



Orientation to Mercy: Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland



Stylized Image of Baggot Street Door, Dublin: Founding House of Sisters of Mercy

This formation resource was developed by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland.

It is a resource to be of benefit to Mercy Wellsprings and its ministries. On August 10, 2023, Mercy Wellsprings, Inc. was incorporated.

The Scriptural quotations used in this booklet are from the New Revised Standard Edition.

Orientation To Mercy

The *Orientation to Mercy* program is designed for staff and board members of Mercy Wellsprings and its incorporated ministries.

The *Orientation to Mercy* (self-paced) is a 7-module program, with each module designed to take 30-40 minutes. In-person seminars always bring an added dimension to education and formation, i.e., the ability to interact, network and share stories with the presenter and other participants. However, bringing people together physically is not always feasible.

The seven topics covered in the Modules are:

- the story of Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, and the sources of inspiration for the work she did
- the early expansion of the Sisters of Mercy
- the *Works of Mercy*, their scriptural basis, and the traditional and contemporary manifestations of these
- *Care for Our Common Home* (the 8th Work of Mercy) and the interconnectedness of the *Cry of Earth, Cry of the Poor*
- The brief history of the Sisters of Mercy in Newfoundland and Labrador and Peru
- Sisters of Mercy ministries in NL and Peru and the establishment of Mercy Wellsprings
- The wider Mercy family & Mercy Values.

Education and formation involve input and processing what has been heard, read and experienced. It also involves critical reflection on the resource material, engaging with it from the head, heart and spirit, being open to new insights. Ideally, formation also moves us into action. Thus the modules include input, short activities and reflective questions.

At the end of each module is a prayerful reflection with questions about the ways God is revealed through what we are seeing and hearing, how what we see and hear can strengthen our relationship with God, and the ways we are invited to respond. If you are unfamiliar with the Christian tradition of prayer and reflection, you are invited to take this time to think about the points in the module which have made an impact on you. You will need online access when participating in this program for video clips and websites - key resource material. It is also hoped that the links contained will be useful as resources for further exploration.

Acknowledgement of Land

We respectfully acknowledge the land on which we gather as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk, whose culture has been erased forever. We also acknowledge the island of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland) as the unceded, traditional territory of the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq, and we acknowledge Labrador as the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Innu of Nitassinan, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, and the Inuit of NunatuKavut. We recognize all First Peoples who were here before us, those who live with us now, and the seven generations to come. As First Peoples have done since time immemorial, we strive to be responsible stewards of the land and to respect the cultures, ceremonies, and traditions of all who call it home. As we open our hearts and minds to the past, we commit ourselves to working in a spirit of truth and reconciliation to make a better future for all.

Charism of Catherine McAuley

Charism can be a difficult word to define, but it is understood as a gift given to Christians by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. Founders of religious institutes are said to have received a particular charism that urges and inspires them to commit their lives to living the gospel with a special emphasis on the insights that are the gift of their charism. For the Sisters of Mercy, the charism of Catherine McAuley involved a deep understanding of and commitment to the Mercy of God. Her response to

that charism was to actively serve the poor and, in time, to establish a religious congregation with vowed members who shared her deep understanding and commitment to God's mercy.

Ways of praying and reflecting

As part of each module you are invited to spend some time in prayer and reflection. There are many ways of praying, of taking time to be in touch with the deeper part of ourselves, pondering the gifts of life and love, marveling at creation, seeking a life-giving spirituality, grappling with grief or loss or just being in God's presence. Prayer can take many forms, some of which include:

- Consciously being aware of the gifts of creation around you and giving thanks
- Creating your 'quiet space' and regularly going there to refresh your spirit, to meditate, to become 'grounded' again
- Talking to God about the things which are important to you
- Reading or praying aloud from a book of prayers, from the Word of God in the Scriptures or from a piece of reflective writing and pondering your response
- Writing or drawing in a journal to express your thoughts, feelings, dreams, regrets ...
- Focusing on an object such as a candle to signify you are in a sacred place Engaging in 'centering prayer' by becoming attentive to your breathing, then slowly repeating a significant phrase from Scripture
- Listening to reflective music as you work, drive, prepare a meal or go for a walk, joining others in a place of worship to pray, sing and celebrate together
- Being part of the prayer and reflection opportunities
- Finding your particular way of praying ...

MODULE 1

The Story of Catherine McAuley

Introduction to Module 1

In this module, we explore the story of Catherine McAuley, her life and the events that led to her founding the Sisters of Mercy. We reflect on what inspired and motivated her.

The poor were everywhere on the streets of Dublin in the 1820s and 1830s. Provision of adequate housing in Dublin was a huge issue. The wealthy, including those who lived in Baggot Street, may not have wanted these unfortunate people in their vicinity. Catherine McAuley, however, saw their potential.

Docudrama 'In God Alone'

To begin this Module, you are invited to view the docudrama on the life of Catherine McAuley at <https://www.mercyworld.org/film-in-god-alone/> (22 min 25 sec)

Jot down some of the things that were significant or inspirational for you in this short film.

Were there any aspects of Catherine's life story which surprised you? If so, why?

What 'picture' of Catherine as a person are you developing in your mind?

If you met Catherine today, what question would you ask her? How do you think she might respond?

Prayerful Reflection

Read the passage from Isaiah 45:1-5 below:

... Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you... you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you... Do not fear, for I am with you...

Reflecting on the film, how was God showing Catherine that she was 'precious' in the eyes of God?

How did Catherine allow God to use her significant relationships to shape her journey?

Imagine God were in front of you, talking to you.

... Do not fear, (say your name) for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, (say your name) you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you... (say your name), you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you... (say your name), do not fear, for I am with you...

How is God showing you that you are 'precious' in God's sight?

What example of Catherine's might you be called to follow?

MODULE 2

Early Expansion

Watch the Introduction to Module 2 video clip [Orientation Intro 2 \(vimeo.com\)](https://vimeo.com/111111111) Annette Schneider, rsm (Australia) 3:38 min.

Introduction to Module 2

News of the work that Catherine McAuley and her Sisters of Mercy were doing spread rapidly. Consequently, Catherine received many calls for assistance. She responded to these calls in her typical generous nature. In this module, we briefly look at the foundations of Sisters of Mercy which occurred in Catherine's lifetime.

Catherine McAuley was a prolific writer, and we are blessed to have access to a wealth of her writings. In this module, we explore three letters she wrote to the early Sisters.

Opening Reflection

Meeting Mercy

May you meet mercy each day:
in the light of your own heart,
at the hands of your loved ones,
in the eyes of the stranger and the needy.
And if by chance you do not at first meet it,
then search your heart for it,
listen patiently for word of it,
and it will tap you on the shoulder,
a quiet surprise,
a small gesture,
the tender look,
given and received
in the encounters of your day.

Mary Wickham RSM, *Souvenirs of Spirit: Poems & Prayers*, p. 37.

Outwards from Dublin

In the remaining 10 years of her life following the founding of the Sisters of Mercy and the first convent at Baginbun Street, Catherine founded a further nine autonomous convents, two of them in England (E), and two branch houses of the Dublin community.

AUTONOMOUS CONVENTS

Tullamore	1836
Charleville	1836
Carlow	1837
Cork	1837
Limerick	1838
Bermondsey	1839 (England)
Galway	1840
Birr	1840
Birmingham	1841 (England)

BRANCH

Kingstown	1835
Boooterstown	1838

Learn more about Catherine and her early foundations at <https://www.mercyworld.org/catherine/chronology/>

The outreach of the Sisters of Mercy was not restricted to Ireland and England. Between 1842 and the 1980s, many autonomous foundations of Sisters of Mercy were established in Newfoundland. We will briefly explore these in Module 5.

Sisters of Mercy are currently in 46 countries, working with an increasing number of ministry partners, associates, and volunteers. You can view the map of where the Sisters of Mercy are ministering at <https://www.mercyworld.org/about/mercy-family/>

“... each society of Religious receives a grace particularly adapted to the duties which they are called to perform. We ought then to have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal – which constitute the business of our lives ...”

Mary Sullivan RSM *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818–1841*, p. 462

Catherine McAuley's Letters

Catherine McAuley was a prolific writer and kept in touch with her ever-growing network of Sisters of Mercy through letters. We are very fortunate as a great number of these letters have survived, allowing us to learn much about Catherine and the early Sisters of Mercy. We are indebted to Mercy historian, Mary C. Sullivan RSM, for her research and scholarship in making these letters accessible to the Mercy family.

