

# Mercy Spirituality



Reflections on Living the Charism of Mercy

**GENERAL EDITOR**  
**PAGE DESIGN & LAYOUT**  
**ORIGINAL ARTWORK**

Maria J. Burt

**CONSULTING EDITOR**  
Barbara Wheeley, RSM

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South Central Community  
101 Mercy Drive  
Belmont, NC 28012-2898

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## Preface

*T*his Mercy Spirituality Series was originally developed as a resource for Mercy groups to use in faith-sharing or group reflection. It can be helpful as an introduction series for those interested in Mercy life, e.g., inquirers, potential associates, ministry co-workers—or as an opportunity to deepen one’s own immersion in Mercy spirituality. Repeated use can provide refreshment and new insights into the themes. As Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, has said: “Your whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer....” Perhaps this series can assist us in this effort.

*W*e are grateful to the original authors, to those who managed the logistics, to those who edited the individual reflections into a series and who made this version beautiful.



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# Catherine McAuley, Woman of Contemplation and Action

## Introduction

Both Jesus and Catherine call us to prayer and ministry as vital dimensions of our relationships with people and with God. Our prayer calls us to respond to the needs of the world and our ministry leads us back to God. This reflection leads us further into the rhythm of contemplation and action.

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

“... the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating from the love of God, unite them much more closely to (God), and render them more valuable in (God’s) holy service.”

*~ from “The Spirit of the Institute”*

“Prayer, retirement, and recollection are not sufficient for those who are called to labor for the salvation of souls. They should be like angels who, while fulfilling the office of guardians, lose not for a moment the presence of God, or as the compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its center.”

*– from Retreat Instructions of Catherine McAuley, p. 154*

## Song - Center of My Life

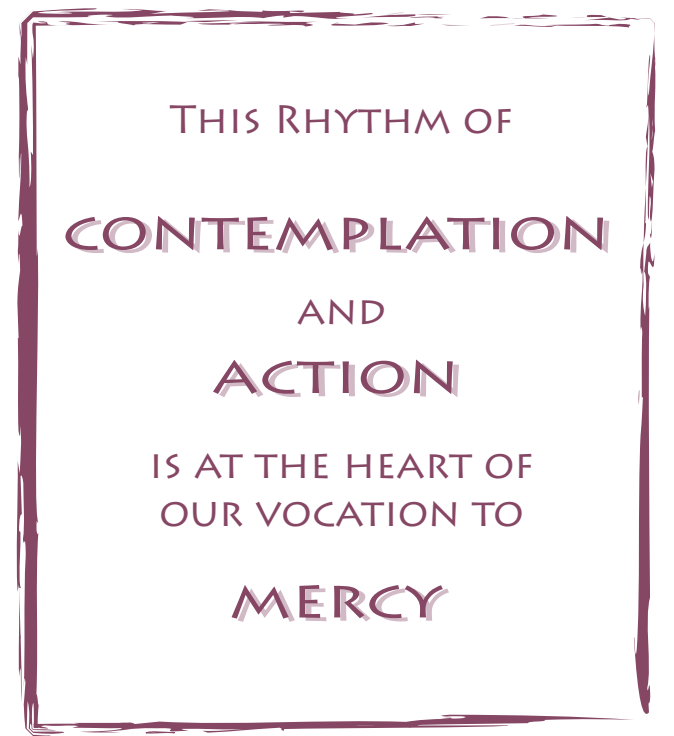
*Refrain:*

O Lord, you are the center of my life:  
I will always praise you,  
I will always serve you,  
I will always keep you in my sight.

Keep me safe, O God, I take refuge in you.  
I say to the Lord, “You are my God.  
My happiness lies in you alone;  
my happiness lies in you alone.”

You will show me the path of life,  
the fullness of joy in your presence,  
at your right hand, at your right hand happiness  
forever.

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Readings

Through prayer  
we adore God as the Merciful One;  
we seek to discover God’s movement  
in us and in our world;  
we learn how to forgive and  
we intercede for ourselves and for others.

Because Mary entered fully  
into her Son’s mission  
she became the Mother of Mercy  
and our model of faith.  
Like Mary, we dispose ourselves  
to receive God’s Word and to act upon it.  
This rhythm of contemplation and action  
is at the heart of our vocation to Mercy.  
~ *Constitutions #10, #15*

Through her long years as a caretaker, housekeeper, and member of Dublin’s social set, Catherine McAuley had cultivated a steady awareness of God’s presence in her everyday experience. Some time after her father’s death, Catherine copied in childish script the Psalter of Jesus to be recited often during the day. As a young woman at Coolock House, she used natural objects to lift her heart to God: the cross in the branches of trees, in the window frames, and in door panels of the house. This quiet centeredness in God sustained Catherine in the whirlwind of activity that marked the fourteen years between the founding of the House of Mercy in Dublin in 1827 and her death in 1841.  
~ *from Praying with Catherine McAuley, p. 40*

Catherine McAuley’s human qualities were sublimated by a spirituality that was centered on the mercy of God to (humanity) in Jesus Christ. That spirituality included joy in suffering, peace in the Cross, prayer in action and action in prayer.  
~ *from Catherine McAuley: Venerable for Mercy, p. 97*

From Scripture

Remain in me, as I in you.  
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,  
unless it remains a part of the vine,  
neither can you unless you remain in me.  
I am the vine;  
you are the branches.  
Whoever remains in me, with me in them,  
bears fruit in plenty;  
for cut off from me you can do nothing.  
If you remain in me  
and my words remain in you,  
you may ask for whatever you please  
and you will get it.

It is to the glory of my Abba that you should  
bear much fruit  
and be my disciples.  
I have loved you just as my Abba has loved  
me.  
Remain in my love.  
~ *John 15:4-5, 7-9 (NJB)*

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- What are my deepest desires?
- Where do I find God in my everyday experience?

Psalm 139

O God, you examine me and know me,  
you know when I sit, when I rise,  
you understand my thoughts from afar.  
You watch when I walk or lie down,  
you know every detail of my conduct.  
  
A word is not yet on my tongue  
before you, O God, know all about it.  
You fence me in, behind and in front,  
you have laid your hand upon me.  
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,  
a height to which I cannot attain.

Where shall I go to escape your spirit?  
Where shall I flee from your presence?  
If I scale the heavens you are there,  
if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are.

If I speed away on the wings of the dawn,  
if I dwell beyond the ocean,  
even there your hand will be guiding me,  
your right hand holding me fast.

I will say, ‘Let the darkness cover me,  
and the night wrap itself around me,’  
even darkness to you is not dark,  
and night is as clear as the day.

You created my inmost self,  
knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
For so many marvels I thank you;  
a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.

You knew me through and through,  
my being held no secrets from you,  
when I was being formed in secret,  
textured in the depths of the earth.

How hard for me to grasp your thoughts,  
how many, God, there are!  
If I count them, they are more than the grains of  
sand;  
If I come to an end, I am still with you.  
  
God, examine me and know my heart,  
test me and know my concerns.  
Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,  
and guide me on the road of eternity.  
~ *NJB (Adapted)*



Words of Catherine

We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God—for whom alone we go forward—or stay back.

~ from *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*, p. 332

Prayer Moving to Action

What challenges your imagination to respond to the needs of our times in your location? What is stirring within you that impels you to contemplative action?

Closing Prayer

Christ be beside me, Christ be before me, Christ be behind me, King of my heart. Christ be within me, Christ be below me, Christ be above me, never to part.

Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left hand, Christ all around me, shield in the strife. Christ in my sleeping, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising, light of my life.

~ *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*

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Adapted from a prayer service by Cabrini Taitano, RSM

Theology of Mercy

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas and his colleagues linked mercy and justice because both influence relations between persons. John Paul II referred to that link in his Encyclical Letter, *The Mercy of God*: “True mercy is, so to speak, the most profound source of justice.... Mercy that is truly Christian is also the most perfect incarnation of “equality” between people ... mercy brings it about that people meet one another in that value which is [the dignity of each person].”

