1986. The Mercy Youth Team continued their work in the local area for a further three years and while I remained in my role with them, I also commenced the foundation work for Mamre, Place of Promise.

The Mamre Property

Providence smiled on us with the name of “Mamre.” This was the name Samuel Marsden had given the property. What a rich and meaningful name it is. In Genesis, Abraham and Sarah were asked by God to leave their homeland for a land God would show them.³ In return God made the promise that in this unknown land they would have a son and their descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky.⁴ For an aged childless couple, this was an extraordinary, and seemingly unlikely promise. Yet, their absolute faith enabled them to set out on a journey of huge distances from Ur, through Haran, Damascus, Shechem, Bethel and even “down” into Egypt, through many dangers and challenges. On reaching Mamre they set up their tent and made an altar to the Lord.⁵ It was at Mamre that Abraham and Sarah were visited by angels. We see the immediate attention to hospitality and hear the promise repeated. And we had inherited Mamre – Place of Promise and Hospitality!

When I first saw the Mamre property, it was dry, unkempt, sad, unloved, abandoned and desolate. It had been vacant for many years. Even cows rambled through the old house, a faded shadow of the past. It seemed to echo Abraham’s Mamre in its desolation and isolation. Both the abandoned house and the biblical passage sounded echoes from the past. For Abraham’s Mamre, it was the trace of past civilizations. For our Mamre, there was also an invocation of the past—the gathering place of the Dharruk tribe of Australia’s first people, the Aborigines; the old fruit trees from Samuel Marsden’s orchard; the

convict-built house that had started as a wool shed; the stories of enablement of this model farm that had been a birth place of sustainability in the young colony. Oak trees planted here echoed the biblical Mamre—with the aboriginal symbol of life, strength, wisdom, nobility, longevity, heritage and power. Finally, it was the spirit of the land itself—ancient, deep, serene, welcoming and healing. I feel this unique spirit each time I come through the gate. Others have shared a similar experience.

This was our springboard to the future. We were inspired and encouraged to forge ahead against the odds. We learned the importance of “place.” Mamre’s Vision Statement describes it as, “A place of promise where individuals are enabled to realize their potential and to participate in the community.”

A Mission of Assistance to Youth

Over three decades, Mamre has assisted the people of Western Sydney through programs for the unemployed, youth at risk of not completing their education, and those with disabilities. More recently, we have welcomed refugees from South Sudan and other African countries, Burma and Bhutan.

The refugees have found a place to “touch the earth” and grow the special vegetables from their homelands that they miss. People with disabilities have found that they have valuable skills to offer. They have seen the fruits of their labours when they get jobs, and when they create and maintain Mamre’s gardens. Young people have been empowered to fit into their school community with confidence. They learn techniques that enable them to move on to realize their full potential.

Mamre is a focus for the local community. All are welcome to enjoy its beauty and tranquil gardens and be refreshed by its healing spirit. There have been days themed around Women’s Wisdom and Days of Tranquillity that have provided a haven for women coping with the stress of family and society. People have celebrated every aspect of their lives at Mamre, from baby showers to wakes, receiving warm hospitality. Mamre is a community within a community – supporting, caring, enabling and bringing the mission of Jesus alive within the

practicalities of life. "I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance."⁶

Mother of Mamre

I believe I was called into this "edge" ministry. I think I was an unlikely choice. But as I look back, I see that Mamre was the catalyst for me to find who I was and what talents and strengths lay within me. Over the years, people have called me the "Mother of Mamre" or they say, "Mamre is your baby." I have always deflected such remarks, since I am aware of the enormous work and commitment of others. Recently, through professional supervision, my "motherhood" has come to the fore again and I have been encouraged to own it in its reality. This has been a graced time for me. I cannot express the depth of emotion that has been unlocked in the exploration of this reality. I have been able to see with clarity my role in a "birthing" sense.

Other roles have become clear. I honor in a new way those others who have brought Mamre "into the light." Ellen Conway and the Congregation were the "midwives" of Mamre. The founding members were Paddy Murray, Joyce Vella, R.S.M, Laura Murray, Bob Thatcher and Jennifer Clarke. These people and their various roles were critical to sustain the fledgling vision. They brought a variety of essential skills, practical know-how and creative energy which have left foot and finger prints that can never be erased.

Over all the years our strength has been within our staff and volunteers, many of whom regarded working at Mamre as a vocation. They understand the mission of Jesus and the spirit of Catherine. This hasn't happened by magic, but has developed through formation and respectful engagement, strong relationships and a spirit of Mercy. Many of our Sisters and other Religious have made their unique contribution, too, with a deep passion for the needs of the poor.

We adopted as "our song" *Point of Light* by Randy Travis:

All it takes is a point of light,

A ray of hope in the darkest night.

If you see what's wrong,

And try to make it right.

*You will be a point of light.*⁷

Mamre was, and is, a "point of light" in our community.

Challenging Choices: Becoming Inclusive of All Unemployed Persons

At every stage, I believe we have made choices that have challenged us and often asked us to dig deep to find the courage to see them through.

One of the first choices we made was the selection of the area in which we were going to serve. It sat between two larger and better-resourced suburbs. The people in this corridor were not receiving services because other providers were based where the funding dollars were more assured. We chose this area because people were falling through the net. In effect, the Congregation was committing itself to a

considerable investment of finance and resources on an ongoing basis. We have persisted in carrying something that seems "uneconomic" for thirty years.

In the last few years, we have been asked by the community to provide a service for refugees. Their numbers are not large as in some other areas of Sydney, so there is no funding available. We have managed, through Congregational funds, fundraising efforts and community partners, to create a refugee training center. We have provided English programs, vocational training, health education, employment assistance, citizen tutoring, general living and parenting skills. We have made available a crèche, initiated homework

The Congregation was
committed to risk the
"leaving our homeland" of
education to move into
this new and unknown
sector. There was no road
map. It was a time for
making the path by
walking it.

programs for the children and computer classes for the men.

The Congregation was committed to risk the “leaving our homeland” of education to move into this new and unknown sector. There was no road map. It was a time for making the path by walking it. It wasn’t a decision taken lightly. It was controversial, and not everyone agreed with it. One Sister said, “It shouldn’t be allowed,” and others may well have felt the same. Mamre was threatened with closure on a number of occasions. Sometimes we felt isolated and challenged beyond our capacity. But the promises of God were for us too. Our spirits were strengthened purely by grace to continue this most precarious journey.

There were other choices, perhaps not so challenging, but nevertheless significant. Mamre was to be entirely inclusive of all persons. All were welcome in this place. Early in the planning, we moved from a solely youth-oriented orientation to one that encompassed all unemployed persons. There was an emphasis on women returning to the workforce in an era when personal computers were just being introduced. We were “at the edge,” providing programs that no one else was offering – computer courses, social enterprise and holistic programming, with special emphasis on personal development, which was critical for those who had been unemployed long-term.

Mamre was incorporated as a company from the beginning. This was a first for our Congregation, and leadership held the reins very tightly in those early days. Since then, we have embraced the involvement of our lay partners and gained from them an abundance of assistance, wisdom and Mercy commitment. Apart from the old house, there were no buildings, so we bought disused train carriages for offices, training rooms, a convent and chapel. Joyce and I still live in one of these “buildings” today. We have appreciated the gift it has been to live among the people of Western Sydney in a simple way.

Future Planning and Reflection on Thirty Years

As I write this reflection, we are preparing to gift the work of Mamre to the Diocese of Parramatta. In Australia now, it is difficult for small organizations to be sustainable and survive.

After much discernment between the Congregation—under the Leadership of Catherine Ryan R.S.M.—and the Mamre Board, we made the decision that this vital ministry needed to insure its needs would be held within a larger organization. We approached the Diocese because, under Catholic Care Social Services, the diocese already provides services to the disadvantaged of Western Sydney. The final decision has been made just this week. Therefore, it's been timely for me to reflect on the Mamre journey of thirty years.

Mamre has become an icon of Mercy, the loving kindness of the heart of our God, in a land of deep need. It has brought the promises of God to a reality. It is a place where dreams have been fulfilled, hearts have been stirred with compassion and love, and people from all ages, religions (and none), nationalities and ideologies have found dignity, respect, confidence in a safe and beautiful haven. It is where the gifts of many have been shared and appreciated. It is where Mercy has not only been given, but also received in abundance. This is our Mercy legacy to the people of Western Sydney. Moreover, while there is a deep grieving in letting Mamre go, we do so with great hope that the mission of Jesus will continue and flourish as we entrust it to the Diocese of Parramatta. ♦

Endnotes

1. Atlas of youth unemployment, 1981: the geographic distribution of youth unemployment in Australian cities from the 1981 Census according to birthplace and gender / prepared by Peter Matwijiw ; assisted by Errol Bamford and Chris Maher
2. Penrith Heritage Inventory, State Heritage Inventory, SHI Number 2260228, Study Number SM28; Item Name: Mamre House; Location: 181-275 Mamre Road, Orchard Hills
3. Genesis 18:1
4. Genesis 15:5
5. Genesis 13:18
6. John 10:10
7. *Point of Light* – recorded by Randy Travis; lyrics by Don Schlitz and Thom Schuyler, 1991 - for President George Bush's campaign for volunteerism.

Musings of a Mime

Gloria Heese, R.S.M.

In Deuteronomy 8:7 we read, “For the Lord, your God, is bringing you into a good country.” Following are musings of my journey into the “good country of mime.”

My spiritual journey is an ongoing, ever developing dynamic, and miming is an integral part of that journey. In my prayer and meditations, movement and art are major components. After a number of years, I now enjoy the graced luxury of having time and opportunity to focus my energy in that direction without the overwhelming stress of administration that I have had most of my religious life.

Through the years, many of my spiritual experiences have been connected with miming. For instance, when I was asked to provide the movement to a psalm or song for a particular liturgical event, I found that the content resonated with where I was spiritually.

Two such events that have stayed with me are movements to Catherine McAuley’s “Suscipe” and Psalm 63 - “My soul is thirsting,” especially verse 2 - “*O God you are my God—for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless and without water.*” Both of these have been and continue to be especially *meaningful*. Doing what I call “body prayer” to these words, still gives me an experience of what Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B., in her book *Abide*, calls a “magnetic force drawing us to the Divine.”¹

Personal spiritual enrichment comes through this ministry because I must pray and internalize the meaning of whatever I mime. If I do not take time to do this, my movements are just hollow gestures without meaning for anyone, including myself. There is no touching of hearts. This is the goal of my present ministry called Mime-Ink.

Mental State Needed for Miming

When I mime, I go to a place where I feel no tension, worry or stress. I simply am within the flow of my actions—much like dancing when one loses oneself in the freedom of the movement. I see myself as having two “modes” of mime that can lead me to this place. In one mode, which I call “spontaneous mime,” I simply react to the reality in which I find myself. I closely observe what is going on around me with a goal of engaging, inspiring or entertaining. I let myself respond to people in a physical, non-verbal way. I do this, sometimes called “working a crowd,” at fairs or standing at the door of fundraisers or special events welcoming people as they arrive. I simply respond to the people with a welcoming and loving spirit. In this mode I am forced to “live in the *now*.”

Another mode is what I call “practiced mime” where I act out a specific idea or message and I usually do it in conjunction with spoken words or a song. For example, as someone narrates a gospel story, I act it out doing actions that bring out the message I want to convey. The visual component of the mime seems to allow the listener to go beyond the meaning of the spoken word and

The visual component of the mime seems to allow the listener to go beyond the meaning of the spoken word and move to a deeper level of understanding and engagement with the message.

move to a deeper level of understanding and engagement with the message.

The spiritual cosmology of Matthew Fox’s *Creation Spirituality*, and authors such as Teilhard de Chardin, Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Diarmuid O’Murchu, David Steindl-Rast, and many others have been my spiritual inspirations.

How It Began and My Stage Name

The story of my evolution to a ministry in mime began over 30 years ago. With a first degree in Music Education, and a Masters in

Theology, I was working as a teacher and administrator in schools in Colorado and California. I had no thought of clowning or miming until I worked with a very creative spiritual director during my 1983-84 sabbatical year. I attended a program that focused on helping sisters, brothers and priests find a new ministry. That program led me further into contemplative prayer and into a spirituality that involved movement and the visual arts.

In a creative prayer session focusing on clowning, I worked out movements to a poem about death and resurrection. This work made me realize the richness of combining actions with the spoken word. This combination has been and continues to be what I usually do today when I mime. I really enjoyed the “clowning” experience, and people were inspired by what I did. I realized I had a natural talent for clowning and ultimately miming. Always loving to dance, I also explored liturgical movement and began using movement and art in my personal prayer.

After that sabbatical year, I was asked to join a team at Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, Iowa to establish a Renewal Center for Women. Besides a focus on one theme of our Direction Statement, this ministry fit with my experience and newly found talents. It allowed me time and opportunity to develop creative ways of helping women to pray, and to clown on the side. As “Suzie Q,” my clown name, I visited the hospital’s pediatric ward. I welcomed people to open houses using a welcome sign. I was always silent, letting my actions speak for themselves. I felt that if they heard a voice, it would break the aura of mystery and reveal my identity. Eventually, I found that a clown persona was by nature too restrictive.

A silent mime in white face and black was less distracting, and more like a blank slate with which I could invite my audience into deeper reflection. And so “Suzie Q” gave birth to “GLO,” my name as a mime.

Ministerial Partnership

For several years, I worked in Mission Effectiveness at St. Elizabeth Community Hospital in Red Bluff, California. I also worked with others to establish Home Help for Hispanic Mothers. This organization focused on Spanish-speaking women and their families living in permanent homes in the area. At this time, miming was something I did in the evenings and on weekends. It would be more accurate to say that it was something two of us did after regular work hours, because I have a co-worker in my ministry.