Catherine's letter to Sr Elizabeth Moore, written on 13 January 1839, is significant because it contains Catherine's reflections on the first eight years of the new Institute. Listen to the extract from this letter on Track 2 (5 min 20 sec) at the following link:

<https://www.mercyworld.org/library/your-ever-affectionate-catherine-mcauley179/>

Jot down something from Catherine's account of the founding years of the Sisters of Mercy which resonates with your experience of looking back on your life.

NOTE: The page numbers referred to on the web page above correspond to those in the book *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841* by Mary C. Sullivan.

Find out if your ministry has a copy of Catherine's letters for your future reference.

Read the excerpts from two of Catherine's letters on the next two pages of this booklet. Both letters are short, written in 1840 to women whom Catherine knew very well.

Frances Warde, who was the leader of the Mercy Community in Carlow at the time and was a close friend to Catherine, held many leadership roles during her life. **Mary Ann Doyle**, leader of the Mercy Community in Tullamore at the time, was one of the first Sisters of Mercy, having done her novitiate training with Catherine at Georges Hill.

The footnotes to each letter contain important information about the backdrop to each situation.

As you read the letters and the footnotes, reflect on the following questions and jot down some points as you go.

What insights do the letters give you about:

- the things which were important to Catherine?
- Catherine's approach to leadership?
- Catherine's belief that, for the new Institute, mercy constituted “the business of our lives”?

**163. To Sister M. Frances Warde
Carlow**

Convent, Baggot Street
March 2, 1840

My Dear Sister M. Frances

I feel exceedingly anxious about you in your present state of trial and fear for the health of your community, but please God the contagion will not spread.⁴⁰ They have had three in fever in Tullamore - Sister Purcell & two Lay Sisters, all recovering, thank God.⁴¹ I am sure no place or convent could be better situated for recovery than yours - it has everything desirable. Poor Sister M. Francis goes on in the same hopeless way.⁴² Most melancholy are those protracted maladies - six fevers would be preferable in my opinion. They have a similar case in Cork.⁴³

I did hope that God would have spared you all these severe trials for longer time - but His Holy will be done in all things. May He never leave the choice to us. We never can be unhappy while we love and serve Him faithfully. I trust you use every prudent precaution. I am sure you do for others, but remember, well regulated charity begins at home.

May God preserve and bless you. Let me hear often until you have a favorable change.

Your ever affectionate
Mary C. McAuley

Autograph: Silver Spring

40 Irish historians of medicine do not usually cite 1840 as a year in which typhus fever was particularly prevalent in Ireland, yet Catherine McAuley's letters in February and March 1840 report cases of "typhus" or "fever" in the Carlow, Tullamore, Charleville, and Limerick communities- with a total of six sisters affected. In Carlow, the postulant Julia Redmond was still seriously ill, though recovering. Crawford notes that in Ireland in the nineteenth century "four major epidemics [involving "typhus symptoms"] occurred in 1816-19, 1826-7, 1836-7 and 1846-9." Like other medical historians she points out that in the first half of the century "typhus was generally referred to in Ireland simply as 'fever' ... 'Fever', in fact, was an omnibus term that embraced several febrile conditions, such as relapsing fever and typhoid fever, as well as typhus. It was not until William Jenner published his work in 1849 that typhus, typhoid and relapsing fever were accepted as distinct diseases" (121-22). Frederick Cartwright's *Disease and History* provides a helpful historical account of these diseases and of the evolution in recognizing their bacteriological causes. **41** In Tullamore, Mary Teresa Purcell, Mary Martha Gilligan, a novice, and Elizabeth Molloy, a postulant, all had "fever" which "still continued to rage in the town and of course the poor were the victims, As the sisters were unceasing in their visits to the poor sufferers, they naturally caught the infection." Eventually, Dr. Cantwell "formally forbade the sisters to attend infectious cases, and although often called upon to revoke the prohibition, he could not be prevailed on to do so" (Tullamore Annals 32). + Mary Francis (Margaret) Marmion was dying at Baggot Street of consumption. The sister of Mary Cecilia Marmion, she had professed her vows only fourteen months before. She will die on March 10, 1840 (see Letters 164 and 165). **43** Mary Francis (Catherine) Mahony was dying in Cork, evidently of consumption. She was one of the first postulants to enter the Cork community and had just professed her vows on February 11, 1840 (Cork Register) Mary Sullivan (ed.) *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818 – 1841* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 255

190. To Sister Mary Ann Doyle
Tullamore

Convent, Baggot Street
August 20, 1840

My Dear Sister M. Ann

I had a letter this day from Limerick. Sr. E²⁸ says you are about to send two Srs. to learn the education system - indeed she speaks as if you were to be one. Surely not. I suppose you will never be one of the appointed teachers, though you might oversee: Would it not be better to try to get a well qualified Monitress from the Model School until your Sisters would know the method. They sent us such a one from Limerick, quite a poor girl. I should think they could send you one. She should be paid a small salary [*sic*] out of what the board allows. I do not think they permit any one to attend the Model School in Dublin except those who are settled with them for the purpose and remain all day - paying a certain fee.²⁹

There could not be a more delightful school than they have in Limerick--if one of your Sisters went there Sister Harnett, who is exceedingly clever, would teach her in a very short time - if a Priest could be met to accompany her. I need not add that you have this house at your command if you think of Dublin.

Sr. M. Cecilia hurries me lest Sr. M. Teresa should not have her note in time to answer.³⁰

I am much better - the cough almost gone. Write to me soon - and tell me how all goes on. Sr. M. Cecilia was delighted to get a note from her old favorite. God bless you. Give my affectionate love to each and believe me always.

Your attached
M. C. McAuley

Sister Angela has moved into her new Convent.³¹

Autograph: Bermondsey

28 Mary Elizabeth Moore, superior in Limerick. **29** As part of the construction of the new convent in Tullamore, new schoolrooms were provided. Evidently Mary Ann Doyle, the superior in Tullamore, now planned to have the school affiliated with the national school system, once the teachers were prepared to meet its standards. The mode of instruction Catherine McAuley recommends is the Lancastrian method wherein a team of monitresses is employed to hear the students' lessons after they have received instruction from a head teacher or have studied the material on their own. Catherine advocates drawing on the expertise of Mary Vincent Harnett in Limerick, urging Mary Ann Doyle not to burden herself with a teaching role in addition to her other duties as superior. Model Schools were established in some of the major cities of Ireland to prepare teachers and monitresses for the national system, the one in Dublin apparently requiring a prior commitment to the Dublin schools. In the next paragraph Catherine seems to suggest that a sister could also study in the school at Baggot Street for service in Tullamore. **30** Mary Cecilia Marmion, and Mary Teresa Purcell in Tullamore. **31** Mary Angela Dunne in Charleville.

Mary Sullivan (ed.) *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818 – 1841*
(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 295

Prayerful Reflection

Suscipe is the Latin word for 'receive'. It became almost synonymous with a prayer of self-sacrifice to God following St Ignatius of Loyola's prayer of the same title. The *Suscipe of Catherine McAuley* is, as the name suggests, the one that she wrote and prayed. Whilst it uses some language which we may not use today, it continues to be prayed and sung by Sisters of Mercy, their associates, staff, students and volunteers everywhere.

Suscipe of Catherine McAuley

My God, I am yours for all eternity.
Teach me to cast my whole self
into the arms of your Providence
with the most lively,
unlimited confidence
in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
that whatever you ordain or permit
may always be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
suffer nothing to afflict me but sin,
nothing to delight me, but the hope of
coming to the possession of
You my God,
in your own everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Listen to and pray Catherine's *Suscipe* with the staff and students at the Santa Barbara Catholic School in Guam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35tXvZ1BFo0>.

Do you have a prayer, poem, piece of music or art or a special place to go which nourishes you in times of need or which helps you to be your best self?

Think of ways you can be merciful to yourself.

What small response to need could you make as you start or continue your mercy journey?

MODULE 3

The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

Watch the Introduction to Module 3 video clip <https://vimeo.com/490981936/5a084e952e>

Introduction to Module 3

In this module, we explore the traditional corporal and spiritual Works of Mercy, their scriptural foundations and their conventional and contemporary manifestations. We reflect on how the Works of Mercy were central to Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy, and how we are called to engage in them as women and men of mercy today.

Opening Reflection – Catherine’s words

Sweet Mercy! – soothing, patient and kind –
softens the highs and rears the fallen mind;
Knows with just reign and even hand to guide
between the false fear and arbitrary pride.
Not easily provoked, she soon forgives:
feels love for all, and by a look, relieves.
Soft peace she brings, whenever she arrives,
removes our anguish and reforms our lives;
makes the rough paths of peevish nature even,
and opens in each heart a little heaven.

Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, (citing Angela Bolster, 1985, p. 817) *Praying with Catherine McAuley*, p. 36.

Shakespeare’s words

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes....