From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

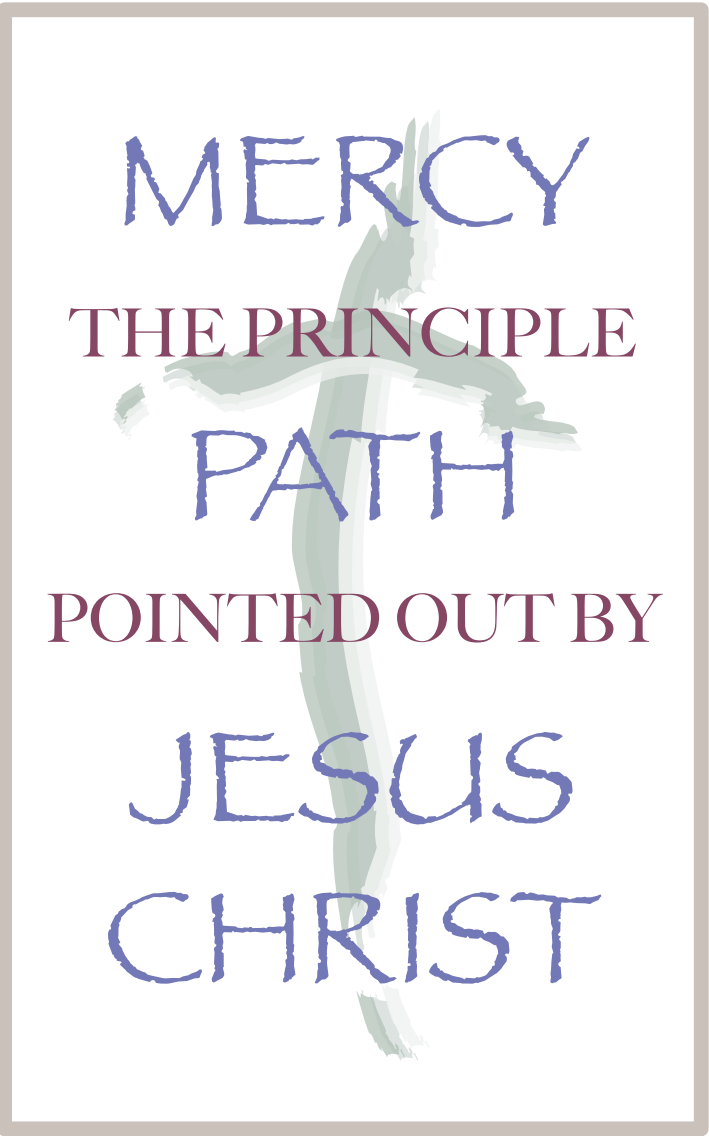
Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master, who has said, “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.”

~ from the original *Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy*

From Scripture

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.

*Ephesians 4:1–4 (NRSV)*





Psalm 85 (adapted)

(Side 1)

You have favored, O God, your land;  
You have restored the well-being of Jacob.  
You have forgiven the guilt of your people;  
You have covered all their sins.  
You have withdrawn all your wrath;  
You have revoked your burning anger.

(Side 2)

Restore us, O God, our savior,  
and abandon your displeasure against us.  
Will you be ever angry with us,  
prolonging your anger to all generations?  
Will you not instead give us life;  
and shall not your people rejoice in you?  
Show us, O God, your kindness,  
and grant us your salvation.

(All)

I will hear what God proclaims—  
for God proclaims peace.  
Kindness and truth shall meet;  
justice and mercy shall kiss.  
Truth shall spring out of the earth,  
and justice shall look down from heaven.  
God will give what is good;  
our land shall yield its increase.

Reading

When Jesus wishes to show what is to be an ideal, total human being, he narrates the parable of the good Samaritan. The moment is a solemn one in the gospels. More is at stake here than mere curiosity as to which is the greatest of the commandments; this parable is a presentation of what it is to be a human being. The ideal, total human being is represented as one who has seen someone else lying wounded in the ditch along the road, has re-acted, and has helped the victim in every way possible. The parable does not tell us what was going through the Samaritan’s head at the time, or with what ultimate finality he acted. The only thing we are told is that he did what he did because he was “moved to pity.”

For Jesus, to be a human being is to react with mercy. Without this reaction, the essence of the human is vitiated in its root as occurred with the priest and the Levite who “saw him and went on.”... But mercy itself is something far more radical. Mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another, whereby one reacts to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this reaction to the ought-not-be of another’s suffering, one’s own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance.

~ from *The Principle of Mercy* by Jon Sobrino, pp. 17-18

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- What aspect of mercy calls to my heart?
- How do I see the relationship between mercy and justice?

Closing Prayer - “Suscipe” of Catherine McAuley

My God,  
I am Yours for time and eternity.  
Teach me to cast myself entirely  
into the arms of Your loving Providence  
with the most lively, unlimited  
confidence in Your compassionate, tender pity.  
Grant me, O most merciful Redeemer,  
that whatever You ordain or permit  
may be acceptable to me.  
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;  
suffer nothing to sadden me but sin,  
nothing to delight me but the hope  
of coming to the possession of You,  
my God and my all,  
in Your everlasting Kingdom.

*Amen.*

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Adapted from a prayer service by Helen Marie Burns, RSM

# The Vow of Service

## Introduction

Essential to being a person of Mercy is our commitment to serve people in need. The impetus for our service is to allow “our hearts ‘to be broken by the very thing that breaks the heart of God.’ In the end, what needs to get disrupted will find its disruption in our solidarity and in our intimate kinship with the outcast—who too infrequently knows the peace of a white dove resting on a shoulder” (Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, p. 177).

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

Responsive in faith to God’s mercy  
Catherine McAuley heeded the call of Jesus  
to reach out with courage and love  
to the needy of her time.  
She founded the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy,  
to involve women as religious  
in the mission of the church in the world.  
Her vision continues to animate  
the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas,  
a religious institute of pontifical right  
dedicated to the works of the apostolate.

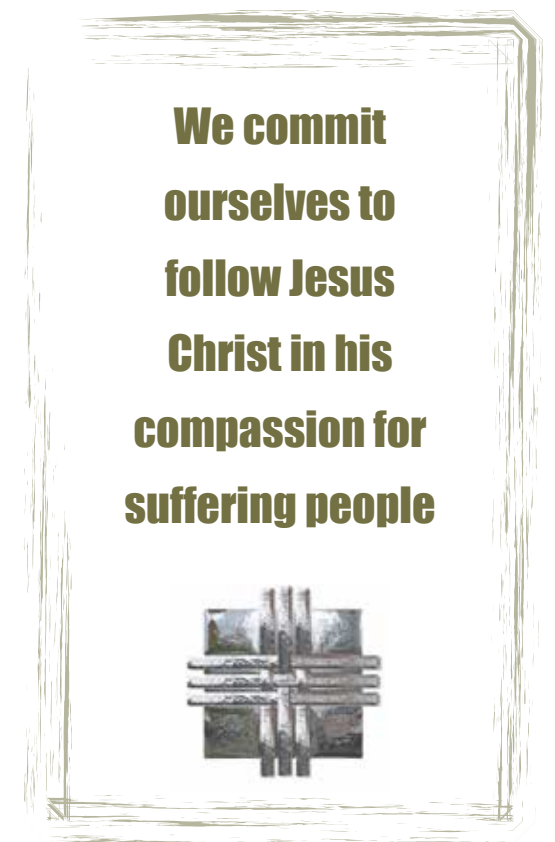
We as Sisters of Mercy  
freely responding to a call  
to serve the needy of our time  
commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ  
in his compassion for suffering people.  
We profess by public vows  
to live in chastity, poverty and obedience  
and to serve the poor, sick and ignorant.

~ *Constitutions #1, #2*

## From Scripture

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

~ *Matthew 9:35-36 (NRSV)*





Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Who are the poor, the sick and the ignorant you have encountered in your service experiences?
- How have you been shaped, both personally and spiritually, by those encounters?

Song - What You Have Done for Me

I am the hungry, I am the poor,  
I am the stranger outside your door.  
So when you feed the hungry, when you clothe the poor  
I will no longer be just a stranger at your door.