I have been blessed with the friendship and partnership of Janel Sawatzki, R.S.M., who taught science and religion, and has a flare for writing. Although I started clowning while I was by myself on sabbatical, Sister Janel always encouraged me to continue clowning and miming. I have been and continue to be inspired by what she writes for our “scripts.” She often helps me develop my movements to enhance our “message.”

Besides our writing-miming partnership, we began to offer days of reflection for women. We wrote and presented prayers and created rituals for a wide variety of organizations both inside and outside the church. We made presentations to a broad spectrum of audiences: Various Mercy communities, the Sacramento Diocesan Lay Ministry Formation, and events memorializing the mergers of hospitals. We have worked with adults, youth and children. Our aim has always been to enhance meeting themes, motivate the groups assembled, and promote hospitality.

We have helped Catholic women who struggle in our Church as they try to serve a system, which presumes their presence, commitment and involvement. Typically, however, the Church does little to appreciate, support or meet women’s spiritual needs. Miming has usually been included as part of our days of reflection.

Our special focus has been women seeking fullness of life and equality within church and society by helping them develop their relationship with God.

Work of Creating a Mime

Creating a prayer that includes mime is a very conscious, step-by-step process. As we work through the reading, we share ideas about choreography. The movements must feel right within my own body. During the process there is always a period I call my “angst time” where nothing is working out. I get frustrated, feel desperate, pressured, and say to myself, “Why did I ever say I would do this?” Then somehow, a breakthrough comes and things seem to work out, actions feel right and everything begins to flow. However, there is no coasting. I need to practice the routine repeatedly, until it becomes a part of who I am.

Sometimes a sign language dictionary is a source of inspiration for movements I develop. Many times the “signs” for a word are a perfect fit for what I want to express. For example, the sign for “Mercy” is a combination of the word “feel” and “Mercy.” You tap your heart with your middle finger and move your hand out in front of you reaching towards another person. The sign for “Jesus” is touching the tip of the middle finger of one hand on the open palm of the other and repeating that action with the other hand. Slowly doing these movements in silence can bring your mind, body and spirit into prayer.

Development of Miming as a Ministry

The first time I mimed in our Mercy Community, was in 1988 when I mimed at the final session of the General Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union of the United States of America. The delegates had made the decision to disband the Union in order to become separate units in the proposed Institute of the Sisters of Mercy. At that graced moment, there were no words. I mimed with a trunk and a knapsack in rituals that surrounded the decision to dissolve the Union so the nine Union Provinces could become nine Regions in the Institute.

Even now, I will occasionally see a Sister who was at that Chapter or who heard about my

mimes. I am told that there was not a dry eye in the room and that the mime got the Sisters out of their heads and into their hearts, leading them to reach a most momentous decision.

After 1988, I made presentations on weekends or in the evenings while we both had other full-time ministries. From 1989 to 2006, the money earned from our presentations supported our full-time ministry, Home Help for Hispanic Mothers.

In 2002 I was privileged to attend a five-day Movement Art Communications workshop called BodySpeak at Le Centre du Silence in Boulder, Colorado. Samuel Avital, an artist, performer, teacher and author who studied mime in Paris with Marcel Marceau, presented it.

Slowly doing
these movements
in silence can
bring your mind,
body and spirit
into prayer.

Besides practicing mime techniques, I learned the distinction between traditional pantomime (objective mime), which uses conventional gestures to create illusions of objects or persons, and corporeal mime (subjective mime), which is the art of dramatic movement expressing abstract ideas and emotions. This distinction did much for my self-

confidence because I could make this clarification when asked to—create a box or pull a rope.

2005 was a hallmark year in our ministry when, after 15 years, I retired from Home Help for Hispanic Mothers. Sr. Jean Sitter, R.S.M., a member of the Omaha Regional Leadership Team, asked me what I thought about making miming my fulltime ministry. I hesitated. From experience, I had a sense of what was involved in starting up a ministry—and miming, as a sideline was one thing—but doing it fulltime was quite another matter. As I thought and prayed about it I suddenly realized “If not now, when?” I wasn’t getting any younger!

And so, Sr. Janel and I, with the support of the Leadership Team, launched Mime-Ink. We received seed money and began working out of our home-office, designing a brochure, creating a web site (www.mime-ink.com) and launching out to serve on a full-time basis.² We continued offering special prayers and days of reflection as we had in the past. In collaboration with other

Christian churches in the area we began, and continue to offer monthly Ecumenical TAIZE prayer.

Over a long period of time, I also mimed at assemblies and gatherings of the former Omaha Region. I would be asked by a Prayer or Justice or Associates committee to work out a mime for or with them. Our Regional President Sr. Pat Forret, R.S.M., would ask me to add miming to some parts of her reports to the whole Community. She wrote, "The audience 'listens' more intently as the silent gestures of the mime are interspersed with the spoken words. The universality of gestures, enables, and opens the heart to the head's comprehension of words."

In July of 2006 in Chicago, when the West Midwest had its first "Gathering," The committee for the closing ritual sent me the script and asked if there was anything I could possibly mime. The words we all said together were "Stitch our lives anew...quilt us into one." Basically, I did two simple movements with the group. As I stood on the stage and saw over 500 Sisters, Associates and Companions raising their hands in a weaving motion and then reaching out to each other and intertwining their fingers, a sense of pride and wonder swelled up in me that I have never forgotten. It was overpowering to realize we were acting out in a symbolic form the unity we hope to create. It seemed that the Spirit was a powerful force within me as well as with everyone in the room.

Expanding the Ministry

During recent years, we have been putting a greater focus on introducing people, especially women and girls, to Body Prayer. Putting a focus on praying with our bodies is not usually included in a religious curriculum, yet I know it to be a very valuable avenue for meaningful prayer. For example, during the first year at Mercy International Centre's Youth Pilgrimage in Dublin I taught "Movement as Prayer." The following year, a teacher from Ireland who had been at my workshop on Body Prayer, returned

with her girls. These students led the whole group in movements they had worked out to the song "Circle of Mercy." I was thrilled.

Similarly, I worked with faculty members of St. Catherine's Academy in Belize City, Belize, exploring creative ways they could pray with their students. Later, two teachers told me how excited they were about "different" ways they had prayed with their classes after my presentation. It is heartening to see seeds you have planted begin to grow.

Besides Dublin, Belize and California, I have been privileged to mime or lead groups in body prayer in Nebraska, Nevada, New York state, Illinois, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

I really like to work out simple prayer movements for large groups. I believe movement brings one's whole self into the spirit of what one is saying or praying. People express themselves in the language of movement.

I am often asked if I feel "alone" in my ministry since it is so unique, and I know of no other Mercy mime. As a mime there is a sense of loneliness in the Mercy community, but that is non-existent when I work with Sr. Janel and collaborate with others when working out prayers and presentations. Being a mime within a religious community has the same degree of acceptance or non-acceptance as with the general public. Some people welcome and encourage; some seem indifferent; and with others, there is almost complete lack of understanding. When I appear as a clown or a mime, some people won't look me in the eye and seem embarrassed, while others embrace me and start "having fun" with me.

Summing Up

David Steindl-Rast describes gratitude as the heart of prayer. Great gratitude is what I feel about being able to mime as a Sister of Mercy. I am very appreciative of both my past Omaha Region and West Midwest Leadership Teams who have encouraged me and supported Mime-Ink. More than 50 years ago, I took the motto, "To love and to serve." Now I am able to live

It thrills my heart to
see people find
movement to be a
resource for
developing their
spirituality and
relating to God.

out that desire to love and to serve in a very creative way that builds on my natural talents.

I end with a prayer from Macrina's *Abide*: "On my journey into the good country of my life you have lavished me with gifts and surrounded me with miracles. Such treasures have come from your hand, O my God. Thank you for your abiding presence on my wilderness journeys. You are my light! You are my support...O Star and staff of my life—on you I have leaned since birth."³

Endnotes

1. Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B., *Abide: Keeping Vigil with the Word of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011). See "Drawn Like Magnet into the Divine," pp. 11-12.
2. More information about this ministry can be found at www.mime-ink.com.
3. Wiederkehr, p. 208.



I want to subscribe to *The MAST Journal* for:

1 year _____

2 years _____

(\$20.00 US; \$30.00 outside US)

\$40.00 US; \$60.00 outside US

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Please make payment by check payable to ***Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*** (US funds drawn on a US financial institution), money order/international money order or US currency. Mail to **Julia Upton, RSM, Sisters of Mercy, 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791.**
 E-mail uptonj@stjohns.edu.

The Ministry of Pastoral Psychotherapy

Fran Repka, R.S.M.

“I have observed the misery of my people...I have heard their cry...Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.... so I will send you.” (Exod. 3:7-8,10)

The discipline of pastoral psychotherapy is filled with the theology of Mercy. Both are modes of relationship with God and others. Both are habits of mind, heart, and spirit. Both imply a theology that God suffers with humanity. The cries for Mercy in today’s world are loud and clear, but too often go unheard.

I am not a theologian, but as a Sister of Mercy I have come to believe that Mercy is the honest recognition of our sinfulness and our sharing in God’s com-passion “suffering with,” forgiveness, and com-fort—as “standing strong with.” Pastoral psycho-therapy, on the other hand literally means “compassionate soul-healing” and has to do with therapists recognizing with God’s help where and how they have been wounded whereby they can be touched by the suffering of others, walk with them in a spirit of compassion with subsequent movements toward empowerment and community.

It is a joy and a privilege to be invited by the editorial board of Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology (MAST) to do an article about the ministry in which I have been deeply involved and in which I have dedicated my life for the last 40 years. Historically, psychotherapy and psychology have not been considered one of our traditional Mercy ministries, as have education and healthcare. In reality, however, psychotherapy is a form of healthcare. When one gets deeply involved in the process of helping someone in need, mutual education happens.

Mercy theology/spirituality together with psychology/psychotherapy are co-related in several ways, but for the sake of this article I have

highlighted three: a) Call, b) Presence and Service, and c) Community and Mission.

Call: “You have not chosen Me...I have chosen you...”

It was God’s direct hand, and Catherine McAuley’s spirit and life that called me to this ministry of psychotherapy so appropriate to our current, hurting world. I would never have chosen psychology on my own.

As a young Sister of Mercy with a B.S.N. (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) degree, I was assigned to serve as “charge nurse” in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at St. Charles Hospital in Toledo, Ohio. Not a small challenge for a young Sister, but one accepted as a response to “obedience.” I liked ICU because it was a small unit (10 beds) and provided the best staff, best doctors, and best equipment. It was heaven.

However, God intervened. The woman who served as a nurse-teacher in the huge psychiatric wing (60 beds, in addition 30 students to be taught in preparation for their psychiatric-nursing board examinations) fell ill, and had to be quickly replaced. I was assigned to “temporarily” fill her spot. This “obedience” truly ran deeper than my desires or wants. However, at that time, I never thought of resisting the assignment. I was only aware that the new appointment left me

feeling anxious, frightened, inadequate and overwhelmed.

I knew very little about psychiatry, much less preparing students for their State-Boards. The learning curve was steep and time-consuming. When teaching students, I was barely one day ahead of them, sometimes cramming information the night before. I wondered why God was doing this to me, and prayed to Catherine for Mercy.

I stayed at it, literally working day and night to catch up. Catherine’s lived spirit “to go

**In reality, however,
psychotherapy is a form
of healthcare. When
one gets deeply
involved in the process
of helping someone in
need, mutual education
happens.**

wherever we are needed and to do what others need” saw me through these rough times. Before too long, God opened my eyes in an unexpected, surprising way, and planted seeds in my heart for a possible long-term dream of helping the poor. On some level, I knew that in spite of all the headaches, I was exactly where God wanted me to be. It was a mystery at the time, but there was something about the field of psychology and psychotherapy that resonated with who I was in God. God was drawing the best out of me through the encounters I experienced on the large nursing unit, both from staff and from patients.

Slowly, I experienced a new spiritual strength within me. With amazement, I found I could assist persons to move through their pain in a relational, affective way (i.e. pastoral psychotherapy), but I realized I needed more knowledge, education, and practice. Prior to the 1970’s, psychology and psychiatry leaned heavily on pharmacological (drugs), along with behavioral interventions and treatments such as ECT (electroconvulsive treatment), insulin shock, psychiatric medications, and short-term stimulus-response individual and group treatments. “Talk therapy”—whether cognitive-behavioral, affective, or spiritual and other relational methods of treatment—were not yet mainstream. That is, prior to 1970, we were not looking for that “hidden spark” which exists in every human being. Rather, we were working with a disease model, a medical model. We asked, “What is the problem?” then applied the treatment.

Today, the trend is more to view the client as the *expert of his or her own life*. In relational therapy, for example, the client gets involved in:

- Accepting what is (not denying the pain)
- Listening to feelings (no feeling is “bad”; it is what we do with them that matters)
- Naming and owning one’s God-given gifts and strengths
- Reflecting on one’s own behavior and limitations; experiencing God’s Mercy
- Setting goals and articulating hopes
- Practicing new behaviors; getting empowered

- Planning for re-integrating into family and/or community

After two years serving on the psychiatric unit, I became convinced that there might be an alternative way to assist others. With the assistance of my spiritual director, I entered into prayerful discernment. At a time when women religious were almost always being “assigned,” I took courage and put in a request to Mercy leadership to study the art and skill of pastoral psychology/psychotherapy. God said yes through my religious superior.

After graduation from a Jesuit university, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati requested that I open a Counseling Center for Religious and Clergy in greater Cincinnati, the Ohio-Covington-Kentucky area. I was founder and director of that Center for over thirteen years.