The Merchant of Venice Act IV, sc i

Works of Mercy are actions we can take in response to need, giving and receiving the mercy of God. They have been traditionally divided into two categories, the Corporal and the Spiritual.

The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy

The Corporal Works of Mercy address material and physical needs, whilst the Spiritual Works of Mercy address emotional and spiritual needs. Traditionally, there are 7 Corporal and 7 Spiritual Works of Mercy, all of which have their basis in Scripture. Over the centuries, contemplation of the gospels has led to the identification of what have come to be known as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. These are drawn mostly from the words and actions of Jesus as Jesus showed mercy and compassion in so many ways to so many people. The seven corporal works are practical and involve how we serve those around us in need of mercy — they are about our external expression of God's mercy to others.

The seven spiritual works concern our inner disposition — the values and attitudes in our hearts that allow us to see all of humankind, including ourselves, as needing mercy and to respond in humility and sincerity to others. All the works of mercy underpinned the work of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy and continue to do so to this day.

The Works of Mercy

Corporal works of mercy

- 1. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.*
- 2. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.*
- 3. I was a stranger and you invited me in.*
- 4. I needed clothes and you clothed me.*
- 5. I was sick and you looked after me.*
- 6. I was in prison and you came to visit me.*
- 7. Bury the dead.*

Spiritual works of mercy

- 1. Instruct the ignorant.*
- 2. Counsel the doubtful.*
- 3. Admonish the sinners.*
- 4. Bear patiently those who wrong us.*
- 5. Forgive offenses.*
- 6. Comfort the afflicted.*
- 7. Pray for the living and the dead.*

The 8th Work of Mercy

I was Earth, broken and wounded, and you cared for me.

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25:40)

Pope Francis, in 2016, included 'Care for Our Common Home'— 'I was Earth broken and wounded and you cared for me' as an 8th Spiritual and Corporal Work of Mercy. Pope Francis commented that this newly identified work of mercy had both a corporal and spiritual component. As a spiritual work of mercy, it requires 'grateful contemplation of God's world' and as a corporal work of mercy, it requires 'simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness' (Laudato Si, 214 and 230). Given the importance of these works in our world today and the integral way that they are connected to the other Works of Mercy, Module 4 is dedicated to the 8th Work of Mercy. See **Module 4**.

Catholic Social Teaching

Though many people are well-versed in gospel teachings, not all are familiar with the rich treasury of values and principles that are embodied in Catholic Social Teaching. These principles and teachings are founded on a very active and committed proclamation of human rights, drawn from the scriptures and the lived experience of Christianity over the centuries.

There are four foundational principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

Human dignity

We recognize the sacredness of life and that every person has inherent dignity and worth. Our human rights and responsibilities are founded in this essential, shared human dignity.

The common good

We have responsibility for one another in our life together and are called to work for the common good of all. We must advocate for a just society in which all people, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised, are able to flourish and meet their needs.

Subsidiarity

The capacity and capabilities of people and communities ought to be respected, with decisions made at the lowest local level possible. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to decision-making processes that closely affect them.

Solidarity

Humans are social by nature and depend on one another. We seek to stand in unity with each other, particularly those who are powerless or disadvantaged, and recognize each person's rights regardless of our differences.

Other principles include:

Preferential option for the poor: the needs of the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable are prioritized.

Stewardship of creation: care for the earth, recognizing that all of creation is interconnected and we are part of and dependent on the environment. Pope Francis has recently referred to this as integral ecology.

Though not couched in the above terms, the values embodied in Catholic Social Teaching underpinned the work of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy through their commitment to bringing the teachings of Jesus in the gospels to life.

Pope Francis has stated, 'An authentic faith — which is never comfortable or completely personal — always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it' (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*). The principles of Catholic Social Teaching provide an invaluable guide to focusing our mission initiatives. We are called to continual reflection of what it means to live each moment as a sign of the goodness of God. During the Year of Mercy in 2016 the whole Church was reminded of our call to Mercy: 'The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. ... This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as the Father is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other' (Pope Francis, Bull, Jubilee Year of Mercy).

Quotes From Catherine

"A good beginning is of great importance; you must waste some time with visitors."

"It is better to relieve 100 imposters – if there be any such – than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty."

"God knows that I would rather be cold and hungry than the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford"

"Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to where possible."

"Now and again bestow some praise."

"We should be shining lamps giving light to all around us."

"Try to meet all with peace and ease."

"There are things the poor prize more highly than gold, tho' they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look, and the patient hearing of their sorrows."

"There is nothing of greater importance than the perfect discharge of our ordinary duties."

The poor need help today, not next week!"

"It is for God that we serve the poor, and not for thanks"

"We can never say "it is enough."

"You must be cheerful and happy, animating all around you"

Contemporary Engagement in the Works of Mercy

Pope Francis, speaking in St Peter's Square in Rome to a Jubilee audience on 30 June, 2016, reminded those gathered there that *"the works of mercy are not theoretical ideas, but concrete testimonies. They oblige us to roll up our sleeves to alleviate suffering."*

Annette Schneider rsm, reflecting on the legacy of Clare Agnew and the lens she gave us into the works of the early Sisters of Mercy through her illustrations, writes that: *"the works of mercy are the building blocks on which a compassionate and merciful world continues to be shaped by followers of Jesus who have 'rolled up their sleeves', alongside people of all faith traditions and all people of good will, to advocate for mercy, justice, compassion and inclusiveness."*

Schneider, A. (2019) *A Lens on the Works of Mercy: Clare Agnew and her Legacy*, p. 62

What are some of the contemporary issues in response to which we are called to 'roll up our sleeves' and engage in Works of Mercy?

Think about the scope in your current ministry role. How might you nurture a culture of 'cheerful response to need' amongst those with whom you work?

Prayerful Reflection²

The parable of the Good Samaritan reveals Jesus' response to the question "Who is my neighbour?" posed to Jesus by one of the scribes. Take some time to read the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke 10:25-37.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Notice that Jesus does not answer the scribe's question by defining "my neighbour", but turns the question around and instead, asks "who is the neighbour to the person in need?"

Stopping to help the man in need was not a simple action. Showing mercy entailed the "willingness to enter into the chaos of another" to make things right. Viewed through this lens, it is easy to see how mercy is at the heart of Catholic theological tradition. Jesus is God's way of entering into the chaos of human existence to rescue us from our slavery to false gods.

What are some of the 'false gods' from which God is calling us away in contemporary society?

² Adapted from James Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 3rd Edition (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 4-7.

MODULE 4

The 8th Work of Mercy

Watch the Introduction to Module 4 video clip [Orientation Intro 4 \(vimeo.com\)](https://vimeo.com/111111111)

Introduction to Module 4

In this module, we briefly explore the 8th Work of Mercy proposed by Pope Francis in 2016. We see how the Cry of the Earth invariably becomes intertwined with the Cry of the Poor.

Opening Reflection

Blessing

Blessed be mother earth
who nourishes and cares for her children.
Blessed be the fruits of earth
that I often take for granted.
Blessed be the eyes that see
what is truly happening around us.
Blessed be the heart of mercy
whose crack enables deeper seeing.
Blessed be the 'saving element'
hidden deep within despair
that can gently transform
all darkness into light

Madeline Duckett rsm,
Boots, Cracked Pots and a Place at the Table, p.72.

The 8th Work of Mercy: Care for our Common Home– I was Earth broken and wounded and you cared for me.

Three key dates

24 May 2015

Pope Francis promulgated his encyclical (a letter which deals with some aspect of Catholic teaching), *Laudato Si'* (Praise be to you): On Care of Our Common Home. Unlike other papal encyclicals which are normally addressed to a particular audience, e.g., bishops in a specific country, all clergy throughout the world, etc., Pope Francis addresses *Laudato Si'* to "every person living on this planet". The encyclical can be found at:



[Laudato si' \(24 May 2015\) | Francis](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francis/encyclicals/laudato-si/20150524_la-udato-si_en.html)

On 13 March 2015, Pope Francis declared an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy 8 December 2015 - November 2016: I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (cf. Lk 6:36).

Pope Francis

A simple search of "jubilee year of mercy resources" on the internet will result in several excellent resources on the theme of "Mercy" created for this world-wide event.

1 September 2016

Pope Francis declared that in addition to the seven corporal and spiritual works of mercy, an eighth work, 'care for our common home': 'I was Earth broken and wounded and you cared for me' would be included both as a spiritual work and as a corporal work.

As a spiritual work of mercy, the eighth work of mercy calls for a 'grateful contemplation of God's world' which 'allows us to discover in each thing, a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us.'

As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires 'simple daily gestures, which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness' and 'makes itself felt in every action that seeks a better world.'

Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor

One of the key messages in *Laudato Si'* is that the degradation of the earth invariably affects the poor. When the earth suffers, it is the poor and marginalised who suffer first and the most. Recognition of this correlation between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor is neither new nor championed only by Pope Francis.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 9 out of 10 people worldwide breathe polluted air, and more than 7 million people die from air pollution related causes every year. More than 90% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, mainly in Asia and Africa, followed by low- and middle-income countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas.³

According to water.org, a global non-profit organization working to bring water and sanitation to the world, 1 in 9 people around the world lack access to clean, reliable drinking water. The vast majority live in extreme poverty and children are often the hardest hit. Their growth is stunted because poor water quality inhibits their ability to absorb nutrients. Women are also disproportionately affected by lack of clean drinking water, because they are often forced to spend hours fetching water every day when communities lack safe taps.⁴

In wealthier countries, we don't usually eat spoilt or contaminated food and often throw out food even when it is edible. Legislation ensures that contaminated and spoilt food is recalled, preventing the contraction and spread of disease. According to WHO, contaminated food still affects 600 million people each year, killing 420,000 people. The vast majority of deaths from food poisoning occur in poorer nations, with children under the age of 5 accounting for 40% of all deaths. Apart from not being able to afford better food in the first place, the lack of regulation on food safety, industrial contaminants in the water used for crop irrigation, tropical weather allowing pests to flourish, food being improperly transported and handled, chemicals leaching into food supplies, and other reasons, poorer people are greatly disadvantaged.⁵

³ Pollution <https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab1>, accessed 8 December 2020

⁴ Water.org, Access to water turns poverty into possibility <https://water.org/about-us/>, accessed 8 December 2020

⁵ Scientific American, Contaminated Food Sickens 1 in 10 People Worldwide Each Year <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/contaminated-food-sickens-1-in-10-people-worldwide-each-y>, accessed 8 December 2020

Gratefully Contemplating God's World

Reflect on the beauty of creation by contemplating the following images, other images that you might have or photographs of nature you have taken.

View these 1–2-minute time-lapse videos from the World Economic Forum which focus on the human impact on the earth

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/5-videos-that-reveal-the-human-impact-on-earth/>



What response do you have to these clips? What stays with you?

MODULE 5

Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland



Introduction to Module 5

In this module, we briefly explore the establishment of Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland, tracing its history from the various original foundations located in Ireland and Rhode Island. We also look briefly at the ministries of the Sisters and those who work alongside them today.

Opening Reflection

Mercy

Mercy is a woman of indeterminate age
and unremarkable appearance.
She is not fussy about the company she keeps,
and tends to be full of excuses for her friends,
having seen life from their angle.

Her heart, like her pockets, is capacious.
She has a voice rich in tender understanding
But is at her best in silence
when she sits alongside
the grief-stricken and the guilty
and their sorrow seeps into her soul.

Curiously, she sees herself reflected
in the eyes of both murderer and victim,
so sits not in judgement but companionably.
She is a subtle teacher.

Mary Wickham rsm, Extract from *Souvenirs of Spirit: Poems & Prayers*, p. 64

Foundations of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland

The Beginning Years

In early 1840 a meeting between Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy and Bishop Michael Anthony Fleming, Vicar Apostolic of Newfoundland took place in

the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street, Dublin. It seems that the purpose of the bishop's visit was to request a community of Sisters who would respond to the needs of his mission territory. He had already set his sights on a possible Mercy foundation in Newfoundland, a mission he assumed would be led by Marianne Creedon, whom he had sent to Ireland in 1839 to be trained by Catherine McAuley. The bishop had chosen wisely as Marianne had lived in St. John's for six years, knew the critical needs of the area and had a strong desire to help the people of her adopted homeland. On August 19, 1841 Marianne, now Sister M. Francis, was professed for the Newfoundland mission.

The opening of the Newfoundland mission was delayed, likely because of Catherine McAuley's illness and death and it was not until May 1842 that Sister M. Francis and two companions, Sisters M. Ursula Frayne and M. Rose Lynch began their voyage to Newfoundland, arriving in St. John's on June 3. Their first year was spent in visitation and care of the sick and those suffering from poverty and wretched living conditions, and this ministry continued even when the sisters opened school on May 1, 1843. Meanwhile on December 12, 1842, the little community had moved from the bishop's residence where they had lived since their arrival to their new convent on Military Road.

Sometime in late 1842 Maria Nugent, later known as Sister M. Joseph Nugent, asked to join the Sisters of Mercy. She had entered the Presentation Convent at Cathedral Square but withdrew after two years because of illness. Her novitiate with the Presentation Sisters was deemed sufficient preparation for becoming a Sister of Mercy and she was professed by Bishop Fleming on March 25, 1843. In November of that year Sisters M. Ursula and M. Rose returned to Ireland, leaving Sisters M. Francis and M. Joseph to carry on the arduous work of a very fragile and demanding mission. Epidemics were a recurring danger and the two sisters, along with their work in the school, faithfully cared for those afflicted with these terrible diseases in their homes and in St. John's Hospital. In June

of 1847 Sister Mary Joseph died, having contracted the deadly disease through nursing a typhus victim at the hospital. Sister M. Francis was now the sole Sister of Mercy in Newfoundland and for the next ten months she faithfully and courageously tended the mission, impelled by its urgency and convinced of God's abiding presence and guidance.

In April of 1848 her niece, Agnes Nugent asked to join her and in 1850 two other Irish women joined the community. In 1855 Sister M. Francis was overjoyed to receive Anastasia Tarrahan, the first Newfoundlander into the novitiate. Less than two weeks later, on July 15 Sister M. Francis, died as quietly as she had lived, leaving a legacy of compassion, hope, commitment, courage and trust in a provident and merciful God to a fledgling community of four young sisters. She was succeeded by Sister Francis Xavier Bernard, during whose long tenure in the Newfoundland mission, forty young women were professed as Sisters of Mercy, fifteen of them Newfoundlanders.

In 1854 when the deadly cholera epidemic left many children orphans, Sister M. Francis had opened Immaculate Conception Orphanage at Mercy Convent. This soon became overcrowded and in 1859 Sister Xavier Bernard established a convent and orphanage at Belvedere, the property that Bishop Fleming had bequeathed to the Sisters of Mercy. The vacated space at Mercy Convent became St. Clair's Boarding School, providing educational opportunities for girls from outside St. John's. In 1863 Sister Xavier Bernard opened St. Brigid's School for the instruction of poor girls living in the city's east end.

Expansion

As the number of sisters increased and their work became well-known throughout the island there were more requests for foundations. Like Catherine McAuley before her, Sister Xavier Bernard responded, setting up Mercy foundations in Brigus, Burin, Petty Harbour, Conception Harbour and St. Lawrence in eight short years. In 1883 under the leadership of another great woman of Mercy, Sister M. Bernard Clune, the Sisters of Mercy purchased the Little estate in the Waterford Valley to establish St. Bride's Boarding School for the education of Catholic teachers. From its foundation in 1884 to the mid-1970s St. Bride's played a prominent role in the educational life of Newfoundland, training teachers and making it possible for Newfoundland youth to avail of the best possible educational and cultural experiences.

Mercy on Newfoundland's West Coast

An unusual set of circumstances brought Sisters of Mercy to Newfoundland's west coast. Bishop Michael Francis Howley, zealous for the advancement of his very extensive mission in western Newfoundland, saw the importance of a community of sisters to carry out his missionary goals. At the same time, a wealthy American woman had a dream of funding such an endeavor in mission territory. Providentially, the two plans merged and in 1894 four Sisters of Mercy left their community in Providence, Rhode Island to found a Convent of Mercy at Sandy Point, Bay St. George. With the completion of the trans-island railway in 1899 the Convent and school moved to St. Georges.

Amalgamation

By 1916 there were nine independent Mercy foundations scattered across Newfoundland, but in August of that year all nine were united under one central administration, with Sister M. Bridget O'Connor as the first Mother General. Seven new foundations were opened in the next eleven years. Other foundations were established as needs arose and by 1970 the Sisters of Mercy could be found in practically every part of Newfoundland.

New ministries – Mercy's Response to needs

As the congregation grew and spread, the sisters continued their ministry in schools and in visitation of the sick but other needs also came to the fore. The need for a Catholic hospital in St. John's had been evident for some time and in 1922 the Sisters of Mercy opened St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, which after 100 years, is still serving the people of the province. In the 1950s as part of Archbishop P.J. Skinner's platform of social reform, a home for the aged and infirm was envisioned. At his

invitation the Sisters of Mercy agreed to administer and operate St. Patrick's Mercy Home, which opened in January 1958.