*(Refrain)*

What you have done for the least of my children  
you have done for me.  
What you have given, with nothing left to give,  
you have given me.

Come all you blessed, come and rejoice.  
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you.  
For you are my children, called to serve  
as keepers of the vision and speakers of the word.

I will look to you when life on earth has ended.  
Those who give will receive, those who seek will find;  
So seek my face in every face and see the eyes of God!

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Psalm 112 (Adapted)

Happy those who love God and delight in the law.  
Their children shall be blest, strong  
and upright in the land.

Their households thrive, their integrity stands firm.  
A light shines on them in darkness,  
a God of mercy and justice.

The good lend freely and deal fairly;  
they will never stumble;  
their justice shall be remembered.

Bad news holds no power; strong hearts trust God.  
Steady and fearless, they look down on their enemy.  
They support the poor;  
their integrity stands firm;  
their strength brings them honor.

Reading

By our vocation to the Order of Mercy, and by a most sacred vow at our Holy Profession, we are engaged to comfort and instruct the sick poor of Christ.

This is the principal reason why we are called “Sisters of Mercy,” and why, to the faithful discharge of this duty, so many graces are annexed. Remark the words of our Blessed Lord, quoted in the first section of this Rule: “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” Oh! What an ineffable consolation to serve Christ Himself, in the person of the poor, and to walk in the very same path he trod! And this happy vocation is ours, all unworthy as we are of such a grace.

*~“Service of the Poor” from the Familiar Instructions of Catherine McAuley, p. 16*

Reflection and Time for Sharing

- How do we continue Catherine’s vision of service in the twenty-first century?
- What are the pressing needs to which she would call us to respond today?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, encourage us as we continue the mission of Jesus in the twenty-first century. Teach us “to walk in the very same path he trod.” Help us to discern what towns and villages call for our merciful response. Give us the courage to address the systems and structures that perpetuate poverty in our world. May the vision of Catherine McAuley continue to inspire and challenge us as we serve our brothers and sisters. We pray and ask this prayer in the name of Jesus, the compassionate One. Amen.

Closing Song - We Are Called

Come! Live in the light!  
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!  
We are called to be light for the kingdom,  
to live in the freedom of the city of God!

## The Vow of Service

*(Refrain)*

We are called to act with justice,  
we are called to love tenderly,  
we are called to serve one another;  
to walk humbly with God!

Come! Open your heart!  
Show your mercy to all those in fear!  
We are called to be hope for the hopeless  
so hatred and blindness will be no more!

Sing! Sing a new song!  
Sing of that great day when all will be one!  
God will reign, and we'll walk with each other as  
sister and brother, united in love!

Text and tune: David Haas.  
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Adapted from a prayer service by Patty Beairsto, RSM

## Mercy Life

### Introduction

Many people embrace the virtue of mercy in their lives, generously extending compassion and forgiveness to others. Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Mercy Companions, and Mercy Volunteer Corps members choose to join a community of people who are named Mercy, people who inspire and encourage one another to deepen their lives in Mercy. Like Catherine McAuley, they recognize God's Mercy in their own lives and commit to sharing that Mercy with others.

### From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

Sisters of Mercy are women who commit their lives to God, deepening their relationship with God and serving God's people, especially those who are sick, poor and uneducated. In the spirit of the Gospel, our mission is to help people to overcome the obstacles that keep them from living full and dignified lives. A life of prayer and community is at the heart of our shared mission.

~ "Mission" taken from the Sisters of Mercy Web site

### From Scripture

"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

~ *Matthew 25:37-40 (NRSV)*

### Reading

Drawing upon years spent learning to respond to gospel imperatives through prayer and reflection as well as developing spiritual strength through self-forgetfulness and self-discipline, Catherine had acquired the conviction that the life of Christ was to be imitated. She not only entered the Gospels; she internalized them. For her Jesus was [a] model, a way to be, a way to live.

**SISTERS**  
of  
**MERCY**  
ARE WOMEN WHO  
**COMMIT THEIR**  
**LIVES TO GOD**  
DEEPENING THEIR  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD  
**AND SERVING**  
**GOD'S PEOPLE**  
**ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE**  
**SICK, POOR**  
&  
**UNEDUCATED**

The gift of the Spirit to Catherine, her charism, accentuated in her an awareness of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus: salvation in the giving—the gift that was needed, neither earned nor deserved. Her years of private study to substantiate the faith that was in her led her to understand that God, responding to the brokenness or imbalance of humankind, sent his Son to teach us how to be human, to show us the way. The Scriptures drew the blueprint in Jesus’ response to the brokenness of the human condition: “Offer the wicked no resistance ... Turn the other cheek ... Go a second mile ... Love your enemies ... Pray for those who persecute you ... Heal the sick, the lame, the blind. What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.”

~ from *Tender Courage* by Regan & Keiss, p. 45

### Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- What in these readings attracts me?
- How does your life right now embody the gospel call?
- How would living these statements change my life?

### Song - The Circle of Mercy

In Mercy, we touch the hearts of those who are in mis’ry.  
In Mercy, we’re touched by them and feel their strength and courage.  
In Mercy, we heal the pain of those who are in sorrow.  
In Mercy, we’re healed by them and see the face of hope.

*(Refrain)*

For the circle of Mercy is timeless:  
it is Spirit of Life itself—  
Which roots us in Faith, and lifts us in Hope,  
and holds us in God’s loving care,  
and holds us in God’s loving care.

In Mercy, we welcome those the world has left rejected.  
In Mercy, we’re drawn within the loving heart of God.  
In Mercy, we forgive the incompleteness in another.  
In Mercy, our sins are healed and we are whole again.

In Mercy, the Spirit Faith will root us in God’s Presence.  
In Mercy, the Spirit Hope will lift us out of doubt.  
In Mercy, the Love of God will be our joy in living.  
In Mercy, we join with one another on our journey.

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### Psalm 16

Protect me, God,  
I turn to you for help.  
I profess, “You are my Lord,  
my greatest good.”  
I once put faith in false gods,  
the idols of the land.  
Now I make no offering to them,  
nor invoke their names.  
Those who chase after them  
add grief upon grief.  
Lord, you measure out my portion,  
the shape of my future;  
you mark off the best place for me  
to enjoy my inheritance.

I bless God who teaches me,  
who schools my heart even at night.  
I am sure God is here,  
right beside me.  
I cannot be shaken.  
So my heart rejoices,  
my body thrills with life,  
my whole being rests secure.  
You will not abandon me to Sheol,  
nor send your faithful one to death.  
You show me the road to life;  
boundless joy at your side forever!

~ adapted by Gabe Huck

### Song - Holy Is God

Now is the time, now is the place.  
Here we all gather in God’s holy space.  
Here is our hope, here is our light;  
Dawn is approaching and gone is the night.  
All you who thirst, come seek and find.  
Drink from the fountain of heaven’s sweet wine.  
All you who hunger, come seek and find.  
God of all plenty, God ever kind.

*(Refrain)*

Holy, holy is God,  
God of all wisdom, God of the Word.  
Holy, holy is God.  
God ever faithful, God of all love.

Here is the source, here is the stream,  
here we shall drink heaven’s water so clean.  
Here we shall bathe in Wisdom’s delight,  
cleansed of our failings in God’s loving sight.  
All you who hide come to the fore.  
Come, cross the threshold of God’s open door.  
All who despair, come from the night.  
Eat of the table with God by your side.

Now share the story, now we recall,  
How God leads the children who answer the  
call.  
Now we remember all those in need,  
God comes to comfort, the hungry to feed.  
Let us give thanks, let us sing songs.  
Come to the feast of the God of all gods.  
Let us give praise, let us delight.  
Come to the feast of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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### Reflection and Time for Sharing

As I reflect upon the experiences of my life, what has Jesus modeled through me? Through what desires of mine does God speak?

### Prayer Moving to Action

As you have prayed, what has stirred in you; what does it require of you?

### Closing Prayer

O God, walk with us on our journey. Open us to see the revelation of your presence in the daily events of our lives. You who promised to be with us always, be faithful to your word. We ask this in your name. Amen.