Then for six years, I was invited to join a professional group practice of psychologists and psychiatrists. I thoroughly enjoyed this time, and it prepared me well for the implementation of a long-held dream to open a Center for the poor and underserved “regardless of race, color, creed, or ability to pay.” The opening of this Center came on the heels of our 1991 new Direction Statement. This resonated with my lived experience of Christianity. My ministry has had as its theme a focus on relationship as the cure for the many ills people suffer.¹

Opening Mercy Counseling Center

Opening the Mercy Counseling Center for the poor and underserved in 1994 was a huge challenge. Our staff of six very soon became a staff of twelve. Donors, including the doctors in my former group private practice, religious congregations, foundations, and grants poured in with great generosity. An endowment for the Center was soon begun so that more families could be served. Catherine was smiling down on us. The Center, situated in a struggling neighborhood, grew by leaps and bounds. It took all twelve staff to make it work. Over 300 individuals and families were coming to the Center each week.

Presence and Service: “As you go, proclaim the good news...Cure the sick...cast out demons.” (Matt 10:8)

In Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 13, Jesus encounters a woman who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit, which drained her strength. She is not unlike persons today who are possessed with chemical addictions, alcohol, or crippled by depression for years and years, draining their strength and ability to function in their families. Scripture tells us that Jesus “sees” the woman, empathizes with her, is present to her, and lays his hands on her. She stands up straight, and thanks and praises God.

The story of the bent-over woman is not unlike the stories of healing at Mercy Counseling Center. Relational sufferings—people’s need for genuine encounter—are ubiquitous in today’s society. Many people feel “possessed by a spirit,” for example, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorders, addictions of all kinds, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Others carry unbelievable pain in the form of losses—deprivations in childhood, loss of spouses, jobs, housing, and self-esteem. For so many individuals and families, the Way of the Cross describes their daily life. They long to “stand up straight.” And when they do, they spontaneously praise God.

At another gospel story, Jesus is on his way to heal Jairus’ daughter and gets caught in the crush of a crowd. He senses that someone has “touched the tassel on his cloak.” The woman who touched him had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, and was considered incurable by many doctors at the time. As soon as she touched Jesus’ cloak the bleeding stopped. Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” Everyone disclaimed doing it, but Jesus insisted, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone from me.” The woman, having great faith, “came forth trembling” and told Jesus she was the one and how she had been instantly cured. Jesus responded: “Daughter, it is your faith that has cured you.”

Like the woman with the hemorrhage, some people struggle for years, going from doctor to doctor, trying to find a cure for the terrible way they feel. However, they only discover that all medical tests have proved negative for any specific disorder. In the end, they need someone to listen to them, to believe that healing can

happen, to touch them with empathy. They are like the woman with the hemorrhage, and need, like her, to take the initiative for their own healing in relationship. Ultimately, it is faith that heals. At Mercy Counseling Center, we are moved by the fact that people who are overwhelmed by suffering, are also the ones who know God deeply.

In pastoral psychotherapy and in spiritual direction, what is curative is *relationship*—with God, with self, with others, and with creation. When clients come to the Center, one of the greatest gifts we can give them is *hope*. This is the conviction that whatever it is they are suffering, there is a light at the end of the dark tunnel. The environment, which greets clients when they knock on the door at Mercy Counseling Center, is deliberately chosen. As they enter the waiting room, there are cultural images of healing, dialogue, joy, family, and community. In the children’s corner, there is an image of Jesus warmly speaking with the children, as well as images of children positively relating to each other. There is classical music softly playing in the background, and there are educational materials available should adults, children, or families have to wait for loved ones.

The staff at Mercy Counseling Center are imbued with Catherine McAuley’s spirit and her love for people—especially those who happen to be poor, and they try to emulate her compassionate approach. Each week (year around) the staff takes time to do faith sharing followed by clinical conferencing. It is an energizing exchange. There is a mix of religions among the staff, mostly Catholic, but also Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Buddhist, Quaker, and Jewish. It is a reminder of Catherine’s broad vision, for Mercy runs through all these religions.

Mercy-centered psychotherapy and counseling are not the same as therapy done by our secular counterparts. Weekly faith sharing assists therapists to stay aware of the fact that they are all “wounded healers.” Through this ongoing awareness, therapists learn to salve the wounds of others by knowing and remembering how much it hurts to hurt. This memory can come from the realization of their past smallness, mistakes, immaturity, selfishness, false victimhood, and so on. It is painful to admit transgressions, yet at the

same time, it is a grace to grieve, to experience God's Mercy, and find themselves anew. Fortunately, God reveals our sins to us gradually so we can absorb what we have done over time.

"Now I know what Mercy means," said Maria after receiving help at Mercy Counseling Center. Individuals and families come to the Center via word of mouth, and they continue to come. The waiting list can be up to eighty individuals and/or families. More needs to be done. The current need for quality, affordable counseling is huge. Catherine McAuley read the signs of the times, and focused on where the cries of the poor were the loudest.

Today, we live in a very different world from Catherine's Ireland, but still, we must read the signs of the times and move toward the greatest needs people have. People suffer from a combination of readily available drugs, proliferation of guns, and unsafe neighborhoods. Pollution of air, water, and soil are affecting brain development and contributing to a plethora of cancer diagnoses. Joblessness and poverty have added to unprecedented stress levels in U.S. society. Rage leads to high rates of homicide and depression leads to high rates of suicide. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among young people. The call for Mercy is incredibly alive and needed. In that Mercy we will find hope.

A Patient Hearing of Sorrows

Catherine McAuley said, *"There are things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost ...nothing: The kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows."* I never knew that this "patient hearing of sorrows" and watching families grow could bring me such joy. As Pope Francis said, "The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy....it is the joy of giving and going forth."²

The ministry at Mercy Counseling Center is a missionary endeavor. It is heavy work, but the joy in working together is palpable, not only among

staff, but in the mood of the thousands of clients who have come through our doors. When we do this "patient hearing of sorrows" well and with compassion, persons and families re-gain their energy for self-empowerment and re-establish their confidence in building healthier families and neighborhoods. The following true stories of Maria and Fionna are two stories among thousands over the last twenty years.

Maria's Story

"Now I know what Mercy means," said Maria after receiving help at Mercy Counseling Center. Maria came to Mercy Counseling Center depressed, frightened, and terrified. Her infant daughter had died in her crib. Her five other children had been placed in protective custody pending an investigation. There was a warrant out for her arrest because she did not show for a hearing, fearing she'd be placed in jail and never

see her children again. Maria herself had been abused as a child and found herself in an abusive relationship with the father of her six children. Needless to say, she was desperate, and begged for help. Maria worked very hard with her Mercy bilingual therapist who helped her grieve the loss of

her dead child as well as the loss of her other children taken away against her will. Besides helping Maria manage her depression and anxiety, the therapist became her advocate in court. She also taught Maria parenting skills, time management, stress management and other skills, which assisted her in getting back on her feet. To make a very long story short, charges against Maria were eventually dropped, she separated from her abusive partner, obtained an apartment for herself and her children, completed her GED, got a job, and eventually her children were returned to her. This took time but Maria felt she had a friend in her therapist, and ended the counseling with: "Now I know what Mercy means."

Maria's story exemplifies the fact that Merciful compassion is more than empathy or sensitivity to need. Inherent in Mercy is the type

**"Now I know what
Mercy means," said
Maria after receiving
help at Mercy
Counseling Center.**

of compassion that is *faith-filled, desires to connect, does justice, and empowers.*

Fionna's Story

Fionna came to the Mercy Center because she could not afford treatment anywhere else. Fionna was sexually abused by a male nurse in a public hospital where she was recovering from a stroke. Needless to say, she was vulnerable, powerless, and so traumatized, she was unable to communicate effectively. When Fionna was discharged, the hospital employee, noting

Is it possible for the
Sisters of Mercy along
with our companions
and associates to
create *communities of
accountability* around
mental health needs?

Fionna's depression and anxiety, sent her to Mercy Counseling Center. Here she spoke of her tragic experience for the first time. Counseling took a while, but Fionna ever so slowly found the strength and courage to expose the abuse so that no other patient would be violated. With her enhanced self-confidence, and the support of her therapist, Fionna was able to contact a pro-bono lawyer from Legal Aid.

Fionna finished the counseling process with her therapist and felt renewed dignity, strength and tremendous gratitude. She felt empowered to move forward. Two years later, after winning a lawsuit against her abuser, Fionna sent a \$3,000 check with this note:

A couple of years ago I was in deep emotional and financial trouble. When I came to your Center, you counseled me back to health, though I had almost no money and no insurance. You restored my emotional and spiritual health within months, and I have had no relapse. Please accept this check as a modest thank you. There is no way I could ever

Repka: The Ministry of Pastoral Psychotherapy

repay you for all you have done for me, so please let this money go towards helping another person in need..." Sincerely, Fionna (not her real name).

Like Fionna, the average person does not know where to turn when struggling with mental issues. There are literally hundreds of thousands of Marias and Fionnas in U.S. cities and towns. As the nation continues to confront economic challenges, demand for mental health services is increasing. However, State budget cuts (9 billion dollars cut from mental health in 2013) are creating a vicious cycle that is leaving some of our most vulnerable citizens without resources for their families. Mentally ill persons end up homeless, in hospitals, or in jail. Could the Sisters of Mercy lead in finding an answer to this terrible dilemma?

Community and Mission: "God asks us to be missionaries...starting at home."(Pope Francis)

Catherine McAuley worked hard at creating *communities of accountability*, connecting the rich with the poor, the sick to the healthy, the uneducated to the educated, and the powerful to the weak. Is it possible for the Sisters of Mercy along with our companions and associates to create *communities of accountability* around mental health needs? It will take some out-of-the-box thinking, but I believe we could do it if we view it through Catherine's eyes, i.e. see the need and place our total trust in God.³

Without education and treatment, the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering: abuse, homelessness, addictions, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives. The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than \$100 billion each year in the United States alone. What would it be like for Sisters of Mercy to sponsor faith-based neighborhood Mental Health Care clinics that are easily accessible and staffed with well-supervised therapists, social workers, and companions (trained listeners, spiritual directors, educators). Here, hurting children, adolescents, adults, and families could get what they need, and ultimately have the experience of "knowing what God's Mercy means..."

Prevention and mental health education would be primary goals in these clinics. Although inpatient units are also needed, prevention is far more economical and it is far more likely to be successful. Prevention requires appropriately specific programs for healing, social welfare, planning which includes neighborhood leaders, general strengthening of a supportive community, and Mercy educational programs which can do much to eliminate or correct the harsh environmental conditions which are often associated with mental illness and poverty.

Of course, this has to be envisioned for the long haul. Faith-based mental health neighborhood clinics need to be fully integrated with other health-care providers overseeing a community or population. Comprehensive and coordinated oversight must be managed effectively and appropriately. Service outcomes are primary. In other words, it will be important that expenditures do not result in “captured capital.” One example of this is the use of funds to build new buildings and hospital structures and install the latest technology in these enterprises. There is a national trend to provide care in neighborhood clinics that are accessible, and educating communities to help themselves. Funds should be used to support this trend toward neighborhood clinics.

Mental health and medical conditions are risk factors for each other. Many physical illnesses and heart attacks are due to stress. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that approximately 30 percent of adults with medical conditions also have mental health conditions, and 68 percent of adults with mental health conditions have medical conditions.⁴

There could be considerable financial savings in changing the focus from diagnosis of physical ailments to promotion of mental health. Doctors presently order many expensive procedures that could actually be less related to physical illnesses than stress: cardiovascular and gastrointestinal scans, blood tests, and surgeries—all of which run up doctors’ fees. What if we put the emphasis on

helping to reduce stress by funding mental health clinics in neighborhoods? Is it possible that if there were a sufficient number of Mercy outpatient clinics to assist families in stress, that expensive inpatient services that deal with physical ailments would decrease and thus provide further financial support? Neighborhood mental health clinics would also decrease the need for

families to utilize emergency services as their “doctor’s office”, adding savings to be poured into clinics.

This comprehensive Mercy vision would take strong leaders, mental health experts, community representatives, hospital systems, and other appropriate agencies to come together to find a way to integrate this holistic care.

Performing the works of Mercy is a spiritual exercise. The Sisters of Mercy have traditionally offered the poor the freedom of spirit, which they deserve.

In summary, both pastoral psychotherapy and the theology of Mercy are expressions of Christ’s mission and reveal how God is at work in the world. In the future, a new Pentecost is possible, a new joy can burst forth in communities when we find creative ways to address mental healthcare needs. ♦

Endnotes

1. 1991 Institute Direction Statement reads: *“Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley’s passion for the poor, we, the sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with the economically poor of the world, especially women and children.”*
2. Pope Francis, in his book *The Joy of the Gospel*, writes that God shows the poor “his first Mercy”; and in that there is great Joy. *The Joy of the Gospel* is an apostolic exhortation on the joy of Spirit-filled evangelizing, which has social dimensions.

3. Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" states: "*At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task.*" (Vatican II Gaudium at Spes, §4, 1965) One hundred thirty-four years earlier, Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, spoke similar words when she called us to consistently read the signs of the time in which we live, and respond to need, especially with the poor....as Jesus did.
4. Go to www.rwjf.org for statistics (e.g. 25% of U.S. adult population suffers from mental disorders) and for input on how co-morbidity between mental and medical conditions is the rule rather than the exception. See also this source for how health reform has increased attention on ways to improve quality and reduce cost. Like Catherine, leaders should focus on subgroups most at risk.



~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 19-22, 2015**. 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. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Scripture Reflections at Jubilee ¹

Jean Evans, R.S.M.