Expansion beyond the island of Newfoundland

In 1959 Pope John XXIII appealed to the world regarding the plight of the Church in Latin America. The Sisters of Mercy responded to that call in 1961, sending six sisters to establish a school and undertake the traditional Mercy ministry of visitation of the people living in sickness and poverty in the town of Monsefu, Peru. After twenty-seven years in Monsefu, the sisters moved to nearby Puerto Eten and in 1993 opened a second Peruvian mission in Ichocan, Cajamarca. The Ichocan community moved to Huarmay, Ancash in 2015. There are currently six sisters ministering in Peru, three in each community.

In 1984 the Sisters of Mercy opened a mission in the small island community of Black Tickle on Labrador's south coast and over the next few years sisters ministered in some locations in Labrador – Happy Valley, Churchill Falls, Labrador City, Blanc Sablon and Forteau. For a period of time, one sister lived and ministered in Florida and one sister currently lives in Ontario since 1992 and ministers to religious congregations in a number of jurisdictions.

Special Initiatives

Ever attentive to the signs of the times, in 1958 the Sisters of Mercy, in collaboration with the Presentation Sisters, opened Holy Heart of Mary High School in St. John's, a regional school for girls from all the Catholic schools in the area. Recognizing the need to accommodate out-of-town girls who wished to attend Holy Heart, the sisters built a student residence, McAuley Hall in 1960 and this was later used to accommodate girls attending summer classes at Memorial University. In 1991 McAuley Convent on the Littledale property was established to accommodate sisters needing nursing care. It was administered by the sisters and had sisters on staff. By the mid-2000s discussions began for a more sustainable future for the care of the sisters and in 2020 the sisters moved to The Residence at Littledale, administered by The Residence at Littledale Inc. As the congregation grew in awareness of the need for a more integrated vision of ecology and justice, it opened Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice in 2003. The Centre provides education, inspiration, leadership and advocacy in ecological and justice issues facing our world today.

Today Sisters of Mercy continue to reach out in compassionate service to those in need through their presence and various ministries – to the sick, the marginalized, the elderly, the homeless, prisoners, refugees, all who suffer from poverty and injustice and to planet Earth.

Significant Events in Our Mercy Story

1842: Arrival from Ireland of first Sisters of Mercy in St. John's (Sisters Francis Creedon, Ursula Frayne, Rose Lynch)

1847: Death of Sister Joseph Nugent from typhus

1855: First Newfoundlander, Anastasia Tarrahan, entered the order; death of Sister Francis Creedon

1859: Foundation of St. Michael's Convent and Orphanage

1861: First wave of expansion: Brigus, Burin, Petty Harbour, Conception Harbour,

1871: St. Lawrence

1884: St. Bride's College and Convent opened

1893: Foundation on Sandy Point from Rhode Island (moved to St. George's in 1899)

1916: Amalgamation of nine Convents of Mercy in Newfoundland into one congregation

1917: Second wave of expansion: Curling, Bell Island-the Front, Bay Bulls, St. Joseph's, Marystown, Bell Island-the Mines

1922: Foundation of St. Clare's Mercy Hospital

1939: Opening of St. Clare's School of Nursing

1950: Mundy Pond, Goulds, Stephenville Crossing

1958: Opening of Holy Heart of Mary High School — joint ministry with Presentation Sisters

1959: Opening of St. Patrick's Mercy Home

1959: Third wave of expansion: St. John Eudes, Baie Verte, North River, Upper Ferry, St. Fintan's, Rushoon

1960: Opening of St. Catherine's Convent and McAuley Hall

1961: Opening of Mission in Monsefu, Peru

1974-2015: Further expansion in ones or twos: : Bird Cove, Black Tickle, Lourdes de Blanc Sablon, Brents Cove, Churchill Falls, Clarendville, Conception Bay South, Conche, Conne River, Dublin, Florida, Forteau, Gambo, Grand Falls, Grand Le Pierre, Happy Valley/Goose Bay, Harbour Grace, Kenya, Labrador City, Lamaline, Long Harbour, Mercy Residence (St. John's), Mount Carmel/St. Joseph's, Ontario, Paradise/St. Thomas, Parker's Cove, Pasadena/Corner Brook, Shea Heights, St. Paul's, Stephenville, Terrenceville, Topsail, Washington (DC), West St. Modeste, Zambia

1991: Opening of McAuley Convent on Littledale Property

1994: Opening of The Gathering Place — joint ministry with Presentation Sisters

2020: Move of Sisters from McAuley Convent and St. Bride's Convent to The Residence at Littledale

The Nature of The Institute - Constitution of Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland, 1983

The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy is a pontifical institute of women religious founded by Catherine McAuley for service in the Church. The spirit of the Congregation is mercy as manifested in the life of Jesus Christ and in the spirit of the foundress.

Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our divine Master. . . . Wherever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.

The sisters express the spirit of mercy by compassionate service to "the poor, the sick and the ignorant" (Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, Ireland). In all their endeavours they strive to promote justice and peace in the world.

Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland Chapter Statement (2021)



*Mercying: Imaging the Face of God in All Creation/
Misericordiando: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en toda la Creación*

Trusting in God's providence and inspired by Catherine's vision, we dare to walk together into the future, exploring anew our place in an evolving universe. We commit ourselves, through contemplative and compassionate presence, to:

- ❖ Listening and responding to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor as one
- ❖ Welcoming diversity and inclusion in creation, and in community and ministry
- ❖ Discerning new paths for leadership and ministry

Which of the words or phrases in the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland Chapter Statement are significant for you in your life and work?

Prayerful Reflection

Whilst Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy, neither she nor the Sisters of Mercy have a monopoly on mercy. At the heart of the mercy that Catherine and the Sisters of Mercy live and practise is God's mercy.

The theme of mercy is expressed throughout the Christian Scriptures. In the gospels, Luke begins his story of Jesus, with the portrayal of Mary (Lk 1:50.54) who praises God for the mercy shown to Israel and to the whole of humanity in the Magnificat: "*His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.*" (1:50). God intervenes in the world for the salvation of humankind through Jesus, who is seen as an agent of God's mercy. Jesus also reflects God's mercy as Jesus reaches out to people with mercy and compassion.

"*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*" (Lk 6:20-49). In his Gospel, Luke highlights 'mercy' as an attribute of God and invites us to be 'merciful' in the same ways as God is merciful.

Think of someone you know to be a merciful person. In what ways does that person reflect God's mercy?

MODULE 6

Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland Ministries

Introduction to Module 6

In this module, we explore the various ministries in which Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland and the wider Mercy family are involved, focusing on the call to the common mission of mercy which brings us all together. The Sisters of Mercy commenced many ministries within Canada and Peru over the years. Some have discontinued or been handed over to other organizations to administer, while new ones have been established to meet new needs. Some sisters work in other Church or community agencies or volunteer their time and talents to assist people in need in their local areas.

The most recent development in the governance of these ministries has been the establishment of *Mercy Wellsprings Incorporated* on 10 August 2023 (See p. 30)

Opening Reflection

Blessed be the house
that offers the traveller a place of rest.
Blessed be the table
that sets a banquet for the stranger to share.
Blessed be the heart that opens to welcome
the one who cannot repay.
Blessed be he who receives
and she who gives
Blessed be the be-longing we can sense
when the heart is still.
Blessed be the space created by kindness
in which we step into our potential.
Blessed be mercy in all of its facets
for it invites us to unwrap its gifts
and sing with all of creation
a song of joy
Amen

Madeline Duckett rsm, *Boots, Cracked Pots and a Place at the Table*, p. 95

Ministries for which Mercy Wellsprings has governance responsibility

During 2019 - 2023, the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland explored ways of ensuring the governance of its sponsored ministries could be sustained into the future. Following a detailed research and consultation process, the Leadership Team decided to establish *Mercy Wellsprings* to assume the canonical (Church-related) and civil responsibility for its ministries. *Mercy Wellsprings* was incorporated on August 10, 2023. The seven sponsored ministries are: St. Patrick's Mercy Home (a 210-bed long term care facility for older people); St. Patrick's Mercy Home Foundation (a fund-raising entity which provides financial support to the residents of the Home and to the staff and volunteers who provide the care there); St. Clare's Mercy Hospital (a government-owned acute care facility previously owned by the Congregation and now operated in accordance with the principles and values of the Sisters of Mercy); The Gathering Place (a community centre and shelter for homeless persons and persons precariously housed); Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice (a centre focused on integral ecology, justice and care for our common home); Misericordia Mission Fund (a funding entity which provides financial support for the ministries of the Sisters who live in Peru); Belvedere Orphanage Fund (a funding entity which provides financial support for families with orphans or half-orphans).