~ Adapted from *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy*

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Adapted from a prayer service by Mary Daly, RSM

## The Corporal Works of Mercy

### Introduction

The corporal works of mercy fill the most basic human needs: food, drink, human love, clothing, good health, forgiveness, companionship. As we know, it is difficult for a person to attend to personal and spiritual growth unless these basic needs are met. Mercy reaches out to serve these basic needs of our family and friends, our neighbors and co-workers, all those around the world who have less than we.

### From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

We ought then have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal—which constitute the business of our lives...

~ from “*The Spirit of the Institute*”

### From Scripture

‘When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.” Then the upright will say to him in reply, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?” And the King will answer, “In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.”’

~ *Matthew 25:31-40 (NJB)*

## WORKS <sup>of</sup> MERCY

For I was **HUNGRY**  
and you gave me **food**

I was **THIRSTY**  
and you gave me **drink**

I was a **STRANGER**  
and you **welcomed me**

I was **NAKED**  
and you **clothed me**

I was **SICK**  
and you **cared for me**

I was **IN PRISON**  
and you **visited me**

Song - The Least of These

There’s a hungry one, lives in the street;  
there’s a thirsty one without a cup to drink;  
there’s a little one with no shoes on her feet.  
There’s a family sleeping in the rain;  
and the one abused will never be the same,  
the addicted one with no one left to blame.  
All of these are my people.  
All of these long to be free.  
All of these are my beloved.  
All of these are me.

(Refrain)

So when you hold out your hand selflessly  
and give help to the stranger in need,  
then whatever you do to the least of these,  
you do to me.

In a prison so far from home,  
I was lonely, so bitter and alone;  
evicted, illegal, incurable, diff’rent, despised.  
I was locked out, you took me in.  
I was at the end; you helped me to begin.  
I’m a lot like you: sister, brother, friend.  
So follow me into the kingdom.  
Follow me, you have been wise.  
Follow me, you who have known me,  
I was right before your eyes.

The hungry, the lonely, the forgotten,  
the neglected, abandoned, invisible,  
the homeless, the battered, the frightened,  
the hopeless, the dying.  
All of these are me.

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Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Who are the hungry and thirsty in my life? How do I respond to their hunger and thirst?
- What does it mean to be a stranger? Who are the strangers in my life that are in need of welcome?

Psalm 72

Bring justice to the peoples, O Beloved,  
and your mercy to all generations!  
May the people be known for mercy,  
rendering justice to the poor!  
Let their spirits soar as the eagle  
let joy abide in every heart!  
May we hear the cry of the poor—  
the young and the old,  
setting free all those in need,  
melting the hearts of oppressors!  
May we know You as long as the sun endures,  
and as long as the moon,  
throughout all generations!  
May we acknowledge You in the rain  
falling on the fields,  
like showers that water the earth!

In our day may justice flourish,  
and peace abound,  
throughout all the nations.  
May every heart open to your love  
from sea to sea,  
from the River of Life out to the universe!  
May the fears that imprison the people  
be brought to the Light,  
and rise up from the depths!  
May the leaders of nations from all the earth  
listen to your Word;  
May they spend time in Silence  
before they counsel.  
May the leaders surrender to your love, and  
the nations serve the Most High.

For you heed the needy when they call,  
the poor and those who have no friend.  
You have compassion on the weak, the downtrodden,  
giving them strength and hope.  
From injustice and oppression,  
You redeem their life;  
and precious are they in your Heart.

~ adapted from *Psalms for Praying*  
by Nan C. Merrill

Prayer Moving to Action

As you have prayed, what has stirred in you? What does it require of you?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, by courageous, contagious concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the poor, the sick, and the ignorant, Catherine McAuley broke through the impossibilities of her time. She animated many to walk with her. She animated others at the centers of wealth, power, and influence to share in her heroic efforts. She connected the rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed, the influential to those of no consequence to do the work of God on earth. We pray in our time to do the same. Amen.

~ adapted from *Tender Courage* by Regan & Keiss

Sources

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Whitaker, Janèt Sullivan. *The Least of These*. OCP Publications, 1999.

Suggested Reading

Miles, Sara. *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Adapted from a prayer service by Marie Michele Donnelly, RSM

# The Spiritual Works of Mercy

## Introduction

The spiritual and corporal works of mercy hold a special place in the tradition of Roman Catholicism. Today, however, we need to consider a way to avoid the dualism suggested in their naming as if body and spirit were not integrated in one person. There are only works of mercy responding to persons whose needs are embodied. Persons hunger for food to nourish mind and spirit as well as body. Persons seek healing of bodily wounds which affect the spirit and spiritual wounds which affect the body. We need forgiveness and admonition as well as water to quench our thirst. While garments clothe the nakedness of our body, we often also need comfort and counsel to clothe our naked spirits. As we reflect together on these spiritual works of mercy, let us stretch to embrace the whole person in his/her need.

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

By the vow of service  
we commit ourselves  
to exercise the spiritual and  
corporal works of mercy  
revealed to us through the life of Jesus.  
Enriched by his love,  
healed by his mercy and  
taught by his word,  
we serve the poor, sick and ignorant.

*~ Constitutions #29*

We believe that the life of the community  
is a vibrant sign of the gospel;  
we believe that the presence of the church  
is made visible in this world  
through our service to the poor, sick and ignorant.

*~ The Founding Document of the  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
(Appendix B of the Constitutions)*

## THE SPIRITUAL WORKS *of* MERCY

Bear Wrongs  
**PATIENTLY**

Forgive *all*  
**INJURIES**

Counsel *the*  
**DOUBTFUL**

Admonish *the*  
**SINNER**

Comfort *the*  
**SORROWFUL**

Instruct *the*  
**IGNORANT**

Pray *for the*  
**LIVING and the DEAD**



Psalm 103 (adapted)

<i>Side 1</i>	Bless the Holy One, O my soul; and all my being, bless God’s holy name. Bless the Holy One, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits; God pardons all your iniquities, God heals all your ills. God redeems your life from destruction, God crowns you with kindness and compassion, God fills your lifetime with good; your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.	<i>Side 2</i>	God secures justice and the rights of all the oppressed. God has made known God’s ways, and God’s deeds to the children of Israel. Merciful and gracious is the Holy One, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. God will not always chide, nor does God remain wrathful forever. Not according to our sins does God deal with us. nor does God requite us according to our crimes.
<i>All</i>	God’s kindness is forever, toward the faithful from age to age. God favors the children’s children of those who keep the covenant, who take care to fulfill its precepts. Bless the Holy One, all you hosts, ministers who do God’s will. Bless the Holy One, all creatures, everywhere in God’s domain.		

Reading

The works of mercy are a Christian’s response to God’s love; they are love in action. In grateful imitation of God’s love and mercy to us, Christians attempt to “be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.” Of course there is a vast difference in what humans can do compared to God’s love and power, but we are still called to do what we can. As wounded imperfect persons we do not do works of mercy as though we possess all good things in abundance and dispense them at will. A Lady Bountiful distributing turkeys, baskets of cheer, and instruction is the wrong image. A spiritual or personal psychological work of mercy is not simply a matter of giving things that we have to those without.... The spiritual or psychological works of mercy are necessary because we have all experienced suffering and the brokenness of life to a certain degree. Who has not sinned, doubted, been ignorant, or hurt? We have all been there, and can respond in love to our fellow beings when they suffer or lose their way.

~ *With All Our Heart and Mind*, pp. 15-16

Reflection Questions

- What is your response to human misery?
- How does Psalm 103 speak of God’s works of Mercy? Toward whom? Toward what end?
- What experiences make you more understanding and loving toward those who are suffering?

Song - Psalm 103: With Our God There Is Mercy

*(Refrain)*  
With our God there is mercy.  
With our God is steadfast love.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O God.  
Hear my voice, the sound of my pleading.

Mark but our sins, O God, and who might stand?  
But you forgive, and thus we revere you.

My soul waits for my God, I count on God’s word.  
My soul yearns for my God—as the deepest dawn waits for day.  
As we count on the dawn—so we count on our God.

Kind is our God, who keeps us close in care.  
We shall be saved from all our iniquity.