The readings of today's Mass tell us in no uncertain terms that God is our protector and lifeline, particularly at times when we are most vulnerable. Elijah, the prophet of God who was run out of town by the cruel queen Jezebel, takes shelter in a cave and there in the midst of chaos and distress, of earthquakes and tempests, is consoled by a still small voice of God. Catherine McAuley, from the early days of the Mercy congregation, knew with unquestioning certainty that a "Providential hand" was guiding and supporting the little community when forces from all sides conspired to destroy it. And, in today's gospel from Matthew, the disciples, fighting the winds and squalls of the Sea of Galilee, are miraculously saved by the presence of Jesus. This Jesus is the Son of God, who calms the stormy sea, and says just enough to reassure the disciples, "Take courage. It is I; don't be afraid."

The celebration of a Jubilee is a moment to thank God publicly for a lifetime of love and service within the Church; for protection from God who has held us by the right hand, from God whom we chose to be our portion forever, many years ago: 25, 50, 60, 70, and even 75 years ago in this Mercy Congregation.

Our jubilarians have served the Lord in education and health care, pastoral care and administration, social work, parish work and counseling. They responded to the needy in a myriad of ways through their presence, their prayer and their suffering in union with Christ. Today is a day to give thanks and praise to God who has done great things for us!

Our vocation to the Sisters of Mercy has been a gift and continues to be an on-going call: to live joyfully in the spirit of our foundress. We are the daughters of Catherine McAuley, as we sang so many years ago. She was a brave and determined

woman who knew deprivation and hardship, who lost her parents and struggled to keep her family together in the hostile environment of anti-Catholic Dublin of the 1800's. A person internally displaced within her own country and culture, Catherine McAuley saw beyond herself to the plight of destitute women and children in the Dublin streets. She tried to save women and children from prostitution and workhouses. In our day, these children would be trafficked and these women would be bused from our borders to detention camps.

When the Providence of God changed her financial circumstances, Catherine McAuley spent

**What a marvelous gift
each of us jubilarians has
received: To live a life
infused by the grace of
God that transforms our
lost opportunities, our
sins and resistances into
moments of surrender,
of peace and of
contentment.**

all she had to better the lives of the poor women and children by opening the first House of Mercy on Baggot St. in Dublin on September 24, 1827. All the while, she was impelled by the conviction that God, to whom she dedicated herself for time and eternity, sent her and her companions to bring relief and comfort to God's own poor, vulnerable children. She was convinced that, by serving suffering people, she was serving and loving Jesus Christ her Lord.

What a marvelous gift each of us jubilarians has received: To share with Catherine in Jesus' mission of mercy.

What a marvelous gift each of us jubilarians has received: To live a life infused by the grace of God that transforms our lost opportunities, our sins and resistances into moments of surrender, of peace and of contentment.

What a marvelous gift we have received to be called to a common life: To support and be supported by our companions on the journey—some of whom, like Sisters Joseph Mary Galli, Barbara Henry and Ellene Egan have preceded us into eternity. And one, Pauline Mary White, is a Carmelite in a small village in Wales.

When we were young, jubilarians ahead of us seemed so old! Now, that we're all living longer, maybe we have to think a little differently about the meaning of jubilee.

A jubilee can't just be a getting together for a luncheon, like a retirement banquet. Jubilee can't be the end of the story because the book is still being written!

By our vows, we are committed to a dynamic life-long relationship with God whose love and unspeakable tenderness continue to lead us into the heart of the Trinity.

By our vows, we are committed to work for, advocate and pray for the welfare of all God's people in this world—you who are with us today, those near and far, families, the young and the aging, the lost, the vulnerable, ordinary people in distress or spiritual need.

We are committed to the protection of all God's creation--this earth, which is experiencing its own agony, passion and transformation.

Long ago the prophet Jeremiah spoke for God to the Jews of the exile reminding them of the covenant: "With an age-old love, I have loved you" (Jer. 31:3). There is a special significance to this term "age-old love" according to scripture scholar Carroll Stuhlmueller. The adjective "age-old" *ôlam* in Hebrew, refers much more to the distant future without excluding the ancient past. So what does this mean for us jubilarians?

There is nothing to fear. There is nothing to fear because our future is provided for by the very One who initiated the covenant of love. It is a future more hope-filled, more blessed by God's mercy than we could ever imagine. It is a future of a Congregation that has relied on Providence from its inception—God's Provident Hand holding all our lives gently and lovingly.

On this day of gratitude, I ask God for three blessings for the jubilarians:

- May our Jubilee be a moment of joyful re-dedication to Christ in consecration and mission celebrated together with our community, families and friends.
- May our Jubilee be that moment when, looking across the sometimes troubled waters of our lives, we discover ourselves held secure by the gaze of Jesus, by Jesus who says, "Take courage; it is I; don't be afraid."
- May our Jubilee take each of us to a deeper love and more authentic living, to a time when we can pray the words of Teilhard de Chardin, "Lord, lock me up in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there, burn me, purify me, set me on fire, sublimate me, till I become utterly what you would have me be..."² ♦

Endnotes

1. These reflections were given at the Jubilee Mass celebrated in Burlingame, California on August 10, 2014.
2. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*. <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1621&C=1535> August 2, 2014.



Mercy Works in Australia: The Poor Need Help Today, Not Next Week

Ailsa Mackinnon, R.S.M.

My current ministry carries the title, Executive Director, Mercy Works. That is an elegant description for a very basic work of Mercy – assisting in the care of the most poor and vulnerable in our society and encouraging their movement towards self-reliance.

The organization I am currently involved with, Mercy Works, supports the Australian and overseas development activities that are part of the vision and mission of all the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. In Australia, Mercy Works offers community education in world development concerns, provides assistance with refugees and asylum seekers, and works in partnership with Indigenous peoples. In Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste, Mercy Works collaborates with local partners and directs its efforts towards education, health care and the social and spiritual well-being of those who are poor or displaced.

We are a comparatively small organization. Unlike OXFAM or World Vision or Save the Children, we don't have a budget of millions of dollars. Yet, our assistance ranges far and wide and is very effective. That is due to the competence and hard work of the coordinators and their capacity to work with local people, after they have listened to what people need. Some of the Mercy Works personnel are Sisters of Mercy. But many more are laymen and women who have been inspired by Catherine McAuley's life and mission.

Funding from Various Sources

Mercy Works receives no government funding, so we depend on friends and benefactors

for donations. The four Mercy Congregations in Australia are strong financial backers, as are the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland. Then there are many Sisters of Mercy across the length and breadth of Australia who give regular contributions. The Sisters of Mercy have a long history in Australia of education and health care, so we have institutions on which we can depend for generous support of our outreach.

On some occasions, we receive donations from corporations. One example of this is Horizon Oil. An Australian company, it does exploration for gas and oil in Papua New Guinea. When the owner of the company heard of our work in the village health program, he donated money and has continued to do so for the last four years. He is still committed to the cause. The company also provides assistance in transporting our goods and equipment from Port Moresby to the remotest areas in which we work.

However, there is always the struggle to raise enough funds for each year's projects. Hence, advertising, community education and fundraising are essential components of my role. I am continually reminded of Catherine McAuley's absolute dependence on Divine Providence. The required amount of donations always seem to come in within each year, even though we start the year having committed ourselves to projects without knowing where the funds will come from. Thankfully, each year our books remain in the black!

Our key quote of Catherine's governs my work: "The poor need help today, not next week." And that is what happens in our projects. Those who require assistance don't have to wait long to have their request answered. Because we

I am continually reminded of Catherine McAuley's absolute dependence on Divine Providence. The required amount of donations always seem to come in within each year, even though we start the year having committed ourselves to projects without knowing where the funds will come from.

are a small organization, the local coordinators know the region's need very well and are able to make an assessment quickly so that the funds can flow. Then the project is carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure that effective change can occur.

Commitment to Justice Carries Risks

As a Sister of Mercy, I have had a long-term interest and involvement in social justice. I have kept myself abreast of current issues. On particular occasions, I have written advocacy letters and have participated in protest marches. During my 14 years as a high school principal I encouraged the education of staff and students on social justice issues and the resources that needed to be devoted to such activities. I know that there are many women with a strong social conscience making a difference in our country because of the Mercy education they received. Nothing warms my heart more than to meet them and listen as they talk to me of the good they are doing for others.

Sometimes my actions for justice have incurred the ire of the more conservative members of our society and I have had to bear the brunt of that. The Church's social teaching is very clear that action on behalf of justice is a constitutive element of the preaching of the Gospel. All the Popes from Leo XIII to the current Pope Francis have taken that stance. So I know that I stand on solid ground when I get involved in action for justice.

Even though I have undertaken no formal study in development, over the years I have gotten my hands dirty doing the works of mercy with a development lens. My involvement at Mercy Works is a natural fit for me. I am pleased to be able to use my skills in administration and leadership in this vital work of Mercy.

Mercy Works. Some people contact us thinking we are a construction company. And that is what we are. We do not construct many buildings, but we certainly assist people to construct their lives. Mercy works for people in many ways. Helping to build their self-confidence, self-respect, self-protection and understanding of their rights and responsibilities is a great work of Mercy.

Receivers of Service Participate and Take Charge of Programs

While a fair amount of my role involves paper work and compliance issues, I love to take the opportunity to speak to other Australians about our work and to visit the many and varied projects across Australia, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste.

For three years now I have been visiting projects and still I continue to be appalled at the difference between the standard of living the average Australian enjoys and that of the peoples of Papua New Guinea or Timor Leste. These countries are our closest neighbors. It is a short plane flight from Cairns to Port Moresby or from Darwin to Dili, yet the living conditions are miles apart. A few statistics demonstrates this immense gap. For example, in the achievement of the United Nations Millenium Development Goals, Australia rates 2nd out of the 187 countries. Timor Leste is 128th and Papua New Guinea is further down at 157.

In all our projects, we encourage participation of as many people we serve as possible. The dictionary defines participation as "to take part, be or become actively involved in." Whether you live in the PNG towns of Kiunga, Goroka, Wewak, Mt. Hagen, the Timor Leste areas of Fohoram or Maliana, or the Australian cities of Alice Springs, Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne or Ballarat—the participants in projects make this definition jump out of the dictionary at you. In fact, people's stories add to the definition because they speak of not only taking part but also of owning the process, setting priorities and taking control of the outcome. What a wonderful difference a little help can make in a person's life! And what difference there is when the process and the outcome are owned by the participant.

One legacy we have received from Catherine McAuley is that she valued excellence. Catherine's concept of excellence is not one of elitism but of participation. She believed that everyone has the right as human beings to be able to access education, health care and the means to live a fruitful and fulfilling life. Therefore, no matter their abilities, each person can strive for excellence in whatever they take on. Given the

opportunity in a spirit of encouragement and generosity a person then can achieve such excellence.

Celestine's Story

I'm sure, for example, that Celestine Oropka is an excellent teacher at St. Gabriel's Kiunga and is inspiring others to also achieve excellence in their lives. Her family lives in a remote village in the Western Province of PNG. They knew Celestine was intelligent, and they wanted to encourage her to live out her potential. When Maureen Sexton, R.S.M., the Mercy Works project coordinator heard about her, she encouraged her to apply for a scholarship through Mercy Works. Celestine boarded at Mercy Secondary School Yarapos, completed her secondary schooling, and then studied teaching. When she completed her training, she went back to her hometown of Kiunga to teach because she wanted to give back to the community something of what she had received. Such is the reciprocal nature of Mercy.

Challenges of Timor Leste

In Timor Leste life is tough. This new country has been ravaged by decades of civil strife and services such as roads, water and electricity were severely disrupted during that time. Mercy Works has a presence in remote villages in the Cova Lima district assisting them to establish early childhood learning centers. We are constantly approached by local villagers to build a new center. We hire local builders who use local materials and train local people to be the teachers. Then we support and mentor them in their work. Some teachers walk over rough roads for up to an hour to get to work. The children, too, walk long distances to get to the center.

The children of Timor Leste are among the most malnourished in the world. In order to overcome this, each center provides a nutritional lunch for the preschoolers. For some of them, it is the only meal they eat in the day. Mercy Works is about to embark on building its fifth such center.

When I visit, I continue to be impressed by the joy and determination of these people as they make the best of their lives.

It is a most enlivening experience to visit these projects. Everywhere I go people express genuine gratitude for the assistance we have provided. Even though I know it is quite small, it makes a big difference to them. And it is such a simple thing to achieve, each project costing much less than what it would be if it were attempted in Australia.

To be honest, though, I have to admit I always enjoy coming home. For, I know that at home the electricity will work, the shower will run hot and I will sleep in a comfortable bed. The people I have visited are not afforded such luxuries.

When I visit, I
continue to be
impressed by the joy
and determination
of these people as
they make the best
of their lives.

Needs of Indigenous Peoples and Refugees

Even though Australia is a wealthy country, there are many here, who cannot access its benefits. Among these are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the southland who have been here for over 50,000 years. The life expectancy of the average Australian woman is 84.3,

yet most aboriginal woman have died before age 70. In spite of the fact that the aboriginal population of Australia is less than 2% of the whole, they constitute at least 25% of the prison population. Mercy Works is in partnership with a number of aboriginal communities helping to redress the wrongs and bridge the gaps.

Then there are those who have come recently seeking refuge from persecution in the war-torn countries of Africa and the Middle East. Current Australian Government policies and practices threaten to deny them their basic rights. In fact, there is a danger of contravening the United Nations Convention on Human Rights. The Government does not seem to be heeding the words of the Secretary General of the United Nations. Ban Ki-moon is convinced that the United Nations must play a role in promoting human rights. To the Human Rights Council he has said, "All victims of human rights abuses should be able to look to the Human Rights

Council as a forum and a springboard for action.” (12 March 2007). It is proper, then, that we should all, as members of the human family, work to seek these rights and freedoms.