Mercy Wellsprings ~ Fuentes de la Misericordia

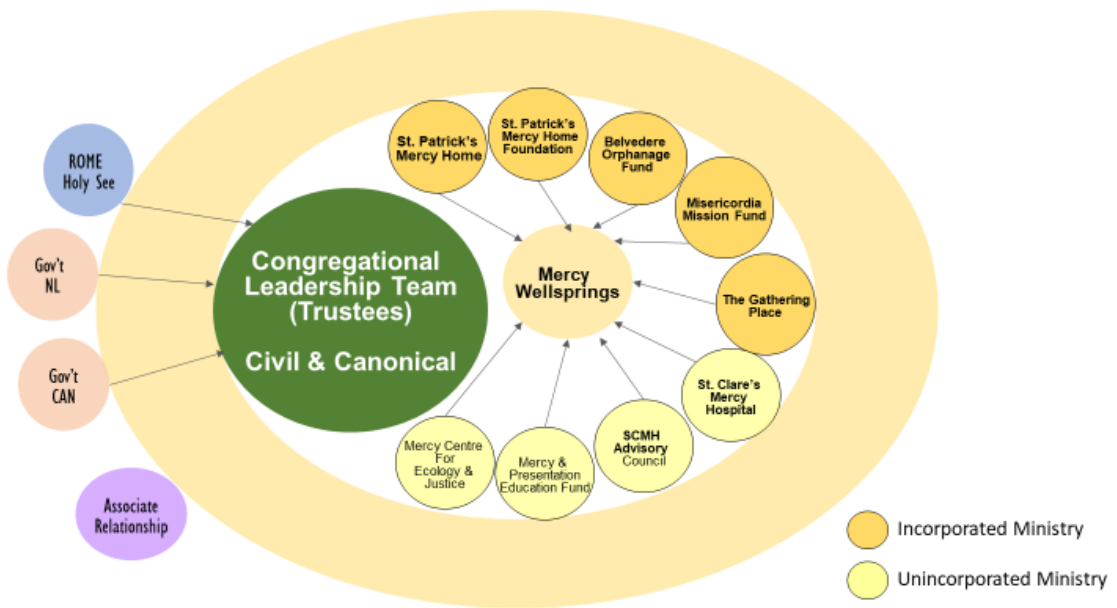


At Chapter 2021, the sisters made a commitment to ensure the sustainability of their sponsored ministries into the future even when they can no longer be personally present. In February 2020, a Sustainable Ministries Advisory Committee (SMAC) was established by the Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy. In addition to the Associate Relationship with its Associate Advisory Council, there are seven ministries sponsored by and reporting to the Leadership Team: St. Patrick's Mercy Home, St. Patrick's Mercy Home Foundation, St. Clare's Mercy Hospital Advisory Council, The Gathering Place, Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice, Belvedere Orphanage Fund and Misericordia Mission Fund. Five of those presently incorporated will maintain their corporate status within Mercy Wellsprings. In developing this direction, our Congregation complies with two sets of law: (i) civil law (in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador for incorporation and in Canada for registered charity status), and (ii) canon law (under the direction of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life-DICLSAL) in Rome.

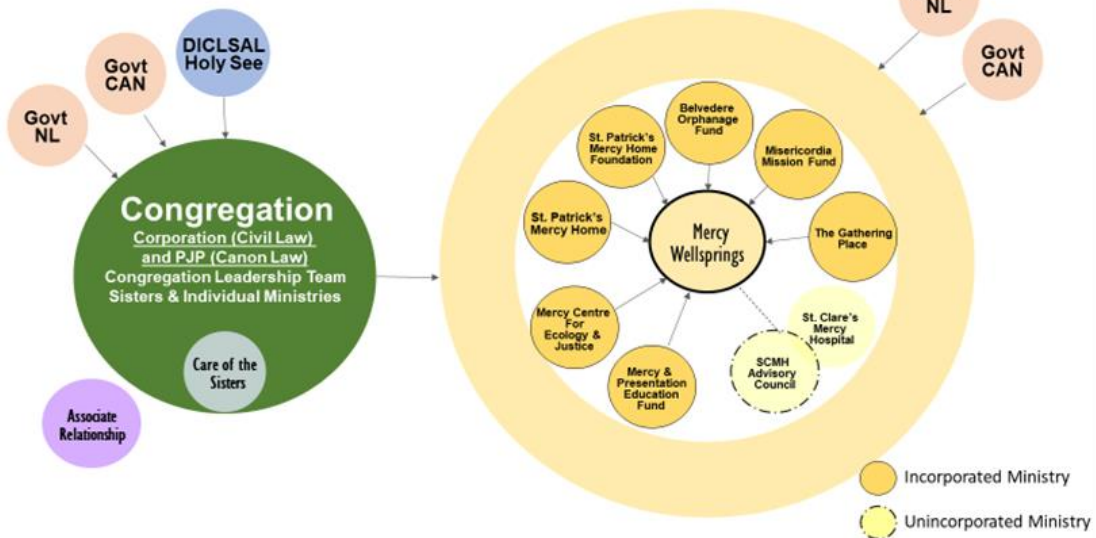
With competent advisors and consultants, the Sustainability Committee (SMAC) sent to DICLSAL an information package in June 2023 regarding establishment of Mercy Wellsprings ~ Fuentes de la Misericordia. There was registration in the Province of Newfoundland on 10 August 2023 and incorporation as a charitable organization with the Government of Canada in 2024. Communication and engagement were also through the committee's monthly newsletter, *Mercy Alive Mercy Anew La Misericordia Viva La Misericordia Nuevamente* to sisters, associates and boards, presentations by a SMAC Formation sub-committee and by Sister Elizabeth Davis as SMAC Chair to all Boards and Associate Advisory and the 2023 Assembly of the Sisters of Mercy and discussion. SMAC held its concluding meeting on 19 September 2023. There was the creation of the Members Board (19 September 2023), appointment of the Honourable George Furey as Chairperson on 19 January 2024 and the Mercy Wellsprings, Inc. initial Board (19 January 2024). In 2024 there was the hiring of a small staff and the development and implementation of a Formation Program.

The five sponsored ministries that are incorporated and the two unincorporated sponsored ministries report directly to the Congregational Leadership Team. The incorporated entities are also registered as charitable organizations. The Congregational Leadership Team is the canonical leadership team for the Congregation as a public juridic person (a pontifical religious institute of women) and the civic members and Board of the Congregation as an entity incorporated in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and as a registered charity with the Government of Canada. The Associate Relationship is between the Congregation and the Associate members.

Present Reality – Sisters of Mercy Congregation Sponsored Ministries



Future with Trust



1. St. Patrick's Mercy Home/St. Patrick's Mercy Home Foundation

- a. St. Patrick's Mercy Home in St. John's NL is a nursing home owned by the Congregation and funded for its operation by Government. Opened in 1958, it is an incorporated entity with two members: the Archbishop of St. John's and the Congregational Leader. It is managed by a separate Board of Directors appointed by the Congregation.
- b. The Board has a Memorandum of Understanding with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (dated June 2004 with the Authority's predecessor, the St. John's Nursing Home Board and its successor organization, the Eastern Regional Health Authority). This agreement includes confirmation of monies owed to the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's concerning the outstanding debt of one million nine hundred fifty-four thousand seven hundred sixty-nine dollars plus interest accrued after the year 1999. This debt relates to the construction of the Home in 1958. It can only be called if the Home is to change its mandate or be closed. The agreement also recognizes the use of eight rooms for members of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's when these rooms are available.
- c. At the Home, Sisters participate in pastoral ministry, volunteer services, and mission effectiveness as well as in membership on the Boards of the Home and the Foundation.
- d. The Home and the land on which it is located are owned by the St. Patrick's Mercy Home Inc., but they are to be returned to the Congregation if the Home is closed or expropriated by the Government.
- e. While Government provides overall operational funding through the NL Health Services, the Congregation provides financial support for pastoral services and volunteer services as well as stipends for the two senior management positions. This averages \$85,000 annually.
- f. The St. Patrick's Mercy Home Foundation supports the ministry of the Home and is guided by an Executive Director and a very dedicated group of volunteers who work tirelessly for the residents. The Foundation is a separately incorporated entity. It is managed by a separate Board of Directors with the chairperson appointed by the Congregation. Donations to the Foundation from the Congregation average \$30,000 annually.
- g. The Chairs of both Boards and the Executive Directors are lay people.