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Closing Prayer

God of Mercy, we pray for courage to see the needs of the world in which we live; for prudence to know those needs we can address and for wisdom to respond in ways that address the needs and maintain the dignity of all. You have loved us into being and loved all creation into being. We pray that we may not forget all your benefits to us—a lifetime filled with good. Amen.

Sources

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Suggested Reading

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Cassidy, Sheila. *Sharing the Darkness: The Spirituality of Caring*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Adapted from a prayer service by Helen Marie Burns, RSM

# Mercy and Justice Meet

## Introduction

“Mercy and justice shall meet...” (Ps 85). In our day-to-day lives, we often struggle with a decision about whether to be fair or to be compassionate in a particular situation. Can we imagine that both can meet in our decisions, in the way we treat one another, in our service? If we are truly just, we are also merciful; if we are compassionate, we also bring justice to those who are suffering.

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

Recalling the word of Jesus that he is one with his suffering members, we respond to the cry of the poor... Through direct service and through our influence we seek to relieve misery, to address its causes and to support all persons who struggle for full dignity.

~ Constitutions #3

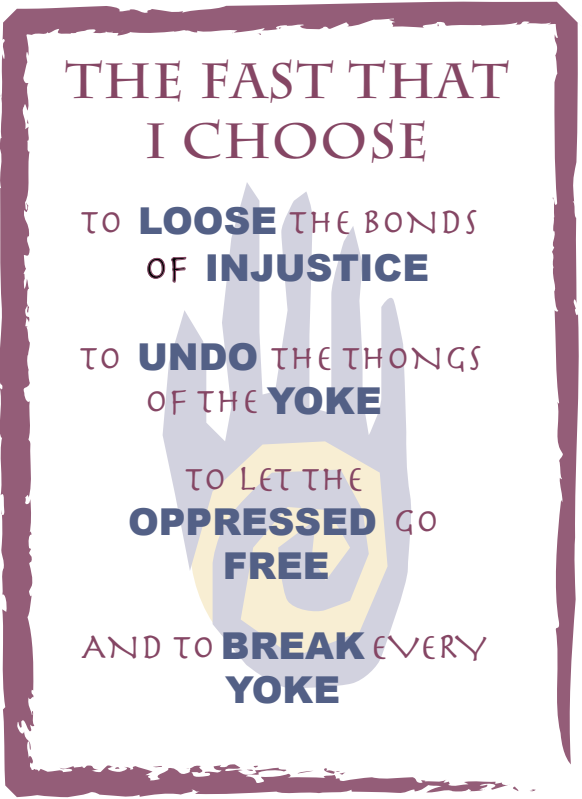
## From Scripture

Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before you,  
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

~ Isaiah 58:6-8 (NRSV)



## Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Who are the hungry, the strangers, the naked, the sick, the prisoners in today’s world?
- How am I called to respond to their suffering?

Song Suggestions

- “Bring Forth the Kingdom” - Marty Haugen
- “Blest Are They” - David Haas
- “The Circle of Mercy” - Jeannette Goglia, RSM
- “Tu Llamada - Women Speak Justice” from the tape “Circle of Mercy”

Psalm 41

Blessed are those who consider the poor;  
Our loving God delivers them in the day of trouble.  
God protects them and keeps them alive;  
they are called happy in the land.  
God sustains them on their sickbed;  
in their illness God heals all their infirmities.  
Blessed be the Most High, the God of Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.

~ NRSV (Adapted)

Reading

Mother Catherine’s insistence on and provision of good education for girls, middle-class as well as poor children, was a direct challenge to the injustices of her time. Her practical programmes were hitherto unheard-of social services which broke the barriers of indifference, making them give way to social caring and compassion. Her sense of justice allied to mercy made her as convinced of the quality of presence as of performance; hence she stressed the how of things rather than the why.... Her congregation was the canonical expression of her vision of promoting social justice, of providing the poor with the services she believed they needed and had a right to, and of doing this on a comprehensive and as flexible a scale as possible.

~ Documentary Study for the Canonization Process of Catherine McAuley

Reflection and Time for Sharing

The Sisters of Mercy have chosen several social issues as their Critical Concerns: nonviolence, racism, Earth, women’s equality, and immigration. These issues are all related to each other with poverty as a root cause. The Sisters have also committed to live a life of contemplation and action.

- How do you see these issues related to the call of Christ’s gospel?
- How do you see this commitment lived out in the life of those who embrace the Mercy charism today?

Prayer Moving to Action

- As you have prayed, what has stirred in you; what does it require of you?

Closing Prayer

God of justice and mercy, you are our saving God. Come with your power to save and free those held captive by oppression. Use us as your instruments of mercy and peace. Give us the courage to challenge all that enslaves the human spirit. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Closing Song

See suggestions listed above.

Sources

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*Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. Silver Spring, MD: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 1992.

Suggested Resources

*Mercy and Justice Shall Meet: An Interactive Journey*. [Carlton, Australia]: Fraynetwork Multimedia, 2004. Audiovisual Material.

*This interactive DVD uses a narrative approach with the telling of eight key stories. These stories are case studies drawn from different parts of the Mercy world. Three themes underpin these stories: violence against women and children; racism in all its forms; and displacement of peoples. Suitable for private use or in a group for prayer and reflection.*

*The Mercy Housing Story*: Denver, Colorado: Mercy Housing, Inc., 2000. Audiovisual Material.

*Ten minute videotape describing the work of Mercy Housing.*

Medrano, Adán M. *Ministry in a Multicultural World Beyond Borders: A Fresh Look at Multiculturalism and How It Is Changing Ministry*. San Antonio, Texas: Mexican American Cultural Center and JM Communications, 2001. Audiovisual Material.

*This is a Hispanic family photo album, a resource for personal reflection or for use in the classroom. Offers three hours of inspiring testimonies from scholars and practitioners, including Virgil Elizondo, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jeanette Rodriguez-Holguin, María Elena González, and others. Ministry faces complex ethnic, racial and cultural changes today. How can the great diversity in the church go beyond coexistence to real community? This rich resource presents a multi-faceted framework for reflecting about and dealing with racism, mestizaje, borders and cultural differences.*

Adapted from a prayer service by Susan Severin, RSM

# Mercy as Compassion

## Introduction

The word “compassion” is taken from the Latin, *compassio*, which means “to feel with another.” Often, compassion is used in the context of being present to a person or people who are suffering. What is it like to feel the suffering of another so much that it moves us to action, to extending mercy to that person?

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

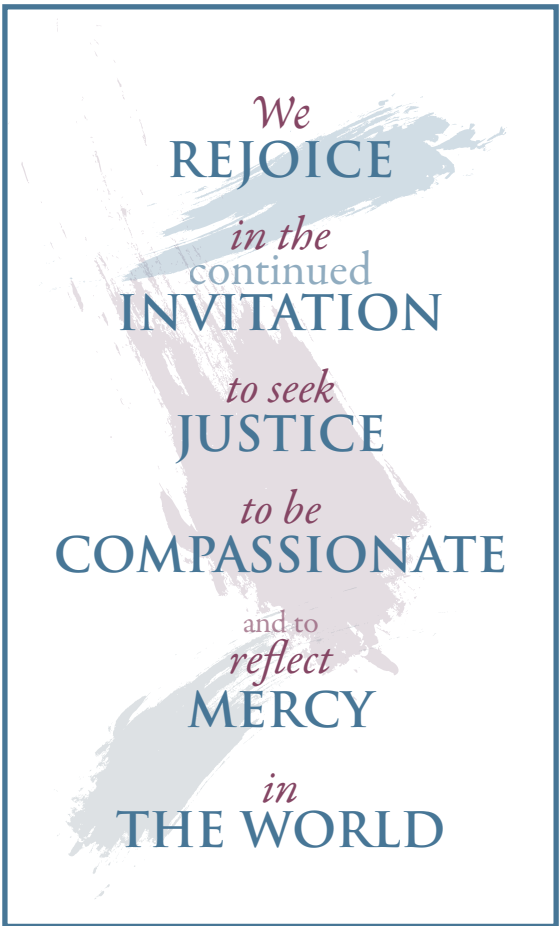
To celebrate our corporate word  
in a discordant society  
requires the courage  
of a deep faith and interior joy.  
We believe that God is faithful  
and that our struggle to follow Christ  
will extend God’s reign of love  
over human hearts.  
We rejoice in the continued invitation  
to seek justice, to be compassionate  
and to reflect mercy in the world.