Our most recent innovation was to open the Mercy House of Welcome in Adelaide. This center is specifically for those asylum seekers who have had their claims for refugee status rejected. With no access to medical benefits or permission to work, these people often suffer mental illness. Their futures are uncertain. They may face the threat of being repatriated to the land they fled. They feel a risk of persecution and, in many cases, death. The House of Welcome gives them a reason to get up in the morning, come to a place where they are welcomed, learn English and receive assistance in their need. The center has been operating for nine months and, already, there

are over 200 regular visitors.

Assurance of God’s Blessing and Benefactors

Just in case we might be inclined to be disheartened when we do not make the progress we would like to see, there are words of Catherine McAuley to console and encourage us: “God’s work does not depend on anyone in particular but on the continuance of God’s blessing.”

Of course, Mercy Works can do nothing without the continuing support of benefactors, supporters, staff and friends. By participating in this work of Mercy, we are all doing our part to help us all meet our goals. I am thankful for the generosity of many good-minded people. I am grateful, too, that I can devote my time and talents to this work. ♦



MAST BOARD MEMBERS

The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology publishes *THE MAST JOURNAL*, begun in 1991, 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., Sisters of Mercy, 600 Convent Rd., Syosset, NY 11791. E-mail: uptonj@stjohns.edu

Manuscript submissions to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., at 1600 Petersen Ave. #40, San Jose, CA 95129, e-mail eloros@sbcglobal.net. Printing by St. Joseph Press, La Grange Park, Illinois.

Mercy Farm in Vermont

Mary Quinn, R.S.M.

Benson, Vermont! How did I end up here? Population: 1,050. It appears that the dairy cow and steer count is greater. Mercy Farm? I never knew we had a farm. Really, and it is in Benson. But now I'm getting ahead of my story.

It seems to me now that all of my previous ministries and life experiences became a base for an opportunity that I would never have imagined. The old cliché, that life has many twists and turns, is certainly true. However, I like to think that many paths or more precisely, opportunities come along, each giving a chance to say, "Yes." And so it has been.

Ministry in the Medical Field

In 1967, as an Elementary Education major at Saint Joseph's College in Maine I was assigned to Mercy Hospital in Portland, Maine. I would begin classes at the School of X-Ray Technology in two months. Following graduation in 1969, I was assigned to Madigan Memorial Hospital in Houlton. I was a 24- year old caught up with the breaking technological innovations that were beginning in the field of radiology. Thus, the move to Houlton, a small town in Aroostook County along the Canadian border, was both

However, I like to
think that many paths
or more precisely,
opportunities come
along, each giving a
chance to say, "Yes."

disappointing and a great learning experience.

It was also a time when a merger of the two hospitals was underway, and the subsequent withdrawal of the Sisters of Mercy from health care in this area. By 1973-74 the "Madigan Five" as we were affectionately called, were all

transferred to Portland. I was a weekend radiologic technician at Mercy Hospital, and during the weekdays, worked toward completing my M.A. at University of Southern Maine. In the fall of 1974, I was asked to be the Program Director of the School of Radiologic Technology, a position I held until January 1986.

Ministry in Education

During that spring I volunteered in the newly established Development Office at Catherine McAuley High School (CMHS). That summer I was given an opportunity to volunteer for Movement for a Better World, an NGO of the United Nations. In New York City, I lived in Spanish Harlem with the Sisters of Mercy. Needless to say, this was a most exciting, enriching and memorable experience. Returning to Maine in August, I was asked to consider the position of Development Director at CMHS, which also included Marketing and Alumnae Relations. This also was exciting, challenging and exhilarating. It was fun! In addition, it was rewarding to watch entering freshmen become articulate, inspiring, accomplished women who have and continue to make a positive difference in our world.

In 1995, I was asked to do development and communications for the Sisters of Mercy, a most stimulating experience. I don't want to beat my mantra to death but I have found whatever the ministry I have, I loved it, made the most of it, and met a lot of wonderful, caring, committed, fun-loving and talented people along the way.

Manager of Good Cause Thrift Shop

In 2003, the position of manager of the Good Cause Thrift Shop became available. I submitted an application and became the manager. The Good Cause was established during my tenure at McAuley High. Its two-fold purpose was to provide funds for the Student Financial Aid Program and quality merchandise at affordable prices to those we served in downtown Portland,

and beyond. This, too, was stimulating, challenging, and heartbreaking.

There is a whole other life out there and one can question: How do people make it? How do they survive? Some shared their stories. We would ask if they would like their needs listed on our prayer board, which hung in the lunchroom. Yes. Of course, you will be remembered in prayer. Others heard of this and asked if they could be included on the board. And so the prayer board grew both in the lunchroom—and in my own prayers.

Still today, I remember many by name. I wonder how they are doing. Are they safe? Were they able to pull themselves out of the mire? At Good Cause, I honed my listening and observation skills. I learned openness, caring, gentleness and at times how to express “tough love.” Some people just needed to come in, dry off from the rain or snow, and get warmed up. They left with a warm smile, kind word or a hug, refreshed and perhaps strengthened for a moment in time. I believe that “our people” knew that they were cared for, accepted and loved. I hope that I touched their lives as they certainly touched mine. Retiring from Good Cause in the fall of 2012 opened new paths. What would lie ahead?

Various Volunteer Jobs

From early winter through springtime, three opportunities piqued my interest. I was a volunteer in the Mercy Hospital Gift Shop. Here we had computerized the transactions, and a sale could be one of seven possible options. It took great patience on the part of seasoned volunteers to bring me up to speed.

Having a great love for animals, I checked out the need at the Westbrook Animal Refuge League. Until a part-time person was hired, there was a need in the laundry room. Here 200 pounds of bedding were processed daily. Since I had a background in health care, I volunteered for the newly formed Animal Clinic. This work involved preparation and autoclaving of surgical instruments, gowns, drapes and towels. I took care of the dogs, cats and mice pre- and post-operation. I readied the clinic for the next day, and filled the “holes” in tasks no one else was covering.

My other volunteer job, most important of all, was serving as a driver for a gentleman who had become blind. Twice a week, we set out to do banking, grocery shopping, getting gas or furniture shopping. A stop at Tony’s Donut Shop was also on the list. All were enjoyable adventures and learning experiences. I never knew how each day would unfold, or the blessings that would be realized – hopefully by all parties!

Not all these opportunities, even though life-giving for me, were without struggles and challenges. I felt a lack of support. I seemed to be living in a vacuum. At the same time, I felt I had been left hanging out to dry. I had a mentor/kindred spirit who helped me through this period.

Discovering Benson Farm and Who Was There

During all of these activities, I looked for a ministry in the Greater Portland area, and finding none, I cast my net further out. Mercy Farm in Benson, Vermont, needed volunteers. A search online provided me with an enticing glimpse of Mercy Farm. The photos showed a goat, vegetable and flower gardens and a reflective space. Retreats occurred here and provided respite and renewal for guests. Reading the description, I had no clue what an “eco-spiritual center” was or what “sustainable living practices” were. With dictionary in hand, I learned a bit more and thought there must be something I could do. I arrived with suitcase in one hand and my miniature poodle, Andy, in the other one, on July 3rd for a three-week stint as a volunteer. I felt immediately attracted by the peace that envelopes the farm and seems to cleanse and heal as it washes over you.

At this point, Mercy Farm had on staff Sister Holly Cloutier, R.S.M., with 10 years of gardening experience. Sister Betty Secord, R.S.M., a Master Gardener, had expressed an interest in joining the staff. Another staff person was being sought. Connecticut is the community of entrance for both Holly and Betty. Highlights from Holly’s ministries include teaching elementary school, special education in a treatment center, residential work in a home for teenage mothers and transitional housing for single parents and their children. Holly volunteered for seven years on a

farm and has many years as a volunteer with the American Red Cross. Betty's past ministries range from teaching elementary school children, working with the elderly in parishes and nursing homes, coordinating adult education and working with women who were incarcerated.

Can three very different people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and experiences come together as one for the benefit of Mercy Farm? This was the underlying question Sister Nancy Audette, R.S.M., had to answer. Nancy's community of origin is Vermont, and her ministries span teaching French language and literature at all levels, and administration at Trinity College in Vermont. She served as coordinator of volunteer services for the Vermont Department of Corrections. She did prison ministry with men and women incarcerated in Connecticut. She served on the leadership team for Vermont Mercy Community. She did environmental work for Mercy Northeast, including facilitation and training of facilitators for *Awakening the Dreamer: Changing the Dream*. She is currently chairperson of the board of trustees for Mercy Ecology, Inc.

Making It All Grow

Mercy Farm sits on 39 acres of land at the lower end of the Champlain River Valley, which separates the Adirondacks from the Green Mountains. The Sisters of Mercy have owned this property since 1993. Initially, it was the site of the Institute for Spiritual Development. In the fall of 2010, it became Mercy Farm, an eco-spiritual center whose mission is to provide care for the earth through environmental education, organic gardening and sustainable living practices.

During August of 2013, Nancy arrived at Mercy Farm and met with the three of us. She had, so it seemed, an endless list of questions that were thought-provoking and daunting. Her questions gave us a sense of who we were. Were we compatible? How did we see our ministry at Mercy Farm? Could each of us commit to work together for the good of Mercy Farm? Could we bring Mercy Farm to the next level and even beyond? She was seeking three Sisters who would act as a team, with each having different roles and

areas of responsibility. At the same time, they needed to come together as a whole, and all be able to comfortably "cover" for each other. Holly was the Farm Manager; Betty, the Program Manager; and I, the Business Manager.

But wait, why would anyone want to leave their home, family, local community, the sea shore, Lake Region, and all that is familiar and move to an unknown and remote area along the western border of Vermont? Why start a totally different career in the fall of one's life? After prayer and reflection, the pros far outweighed the cons for my making such a decision for a life-altering transition. By mid-September, the Team was in place and I began to engage what I refer to as "Hands-on Farming 101." In less than a year, I learned a great deal about caring for the guinea fowl, French hens, and the gardening process--from planting seeds to harvesting. That includes watching all that goes into maintaining and caring for the honeybees and their hives and now -- harvesting of honey. What an awesome process this is.

Together, Holly, Betty and I are gathering data on pond-restoration and solar-energy potential. We have been working to lay out the nature trails. We look for ways to make Mercy Farm a bird sanctuary, and were recently certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a wildlife habitat. It goes without saying that with each step forward there is more to learn. These are indeed exciting times "down on the farm!"

Reflection on the Influence of Catherine McAuley

Reflecting back on the past 68 years, and particularly on the last 51, I realize how privileged I am in spite of the ebb and flow of these years. As the oldest of seven in an Irish family, I would help my Mom with the myriad of household tasks and taking care of the kids and would follow my Dad around helping with outside chores. Here I learned the basics of running a home and caring for it with TLC. It was during Summer Bible School that I first met and was mesmerized by a Sister of Mercy. I think it was then, as a junior high student, that I wanted to be a Sister. As a public school student, I could only have met Sisters

through religious education classes. As high school approached, I attended the forerunner of Catherine McAuley High. After graduation, I entered the convent in the fall of 1963. During high school, I caught glimpses of Catherine McAuley through the many Sisters of Mercy who taught or influenced me along the way. The attraction to religious life was Catherine McAuley—her person and her charism. And like all Sisters of Mercy, her charisma, focusing on the needs of the time, are threaded throughout our ministries.

As Catherine responded to the needs of the mid-1880's, we too, are responding to the needs of the 21st Century. Catherine was a forerunner for women religious in stepping out of the cloistered life and walking among the people. Today, religious life has evolved and has kept in step with modern needs.

Our response is articulated in the Direction Statement and the Critical Concerns. At Mercy Farm, we do the following:

(1) Address local needs by donating 50% of our produce to the Fair Haven Concerned Food Shelf. This area, like most of Vermont, is food-insecure. That is, because of their lack of financial resources, people don't have access to enough food to meet their basic needs at all times. Obesity is also a problem because diets are high in starch, sugars and processed foods. Currently, Mercy Farm is the only farm which weekly (or more often, depending on abundance) donates fresh produce to the Food Shelf. Recipes are also provided with each specific vegetable.

(2) Educate people about ecology. The ideas and ideals of the following DVDs make up our current educational component: "Journey of the Universe An Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation,"¹ "Queen of the Sun: What are the Bees Telling Us?"² and "Dirt! The Movie."³ Betty customizes her presentation to age level and follows through with hands-on experience.

(3) Practice sustainable living. This includes exploration of solar energy, refurbishing the pond to a habitable state, maintaining bee hives, laying

out nature walks, and working toward becoming a bird sanctuary through the Audubon Society, enhanced by recently receiving National Wildlife Federation Certification.

(4) Like Catherine, we also reach out to elderly neighbors. We join in the festivities of the monthly senior luncheons, and when possible, attend other gatherings, town meetings and local events.

The mission of Mercy Farm has been a transforming element in my life. Like all of us, I had done some recycling, but never fully realized the negative impact *not* recycling or doing it in a haphazard way has on each living creature. Just turn on the tap or the switch and "it's there!" The question of the day is, for how long? Can what has happened in California, happen here? Not only is water diminishing, but also vegetables, fruits, meat produce and the livelihood of our neighbors. Then what? Am I in the right place? Yes, without hesitation or question. In the short time I have been at Mercy Farm, I am awed and inspired

by all that surrounds me. Perhaps I never took the time to really see and hear bees gathering nectar or making honey. I now hear whispering leaves, the sounds of frogs, coyotes, and bubbling brooks. I look up at a night sky and see the countless galaxies spread out. Books that have inspired me with new perspectives include Joan Chittister's, *The Way We Were: A Story of Conversion and Renewal*, which seems to answer some of the hows and whys of Religious life during the fifties and sixties, enabling me to see and understand religious life as it was.⁴

The Universe is a Green Dragon A Cosmic Creation Story by Brian Swimme, has a thought provoking subtitle.⁵ Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* also gives the reader many points to ponder along our spiritual journey.⁶ The importance of recycling or thinking twice about buying water in plastic bottles.... the list goes on. There is time to reflect, to be at peace and to just be.