2. Misericordia Mission Fund

- a. The Misericordia Mission Fund, an important dimension of the ministry of the Congregation, is an incorporated entity and a registered charity established by the Congregation in 1992 for the support of the ministries and programs of its mission in Peru. The mission fund is used in both communities of the Sisters of Mercy in Peru for the education of individuals as leaders and professionals, the health and educational needs of the poor, outreach to families who are struggling, catechetical formation of groups and individuals, pastoral and human development programs, and response to various disasters and other crises. The Leadership Team and three other Sisters from the Congregation serve as the Board of this Fund.
- b. The Misericordia Mission Fund is the only structure through which the Congregation can send money to Peru from Canada because of the federal regulations of the Government of Canada. These regulations limit ways in which a registered charity can send money outside the country. Donations to this Fund from the Congregation average \$60,000 annually.
- c. There is no other source of funding for the Mercy ministry in Peru except occasional grants from international foundations and donations from the public.

3. The Gathering Place

- a. Since 1994, the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters have jointly operated a volunteer-based facility in the city of St. John's known as "The Gathering Place." The Gathering Place provides an inclusive, safe, and compassionate community where people who are underserved, at risk, or in need, receive nourishment, health and social support, and respite from discrimination, loneliness, and exclusion. It is a separately incorporated entity with a Board of Directors appointed by the two sponsoring Congregations.
- b. In 2019, an independent study carried out by Deloitte and funded by the Government of NL confirmed that there is a growing number of people in St. John's and area who are homeless or have poor social support and have intersecting vulnerabilities: poverty, mental illness, physical

illness, addictions, etc. Those who are in this position have been missed by all government programs and services and existing community-based services except The Gathering Place.

- c. Today, The Gathering Place is open seven days a week, provides three meals for seven days, has a medical clinic, nursing services, a dental clinic, literacy programs, computer programs, laundry services, showers, hair-dressing, and social programs. Its case management staff help facilitate access to and provide resources in key life support areas, including income support; permanent housing; medical; mental health; bus passes; Service Canada access; Canada Revenue Agency (tax help); emergency housing; addiction recovery; legal matters; taxi and bus service; and food-bank access. It has 30 low-barrier emergency beds for overnight occupancy only.
- d. Since April 2019, The Gathering Place receives 60% of the funding for its operations annually from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Gathering Place funds the remaining 40% of its operations, its maintenance costs, and its building repairs through public fund-raising and support from the Congregation. Donations from the Congregation to The Gathering Place have averaged \$490,000 annually over the past ten years. These donations include a total payment of \$2,250,000 towards the renovation of the building.
- e. In 2022, The Gathering Place received federal, provincial, and private funding to renovate the nearby Mercy Convent as a permanent shelter with supportive and transitional housing. The Board presently is chaired by a Sister of Mercy with the Congregational Leader and a number of lay persons serving as the remaining members.
- f. In December 2022, the Presentation Sisters withdrew as sponsors of this ministry but continue to provide financial support.
- g. The Gathering Place building and land on which it is located are owned by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy and leased without cost to The Gathering Place Inc. on an annual basis. The Convent which is being renovated for a shelter and supportive and transitional housing is also owned by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy and is leased to The Gathering Place Inc. without cost for a forty-year period.
- h. The present Executive Director of The Gathering Place is a lay person.

4. Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice

- a. Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice is the focus for the Congregation's ministry in the fields of cosmology and integral ecology. The Centre was established in 2003 to focus the resources and energy of the Congregation in examining, challenging and healing in situations of injustice and oppression and to help keep alive a spirituality flowing from a sense of the sacredness of creation.
- b. In 2009, the Centre moved from an office in The Gathering Place in St. John's, NL to a building and grounds on Mount Scio Road in St. John's, NL.
- c. This ministry is carried out primarily through partnerships and alliances with other like-minded individuals and organizations in the areas of social justice and ecology.
- d. The Centre is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by Congregation (established in 2012). It is fully funded by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy with donations averaging \$25,000 a year over the past ten years.
- e. The building and land on which the Centre is located are owned by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. The Centre is not incorporated, nor does it hold registered charity status.

5. St. Clare's Mercy Hospital

- a. St. Clare's Mercy Hospital was founded in 1922 and was owned and operated by the Congregation until 1994. Since 1994, ministry at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital in St. John's is carried out in the context of an Agreement between the Congregation and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador through Eastern Regional Health Authority, initially signed in 1994 and renewed in October 2018. The Agreement is now held with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, the successor of the Eastern Regional Health Authority (since April 2023).
- b. The Agreement between the Congregation and Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services is monitored by the St. Clare's Mercy Hospital Advisory Council which is appointed by the Congregation and reports to the Congregation and the Health Authority.
- c. In the letter renewing the Agreement in 2018, the Chair of the Board of the Eastern Health Authority noted: At the end of the formal agreement, the Congregation expressed a desire that

the presence of the Sisters of Mercy at the St. Clare's site be maintained for the ongoing benefit of patients, families and staff. Specifically, the Congregation requested that their ongoing presence would include: continuation of the St. Clare's Hospital Advisory Committee; voluntary involvement of Sisters in Pastoral Care; provision of religious services at the Chapel; involvement in St. Clare's Auxiliary; organization of related events for staff; and other mutually beneficial involvement for the improvement of quality of healthcare at St. Clare's. The Board of Trustees of Eastern Health fully appreciates and recognizes that the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy has a tremendous legacy in leadership within Newfoundland and Labrador's healthcare system. Accordingly, the Board is pleased to fully support the request and endorses your ongoing presence at St. Clare's.

- d. Presently, Sisters provide pastoral services and counselling services at the hospital. A Sister chairs the Advisory Council.
- e. Although the Congregation no longer has funding obligations for St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, it provides an average of \$20,000 annually to support the SCMH Advisory Council. It gives donations to the Health Care Foundation for support for the St. Clare's site with a recent one-time commitment of \$500,000 for a special project related to acute care for elderly persons.

6. Belvedere Orphanage Fund

- a. The Belvedere Orphanage Fund provides support for orphans and half-orphans (female and male) until their 19th birthday, a group often overlooked in our society. Among those served by this Fund are growing numbers of immigrant families. The Fund is an incorporated entity and a registered charity established by the Congregation in 1971 following the closure of St. Michael's Orphanage, Belvedere.
- b. The donations and bequests, which had been received prior to St. Michael's closing and which were for the benefit of female orphans and half-orphans, were deposited in this account. These funds and those which have been received in the years following have been invested, and the interest has been used to support the Fund. Today, the majority of the money used for the ongoing operation of the Fund is provided by the Congregation. The monies to support this Fund average \$35,000 per year. The Fund's only assets are its investments.
- c. The Board of Directors is appointed by the Congregation and is co-chaired by a representative appointed by the Archbishop and the Congregational Leader. The other members of the Board are lay persons from the wider community.

Mercy Associates

Mercy Associates are lay women and men whose lives are inspired by the Mercy charism of Catherine McAuley and the heritage and mission of Sisters of Mercy. They experience a sense of being called to engage more deeply with the Mercy charism yet do so in a way that differs from the Sisters of Mercy, who make lifelong vows to live as religious women. Lay women and men may also share a deep commitment to serve God that draws on the charism of a particular religious congregation. The purpose of Mercy Associates is to provide an intentional community through which this lay calling to the Mercy charism can be both nurtured and expressed. There are no canonical, legal or financial ties to the Congregation. In Newfoundland as of April 2023 there are eighty Associates in nine Associate groups co-facilitated by a lay woman (9) and/or a sister (5). "Charism is where the deep story and needs of the times meet. It calls us. Associates and religious live the same charism, but in unique ways. ... Associates express what they have caught from their community in their prayer, presence, service and commitment statements." (North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR), *Lead with the Spirit, A Manual for Associate Leadership*, 2015, Tab 2, p. 13). The Associate Program is coordinated through two Associate Coordinators (a sister and a lay woman) assisted by a Mercy Associate Advisory Council and a Leadership Team liaison. The *Mercy Associates Formation Resource* is a rich resource (See p.33). You may be interested in becoming a Mercy Associate.

Nurturing a Culture of Mercy in our Ministries

It takes more than the name 'Mercy' to make a place of ministry an authentic Mercy ministry. The culture of an organization (summarized as 'the way we do things around here') can be evident the minute we walk in the front door or make our first contact by phone. **A strong and vibrant culture,**

reflected in a just, merciful and compassionate stance towards all people and creation takes time to grow and develop. When communication is open and feedback is encouraged, new and creative ways of responding to need can emerge. Everyone has a part to play in nurturing this culture of mercy, including those new to the ministry or those taking on a new role within the ministry. Orientation to Mercy and commitment to ongoing mercy ministry formation are important.

As you walk around the built environment of your ministry, which 'Mercy signs and symbols' are evident?

Would visitors recognize your Mercy facility as having a strong and vibrant Mercy culture? Why or why not?

What ongoing formation in mercy would help you to undertake your role effectively?