~ *Constitutions #84*

## From Scripture - The Parable of the Good Samaritan

But wanting to justify himself, he [the lawyer] asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 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 neighbor 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.”

~ *Luke 10:29-37 (NRSV)*





Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- When have I shown compassion to someone in need?
- When have I received compassion from someone when I was in need?

Song - Love One Another

*(Refrain)*  
Love one another as I have loved you.  
Care for each other. I have cared for you.  
Bear each other's burdens. Bind each other's wounds;  
and so you will know my return.

My friends, do you know what I have done for you?  
I have washed your feet with my hands.  
If I, your Lord, have knelt at your feet,  
you should do at each other's feet  
as I have done for you.

When the world will hate you and revile you,  
when they laugh at your care for the poor,  
when they hold you in darkness and imprison your tongues,  
remember how they listened to me.

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Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the mountains;  
where is my help to come from?  
My help comes from God  
who made heaven and earth.  
May he save your foot from stumbling;  
may he, your guardian, not fall asleep!  
You see—he neither sleeps nor slumbers,  
the guardian of Israel.  
God is your guardian, your shade,  
God, at your right hand.  
By day the sun will not strike you,  
nor the moon by night.  
God guards you from all harm  
God guards your life,  
God guards your comings and goings,  
henceforth and forever.

*~ New Jerusalem Bible (Adapted)*

Reading

Catherine was always deeply moved by suffering of any kind and immediately took some step to alleviate it: as when she found a small child weeping on the city pavement, beside a ragged bundle. Her parents had just died of fever and the heartless landlord had evicted the child and her rags from the dingy cellar they had called home. Catherine picked her up, carried her home to Baggot Street, washed and fed her—and thus began the first Mercy orphanage, forerunner of hundreds of child-care homes all over the world, wherever a child in distress is to be found.

*~ from A Woman Sings of Mercy, pp. 42–43*

Reflection and Time for Sharing

- What has stirred in you? What does it require of you?
- What do you want to say/do for those in our world who are so in need of God's mercy?

Closing Prayer

Mercy is God's powerful Word spoken in Jesus—  
His life, passion and resurrection.  
It bends and changes, forms and re-forms our lives,  
so that we may receive Mercy  
and, in turn, be merciful.

As women (and men) of the Church today  
in the steps of Mary and Catherine,  
with faith and prophetic boldness,  
we commit ourselves anew  
to the search for God's Mercy,  
by standing with the poor,  
reassessing our ministries,  
working to alleviate and eradicate  
poverty, injustice and oppression,  
in collaboration with all people of goodwill  
who make the Gospel live in today's world.

*~ Common Statement from the international gathering  
in Dublin of the Sisters of Mercy for Trócaire (1981)*

Sources

*Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.* Silver Spring, MD: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 1992.

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Suggested Resources

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Adapted from a prayer service by Jeanette Noonan, RSM

Mercy as Forgiveness

Introduction

God’s mercy is often understood as forgiveness showered on us. God loves us so much that God maintains an attitude of forgiveness toward us, embracing our failings and forgiving them before we even recognize that we have failed. We humans struggle with forgiveness, especially when we think (or know) another person has seriously wronged us. As people of Mercy, we cultivate our compassionate love for others so that we too can have an attitude of forgiveness.

From Scripture

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

~ *Ephesians 4:25-5:2 (NRSV)*

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Think of circumstances in your life that required you to forgive. What is your usual first response when you’ve been wronged?
- Do you think you can call yourself a compassionate person if you still hold anger towards someone?

MERCY



Forgive  
one another  
as  
Christ in God  
has forgiven  
you.



Reading

Forgiveness as a Work of Mercy

To forgive is not to be passive in the face of injury, neglect, betrayal, abuse. Indeed, forgiveness may be one of the most active responses possible in the face of whatever sort of breach occurs in human relationships—social, personal, or institutional. We learn something about what forgiveness means perhaps first by being-forgiven. To experience being-forgiven is to experience new acceptance, in spite of ourselves, and the restoration of relationship with now a new future. Jesus points to the mystery of a “forgiven love” when he claims that the one who is forgiven much, loves more than the one who is forgiven little (Luke 7:41).

The potentially paradigmatic experience of being-forgiven is our experience of being-forgiven by God—an experience of being accepted by the incomprehensible source of our life and existence, accepted even without becoming wholly innocent (Romans 5:8). The one response asked of us is to trust this forgiveness. To trust is to surrender our hearts in our acceptance of being-forgiven. It requires an ongoing change of heart. To use a phrase of Emily Dickinson, it is to “drop our hearts” that is, to feel our hearts “drop” their objections, their barriers and burdens, in freedom, accepting eternal Acceptance. This experience foreshadows the ultimate experience of which we have inklings:

“By my long bright – and *longer* – *trust* –  
I *drop* my Heart – *unshriven!*”

Like being-forgiven, to forgive is also to “drop our hearts,” to “let go” of something within us, in order to accept someone who has harmed us. But in forgiving someone, what do we “let go” of? Not our sense of justice, nor a sense of our own dignity as a person. Yet in forgiving another, we let go of something in ourselves—perhaps anger, resentment, building blocks of stored up pain. And we let go of something of ourselves—perhaps our self-protectedness, our selves as desiring renewed self-justification in the face of misjudgment or exploitation by another. It entails in a way the letting go of our very selves, a *kenosis*, that alone frees us to become ourselves. This is a work of mercy that changes us, and provides the conditions of heart to sustain all of the other works of mercy.

~ Margaret Farley, RSM

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,

so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.  
Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being;  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
Restore me to the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

~ NRSV

Prayer Moving to Action

- Is there someone with whom you need to be reconciled? What hindrances are preventing this? What might help these to be overcome?
- How can you better express mercy as forgiveness as you seek to build a world of justice and peace?

Closing Prayer

With a healed and happy heart,  
we proclaim our thanksgiving to You,  
God of Compassion and Great Kindness.  
We rejoice in Your absolution of our failings  
and in the fact that You call us  
to forgive each other daily  
with the sacrament of understanding,  
for in that mutual forgiveness,  
we experience Your divine grace.

We are grateful for those persons in our lives  
who have allowed us to be reconciled  
after we have become separated from them

through selfishness and thoughtlessness.  
For the numerous experiences of absolution in our past lives,  
for the lifting of the burden of guilt,  
we are thankful.

We are most grateful as well, Loving God,  
for the gift of Your Son, Jesus,  
who calls us to lives of compassion,  
to forgiveness and understanding.  
He, by His life, gave us an example  
of how we are to love those who harm us  
and forgive those who injure us  
when He asked You, His Father,  
to forgive those who had led Him to suffer  
and die on a cross.

Teach us, Lord,  
how to forgive ourselves  
and to be patient with the slowness  
of our growth in holiness.  
Able to forgive ourselves,  
we shall be more eager and able to forgive others  
according to Your divine pattern.  
Blessed are You, Lord our God,  
who heals us with forgiveness. Amen.

~ from *Prayers for a Domestic Church*, p. 69

Sources

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Mercy Hospitality

Introduction

Hospitality is a cornerstone of Mercy. Without warm, welcoming, and hospitable hearts we are simply unable to be the instruments of God’s capacious generosity to all of creation. As God is merciful and hospitable to us, so we are merciful and hospitable to all whom we encounter. In Mercy, we create spaces of peace and welcome in which persons may grow into their full potential as human beings cherished by God.