As I read this over again it sounds selfish and perhaps even self-giving at the same time. There

How long can the belief "it won't happen to me" continue? What would the Earth look like if we each did one positive thing?

are way too many “I’s,” but if we don’t look back over time, can we truly look forward to what is or what could be for ourselves as well as for others? Could we place the needs of others in prayer or see the needs of the world (or even a small part) and respond to lack of food, clothing or education? Could we say, “yes” to an opportunity, which at the same time addresses another’s need for time apart, the need for quiet and prayer, the need to volunteer or to just be there in the garden?

“For everything there is a season . . .”(Eccles. 3:1), and “Lord, I love the beauty of your house and the place where your glory dwells!” Both have been guiding principles, strong beliefs and a support for me throughout life and now serve as a concise summary of this life. ♦

Endnotes

1. Brian Swimme, and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe: An Epic Story of*

Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation. (Northcraft Productions, 2011). (DVD)

2. _____. *Queen of the Sun: What are the Bees Telling Us?* Evan Schiller Production Company, Produced by Jon Betz, 2010. (DVD)
3. _____. *Dirt! The Movie*. American Documentary Film, 2009. (DVD)
4. Joan Chittister, *The Way We Were: A Story of Conversion and Renewal*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).
5. Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon A Cosmic Creation Story*. (Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 1984).
6. Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011).



During September, temperatures seemed to swing between crisp and toasty daily, the sky was overall bright and blue and the Earth seemed to cry out for rain. A mix of vibrant and muted hues scattered throughout the hills and mountains that envelop and dwarf the Farm and beyond. Now, in early October, cornfields are "as high as an elephant's eye" and meadows are dotted with huge bales of hay. It is truly a breathtaking sight!

—Taken from Mercy Farm’s online newsletter



Free-Lance Musician

Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M.

Free-Lance musician! How did I arrive at this place of ministry?

I did not want to become a Sister of Mercy. I wanted to become a concert pianist. However, the thought of being a Sister would not go away. On my application form, I wrote, "I didn't want to become a sister, but since the thought won't go away, I'll try it but if I don't like it, I won't stay." I had hoped I would not be accepted. Fifty-six years later, the Mercy Community has proven to be a wonderful life path.

My sister, eight years older, wanted to take piano lessons. The family purchased an upright piano in 1944 for \$15. She and I started taking lessons at the same time. I was five and she was thirteen. After two years, she told our parents that she just wanted to learn how to read music and play the piano. She didn't want to continue since she had accomplished what she had set out to do. However, she told our parents that I had talent and should continue. I owe so much to my sister. I've been playing ever since. She died at twenty-eight, but had wisdom beyond her years in so many ways.

Formal Training in Music

I thought I was giving up music when I entered the convent, but the community has always encouraged the development of my God-given talent. I was sent to Catholic University in the summers of the 1960's to get my master's degree in piano performance. There, I experienced the changes that came as a result of Vatican II. One summer you needed to have enough guimpes and coifs to last a summer in the long black, serge habits. The next summer you were wearing the street-length, navy blue habit. It was also an opportunity to meet Sisters of Mercy from across the nation.

At the time, I was teaching at a largely Hispanic high school in Denver. I was living in two worlds. During the school year, I was practicing piano while teaching religion, English, music, coordinating the school of religion, and learning a culture that was new to me. During the summer I was immersed in study for a Master's degree in piano performance. As I grew to know, understand and love the variety within Hispanic culture, I think I could have spent my life in ministry with the Hispanic culture and people.

I think I may have been one of the first pastoral liturgists in the nation, learning as I went along. It was an exciting time of creating parish councils, and working with lectors, communion ministers, cantors, and greeters. We were forming a participative assembly of laity.

When I received my Master's degree, I was sent to our college. I was then teaching alongside my own former music teachers of high school and college, Sisters Catherine Marie Franey and Rosanne LaFond. During that time, we were beginning to feel the effects of Vatican II. I was blessed to be mentored by the college chaplain and theologian. I gradually learned what the new liturgy meant musically.

Liturgist in the Post-Vatican II Era

After two years of college teaching, I was invited to become the liturgist at the Cathedral in Omaha. I replaced the choir director and organist who had been there for 50 years--Winifred Traynor Flanagan. She had been my first organ teacher. She was also the sister-in-law of Fr. Flanagan, the same one who founded Boys Town.

I think I may have been one of the first pastoral liturgists in the nation, learning as I went along. It was an exciting time of creating parish councils, and working with lectors, communion ministers, cantors, and greeters. We were forming a participative assembly of laity. Choirs and liturgical musicians were using the vernacular, and letting go of Latin. We were developing awareness of the liturgy on Sunday being connected to our lives during the rest of the week.

Although I had no formal training in liturgy, I continued to be mentored by priests who were themselves embracing the new liturgy as a way of forming the People of God.

Looking back on the changes that occurred, I think that we missed the boat by not continuing to develop chant and polyphony. We were concerned with creating music in the vernacular and lost our sense of tradition. Since it was lost for quite a while, it has been difficult to reintroduce that part of our tradition without resistance.

From there, I took several positions as parish liturgist and music director. I continued to enjoy forming liturgical and musical ministers according to Vatican II. During that time, I also performed as a pianist. In the 1980s, I was the pianist in a trio with a violinist and cellist from the Kansas City Symphony. Our trio performed regularly.

For a few years in the late 1980's, I free-lanced. Although I enjoyed the diversity of music making, I missed serving in a parish community. As a result, I returned to various parishes as their liturgist and musician.

Musical Service at Organizational Events

Additional opportunities to serve as a liturgist and musician came with invitations to plan and provide music for local Mercy gatherings, provincial and general chapters, and LCWR conventions. A highlight for me was serving on the liturgy committee for the founding event of the Institute in 1991 with Sisters Cynthia Serjak, Celeste Marie Nuttman, Kathy Green, and Mary Galeone. People still remember and talk about the "door opening."

Organizations that have become important to me are the National Pastoral Musicians for Catholic Musicians and the American Guild of Organists, which crosses religious boundaries. I have been active in both organizations, which offer many avenues of member support, education and professional development.

In my last parish setting—after serving as coordinator of music, RCIA, and outreach as well as being on the extended leadership team—I asked the community for a sabbatical. Although I expected to take a year, at the end of the year, I asked to stay on for a second year to receive a

Masters in Sacred Music with a concentration in organ at Kansas University. I was 60 at the time.

The young people with whom I was studying told me that I studied and practiced too hard. I responded that after they had been working for a while, they, too, would enjoy returning to school for enrichment. I took every course I could. When I finished, the dean told me that I had enough hours to begin a doctoral program! At that stage of my life, I did not feel it was necessary. For young people today, advanced degrees are essential, although many of them become strapped by student loans. It was a wonderful program. I was surprised that a Sacred Music degree from a secular university could prepare me for my next ministry as Director of Music for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

Ministerial Challenges

In parish work, I experienced two major disappointments. At one parish, the roof was leaking and the church needed to be painted. One day the pastor came running into my office, very excited. He was holding a copy of the American Bishops' document, "Art and Environment" (1976) and said, "We can do more than paint the church!" I had no idea what he meant until I read the document. It referred not just to pictures on the wall, but also to architectural renovation.

He hired Br. William Woeger to be the liturgical and design consultant. For two years, we embarked on an educational project to prepare parishioners for the renovation. The final product split the parish. While some were very enthusiastic, others felt that they had lost their beautiful church with pews replaced by chairs, a configuration of the assembly around the altar, and the Blessed Sacrament placed in a chapel for veneration instead of in the main church. Thirty years later, the parish renovated the space to its former appearance. From this experience, I learned that the best-laid plans often go awry.

I found myself feeling caught in the middle of advancing and regressing, feeling the irony of loss and gain described in Mark 8: 34-36: "Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self, take up the cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his/her life will lose it; but

anyone who loses his/her life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it.”

I took a sabbatical with Margaret Brennan, IHM, and other fine theologians in Toronto at the Jesuit Regis School of Theology’s program, Spiritual Integration for Ministry. As with my early experience at Catholic University of America, I studied with ministers from around the world.

Following that year of enrichment, I took a parish position in Kansas City. The people had a wonderful adult-formation program and I worked with Fr. Bill Bauman, a liturgist and musician. However, after a change of pastors, the church became divided. Evidently, not everyone was excited about the changes of Vatican II. The polarization that we are experiencing today unfortunately became evident in the mid- 1980s. I thought that the parish could not fall apart because of its strong adult-formation program, but difficult years followed for that congregation.

Polarization in parishes seems so prevalent today. Questions I wish I could answer are these: “How can we all get along and follow the Gospel message with a sense of both-and rather than either-or?” And, “How can we live together in a sense of inclusivity rather than exclusivity? Why do we emphasize difference rather than commonality?” I wish we could surmount these divisions and fulfill what Paul says in Philippians 4:8: “ Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise.”

Various projects have come my way in the course of ministry. I was involved in creating a parish hymnal. I was the cofounder of three organizations: a scholarship program for organists in eastern Kansas, and a contemporary music group which performs serious music composed in

the last 25 years. (It has now enjoyed 25 years of success, but I had to leave it for other responsibilities). A third organization was *Imago Dei*, an organization for theology and the arts. It was successful for a few years but several cofounders changed. As a result, the group has gradually followed a different direction than the one we started.

People often ask me what I have been composing. I have always considered myself a performer, not a composer. I have occasionally written music when there was a specific need or if I was asked to write something. But that is the extent of my work as a composer.

Active Retirement: Doing What You Love

Now I am retired. But my life is full. I enjoy substituting in Catholic and Protestant churches. I play for Shabbat and the High Holy Days at synagogues. Ecumenism and inter-faith relationships have always been important to me. There are many paths to God and I am blessed to meet many faith-filled people in various church and synagogue settings. I consider my outreach to other faiths in the spirit of the Lord’s words to the merciful person in Matthew 25:40: “ In so far as you did it to the least of

these, you did it to me.”

I continue to give organ lessons because I am concerned about the future of organists. I also volunteer at our new Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, which is known internationally for its architecture and acoustics. It is an opportunity to see and hear wonderful performances free of charge. People tell me that I am too active to be retired. My definition of retirement is doing what I love.

As I age, I find the psalms very meaningful and I relish their different moods. Think of how long people have been praying these poems, which express our varied needs and longings for God!

“How can we all
get along and follow the
Gospel message with a sense
of both-and rather than
either-or?” “How can we live
together in a sense of
inclusivity rather than
exclusivity? Why do we
emphasize difference rather
than commonality?”

Currently I am reading *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older* by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller. This book talks about being elders, not elderly, and sharing our life experience and wisdom. I find it inspiring and hope-filled for our later stages of life.

Looking Back and Forward

I have felt that my life has been a balancing act of being a Sister of Mercy, a community member, a performer, and a minister. I consciously read our documents, am challenged by them and sometimes wonder how I contribute to them through my life of music. I know that I stay in the conversation.

I have been living alone now about as long as I have lived in community and have found both ways to be growth-filled. I stay connected to Mercy community members through prayer, our local lunch-bunch, our dialogue circle, by technology, and through our Consultation Network. I am blessed to belong to a community of women striving to express the compassion of God through many ministries.

When I entered, there were many more musicians among us. I am not aware of musicians joining our ranks these days. In the past, women religious founded Catholic schools and Catholic hospitals. Musicians worked in educational settings. Today, religious communities are addressing the unmet needs of immigration, trafficking, and the environment. If a musician feels called to religious life, I imagine that her life,

too, will be a balancing act between music and our critical concerns.

Catherine McAuley connected the rich and poor and had a sense of elegance about her. Through the years, Sisters of Mercy taught piano lessons but I could not see myself doing just that. The performer has always been part of who I am.

I marvel at the balancing that young couples are doing raising a family and having a professional career in music, despite the odd hours. In my ministry—or career, or profession, or use of my gifts—I meet wonderful faith-filled and talented musicians who strive to be the best they can be. I find great hope in the future in the young people that I meet.

I have survived a variety of disasters—a car crash, a tornado, the after-effects of an earthquake, the loss of immediate family members, our convent being broken into, breast cancer and an apartment fire. I recently visited relatives in Italy and realize that ours is a dying family. There are more elderly members than young members. Despite this reality—true for my family and true for my community—I have always had an optimistic outlook and resilience. I wonder why some people are resilient and others are not.

Over time, I came to see that music is a spiritual work of Mercy, giving joy and comfort to many. There were periods in my life when I thought I was not fulfilling my fourth vow of serving the poor, sick, and ignorant. Gradually I've come to see and accept that "there is a variety of gifts." I am amazed at the variety of gifts in our Sisters and realize that my gifts are appreciated and part of who we are as Sisters of Mercy. ♦

I am blessed
to belong to a
community of women
striving to express the
compassion of God
through many ministries.



Sharing Our Vision: *Papatuanuku ki Taurangi*-Earth Promise

Rosemary Revell, R.S.M.