Prayerful Reflection

From time to time, individually and together, we are invited to reflect on what it means to be women and men of mercy in our time, within our particular mercy ministry, in and through our particular role in that ministry.

No matter where we are located, we are part of the wider Mercy ministry family. Wherever there are people of goodwill whose hearts are touched by the plight of their neighbours, mercy can be given and received. We each have a 'merciful contribution' to make, using our time, our talents and the resources at our disposal.

The reality is, however, that we each face personal and organizational challenges as we strive to balance our ideals with our personal circumstances. It is not always easy to bring to life our vision for what might be possible. But we continue the journey, sometimes on a path we may not have chosen or thought possible. Through all this, we strive to find our place in the wider scheme of things.

In her poem '**Wild Geese**', Mary Oliver captures this beautifully when she says:

"Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
Over and over announcing your place
In the family of things."

Oliver, M. (1986) p. 14

What 'image of mercy' is nourishing/calling you at this stage of your Mercy journey?

MODULE 7

The Wider Mercy Family & Mercy Values

Watch the Introduction to Module 7 video clip [Orientation Intro 7 \(vimeo.com\)](https://vimeo.com/111111111) (MIA Vision Statement, MGP Vision, Chapter Statement-common values)

Introduction to Module 7

In this module, we introduce the wider Mercy Family to which Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland and Mercy Wellsprings belong, and briefly look at some ministries and international initiatives, focusing on the common mission that brings us all together. *You are part of this family through your involvement in a ministry with a 'mercy heritage'.* We also consider some of the values which are core to the expression of our mercy ministry.

You will need access to a copy of your organization's mission, vision and values statements for one of the activities in this module.

Opening Reflection

There is a Wideness in God's Mercy

There is a wideness in God's Mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There is a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgement given.
For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
At the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God's Word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.

<https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Prayers-for-Mercy>

On the following page, you can read a brief summary of four key aspects of the wider Mercy family [Mercy International Association (MIA); Mercy Global Presence; the MIA Vision Statement and Mercy Wellsprings Foundational Statement in which we are engaged and to which we each contribute in our local area. You can explore more detailed information through the links provided.

Mercy International Association

Mercy International Association (MIA) was formed in 1994. Its members are the Mercy Institutes, Congregations or Federations in the Americas, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, Newfoundland, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. The first house of Mercy, in Baggot Street, Dublin, is the location of Mercy International Centre, the focal point for many of the activities of MIA and a place of pilgrimage for many mercy women, men and young people inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley. Further information can be found at <https://www.mercyworld.org/>

The Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland's lives, as individuals and as a Congregation, have been deeply enriched by our association with Mercy International. Involvement includes sabbaticals, retreats, conferences, and ministry, not only for our sisters, but also for our Associate members and co-workers.

In terms of leadership, one of our sisters was a member of the International Steering Committee – World Mercy (1990 – 1992), that led to the founding of the Mercy International Association and of Mercy International Centre; five Congregational Leaders have served as Members of the Association, three sisters served on the Centre's Board of Directors; two sisters have given a total of six full years as members of the Centre's Leadership Team; sixteen of our sisters have given short term volunteer service at the Centre; one sister gave a presentation on our Newfoundland foundress, Sister Francis Creedon; two sisters have led 'Walking and Praying', and 'Come Home to Catherine' sessions; one has been involved in 'Watering the Roots at the Wellspring of Mercy' as well as a number of presentations; two sisters were involved in leading the Mercy International Reflection Process and three were involved in leading its follow-up, Mercy Global Presence (see below and references).

Opening Doors is part of MIA's response to the challenges facing Mercy today. It is more than just a project; it symbolizes openness, welcome, hospitality, networking, collaboration, and the sharing of Catherine's legacy of Mercy. After wide-ranging consultation and group exploration, the following five themes have emerged as significant to our Mercy companions: *Formation, Communications, Youth Engagement, Action for Justice* and *Structures*. Opening Doors is a comprehensive initiative that aims to develop relevant and meaningful in-person formation experiences and online formation resources for the Mercy global world. These resources are designed for a wide range of audiences, including the executive leadership teams of Mercy Ministries, Mercy Associates, universities, schools, hospitals, justice, environmental, and community groups, and all our companions throughout the Mercy world. It is a collaborative effort that unites us all in our shared mission of Mercy, making each one of us an integral part of this journey. As we journey together, we look forward to your participation and engagement.

Mercy Global Presence

MIA describes Mercy Global Presence as "*an organic entity and a countercultural sign in a globalized world which has made more extreme the displacement of persons and degradation of Earth.*" Mercy sisters from the member congregations, institutes and federations, their ministry partners and Associates are currently exploring this in greater depth through prayerful reflection, poems, artwork, grassroots ministry experiences and a systemic change lens. Further information can be found at <https://www.mercyworld.org/about/our-initiatives/mercy-global-presence/> The booklet's link is: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5ijlmggiwpt9r68/AADN9_-F2_PH0IYgIk-mNKTQa?dl=0

MIA Vision Statement

The current MIA Vision statement was approved by the MIA Board and launched at the start of the 25th anniversary year of MIA, in early 2019. The concept of Mercy Global Presence is core to the renewed Vision, with an emphasis on the invitation to all members of the wider Mercy family to help bring this vision to life. On the MIA website you will find the Vision Statement in the 8 languages spoken across the Mercy world. Further details at <https://www.mercyworld.org/about/vision-strategy/>

The Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland

In the inspirational section of the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland, we are reminded of Catherine McAuley's teaching that '*Mercy is the principal path marked out by Jesus for those who desire to follow him.*' (Original Rule, p. 304) There are many ways of responding mercifully to those in need, to heed the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. Each ministry is called to meet a particular need, as expressed in its Mission, Vision or Values Statement. As the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland emphasize: *The spirit of the Congregation is mercy as manifested in the life of Jesus Christ and in the spirit of the foundress. . . The sisters express the spirit of mercy by compassionate service to "the poor, the sick and the ignorant" (see Original Rule of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, Ireland). In all their endeavours they strive to promote justice and peace in the world.*

Mercy Wellsprings Foundational Statement and Guiding Principles

Foundational Statement of Mercy Wellsprings

Faithful to the call of the Gospel, the charism of Catherine McAuley, and the social and ecological teachings of the Catholic Church, the Sisters of Mercy entrust their sponsored ministries to Mercy Wellsprings and its Boards. The Sisters invite them to embrace the spirit and culture of Mercy and to listen and respond to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor as one.

Guiding Principles of Mercy Wellsprings

Compassion, a quality of the heart, embodies and expresses the charism and mission of Mercy. It respects the dignity of each person and is particularly sensitive to vulnerable and disadvantaged persons. Its reach extends in tenderness and care to the whole of creation. It is non-judgmental, supportive, and empowering.

Respect recognizes each person as uniquely made in God's image and likeness and celebrates the beauty, integrity, and diversity of creation. It encompasses all interactions and expresses itself in supportive presence and care for all life.

Justice seeks to uphold and support the rights of all persons and Earth and to challenge all forms of injustice. It encompasses advocacy and ethical decision making and highlights the social and ecological responsibilities of the human family.

Collaboration engages others, as partners, to participate in the mission of Mercy. It fosters active involvement and shared responsibility, connecting people and resources. It welcomes and values diversity and inclusion as important and enriching elements in partnership.

Deep Listening challenges the community that is Mercy Wellsprings to hear the voices of people who are poor or at risk, of Earth beings, and of Earth herself as they continue to shape ministries that respond to these cries.

Inspiration for Naming of Mercy Wellsprings

"... from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness which springs up from it." *Misericordiae Vultus* #25 Pope Francis

Mercy Values

Take some time to read your organization's Mission/Vision/Values statements.

What are the Mercy values named in your ministry's/Mercy Wellsprings' documents?

What connections, if any, do you notice between these values and those stated by Mercy International Association and Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland stated aim or its Chapter Statement 2021?

Concluding Reflection

Much has been explored in these seven Orientation modules. There will be other opportunities provided to enhance your understanding and appreciation of 'mercy' as it is lived out in the tradition of Catherine McAuley in a wide range of contexts. More than ever, we are called to be people of hope, to welcome and encourage others and help them to find a sense of purpose. No matter their background, language, culture or faith tradition, for many people we encounter, **we are a face of mercy** for them.

As you reflect on the following words of Mary Sullivan, give thanks for the opportunity you have, as a member of the Mercy family to sow seeds of hope in the life of another, and then another and then another ...

Catherine's Embrace of Cultural Diversity say: This is the way we must do it - one person at a time: one answering of the figurative door, one embrace of the stranger, one welcoming of the other, one sharing of our bread and milk -one person at a time.

Sullivan, 1996, in *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy*, p. 931

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Additional Resources on Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland

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