From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

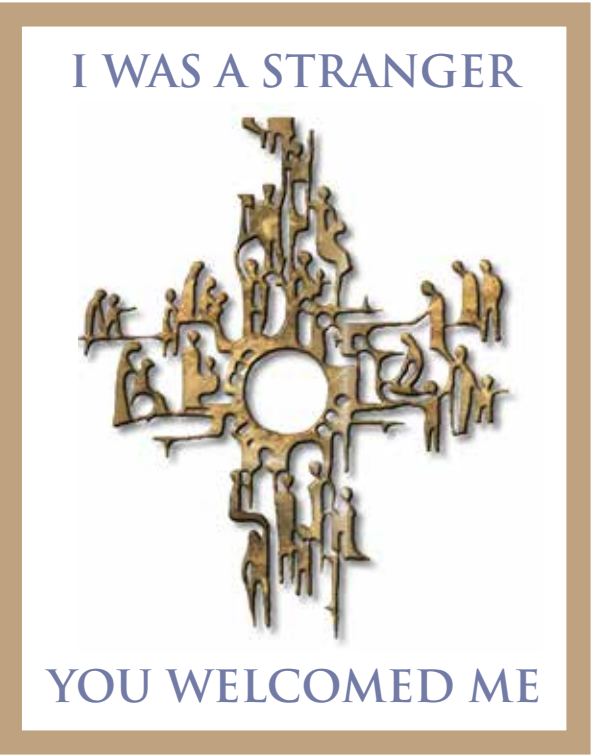
We strive to witness to mercy when we reverence the dignity of each person, create a spirit of hospitality and pursue integrity of word and deed in our lives. Recognizing our own human weakness, we know that only through God’s mercy can we be merciful.

~ *Constitutions #8*

From Scripture

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

~ *Romans 12:3–16 (NRSV)*



Reading

If I were to summarize in the broadest terms Catherine McAuley’s embrace of cultural diversity and her legacy of hospitality to strangers, I would have to say that:

- ~ She did not narrowly define the love of God or the unity to which we and our neighbors in the world are called.
- ~ She did not misname differences or see cultural variations as obstacles to that unity.
- ~ She did not use adversarial language to describe these differences.
- ~ She did not cling to her own distinctiveness or to her own personal preferences or non-essential customs.
- ~ And she did not regard her friendship with God as something to be coveted or exploited for herself alone.

Rather:

- ~ She emptied herself of the comfort of her former way of life.
- ~ She took the form of a servant in her human context.
- ~ She extended her affectionate embrace to otherness.
- ~ She opened her door to strangers.
- ~ She welcomed them.
- ~ She learned from those who were different and left them whole in their Godly difference.
- ~ She humbled herself before all human forms.
- ~ And she followed, as best she could, the example of Christ, who became obedient to God’s wide and merciful love of all humankind, even to the point of death, even death on a cross.

If we wish to sow the seeds of real hope in the world, I think Catherine McAuley would say: This is the way we must do it—one answering of the figurative doorbell, one opening 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.

~ from “*Welcoming the Stranger: The Kenosis of Catherine McAuley*”

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- How have these readings expanded your understanding and definition of hospitality?
- What is it in others that you find most difficult to welcome?
- What is it in yourself that you find most difficult to welcome?

Psalm 8

O God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

~ *NRSV (Adapted)*

Prayer Moving to Action

- Be mindful during your day of your own capacity to receive the gift of hospitality from God through others and to extend hospitality to others.
- Acknowledge and affirm the fact that the reign of God is present in the “here and now,” in every act of hospitality which you receive or extend to others.

Closing Prayer

Loving and gracious God, you know our needs and desires before we are able to form the words. Read our hearts, and grant us what we most need to walk in hospitality and holiness before you. As you are generous with us, may we be open-handed with all those whose needs are greater than our own. We ask this in the name of Jesus, the greatest host who feeds and heals us. Amen.

Sources

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Haugen, Marty. *Gather Us In*. GIA Publications, Inc., 1982.

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# Earth Spirituality

## Introduction

Our suffering planet Earth is crying out to us to act in ways that will preserve every form of life in our universe. For a number of years many Mercy people have been involved in recycling and in trying not to use plastic or styrofoam. More and more we are recognizing the need for much more significant changes in our lives in order to reduce our footprints on Earth. Let us pray that the Spirit will guide us and give us the courage to make these changes.

## From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

This commitment will impel us to  
develop and act from a multicultural and  
international perspective;  
speak with a corporate voice;  
work for systemic change;  
practice non-violence;  
act in harmony and interdependence with all  
creation; and  
call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle  
and ministries.

*~from the Direction Statement of the  
Fourth Institute Chapter of the  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (2005)*

## Come, Holy Spirit,



## renew the whole creation!

We are called “to reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life and toward universal recognition of the fundamental right to water.”

*~from the Critical Concerns of the Fourth Institute Chapter  
of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (2005)*

## From Scripture - Canticle from the Book of Daniel

Bless God, all you works of creation.  
All creatures of the earth, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.



You heavens, sun, moon, and stars,  
all the universe, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.  
All you waters above the heavens,  
every shower and dew, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.

Frost and chill, ice and snow,  
fire and heat, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.  
Light and darkness, night and day,  
morning and evening, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.

Give thanks to the Source of all Blessing.  
All the beauty of the earth, bless God.  
God of Creation, we praise you forever.

~ Daniel 3:57-74, 89  
(Inclusive translation - Benedictine Sisters of Erie)

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Do I see myself as part of creation and as a member of the Earth community?
- Recall a moment or place in time when you were struck by the beauty or profoundness of creation. Return to that moment in your imagination. What did you experience about God? Yourself? The rest of creation?

Psalm 147

Alleluia!  
Praise God—it is good to sing psalms to our God—how pleasant to praise the Holy One.  
God, Builder of Jerusalem! Our gracious God gathers together the exiles of Israel,  
healing the broken-hearted and binding up their wounds;  
God counts out the number of the stars, and gives each one of them a name.  
Our God is great, all-powerful, God’s wisdom beyond all telling.  
The Holy One sustains the poor, and humbles the wicked to the ground.  
Sing to God in thanksgiving, play the harp for our God.  
God veils the sky with clouds, and provides the earth with rain,  
makes grass grow on the hills and plants for people to use,  
gives fodder to cattle and to young ravens when they cry.  
God takes no delight in the power of horses, no pleasure in human sturdiness;  
The Holy One’s pleasure is in those who fear God, in those who hope in God’s faithful love.  
Praise God, Jerusalem. Zion, praise your God.

~ NJB (Adapted)

Reading

At the heart of physical reality we find a living communion, today under threat. Being converted to the earth in its hour of suffering places us in resonant cooperation with the deepest reality of creation, the Creator Spirit. When we work with people and movements committed to cherishing the earth and opposing its plunder, we are participating in the Spirit’s own political economy of life. Instead of living as thoughtless or greedy exploiters we are empowered to become sisters and brothers, friends and lovers, gardeners and stewards, advocates and poets, priests and prophets, colleagues and fellow dancers, co-creators and children of the world that gives us life. Too much has already been lost. But the narrative memory of the dead, as always, has the capacity to bring about a living future if we cooperate with the compassionate power of the Creator Spirit. As a symbol of the solidarity between east and west on this issue, I close with the prayer uttered by Korean theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung in her Canberra address on peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. “Wild wind of the Holy Spirit blow, to us. Let us welcome her, letting ourselves go in her wild rhythm of life. Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation. Amen!”

~ from *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, p. 68

Prayer Moving to Action

- If I perceive Earth and all creation as a manifestation of the Divine, what actions can I take to incarnate this belief?
- What are the implications for my lifestyle?

Closing Prayer

Mother, Father, God, Universal Power.  
Remind us daily of the sanctity of all life.  
Touch our hearts with the glorious oneness  
of all creation,  
As we strive to respect all the living beings  
on this planet.

Penetrate our souls with the beauty of this earth,  
As we attune ourselves to the rhythm and  
flow of the seasons.

Awaken our minds with the knowledge to  
achieve a world in perfect harmony  
And grant us the wisdom to realize that we  
can have heaven on earth.

~ Jo Poore, from *Earth Prayers*, p. 179

Sources

*Critical Concerns of the Fourth Institute Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. Silver Spring, MD: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2005.

*Direction Statement of the Fourth Institute Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. Silver Spring, MD: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2005.