I have worked at *Papatuanuku ki Taurangi*—Earth Promise—with men suffering various disabilities since 2010, for three days a week. The garden is a beautiful space full of fruit trees and vegetable beds, and fully equipped for all sorts of projects. The garden was an initiative of the Mercy congregation, with its title combining indigenous and English languages as “*Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa* Sisters of Mercy New Zealand.” The name of the project—*Papatuanuku ki Taurangi* (Earth Promise)—seeks to offer a living model that bears witness to a healthy and sustainable ecological relationship with Earth and universe, and to explore another way of living as a religious community that speaks to the needs of this time. It aims to create community around a garden with a primary focus on growing food for families.

The rest of the time I work in pastoral care with our elderly sisters in the Auckland, New Zealand area. In 2012, I won the *New Zealand Gardener Magazine* Gardener of the Year competition. This is far from how I imagined my life would be, but it shows how one woman responded to the changing needs of our community and our world.

I am a 4th generation New Zealander of Irish and Scandinavian ancestry. Following my initial training in nursing, I joined the former Auckland Sisters of Mercy in 1971. In the novitiate, I began a post-graduate course at Massey University Palmerston North to upgrade to a Bachelor of Arts degree in social sciences, majoring in nursing studies. I worked as a nurse at Mercy Hospital in Auckland until 1989, when I volunteered for our Mercy mission in Samoa. There I taught home economics and health, and I ran a small health clinic.

Samoa is located south of the equator in Oceania, about halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand. Samoa was the first Pacific nation to regain its independence (1962) after more than fifty years of colonization by other countries. The Auckland Sisters of Mercy established a mission there in the village of Leulumoega in 1972 at the

invitation of the Archbishop of Samoa. They administered and staffed a secondary school for girls now known as Paul VI College.

In 1990, I had the opportunity to study cross-cultural issues at Pacific Mission Institute run by the Columbans, North Turrumurra, in Sydney, Australia for a year before returning to Samoa. Then in 1994 and 1995, I retrained as a secondary school teacher at Auckland College of Education, gaining a post-graduate diploma in teaching. Again, I returned to Samoa where I became very involved in nutrition for our students. I cared for the vegetable garden and planted fruit trees around the school grounds.

I returned to New Zealand at the end of 1998, and got a job at a state secondary school in a small, rural, mainly Maori area. I taught food and nutrition, health and fabric technology. During that time, I developed a real love for gardening and encouraged everything environmental with my students.

I also served 5 years as a member of the Auckland Congregation Leadership team before we became the new Congregation of Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, *Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa* in 2005.

In 2009, I was lucky enough to be a team member at Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, Dublin. There I served as the food services co-coordinator, and in my spare time tended the garden cemetery there.

Following that, I spent two weeks at the Findhorn Foundation. This is a spiritual community, learning centre and eco-village in Northern Scotland, specializing in organic practices. Earlier this year, I participated in a three-month residential program “Sacred Earth” at Glenburn, an ecology and spirituality center in Victoria, Australia.

Mercy Oasis in Auckland

In the late 1990’s consultation and feasibility studies were carried out on the development of a centre for *Te Waipuna Puawai*—Mercy Oasis-- at

the Ellerslie site, an Auckland suburb. Several Mercy ministries were operating on the same property. At the same time, Sisters were beginning to develop a personal sense of connection to the land, with a need to establish a right-relationship with the earth community.

The history of the Ellerslie land showed that originally the area was a small lake that was connected to the larger *Waitairua* wetlands that used to dominate the area. A remnant of the wetlands can be found on Abbots Way below the golf course. Wetlands are a fast-disappearing ecosystem within New Zealand. We had a growing awareness of our custodial duty to preserve what land we had, and so *Papatuanuku ki Taurangi* came to fruition—earth promise.

We have a food garden based on permaculture and organic principles, where an appreciation of our reliance on Paptuanuku is acknowledged. Part of the permaculture ethos is restoration of land back to its natural state. Thus, a small portion of the land has been restored to its original wetland state. This overflows into the Michaels Avenue Reserve.

Commitment to Restoration

In 2000 as part of the 150th Jubilee Celebrations of the Auckland Sisters of Mercy, we sisters, in a ritual at the site of *Waiatarua* Mercy Parklands, dedicated all remaining land to “Restoration of Women, Children and the Earth.” This dedication arose from our vision statement and our subsequent discernment and consultation with sisters, community agencies and various individuals. Our thrust was to form communities of hope, to witness to right relationship with all the Earth community, to stand with those on the margins, and to explore new expressions of committed life together.

We moved into our community house in February 2001, and from that time, we developed our community garden and planted trees on the property. The first community, with helpers, can claim to have built the glass house, laid stonework

and pathways, and put up the garden shed. Our house was intentionally spacious, as we wanted to be open to all. It was also built with some eco-features of the time—recycled flooring, solar heating and north-facing for maximum sunlight. We did seek to have other eco-options, but they were denied. Some options were banned by Auckland City Council. Since the house was built on wetland and peat, we had to avoid the possibility of sinking.

**We had a growing
awareness of our
custodial duty to
preserve what land we
had, and so *Papatuanuku
ki Taurangi* came to
fruition—earth promise.**

Influences on Our Thinking

Our desire to live this way came from two emerging reflections. We had a new understanding of our universe and our role as humans. From this understanding, we looked at new ways to live our vowed life as a response. Miriam McGillis,

O.P., from Genesis Farm, as well as the Loreto Sisters, influenced us through their reflections on the vows in light of the Universe Story and the plight of our Earth.

Passionist priest Thomas Berry, cosmologist Brian Swimme, theologian Mary Evelyn Tucker, and many others continue to inspire and challenge us in our seeking to understand the emerging while keeping faith with our Catholic tradition, the Jesus Story and our Mercy charism. Over the years, many sisters, friends and women in need have graced us with their presence and we are the richer.

Working with Families and Local Communities

The community garden is the scene for learning and teaching, in addition to providing food. Our gardening is based on permaculture and organic principles. We want to encourage participation by our residents and visitors. We have designed it to be a place of beauty with mosaics and with a figure of the Madonna of the Earth. Whoever comes is welcome to share the fruits of the garden. In 2009, we developed more infrastructures—the orchard, the glass house, and the propagation tent.

In 2012, Sister Teresa Anderson became the centre coordinator. She had had a career in teaching and mission effectiveness in former Mercy primary schools. She had also worked at an aged-care facility and at Mercy hospice in Auckland. Teresa had also been involved in initial formation for our members. In addition to being a keen gardener, she had participated in programs at Sophia Center at Holy Names College in Oakland, California. Teresa still works part-time in mission assistance, as well as coordinating Papatuanuku ki Taurangi Centre.

Sisters Teresa, Bridget Crisp and myself strategized anew to revamp the garden. Bridget began gardening classes and cooking classes at Te Waipuna Puawai, a centre for second-chance education right next door to the garden. Before joining the Sisters of Mercy, Bridget had worked as a quarantine officer protecting the country from pests and diseases.

Bridget has a degree in agriculture from Massey University and studied sustainable practices that protect our resources for future generations. She now works part-time at McAuley High School teaching science as well as working in the garden.

Our workers come with histories and disabilities, which make it difficult for them to find work. We give valuable support and encouragement to keep them working and nourished by the garden. For instance, the year after I returned from serving on the team at Mercy International Centre in Ireland, I worked to restore the vegetable gardens after a fallow time. I had the assistance of three men with disabilities. In addition, a young professional couple found out about the garden, and still volunteer weekly, even with two young children.

Our goal is to work with local community groups towards having families develop their own garden at home. We harvest twice each week and our produce goes out with food bank items to help families in need. We see it also as an opportunity

to advocate locally for sustainable practices within local communities and as a way to know the bio-region: “Know your mountain and your river and you will know who you are.”

Remembering our goal, “Honor the Earth and the people of the land,” we take time to ritualize and celebrate our relationship with and care for our Earth. Our commitment to *Te Tiriti (Treaty) o Waitangi* calls us to deep relationship with *tangata whenua* (our indigenous Maori people) and acknowledge that this land is not ours to own, but a gift to be shared. By engaging in the Universe Story on many levels, we enter into the sacred and mysterious, to the Divine, into God. We are extremely grateful for the Funding we receive from our Maher Endowment and are not yet a Company or Trust.

**We seek to offer a living
model that bears witness
to a healthy and
sustainable ecological
relationship with Earth
and Universe, and to
explore another way of
living religious
community that speaks
to the needs of this time.**

Mercy Hospitality

Our house is open to sisters and others who wish to spend time in some way with the Earth, in reflection and in action with the community garden and wider aspects of our mission. Our experience tells us that those who come find healing through creativity and reconnecting to the Earth.

We seek to offer a living model that bears witness to a healthy and sustainable ecological relationship with Earth and Universe, and to explore another way of living religious community that speaks to the needs of this time. We extend a cosmic hospitality—a welcoming of the mystery of the unfolding Universe.

Education and Resourcing

Following in Catherine’s footsteps, we provide reflective and active experiences around the Universe Story as it engages us. We have weekly visits from pre-schoolers passing through the garden to do “Move and Groove” with the elderly residents at *Waiatarua* Mercy Parklands on the same property. These three- and four-year-olds love to find worms in the compost or raid the

strawberry patch. We have school groups, especially secondary-school level, coming for reflection days.

We also provide for adults and have many resources available for them. We have a group of religious from other congregations and companions who share with us. Sister Bridget gives gardening classes for *Te Waipuna Puatawai* students and through Gardens for Health (a Government initiative), holds workshops for refugees. In the past, we have had other groups taking gardening workshops. We hold seasonal rituals for those who are seeking to understand and engage more fully in a new way of being in relationship with our Earth and with each other.

Stories and storytelling deepen our humanity and reveal how we understand our unique relationship to the cosmos, to each other and to ourselves. We rely on our environment and our planet for sustenance of food, water and shelter. When we return to the simple task of growing as much of our food as possible, we can develop our sense of stewardship of the Earth.

The word *community* means hospitality and relationship. If hospitality and relationships (relationship with God, Creation and with each other) are encouraged and enhanced, we all will live in a better world because the sense of stewardship will be shared. The Universe is inherently creative and we hope to continue to celebrate the creativity that is in each of us! ♦

OUR COMMUNITY VISION

We are Earth, one Community of Life
Called to:

- Live within the Divine Mystery
reverencing the sacredness of all life
- Embrace an interconnectedness and
an inclusivity that holds all
- Promote just structures that
recognize and protect the integrity
of all beings



The editorial Board provides this Prompt sheet for all our subscribers to read. It will give you an idea of what a writer for MAST is invited to reflect and write on. This was the Invitation for this issue of MAST Journal. We hope you might consider doing an article in the near future.

INVITATION TO WRITERS OF “MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT”

The editorial board of MAST Journal has been thinking about you, the ministry that you have devoted your life to, the service you give to the people of God, and to the Mercy community. We are thinking about you because you do something different than the traditional “schools or healthcare” ministries. In I Cor. 12, St. Paul speaks about the manifestation of the Spirit being diverse, the body having many parts, and people in the church having many gifts. It’s this diversity we want to invite you to express in our issue themed “Many Gifts, Same Spirit.” It is precisely because you are NOT a scripture scholar or a theologian that we invite you to write about what you do, what has inspired you, and how you understand the significance of your ministry for the Institute and the Church.

SOME “PROMPTS”

As editor, I think the personal narrative might be the easiest way to “tell your story.” You can use the following questions as “starters” or “prompts.” There is no obligation to “answer the questions.” They are only posed to get you started, and make it easier.

For example, some questions that might structure your essay are:

1. How did you come to do the ministry that you are in? Was it your first choice when you entered, or something that evolved? How did you know you had a gift or talent for this kind of ministry? Any anecdotes or memories that occur to you?
2. What has been your ministerial history? What sort of usual, and unusual work have you done?
3. What sort of natural talents and inclinations did you realize you have for this profession? What made you realize early on or later on that you were a “natural” for this work? If you came into this work after a more traditional ministry, what made you change gears?
4. Who influenced you or helped you get into this field? Did members of your family, or persons outside the community influence your choice? Was it “obedience” or “assignment” that sent you in the direction that led to your present ministry, or did you express your preference for it?
5. What kinds of training and on-going education/supervision/accountability are connected with your ministry? What sorts of professional certification are required? Were you trained with other Sisters of Mercy, or in a setting with “seculars”? What was that like, and how did it affect your self-understanding, and your feeling as a member of the community? Did you ever feel a tension between your work as a professional, judged by secular standards, and your ministry as a Sister of Mercy? The tension of living in two worlds? “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s; give to God what is God’s.”

6. What scriptural passages have special meaning for you as an expression of your ministry? What psalms, what parts of the gospels or epistles do you turn to as inspiration for your work?
7. What was it like, and what has it been like, not to be in teaching or healthcare, when most Sisters in the community were doing those works? Is there loneliness, a sense of uniqueness, a sense of connectedness with the community's mission?
8. How does your particular ministry "pick up on" Catherine MAuley's life and charism, our Institute Constitution, our direction statements, or our critical concerns?
9. Are there any Church documents, Bishops' statements, or Catholic professional organizational materials that provide you inspiration or affirmation?
10. Do you have any stories to tell about the effectiveness of your ministry, the ways you know you are "in the right place"? What convinces you that your work is essential and vital for the Sisters of Mercy and for the people of God?
11. If you are doing a work that is fairly unique in the Sisters of Mercy, where do you get professional and social support for what you do?
12. What are some challenges you have faced in your work? How did you negotiate those challenges?
13. Why should other women be involved in the work you are doing as a Sister of Mercy? If a younger woman read your essay, how might she see herself being a member of the community, even if she were carrying on a ministry like yours in which there has not been a "critical mass" of Sisters engaged in the same thing?



Discussion Questions

(Evans) *"A jubilee can't just be a getting together for a luncheon, like a retirement banquet. Jubilee can't be the end of the story because the book is still being written."*

What part of your personal story is continuing to develop? What do you see in the life of your family and friends that is unfolding? What aspects of your ministry are still "in progress"? What in the Church's life do you see moving into a future that isn't yet stated for sure?

