

Celebrating 181 Years of Mercy NL

Opening Prayer: (adapted from IPA Assembly)

Creator God, You are luring us into a future more expansive than our minds can conceive.

Grace us and make space in the womb of our hearts for the possibilities you offer us. Unsettle us! Disturb us!

Move us to the edge of new horizons that we may be open to all the ways you come to us in our sisters and brothers and in the cry of Earth.

May Wisdom's flame shine for us, within us and from us. Our feet know the way; our hearts carry the light.

Guide us! Strengthen us! Help us to trust! AMEN

Readings:

Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives. It is an authentic new creation: it brings about a new heart, capable of loving to the full and it purifies our eyes to perceive needs. (Pope Francis)

Catherine McAuley understood mercy to be the beating heart of her work with the vulnerable and marginalised. She frequently reminded her sisters that mercy was the recognition of Jesus in the face of every person and the imperative to do all in one's power to assist those in need. Catherine was a role model of mercy ...being mercy, living mercy, doing mercy, acting with mercy. (Mary Sullivan, rsm)



Founder: Sister Mary Francis Creedon

Marianne Creedon came to the island of Newfoundland with her sister's family in May 1833 at the age of 21. She lived here for about six years before she returned to Dublin (by arrangement between Bishop Fleming of St. John's and Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy Institute) to join the Sisters of Mercy with a plan that she and other sisters would return to found a Mercy convent, the first out side of Ireland and England. Marianne left St. John's in the summer of 1839. At her reception into the novitiate in 1840 she received the name Sister Mary Francis. She made religious profession on August 18, 1841. On 03 June 1842 M. Francis Creedon along with Sisters M.



Ursula Frayne and M. Rose Lynch arrived by sailing ship to St. John's Harbour. This day marks the foundation date of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland.

Today we reflect on the generosity of these three young women and their courage to brave the treacherous North Atlantic Ocean to set out on a mission that they could not envision. Francis Creedon would have some experience of life in St. John's but she was returning within the context of a newly chosen life in a young new religious order that was different from most women's orders of her time. Life in Newfoundland was difficult and fraught with additional hardships imposed on the poor Irish population. These three women began from the ground up literally as there was no designated home for them until six months later. Early hardship and uncertainty did not stop these dedicated women from pursuing a ministry of visitation to sick and poor citizens as a school was being built and opened at the same time as the convent portion of the building. Teaching and visitation and the exercise of religious life continued to take the day to day focus of the sisters.

Francis Creedon carried an additional burden when her two companions left the newly established mission and returned to Ireland in November 1843. There seemed to be some controversy concerning Bishop Fleming's profession of Maria Nugent. Maria was the fourth Sister of Mercy in the colony of Newfoundland – now there were two!

Thankfully the new foundation was taking hold and over the next few years other women joined. Young Irish women, some of whom would have been prepared for missionary life through a Mercy program in Callan, Ireland came to join the Sisters of Mercy here. In 1854 the first Newfoundland-born woman entered. By 1859 there were eighteen sisters living at Mercy Convent. The congregation also was expanding, opening an orphanage, a boarding school, establishing convents in other areas like Brigus, Petty Harbour, Burin and more.

We are grateful to the first three Sisters of Mercy and especially to M. Francis Creedon who persevered steadfastly. She must have built a very strong foundation in her novitiate with Catherine McAuley, a foundation that continues in the life and commitment of men and women of "Mercy" who continue to live out the spirit and charism of the foundress and the institute.

Blessing: (Judith Walker-Riggs)

May the power and the mystery go before us to show us the way ... Amen
May it shine above us to lighten our world ...AMEN
May it lie beneath us to bear us up ...AMEN
May it walk with us and give us companionship ...AMEN
May it glow and flow within to bring joy to us and to all of creation... AMEN