Benedictine Sisters of Erie. *Five-Week Psalter (Inclusive Language)*. Erie, PA: Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc., 1985.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*. The Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.

Roberts, Elizabeth J., and Elias Amidon, eds. *Earth Prayers from around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Suggested Resources

Awakening the Dreamer Web site: <http://awakeningthedreamer.org/>

*The Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium is a transformative educational experience that empowers participants to respond to humanity’s current situation with action and informed, grounded optimism about our future.*

Earth Policy Institute Web site: <http://www.earth-policy.org/>

Edwards, Denis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.

Natural Resources Defense Council Web site: <http://www.nrdc.org/>

**Photo Credit:** “The Blue Marble,” Visible Earth Catalog of NASA Space Images and Animations  
Web site: <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>

Global Mercy

Introduction

Sisters of Mercy and their associates are attentive to the needs of suffering people worldwide, especially women and children. Through prayer and the efforts of individuals and communities, they have undertaken numerous projects whose purpose is to bring relief from such suffering as severe poverty, homelessness, starvation, victims of violence, unwelcomed immigration. We make every effort to find the systemic causes of these tragedies and to address them in our prayer and in our public efforts for justice.

From the Documents of the Sisters of Mercy

The interdependence of peoples  
and Christ’s mandate  
to proclaim the gospel to all nations  
challenges us to develop a global perspective  
on the works of mercy.

~ Constitutions #3

From Scripture

You will receive power  
when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the ends of the earth.

~ Acts 1:8 (NRSV)

Psalms 123

To You I lift up my spirit,  
You, who are enthroned in every heart!  
For, as the young child holds tightly  
the hand of its parent,  
As those in the throes of disease  
look to one who brings comfort,  
So our spirits seek the Heart of love,  
that we might find mercy and forgiveness.



Have mercy on us, O Compassionate One,  
have mercy,  
that we might turn from our  
blind and ignorant ways.  
Too long have our souls been veiled  
by fear;  
have mercy, lead us to the path of wholeness.

~ from *Psalms for Praying*  
by Nan C. Merrill

Reflection Questions for Prayer and Faith Sharing

- As a disciple of Jesus, how would you respond to the cry in Psalm 123?
- Would you ask Jesus to have mercy? Or would you thank Jesus for God’s mercy?

Reading

The truth is that in the very thick of it all—in the songs that rise from dry, dusty refugee camps; in the hearts of those who have survived torture; in the forging of new friendships; in the small miracles of life that stare down death—there lives, in Gerald Manley Hopkins’ lovely phrase, “the dearest, freshness, deep-down things.” There lives the God of our hearts, the One who breaks down the “barriers of hostility” that divide our troubled world. Despite the violence and poverty, the losses and the suffering and the insurmountable problems, God is present—the steady wake flame that can never be quenched.

This same God, of course, also sets the heavens spinning. Dances inside van Gogh’s brush. Delights in the music of Taizé, the poetry of Rumi, and the laughter of children. Answers to names like Wonderful, Counselor, Friend and Beloved, Desire of the Everlasting Hills, the One who is always there. Shelters with inexplicable tenderness all who draw near, and is endlessly inventive in wooing back those who stray. Once this God has our attention, however, we no longer have excuses for luke-warmness or delay. This God desires our hearts, yes, with a fierce desire, but first wants them connected “with leading strings of love” to the whole human family, especially the poor and outcast.

Like my friend Daniel, we must at some point confront the question, *Why would I donate my heart to a stranger?* There is only one possible reason: because God does.

~ from *This Flowing toward Me* by Marilyn Lacey, RSM, p. 183

Prayer Moving to Action

- Who in the Mercy community needs you to be a disciple of God’s love?
- Who in your civic community needs you to be a disciple of God’s love?
- Who needs you to witness that God’s love for us goes beyond church teaching, discriminating customs, laws and national frontiers?

Closing Prayer

Unnamable One, our God,  
can you lead us into the community of shalom and justice?  
That is your desire, that is your constant longing  
and it is our own greatest destiny as well.

You urge each of us from within to become our full selves,  
following our gifts wherever they may lead,  
connecting to others and rooting ourselves  
in the human circle of which we are most naturally a part.

Inspire us and guide us today  
as you have inspired your people of every age.  
We are on your side, by your grace.

That is where we always long to be:  
on the side of life, of liberation into a community of equals,  
of worthy work for all, of adequate and dignified shelter,  
of a planet home healed and respected,  
of nourishment, of growth in every human way,  
toward insight, discovery, peace, joy, and health.

Be with us in all our desires and undertakings.

~ from *Prayers to She Who Is*, p. 105

Artwork – Mary Jacque Benner, RSM, “Mercy Circle #30”

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Suggested Resources

Mercy Beyond Borders

Web site: <http://www.mercybeyondborders.org/>

*Mercy Beyond Borders was founded in 2008 by three colleagues—a Sister of Mercy, a university professor, and a medical doctor—determined to improve the lives of displaced women and children living in extreme poverty. Mercy Beyond Borders targets Southern Sudan in south Saharan Africa, which has one-quarter of the world’s displaced peoples. Their projects are aimed at educating and empowering the women and girls of Sudan and helping rebuild communities devastated by years of war and famine.*

Mercy Global Concern

Web site: <http://mercyworldorg.ozstaging.com/projects/mgc/index.asp>

*In continuing to promote the vision of Catherine McAuley, the Sisters of Mercy established Mercy Global concern (MGC) in 1998, in order to bring the Mercy spirit to the United Nations (UN), the one forum in the world where all nations have the potential to meet as equals. MGC is the mechanism by which all those associated with the Sisters of Mercy may interact with the UN system. At the UN, Sisters of Mercy can advocate for the less privileged and make explicit preferential options within a huge network of international bodies.*

Adapted from a prayer service by Eileen Hogan, RSM

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Suggested Resources

Awakening the Dreamer Web site: <http://awakeningthedreamer.org/>

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Earth Policy Institute Web site: <http://www.earth-policy.org/>



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*This is a Hispanic family photo album, a resource for personal reflection or for use in the classroom. Offers three hours of inspiring testimonies from scholars and practitioners, including Virgil Elizondo, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jeanette Rodriguez-Holguin, María Elena González, and others. Ministry faces complex ethnic, racial and cultural changes today. How can the great diversity in the church go beyond coexistence to real community? This rich resource presents a multi-faceted framework for reflecting about and dealing with racism, mestizaje, borders and cultural differences.*

*Mercy and Justice Shall Meet: An Interactive Journey*. [Carlton, Australia]: Fraynetwork Multimedia, 2004. Audiovisual Material.

*This interactive DVD uses a narrative approach with the telling of eight key stories. These stories are case studies drawn from different parts of the Mercy world. Three themes underpin these stories: violence against women and children; racism in all its forms; and displacement of peoples. Suitable for private use or in a group for prayer and reflection.*

Mercy Beyond Borders Web site: <http://www.mercybeyondborders.org/>

*Mercy Beyond Borders was founded in 2008 by three colleagues—a Sister of Mercy, a university professor, and a medical doctor—determined to improve the lives of displaced women and children living in extreme poverty. Mercy Beyond Borders targets Southern Sudan in south Saharan Africa, which has one-quarter of the world’s displaced peoples. Their projects are aimed at educating and empowering the women and girls of Sudan and helping rebuild communities devastated by years of war and famine.*

Mercy Global Concern Web site: <http://mercyworldorg.ozstaging.com/projects/mgc/index.asp>

*In continuing to promote the vision of Catherine McAuley, the Sisters of Mercy established Mercy Global concern (MGC) in 1998, in order to bring the Mercy spirit to the United Nations (UN), the one forum in the world where all nations have the potential to meet as equals. MGC is the mechanism by which all those associated with the Sisters of Mercy may interact with the UN system. At the UN, Sisters of Mercy can advocate for the less privileged and make explicit preferential options within a huge network of international bodies.*

*The Mercy Housing Story*: Denver, Colorado: Mercy Housing, Inc., 2000. Audiovisual Material.

*Ten minute videotape describing the work of Mercy Housing.*

Natural Resources Defense Council Web site: <http://www.nrdc.org/>

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## Books

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