(Griffith) *"Leaving the parish broke my heart—broke it open to so many new experiences of goodness and evil."*

Talk about a change you didn't expect or didn't want, and what happened to you for the better, as you look back. What was both the good and the evil you saw as a result?

(Heese) *"The sign for 'Jesus' is touching the tip of the middle finger of one hand on the open palm of the other, and repeating that action with the other hand."*

What forms of non-verbal communication—facial expressions, gestures, touch, physical movement, sounds—have been meaningful for you? Was it only when you were a child that the non-verbal was an important part of communication? What can the non-verbal communicate that words cannot?

(Mackinnon) *"To be honest...I have to admit I always enjoy coming home. For I know that at home the electricity will work, the shower will run hot and I will sleep in a comfortable bed. The people I have visited are not afforded such luxuries."*

What is possible to do in your ministry if you have electricity, hot water and a bed? What are the advantages you have and sustain as a result? What in people's quality of life is diminished if they don't have the luxuries of electricity, hot water or a place of their own to sleep?

(Petro) *"Would I ever tell anyone my idea? If I did, I could reasonably be judged to have lost the plot. Or if someone actually saw something of merit in it, then I would have to do something about it...If, on the other hand, I said nothing, no one would ever know how ridiculous the idea was, and I wouldn't have to do anything about it."*

Is there a dream you have, a thought of something you could do next, or something that you see needs to be done—but you haven't spoken it out loud to anyone yet?

(Quinn) *"It seems to me now that all of my previous ministries and life experiences became a base for an opportunity that I would never have imagined. The old cliché, that life has many twists and turns, is certainly true. However, I like to think that many paths or more precisely opportunities, came along, each giving a chance to say 'Yes.'"*

What opportunities have you said Yes to? What paths did you decide not to take? Any sighs of relief? Any regrets?

(Reicks) *“Catherine also encouraged her Sisters to be good stewards with the advice, ‘While we place all our confidence in God, we must always act as if success depended on our own exertions.’”*

Have you had experiences of working very hard, exerting yourself, and it came out as you hoped? What has it been like to work very hard, but in the end, it feels like a failure? How have you interpreted what happened from a spiritual point of view?

(Repka) *“Prior to 1970, we were not looking for that ‘hidden spark’ which exists in every human being. Rather, we were working with a disease model, a medical model. We asked, ‘What is the problem?’ then applied the treatment. Today, the trend is more to view the client as the expert of his or her own life.”*

How do you describe the “hidden spark” you see in people? Do people have to know it fully and consciously for it to move in them? What’s your own “hidden spark” like? If you are the expert of your own life, what does your body need for you to be healed or for you to feel better?

(Revell) *“We harvest twice each week and our produce goes out with food bank items to help families in need. We see it as an opportunity to advocate locally for sustainable practices within local communities and as a way to know the bio-region. ‘Know your mountain and your river and you will know who you are.’”*

Is there a particular place, a bio-region, that gives you a sense of self and where you feel centered? Is there a geographical area where you don’t feel yourself at home? What is the difference between those two places?

(Schiratti) *“I think I may have been one of the first pastoral liturgists in the nation, learning as I went along. It was an exciting time, creating parish councils and working with lectors, communion ministers, cantors and greeters. We were forming a participative assembly of laity. Choirs and liturgical musicians were using the vernacular and letting go of Latin.”*

Are there aspects of the pre-Vatican church life that you miss? What are the features of liturgical life in the post-Vatican II church that have nurtured your spiritual life? How have the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms affected your spiritual life and your ministry?



Contributors

Jean Evans, R.S.M. (West Midwest) originally entered the Burlingame, California community. She holds an M.A. from University of San Francisco in Applied Spirituality and a D.Th. in Theology with a specialization in Christian Spirituality from the University of South Africa. Her educational ministry has been mainly high school. From 1984 to 2012 she served with the Mercy community in South Africa in various schools open to all races—at Winterveldt, a re-settlement area for non-Tswanas who were discriminated against by the homeland government of Bophuthatswana; the mission in Mmakau with a high school, primary school, adult education center and a clinic. With the Winterveldt Action Committee, she advocated for pensioners rights, adult education, and training of health workers; in Soweto, she taught high school. From 1999-2011, she was principal/site manager of a community center and vocational training center in Mmakau. She was Executive Secretary of the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa 2005-2010. She also did adjunct teaching at St. John Vianney Seminary and St. Augustine College. She returned to the U.S. in 2012. She has published “Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction” in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, in a 2014 e-version. She has several articles in past issues of *The MAST Journal*. Currently she is serving an appointment on the local resource team for Burlingame and the WMW new membership team.

Patricia Griffith, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) entered the Brooklyn community. She holds a B.A. in education from Brentwood College; M.A. in religious education from Fordham University in New York; M.A. in social work from Adelphi University; and D.Min. in Creation Spirituality from the University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California. She also holds several post-graduate certificates: in theology from St. John’s University in New York; in aging from Adelphi University; in management of non-profits from Hofstra University; and in management and community development from Tufts University. She has a background in elementary education in New York. The Hospitality Center opened in 1976. Nine years later, she left and opened Mercy Haven in 1985, which provides housing for 300 persons living with mental illness. Her many years of community service include acting as mentor for LCWR’s community leadership development program and serving on various boards—Mercy Medical Mission, Social Justice Advisory of Stonybrook University, McAuley Institute, and as both regional director and President of NYS Association for Community Living, Suffolk County Mental Health Advisory Committee, and its HIV+ Housing Planning Committee. She has published the story of Mercy Haven’s first 25 years.

Gloria Heese, R.S.M. (West Midwest) entered the Omaha congregation. She is currently Coordinator of Mime-Ink with an office in Red Bluff, California. She earned a B.A. in music education from the College of Saint Mary in Omaha, Nebraska, and an M.A. in theology at the College of Saint Mary, Moraga, CA. After helping to open Nativity grade school in Broomfield, Colorado, and teaching junior high in St. Joseph in Denver, CO, she taught and was principal at Mercy High School in Red Bluff, CA. Here, while working on an M.A. in administration, she inaugurated participative management among staff. She helped found the Renewal Center for Women at Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, Iowa. In Red Bluff, CA, she worked in sponsorship at St. Elizabeth Community Hospital. She co-founded and was Director of Home Help for Hispanic Mothers. Named as Tehama County Public Health Champion through the California Wellness Foundation, she received the Soroptimist regional “Making a Difference for Women” award. Her training as a mime has included sessions with Interactive Workshop on the Avital Method of Mime—called BodySpeak—in Boulder CO; she has attended Clown Camp at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse. She exhibits and sells her art through the Red Bluff Art Association and has been exhibited in Stockton, CA.

Ailsa Mackinnon, R.S.M (Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea—ISMAPNG). Her degrees are A.M. Dip. Teach., B.A., M.A. and M.Ed.Admin. She has had over 40 years experience in educational leadership at primary, secondary and adult levels. Since completing her term as Congregation Leader of the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, Ailsa took up the role of Executive Director of Mercy Works. Mercy Works supports the relief and development activities that are part of the mission and vision of all the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. In Australia, Mercy Works offers community education in world development concerns, provides assistance with refugees and asylum seekers and works in partnership with Indigenous peoples. In Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste it works in collaboration with local partners and directs its efforts towards education, health care and the social well-being of those who are poor or displaced.

Mary-Louise Petro, R.S.M. (Parramatta, Australia) holds a Diploma in Teaching from Catholic Teachers' College, Sydney, Australia and a certificate in Youth Work from the National Pastoral Institute in Melbourne. She first taught primary grades at Our Lady of Fatima School in Caringbah in Southern Sydney, and later did secondary teaching in Parramatta for six years, including a year as Deputy Principal. She also served in Epping as Deputy Principal for two years. She formed the Mercy Youth team in 1984 and worked with two other members for three years. In 1984, she was inspired with the idea of Mamre, founded the ministry and became its CEO until 2011. She has continued in a minor role as founder until now. In between she was appointed as director of Sisters in temporary profession 1994-2004. Her elected positions include Congregation councilor 1992-1998; 2004-2010 and Congregation Vicar 2010-2016 (current). Her various honors, which have given Mamre visibility, include University of Western Sydney Women of the West; Australia Day Penrith Citizen of the Year; St. Mary's Citizen of the Year; Champion of the West; Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow; and most recently this year, the Papal Cross.

Mary Quinn, R.S.M. (Northeast) entered in Portland, Maine. She is presently Co-Director of the Eco-Spiritual Center, Mercy Farm, in Benson, Vermont. She has certification as a Registered Radiologic Technologist (Radiographer) from Mercy Hospital School of Radiologic Technology. She has a B.A. from Saint Joseph's College (Maine), and an M.S. from University of Southern Maine. Her past ministries include service as staff radiographer at Madigan Memorial Hospital and Aroostook General Hospital in Houlton, Maine; staff radiographer at Mercy Hospital in Portland, Maine; Program Director for Mercy Hospital School of Radiology; Director of Development for Catherine McAuley High School; Director of Development and Communications for the Portland Sisters of Mercy, and Manager of Good Cause Thrift Shop, Portland/Standish. She now co-directs Mercy Farm's projects of hospitality, retreats, community education, gardening, bee-keeping and food-bank coordination.

Laura Reicks, R.S.M. (West Midwest) entered in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She holds a B.A from Mt. Mercy University in elementary education and an MBA from University of Iowa. She first worked in elementary education, later as community treasurer. She served a term on the leadership team. Afterwards, she relocated to Washington, D.C. as the associate director for the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO). She worked with many religious institutes on retirement issues, and distributed grants from the Retirement Fund for Religious. After a short stint with the Mercies in St. Louis, she became Executive Director of the National Association for Treasurers of Religious Institutes (NATRI), which merged into the Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI). During her work at both NRRO and NATRI, she interacted with congregations of both women and men religious—LCWR, CMSM, and CMSWR. She then moved back to her roots in Iowa as the treasurer for the Sisters of Charity, B.V.M. in Dubuque. Currently she is the president of the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community in Omaha, Nebraska.

Fran Repka, R.S.M. (South Central) entered the Cincinnati community. She holds a B.S.N. from University of Cincinnati, and is a registered nurse. She earned an M.A. in clinical psychology from University of Detroit. Her Doctorate in counseling psychology is from the University of Cincinnati. She worked as clinical nurse and psychiatric nursing instructor at St. Charles Hospital in Toledo, then from 1976 to 1989 as psychologist, founder and director of the Cincinnati Archdiocesan Consultation Services, for religious and clergy. She was then invited to join a group private practice with 12 others. In 1994, she became founder and director of Mercy Professional Services—to provide counseling to the poor and underserved. At this time, she also taught courses in pastoral counseling at the seminary in Cincinnati and was instructor for the inter-community formation program. She has given workshops internationally—South America, Belize, El Salvador, South Africa, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Guam and Jamaica. She has facilitated chapters for Mercy Sisters, as well as other religious congregations. She is the current facilitator for the Institute's *Women of Mercy*, *Women of Hope*. Her awards include "Distinguished Psychologist of the Year" from the Ohio Psychologists' Association, and Cincinnati's "Woman of the Year." She is published in *Horizon*, *Human Development*, *Sisters Today*, *MAST Journal* and *Critical Juncture*.

Rosemary Revell, R.S.M. (Sisters of Mercy New Zealand), entered the Auckland congregation. She holds a B.A. in nursing studies from Massey University Palmerston North and a Diploma in Teaching from Auckland College of Education. She ministered first in nursing at Mercy Hospital, Auckland. After some years, she volunteered for the mission in Samoa, taught home economics and ran a health clinic. Later, she taught in a state secondary school in a rural Maori area. For five years she was on the leadership team of the Auckland sisters, before its re-structuring into the Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. She then transplanted herself to Dublin, serving as a team member at Mercy International Centre at Baggot Street where she tended the garden and served as food services coordinator. Presently, she works with disabled men at Earth Promise, directing their work in the community garden, which grows food for families in the area. She also does pastoral care with elderly sisters in Auckland. Her gardening skills earned her an award as New Zealand Gardener of the Year.

Claudette Schiratti, R.S.M. (West Midwest) entered the community in Omaha, Nebraska. She holds an M.A. in Piano Performance from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. and a Masters of Sacred Music Degree with concentration in organ from the University of Kansas. She holds an AAGO Certificate from the American Guild of Organists. She is a graduate of the College of St. Mary, Omaha and taught there in the Music Department as well as at a high school in Denver. Most of her ministry from 1971 – 2002 has been spent serving as liturgist and music director in parishes in Omaha, Shawnee, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, as well as at a Lutheran Parish in Kansas City, Kansas, from 1992-1997. From 2002 – 2010 she served in the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph as Director of Music for the Diocese. She has composed music for various Mercy events. She is a cofounder of several organizations: Northeast Kansas Catholic Organ Academy (NEKCOA), a scholarship program for organ students in the Archdiocese of Kansas City, KS; NewEar, a contemporary music ensemble which performs music composed within the last 25 years; and Imago Dei, an organization of Theology and the Arts. Since retiring as Music Director for the Diocese, she enjoys performing, accompanying, teaching organ, mentoring musicians, substituting as organist in Catholic and Protestant Churches, and playing for Shabbat services in a local synagogue. Claudette is an active member of the American Guild of Organists and the National Pastoral Musicians Association. She is Past Dean of the Kansas City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.



Institute of the Sisters of Mercy
of the Americas
West Midwest Community
Mercy Center Auburn
535 Sacramento Street
Auburn, CA 95603

No222n-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Auburn, CA
PERMIT No 183